

**UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY:  
BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE  
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

## ADVISORY BOARD

**His Holiness Thich Tri Quang**

*Supreme Patriarch of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha*

**His Eminence Thich Thien Nhon**

*Executive President of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha*

**Most Ven. Prof. Brahmapundit, Thailand**

*President of International Council for Day of Vesak*

## Editors

Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien

Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu

## CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

**Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu, Vietnam**

*Vice Chairman, National Vesak Organising Committee*

*Chairman, Organizing Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak Conference 2025*

**Most Ven. Dr. Dharmaratana, France**

*Vice President of ICDV*

**Most Ven. Dr. Khammai**

**Dhammasāmi, UK**

*Founder, Shan State Buddhist University,  
Myanmar*

**Most Ven. Dr. Akuretiye Nanda, Sri Lanka**

*Chancellor of University of Ruhuna*

**Prof. Dr. Le Manh That, Vietnam**

*Member of ICDV*

**Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Phra**

**Rajapariyatkavi, Thailand**

*Rector, Mahachulalongkomrajavidyalaya  
University*

**Bhante Chao Chu, U.S.A.**

*President, Los Angeles Buddhist Union*

**Prof. Dr. Phra Medhivajrapundit (Hansa)**

*Director of International Buddhist Studies*

*College, Thailand*

**Prof. Dr. Amajiva Lochan, India**

*Deputy Dean, International Relations,  
University of Delhi*

UNITED NATION DAY OF VESAK 2025

**UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY  
FOR HUMAN DIGNITY:  
BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE  
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Editors:**

**Most Ven. Dr. THICH DUC THIEN**

**Most Ven. Dr. THICH NHAT TU**

**Prof. AMARJIVA LOCHAN**

HONG DUC PUBLISHING HOUSE

## **EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS**

Most Ven. Dr. Thich Tam Duc	Most Ven. Dr. Thich Vien Tri
Most Ven. Dr. Thich Buu Chanh	Most Ven. Dr. Quang Thanh
Most Ven. Dr. Thich Phuoc Luong	Most Ven. Dr. Thich Phuoc Dat
Most Ven. Dr. Thich Chuc Tin	Most Ven. Dr. Thich Dong Tri
Most Ven. Dr. Thich Giac Hoang	Most Ven. Dr. Thich Dong Thanh
Most Ven. Dr. Thich Vien Minh	Most Ven. Dr. Thich Vien Anh
Ven. Dr. Thich Le Ngon	Ven. Dr. Dinh Phuc Samādhipuñño
Bhikkhuni Dr. Nhu Nguyet (TT)	Bhukkhuni Dr. Lieu Phap
Bhikkhuni Dieu Hanh	Bhikkhuni Lac Dieu Nga

## **COMMUNICATION AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

Dr. Le Thanh Binh	Pham Thị Kim Ngan
Nguyen Thi Thai Ha	Truong Nguyen Diem Trang
Le Quang Huyen Tran	Nguyen Quynh Chau
Nguyen Le Phu Thinh	

## **PUBLICATION FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION**

Giac Thanh Nha



## CONTENTS

Foreword - <i>His Eminence Thích Thiện Nhơn</i> .....	xi
Foreword - <i>Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Brahmapundit</i> .....	xiii
Editors' introduction .....	xv
Congratulatory Message on the United Nations Day of Vesak 202 from the Minister of Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Vietnam - <i>Minister Đào Ngọc Dung</i> .....	xxxvii

### CULTIVATING INNER PEACE FOR WORLD PEACE

1. Cultivating Inner Peace for Global Harmony: A Buddhist Perspective on Mindfulness, Vipassanā, and Ethical Living - <i>Most. Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Tuan</i> .....	3
2. Faith and Tolerance, Peace within and Peace without - <i>Most. Ven. Prof. Dr. Gallelle Sumanasiri</i> .....	19
3. Buddhism and Cultivation of Inner Peace for World Peace: The Case of Zimbabwe - <i>Tabona Shoko</i> .....	29
4. Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity - Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development - <i>Dr. YoungHoon Kwaak</i> .....	43
5. A Novel Approach to Emotions to Cultivate Inner Peace for World Peace: A Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions? - <i>Ven. Prof. Dr. Mahinda Deegalle</i> .....	53
6. Compassion and Buddhist AI - <i>Lim Kooi Fong</i> .....	65
7. Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace: A Buddhist Perspective with Special Reference to Nepal - <i>Ashok Nanda Bajracharya</i> .....	81
8. Loving-Kindness and World Peace: Exploring the Buddhist Concept of Mettā - <i>Neeraj Yadav</i> .....	93
9. Inner Peace for the World Peace - <i>Ven. Congo Pannabodhi</i> .....	117
10. War And Peace: A Comprehensive Exploration from the Buddhist Perspective - <i>Ven. Prof. Witharandeniye Chandasiri Thero</i> .....	129
11. The Interconnection between Inner and Outer Peace: A Buddhist Perspective - <i>Ricardo Sasaki</i> .....	143
12. World Peace Through Inner Peace - The Transformative Power of Meditation - <i>Prof. Dr. Lye Ket Yong</i> .....	159
13. Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace: What the Buddha Says about Peace According to the Pali Canon - <i>Bhikkhu Brahmāli</i> .....	177

### FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING: A PATH TO RECONCILIATION

14. An Exploration of Buddhist Principles on Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building as Presented in the Pali Discourses - *Ven. Dr. Rathmale Punnarathana* ..... 193
15. Abandoning Anger for Peace: Analysis of the Three Stages of Anger and Methods to Deal with Them - *Bhikkhu Dr. Sobhana Mahatthero* ..... 205
16. Love Conquers the World, not Arms - *Dr. Labh Niharika* ..... 239
17. A Synergistic Model for Psychological Crisis Management and Healing in Buddhist Contemplative Care and Chaplaincy - *Ven. Tan Paññādīpa* .. 247
18. Liberation by 'Sublime Dwelling' (*Brahmavihāra*): The Way to Inner and External Peace - *Bhikkhuni Dr. Thich Dieu Hieu* ..... 267
19. The Power of Forgiveness: Pathway to Inner Growth and Renewal - *Dr. Jyoti Gaur* ..... 285
20. A Buddhist Philosophy of Forgiveness - *Prof. Dr. Abraham Vélez de Cea* .... 317
21. "Ahiṃsā": A Buddhist Response to Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) - *Elias G. Konyana* ..... 345
22. Spiritual Transformation Through Social Engagement: The Buddhist Perspective - *Most Ven. Prof. KL. Dhammajoti* ..... 359
23. The Contributions of The Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha to the Sustainable Development of The Country - *Bhikkhuni Dr. Lieu Phap* ..... 367
24. Buddhist Reflection on Forgiveness and its Relevance to Patience and Loving-Kindness - *Dr. Wimal Hewamanage* ..... 381
25. Compassion and Tolerance: Not Weakness, but Strength for Human Development - *Dr. Arvind Kumar Singh* ..... 399

### BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

26. Sharing – Not Saving: Empathy and Interconnectedness as Patterns of Contemporary Fundraising Success - *Asst. Prof. Jitka Cirklová* ..... 421
27. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Politics and Buddhism in 1720 - 1730s in and around Tibet - *Dr. Baatr U. Kitinov* ..... 441
28. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs): What the Buddhist Community can do - *Dr. Henry Dang* ..... 459
29. Buddhist Compassion in Action through Promoting Engaged Buddhism: An Altruistic Role of Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō (1865 - 1926) in Pre-Partition Bengal - *Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury* ..... 469
30. Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development - *Dr. Efendi Hansen Ng* ..... 493
31. Care of Inochi, or Holistic Spiritual Care, Offered by Buddhist Chaplains:

Realization of Buddhist Dharma and Practices - <i>Rev. Eishin (Fuminobu) Komura</i> .....	505
32. The Philosophy of Thai - Vietnamese Engaged Buddhism: A Convergent Ethical Framework for Mindful Civic Action - <i>Prof. Manuel Antonio Ato del Avellanal Carrera</i> .....	521
33. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Promoting Education, Harmony and Strengthening Unity Through Buddhist Missionary Schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh - <i>Ven. Jhubhur Chakma</i> .....	539
34. Buddhist Compassion and Human Development - <i>Prof. Dr. Projit Kumar Palit</i> .....	563
35. Buddhism Around the World – Africa: Perspectives of African Buddhist Followers - <i>Rev Dr. ILukpitiye Pannasekara Thero</i> .....	585
36. Buddhists in New Lands: Compassion Values and Actions towards better and Sustainable Futures and Happiness - <i>Prof. Dr. Jose Antonio Rodriguez Diaz</i> .....	605
37. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Chinese Buddhism in Transition under the Teaching of Venerable Taixu - <i>Ven. Thich Thien Tri</i> .....	635
38. Mindful Marketing Strategies for Borobudur: A Buddhist Approach to Sustainable Tourism - <i>Dr. Budi Hermawan, Soegeng Wahyoedi</i> .....	649
39. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Protecting Animals and the Environment with Our Diet - <i>Adele Tomlin</i> .....	675
40. The Bodhisattva Path Through the Application of the Four Means of Embracing and the Four Immeasurables in the Fú Zhì (福智) Sangha of Taiwan (China) - <i>Ven. Thich Nhu Dac</i> .....	691

### MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION FOR A COMPASSIONATE AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

41. Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future and Fostering Unity for Global Harmony - <i>Ven. Lopen Gem Dorji</i> .....	709
42. Application of Mindfulness at Mahāpajāpatī Primary School Education in India <i>Bhikkhuni Dr. Nhu Nguyet</i> .....	723
43. Empowering Students with Compassionate Action for Global Peace: Integrating Buddhist Meditation Retreats and Mindful Living Education to Enhance Mindfulness Effectiveness of Compassion Through Buddhist Educational Development - <i>Burmansah</i> .....	735
44. Seeds of Consciousness: Cultivating Compassionate Education for a Sustainable Future - <i>Georgia Cristian Borges</i> .....	775
45. Sati Meditation (Mindfulness) in Education - <i>Most Ven. Prof. Dhammadipa Ila (Lee Tackhoan)</i> .....	795
46. Creating a Mindful Campus for Global Harmony: Cultivating Mindful Habits from the Classroom to Everyday Life for Students and Educators - <i>Wistina Seneru</i> .....	807

47. The Need for Buddhist Values in Western Society with Special Emphasis on Central Europe and Education - *Prof. PhDr. Milada Polišenská* ..... 841
48. The Concept of Promoting Self-Actualization Needs Sustainable Development Through Buddhist Principles Application Used Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4) - *Ven. Dr. Phramaha Chakrapol Acharashubho Thepa* ..... 857
49. The Role of Buddhist Teachings in Transforming Education for a Sustainable Future - *Asst. Prof. Dr. Asha Singh* ..... 875
50. Buddhist Teachings for Public Education in Mongolia: Past & Present - *Ven. Dr. G. Myagmarsuren* ..... 889
51. Unity and Inclusion for Human Dignity: Buddhist Perspectives on World Peace and Sustainable Development - *Cynthia Chantal Infante Medina* 899
52. Subjectivity, Phenomenology, and the Notion of *Anatta* - *Dr. Jeff Wilson* ... 917
53. Bridging Hearts and Minds: Mindfulness, Heartfulness, and AI in Teaching Dharma Chinese in Bhutan for Compassion and Sustainable Development - *Dr. Yun Fu (Frank) Tien* ..... 931
54. International Council for Day of Vesak and Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Mindfulness Education - A Solution to help Students Face Environmental and Social C - *Dr. Nguyen Thi Bich Van* ..... 945
55. Mindfulness-Based Learning (Mbl) Process: A Case Study of Phd Students in the Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Program at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University - *Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Hansa Dhammaho* ..... 957

#### FOSTERING UNITY: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

56. Conflict Resolution: Buddhist Social Work Approach Based on Buddhist Teachings - *Ven. Omalpe Somananda* ..... 971
57. Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony: History of Buddhism in Germany - *Prof. Dr. Susanne von der Heide* ..... 987
58. New Life Concept towards Global Harmony with the International Nature Loving Association (INLA) - *Dr. Rida Jelita* ..... 1005
59. Cultivating Compassion and Sustainability: Mindfulness, Tibetan Medicine, and the Plant-Based Path in Education - *Inga Pogosyan* ..... 1025
60. A Buddhist Way to Foster Unity and Harmony for the World: Participation in the Global Interfaith Movement, Such as Uri, to Create Cultures of Peace, Justice, and Healing for the Earth and all Lives - *Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Jinwol Lee* ..... 1047
61. The Interconnectedness of Humanity and Human Dignity: Mahāyāna Buddhist Teachings for World Peace and Sustainable Development - *Most Ven. Dr. Thich Hanh Chanh* ..... 1061

62. Bridging Worlds: Uniting Friends of Diverse Faiths and Traditions for a Sustainable Environment, Global Harmony, and World Peace - <i>Christie Yu-Ling Chang</i> .....	1081
63. Dharma as Culture - <i>Dr. Märt Läänemets</i> .....	1095
64. Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainability - <i>Ang Choo Hong</i> .....	1109
65. The Role of Interfaith Collaboration in Promoting Global Harmony, with a Specific Focus on Muslim Majority Nation, Efforts of Preserving Buddhist Heritage Sites - <i>Dr. Numan Anwar</i> .....	1127
66. What the Buddha Taught for Sustainable Peace in the World - <i>Most. Ven. Bhante Jinalankara</i> .....	1141
67. Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam: Compassion in Action and the Social Responsibility of Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911 - 1999) - <i>Dr. Ninh Thi Sinh</i> .....	1163
68. Compassion, Unity, Integrity and Mindful Efforts for The Sustainable Future: As Depicted in the Theravāda Buddhism - <i>Dr. Lalan Kumar Jha</i> .....	1177
69. Mindful Communication and a New Path for Peace Journalism - <i>Dr. Kalinga Seneviratne</i> .....	1201
Biographical Notes on Contributors.....	1215
About the Editors.....	1243



## FOREWORD

His Eminence Thích Thiện Nhơn

*Chairman of the Executive Council, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha*

The anthology “*Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development*” is a significant academic research project, marking a new step in the application of Buddhist teachings to address contemporary global issues.

This book is the result of the United Nations Vesak International Conference 2025, held at the Vietnam Buddhist Academy in Ho Chi Minh City from May 6-8, 2025—an event of special significance as it coincides with the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam) and the 50th anniversary of national unification.

With 72 selected articles from over 600 English-language submissions, the book reflects five key themes: (1) *Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace*, (2) *Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Path to Reconciliation*, (3) *Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development*, (4) *Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future*, (5) *Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony*.

This work not only demonstrates the strategic vision of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in organizing the 2025 United Nations Vesak Celebration but also affirms the important role of Vietnamese Buddhism on the global stage. The Editorial Board, led by Venerable Thích Đức Thiện and Venerable Thích Nhật Từ, has worked with great responsibility, selecting and editing high-quality contributions from esteemed scholars from many countries.

A notable feature of this anthology is its interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach to research. The authors have employed multi-dimensional methodologies, combining studies of Buddhist scriptures with fields such as psychology, education, sociology, and environmental studies to provide profound analyses and practical solutions to global challenges like climate change, social inequality, and cultural conflicts.

The core value of the anthology lies in its application of Buddhist wisdom to address contemporary challenges through key concepts: impermanence (*anicca* in Pāli), interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda* in Sanskrit), and compassion (*karuṇā* in Pāli). The research demonstrates that Buddhist thought

not only holds spiritual value but also has high applicability in building peace, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing human dignity.

In particular, the anthology opens up several new directions for academic research: (i) Applying mindfulness in modern education, (ii) Developing eco-friendly “ecological temple” models, (iii) Organizing Buddhist events according to ESG standards (Environment, Social, and Governance), (iv) Preserving Buddhist cultural heritage in the context of globalization, (v) Promoting interfaith dialogue for world peace.

With its significant academic and practical contributions, this anthology will serve as a valuable reference for researchers, scholars, monks, nuns, Buddhists, and anyone interested in applying Buddhist philosophy to address contemporary global issues. The work also helps affirm the position of Vietnamese Buddhism in the international community while laying the foundation for more in-depth research in the future.

Overall, this is an academic work of great value both in theory and practice, reflecting a harmonious combination of tradition and modernity, ancient wisdom and contemporary needs, making an important contribution to building a more peaceful, sustainable, and humane world.

\*\*\*



## FOREWORD

**Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Brahmmapundit**

*President of the International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV)*

The United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV), initiated by Thailand and embraced by the global Buddhist community, stands as a profound response to the United Nations Secretary-General's call to commemorate Vesak Day worldwide. This occasion marks the sacred triple events of the Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment, and Mahāparinibbāna—not merely as a global cultural festival, but as a sacred duty of the international Buddhist community to advance peace, compassion, and wisdom in alignment with the noble objectives of the United Nations. As Buddhists, we share a collective responsibility to bring the teachings of the Buddha to bear upon the urgent challenges of our time, from social injustice to climate change.

Thailand, with the gracious support of the Thai Monarchy and the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand, has played a important role in this sacred mission. Spearheaded by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and supported by the Royal Thai Government, we established the *International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV)* in 2004. This laid the foundation for the inaugural United Nations Day of Vesak in the same year, uniting global Buddhist leaders in vital forums to explore Buddhist principles as solutions to global issues—resonating with the vision and mandate of the United Nations.

Over the course of twenty UNDV celebrations, Thailand has had the honor of hosting fifteen, Sri Lanka one, and Vietnam has proudly hosted four—namely in 2008, 2014, 2019, and 2025. Each of Vietnam's contributions to UNDV has been remarkably successful, exemplifying visionary Buddhist leadership and international solidarity. The Government of Vietnam and the leadership of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have demonstrated unwavering commitment and dedication in organizing these momentous events, showcasing the power of Buddhist unity and collective action for global peace.

The main theme of UNDV 2025, ***“Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development,”*** reflects the vision of the United Nations and the aspirations of the Government of Vietnam for peace and sustainability in the spirit of the Buddha's teachings. It also honors the Buddha's immense contributions to human history, while commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Republic

of Vietnam and the 50th Anniversary of the country's reunification.

I deeply appreciate and hold in high regard the organizational capabilities, vision, and tremendous devotion demonstrated by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in hosting the four UNDV celebrations. These efforts stand as a testament to the highest standards of Buddhist leadership and an enduring commitment to peace and sustainable development.

From over 600 submissions received for the English academic conference, 75 papers have been meticulously selected for publication in this anthology. These contributions, authored by esteemed scholars and practitioners from diverse backgrounds, reflect the depth and breadth of contemporary Buddhist scholarship. Each article not only aligns with one or more of the five sub-themes but also offers innovative insights and practical solutions to pressing global issues. For instance, some papers explore the integration of mindfulness into modern education systems, while others analyze the role of Buddhist ethics in promoting sustainable development goals (SDGs). Collectively, these works exemplify the dynamic interplay between ancient Buddhist wisdom and cutting-edge research methodologies, bridging theory and practice in meaningful ways.

As we approach UNDV 2025, I warmly welcome the expected participation of approximately 600 international scholars in the English academic conference and around 350 scholars in the Vietnamese conference from 80 countries and 5 territories. Furthermore, I commend the cultural dimensions of Vesak 2025, including the Buddhist Art Exhibition, the Vietnamese Buddhist Cultural Festival, and the international Buddhist cultural performances from India, China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

These scholarly, cultural, and spiritual perspectives collectively contribute to the profound success of this sacred Vesak celebration. Together, let us ensure that the 20th United Nations Day of Vesak in Vietnam becomes a beacon of peace, unity, and sustainable development for the entire world.

\*\*\*

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

### I. BACKGROUND

The present volume, “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development”, constitutes a pivotal contribution to the 20th United Nations Day of Vesak 2025, hosted by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City from May 6 to 8. This publication is one of five thematic volumes prepared for the International Buddhist Conference under the overarching theme “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development.” The five themes of the conference are carefully curated to reflect the most pressing global issues through the lens of Buddhist ethical and philosophical wisdom: (1) Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace, (2) Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Path to Reconciliation, (3) Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development, (4) Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future, and (5) Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony.

This volume comprises 75 selected papers presented at the Vesak conference, drawn from a remarkable pool of over 600 scholarly submissions representing 80 countries and 5 territories. The remaining research papers have been compiled and published in five additional thematic volumes, corresponding to each of the five sub-themes of the Vesak 2025 academic agenda. This collection, therefore, reflects both the intellectual diversity and the global reach of contemporary Buddhist scholarship engaged in pressing global discourses.

In light of the challenges facing humanity today—ranging from armed conflicts and ecological collapse to social polarization and spiritual disillusionment—this volume takes on critical significance. It offers Buddhist perspectives that aim to transcend dichotomies, foster reconciliation, and nurture global solidarity. At a time when the world community is striving to realize the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goals 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), this collection of scholarly essays contributes to global discourse by providing contemplative insights rooted in Dhamma and engaged in the present realities of human suffering.

Vietnam’s hosting of this landmark event coincides with three deeply symbolic national milestones: the 80th anniversary of the founding of the

Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1945–2025), the 50th anniversary of national reunification (1975–2025), and the fourth occasion on which the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has been entrusted with organizing the UN Day of Vesak. In this context, the theme of “unity and inclusivity” not only resonates with Buddhist ethical imperatives but also aligns with Vietnam’s national ethos of resilience, peace-building, and collective progress. Through philosophical inquiry and interdisciplinary collaboration, the essays in this volume exemplify how Buddhist teachings offer both critical reflection and pragmatic pathways for addressing structural injustice and cultivating a world order based on mutual respect and shared dignity.

The academic rigor, cultural sensitivity, and spiritual depth of the essays compiled herein reflect the tireless efforts of Buddhist scholars and practitioners across continents. Drawing upon canonical texts, historical experiences, and contemporary applications, these contributions bridge the spiritual and the secular, the local and the global. They demonstrate that Buddhism is not merely a path of personal liberation, but a living tradition capable of informing public policy, educational reform, environmental ethics, and peace diplomacy.

## II. OVERVIEW OF SELECTED RESEARCH PAPERS

### 2.1. Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace

In their empirical study, “*Mindfulness-Based Learning (MBL) Process*,” Hansa Dhammaho and Nadnapang Phophichit examine the physiological and psychological effects of a structured doctoral curriculum grounded in Buddhist mindfulness. Focusing on PhD students enrolled in the Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Program at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, the authors employ a pretest-posttest design to measure stress levels, cardiovascular indicators, and brainwave activity across two academic terms. Findings highlight significant reductions in diastolic blood pressure and perceived stress, alongside modest gains in hydration and heart rate regulation. While EEG and cortisol shifts were statistically insignificant, the study suggests that the MBL framework enhances well-being in rigorous academic environments. With its integration of scientific analysis and Buddhist-informed pedagogy, the paper affirms mindfulness as both a contemplative and transformative educational tool. Though limited by sample size and lack of a control group, the study provides a valuable foundation for future mindfulness-based research in higher education.

Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Tuan explores in his paper “*Cultivating Inner Peace for Global Harmony: A Buddhist Perspective on Mindfulness, Vipassanā, and Ethical Living*” how meditative insight (*Vipassanā*) coupled with ethical integrity fosters not only personal serenity but global cooperation. The paper highlights how Buddhist practices such as right mindfulness and right livelihood lead to ecological awareness and intercultural empathy. Tuan’s use of case reflections on peace education and social ethics adds grounding to his doctrinal exposition. He proposes mindfulness as a skill for decision-makers, teachers, and activists alike. One of the paper’s strengths is its clear linkage

between personal practice and structural transformation. Its limitation lies in underdeveloped engagement with interreligious dialogue. Overall, the work provides an integrated view of how peace-building must include daily ethical conduct rooted in clarity, concentration, and compassion.

Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Gallele Sumanasiri Thero, in his paper *"Faith and Tolerance, Peace within and Peace Without,"* investigates how interreligious understanding and internal transformation form the basis for sustainable peace. Drawing on Buddhist principles and cross-religious insights, he emphasizes that true harmony must begin with individual moral purification. The paper skillfully bridges doctrinal exposition with socio-political critique, highlighting the role of psychological roots - desire, hatred, and delusion - in fueling violence. By contrasting theistic and nontheistic frameworks, Sumanasiri advocates a pluralistic ethics grounded in mutual respect. A notable strength is his integration of Buddhist texts like the Aggañña and Vasettha Suttas to support the universality of equality and nonviolence. Yet, more empirical data on modern conflict resolution could strengthen his case. Ultimately, the work proposes that outer peace can only arise from inner clarity, compassion, and detachment from ego-bound views.

Prof. Dr. Tabona Shoko, in his study *"Buddhism and Cultivation of Inner Peace for World Peace: The Case of Zimbabwe,"* examines how the Buddhist pursuit of inner peace can serve as a foundation for global harmony and sustainable development. Framed within the context of Vesak 2025, the paper underscores unity and inclusivity as essential Buddhist insights for world peace. Drawing from both textual analysis and fieldwork in Zimbabwe, Shoko contextualizes Tibetan Buddhism's role in peacebuilding and social welfare. The study highlights practices such as mindfulness, compassion, and meditation as transformative tools for addressing violence, inequality, and ecological crises. A particular strength lies in his integration of Buddhist thought with Sustainable Development Goals. However, the discussion would benefit from a more critical engagement with contemporary African spiritual pluralism. Ultimately, the work affirms that inner transformation is indispensable to achieving external peace and global cooperation.

Dr. YoungHoon Kwaak, in *"Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity,"* presents the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District (P.H.D.) as a visionary response to global crises through Buddhist principles. Challenging materialism and nationalism, he proposes a shift from external to internal transformation, grounded in sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation. The Peace City design incorporates Buddhist symbolism with sustainable development, aiming to protect cultural heritage while fostering ecological balance and social inclusion. Drawing from decades of planning and international cooperation, the paper moves beyond theory to offer a concrete model of mindful urbanism. Its strength lies in integrating spiritual ideals with practical governance. However, its realization remains hindered by political inertia. Ultimately, Kwaak's work calls for collective Buddhist action to manifest a living city of compassion, learning, and peace at the Buddha's birthplace.

*“A Novel Approach to Emotions to Cultivate Inner Peace for World Peace: A Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions?”* by Ven. Prof. Dr. Mahinda Deegalle Mahinda Deegalle presents an innovative dialogue between Buddhist moral psychology and contemporary emotion theory, arguing that unwholesome emotions like anger and pride are not merely reactions but karmically charged mental states with social consequences. He classifies Buddhist responses to emotion – such as patience, mindfulness, and compassion – as tools for emotional governance in pluralistic societies. The essay bridges Pāli textual traditions with Western psychology, suggesting a cross-disciplinary roadmap for peace education. Its key strength is the integration of Buddhist emotional training as a secular method for conflict resolution. The scope, however, remains largely theoretical, lacking empirical validation or fieldwork data. Nevertheless, this study adds nuance to Buddhist engagement with modern psychology and reaffirms emotional literacy as a path to inner and outer peace.

*“Principles of Peace in The Lotus Sutra”* by Most Ven. Dr. Thich Tam Thien, offers a profound reinterpretation of Chapter 28 of the Lotus Sūtra, extracting four core principles – seeking the protection of the Buddhas, planting virtuous roots, abiding in right concentration, and generating great compassion – as a structured ethical and spiritual path toward inner and global peace. He argues that cultivating faith, morality, meditation, and altruism can dissolve egocentric tendencies and cultivate social harmony. The paper positions Mahāyāna ideals as tools not only for liberation but for peacemaking, especially in times of division. His metaphor of “lotus in the mud” vividly illustrates transcendence through engagement. While spiritually rich, the essay presumes a level of doctrinal familiarity that may limit its accessibility to non-Buddhist audiences. Nevertheless, this work stands as a powerful appeal to reframe Buddhist spirituality as a foundation for ethical citizenship and sustainable peace.

*“Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace: A Buddhist Perspective with Special Reference to Nepal”*, Ashok Nanda Bajracharya explores how cultivating inner peace through Buddhist teachings can lay the foundation for sustainable world peace, with Nepal as a spiritual exemplar. Emphasizing that suffering arises from greed, hatred, and delusion, the paper outlines how mindfulness, compassion, and ethical conduct dismantle these roots. Drawing on core Buddhist doctrines – such as dependent origination and the Noble Eightfold Path – it demonstrates that peace is both personal and systemic. Through Nepal’s unique role as the Buddha’s birthplace and its post-conflict peacebuilding efforts, Bajracharya illustrates how inner transformation translates into national and global reconciliation. The paper’s integration of meditative insight with policy-level engagement makes it a compelling call for peace rooted in wisdom and compassion. While rich in philosophical depth, a greater empirical focus could enhance its practical applicability. Overall, the work affirms that fostering inner harmony is essential to achieving inclusive and enduring global peace.

Dr. Neeraj Yadav’s paper examines the Buddhist concept of mettā - loving-kindness - as a transformative path to inner peace and global harmony. Drawing from canonical texts, psychology, and case studies, it presents mettā not just



as a virtue but as a pragmatic approach to conflict resolution, social justice, and environmental care. By exploring Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions, Yadav highlights its universal relevance and flexibility. The paper shows how cultivating loving-kindness fosters empathy, reduces hostility, and builds cooperative communities, advocating its integration into education, diplomacy, and grassroots programs. Though the study could benefit from deeper interreligious dialogue, it powerfully envisions peace rooted in compassion and mindfulness, urging a shift from division to dialogue, from self-centeredness to global solidarity.

Ven. Tshibanda Gotama Sidarta, in his article “*Buddhist Meditation, A Right Way To Inner Peace For World Peace*” offers a pragmatic Buddhist framework for peace-building rooted in moral discipline and meditative cultivation. Emphasizing that global peace begins with the purification of the mind, the paper advocates observing the Five Precepts and practicing samatha-vipassana meditation. Drawing from canonical sources, it demonstrates how right morality and right concentration can transform defilements such as greed, hatred, and delusion into serenity and insight. The Four Brahmaviharas are highlighted as both ethical ideals and meditative tools. The work also underscores the foundational role of mindfulness in achieving personal liberation and social harmony. While grounded in Theravada orthodoxy, the paper affirms the universal relevance of cultivating a peaceful mind as the basis for a peaceful world.

In this richly textual work, “*War and Peace: A Comprehensive Exploration from the Buddhist Perspective*”, Ven. Prof. Witharandeniye Chandasiri contrasts Buddhist nonviolence with the global culture of militarism. He revisits early discourses to demonstrate how the roots of war – greed, hatred, and delusion – are treated in Buddhist soteriology as psychological poisons. The essay argues that true peace arises not from treaties or armaments, but from uprooting defilements through spiritual cultivation. He presents peace as an ontological and moral achievement rather than a diplomatic outcome. The paper’s strength lies in its textual fidelity and ethical clarity. However, it stops short of engaging with modern case studies or applying the teachings to state-level conflict resolution. Still, it stands as a rigorous doctrinal reminder that Buddhism’s response to war is introspective transformation, not retaliation.

“*The Interconnection between Inner and Outer Peace: A Buddhist Perspective*” by Ricardo Sasaki investigates the dialectical relationship between inner calm and social peace, proposing that the two are not sequential but mutually reinforcing. Drawing from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the ethics of mettā, he outlines a model in which meditative awareness fosters not only emotional stability but a shift in relational patterns. He supports his argument with references to modern conflict studies and contemplative science. Sasaki’s writing is lucid, bridging doctrinal precision with lived experience. One limitation is that the practical steps for scaling individual transformation into community action remain underdeveloped. Still, his argument is impactful: there is no peaceful society without peaceful people – and no inner peace that remains ethically passive.

Prof. Dr. Lye Ket Yong's paper, "*World Peace through Inner Peace: The Transformative Power of Meditation*," presents a compelling case for meditation as the foundation of sustainable peace in both personal and global dimensions. Drawing upon Buddhist scriptures and contemporary scientific research, the work underscores how meditation cultivates mindfulness, emotional resilience, and moral clarity. The author skillfully weaves together traditional techniques – Vipassanā and Dhammakaya – with reflections on mental purification, ethical development, and the transformative impact of meditative insight. Through detailed discussion of the "Middle Way," the paper reaffirms that inner calm is not only a psychological goal, but a spiritual necessity for social harmony and sustainable development. While rooted in Theravāda and Thai meditative traditions, its universal relevance is amplified by real-world initiatives, including peace-building programs and global meditation campaigns. Ultimately, the paper reaffirms that peace in the world begins with the stillness of one's mind.

Bhikkhu Brahmāli's study, *Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace: What the Buddha Says about Peace According to the Pali Canon*, offers a doctrinally precise analysis of the Pāli Canon's teachings on peace, emphasizing practical teachings from the Dhammapada, Sutta Nipāta, and Anguttara Nikāya. He argues that peace arises from ethical restraint (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), not external control. The work highlights the Buddha's rejection of vengeance and war, positioning forgiveness and understanding as political tools. One of the essay's contributions is its textual rigor combined with real-world application. A minor drawback is limited attention to current geopolitical contexts. Nevertheless, Brahmāli's classical rigor affirms the Pāli Canon's relevance in modern peacebuilding without resorting to doctrinal simplification.

## 2.2. Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Path to Reconciliation

Ven. Dr. Rathmale Punnarathana's article "*An Exploration of Buddhist Principles on Conflict Resolution and Peace-building as Presented in the Pali Discourses*" offers a profound inquiry into how Buddhist teachings address the roots of conflict – craving, hatred, and ignorance – through inner transformation. Drawing from discourses such as the Mahanidana-sutta and the Four Noble Truths, the paper emphasizes the essential role of moral, mental, and cognitive cultivation in resolving both personal and societal discord. It notably broadens the scope of Buddhist peace-building to include socio-economic injustices like poverty and inequality. The analysis shows how inner peace, nurtured through loving-kindness and mindfulness, becomes foundational to sustainable social harmony. While doctrinally thorough, the paper would benefit from broader interreligious and intercultural dialogue on conflict transformation. Nonetheless, it presents a compelling model of ethical and spiritual engagement with contemporary global crises.

"*Abandoning Anger for Peace: Analysis of the Three Stages of Anger and Methods to Deal with Them*" by Bhikkhu Dr. Sobhana Mahatthero, PhD dissects the progression of anger into distinct phases and proposes targeted interventions



rooted in Buddhist practice. His analysis clarifies how transforming anger can lead to inner peace. The work provides a detailed conceptual framework that bridges ancient teachings with modern psychology. It contributes to understanding emotional regulation from a spiritual perspective, yet the subjective interpretation of emotional stages and the lack of extensive quantitative measures present clear limitations.

*“Love Conquers the World not Arms”* by Dr. Labh Niharika explores the Buddhist concept of ‘mettā’ (Pāli) or ‘maitrī’ (Sanskrit), highlighting it as unconditional and selfless love that transcends attachment. Rooted in core Buddhist texts, mettā is shown as both personal and political, promoting harmony from families to global relations.

Ven. Dr. Tan Kah Poh in the article *“A Synergistic Model for Psychological Crisis Management and Healing in Buddhist Contemplative Care and Chaplaincy”* indicates that Buddhist chaplaincy is a relatively recent profession offering spiritual care rooted in Dharma. It supports individuals through crises, particularly illness and death, by applying key Buddhist practices and compassionate presence.

Sunil Kamble’s *“Buddhist Insight for Peace Through Social Conflict Resolution – A Historical Application by Dr. Ambedkar in India”* offers a historical analysis that interweaves Buddhist philosophy with social conflict resolution strategies. His narrative brings forward historical case studies that exemplify how traditional insights can resolve contemporary disputes. The paper is rich in contextual analysis and reinterprets classical teachings for modern applications. However, its reliance on qualitative historical data and the absence of recent empirical evidence present certain limitations. Ultimately, the research provides a thoughtful reinterpretation that could inspire new conflict resolution frameworks.

In *“Liberation by ‘Sublime Dwelling’ (Brahmavihāra): The Way to Inner and External Peace,”* Bhikkhuni Dr. Thích Diệu Hiếu explores the transformative potential of the four Brahmavihāras – loving-kindness, compassion, unselfish delight, and equanimity – as both a path to inner liberation and a foundation for social harmony. Drawing upon Pali texts and Buddhist commentarial traditions, the paper demonstrates how cultivating these states systematically purifies the mind, counteracts hatred, and fosters serenity. Moreover, the study highlights how mental peace, once internalized, naturally extends into ethical conduct, promoting interpersonal goodwill and collective concord. Through doctrinal analysis and practical insight, Dr. Hiếu affirms that true peace begins within but radiates outward, making the Sublime Dwelling a viable framework for both individual transformation and peaceful coexistence.

In the article *“The Power of Forgiveness: Pathway to Inner Growth and Renewal”* Professor Dr. Jyoti Gaur presents a comprehensive interdisciplinary study of forgiveness as a transformative psychological and spiritual practice. Drawing upon diverse traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, and Indigenous spirituality, the paper underscores forgiveness as vital to emotional healing, mental well-being, and spiritual development.

Distinguishing forgiveness from reconciliation, condoning, and forgetting, Dr. Gaur addresses the psychological and social barriers that hinder the process. Utilizing evidence-based methods such as mindfulness, cognitive reframing, and self-compassion, the study highlights how forgiveness cultivates resilience, empathy, and holistic health. Ultimately, the work frames forgiveness not merely as a moral virtue but as a skillful means for personal liberation, emotional renewal, and harmonious living.

Prof. Dr. Abraham Vélez de Cea, in “*A Buddhist Philosophy of Forgiveness*,” delves deeply into the conceptual realm of forgiveness as envisioned in Buddhist thought. His rigorous exegesis provides a robust theoretical framework that links spiritual forgiveness with practical reconciliation methods. The study is notable for its detailed philosophical analysis and its implications for conflict resolution. However, the dense theoretical language and minimal empirical evidence may challenge some readers. Despite these limitations, the work remains a profound contribution to the academic exploration of forgiveness.

In “*Ahimsā: A Buddhist Response to Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)*,” Elias G. Konyana investigates how Buddhist non-violence can counter domestic abuse. He argues that ancient ethical precepts offer practical solutions for modern conflicts, emphasizing compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The paper demonstrates innovative thinking by linking spirituality with social justice. It provides clear frameworks for applying Buddhist values to interpersonal violence. However, its reliance on qualitative insights and limited cross-cultural analysis may restrict its universal applicability.

Dr. Lauw Acep’s treatise *Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Buddhist Perspective* presents forgiveness not merely as a moral virtue but as a transformative force for psychological healing and spiritual liberation. Drawing from canonical Pāli texts and contemporary insights, the work portrays forgiveness (khama) as inherently connected to virtue, compassion, and wisdom. Dr. Acep demonstrates how mindfulness transforms the forgiveness process through letting go, emotional regulation, and self-transcendence, leading to mental well-being and social harmony. The study integrates classical teachings such as the five spiritual faculties, the Brahmavihāras, and satipatthāna with modern meditative and therapeutic methods. Through careful analysis, it affirms that Buddhist forgiveness is not passive absolution but an intentional path of transformation grounded in awareness and loving-kindness.

Ven. Dr. Bhikkhuni Lieu Phap’s essay, “*The Contributions of Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha to the Sustainable Development of the Country*,” offers a comprehensive exploration of how Vietnamese Buddhist nuns integrate spiritual practice with social responsibility to foster national well-being. Through initiatives in education, healthcare, charity, and Dhamma propagation, the Bhikkhuni Sangha embodies the compassionate ethos of engaged Buddhism. The work highlights the transformative impact of nuns in fields ranging from orphan care and elder support to environmental awareness, psychological counseling, and interfaith dialogue. Dr. Lieu Phap articulates how the Sangha’s leadership – rooted in wisdom, mindfulness, and compassion – contributes meaningfully to

sustainable development while preserving cultural and spiritual continuity. This study affirms that Vietnamese nuns are not only custodians of the Dharma but also vital agents of ethical and inclusive progress in contemporary society.

Dr. Wimal Hewamanage, in *"Buddhist Reflection on Forgiveness and Its Relevance to Patience and Loving-Kindness,"* offers a reflective discourse that connects classical Buddhist teachings with modern ethical practices. The research articulates how forgiveness, patience, and loving-kindness can enhance interpersonal relationships and societal well-being. It is celebrated for its clear exegesis and thoughtful synthesis of traditional and contemporary viewpoints. Nonetheless, the study's narrow cultural focus and limited cross-comparative data pose notable constraints. Despite these issues, the paper contributes meaningfully to discussions on ethical living and psychological health.

Dr. Arvind Kumar Singh's scholarly contribution, *"Compassion and Tolerance: Not Weakness, But Strength for Human Development,"* presents a compelling argument for reinterpreting compassion (*karuṇā*) and tolerance (*khantī*) as transformative forces in both spiritual and societal contexts. Drawing from Theravāda and Mahāyāna texts, as well as historical and contemporary examples, the paper asserts that these virtues are not passive traits but dynamic expressions of emotional intelligence, ethical resilience, and spiritual maturity. Singh examines how *karuṇā* and *khantī* are essential for personal liberation, conflict resolution, social justice, and sustainable development. The work stands out for its integrative approach, linking Buddhist ethics with modern psychological well-being, interreligious harmony, and global responsibility. This interdisciplinary perspective underscores compassion and tolerance as indispensable virtues for building a more peaceful, empathetic, and sustainable world.

### **2.3. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development**

*"Sharing – Not Saving: Empathy and Interconnectedness as Patterns of Contemporary Fundraising Success"* by Dr. Jitka Cirklová investigates contemporary fundraising models that prioritize sharing and empathy over traditional saving approaches, drawing inspiration from Buddhist principles of interconnectedness. The paper identifies innovative strategies where donor engagement is reshaped by practices of mutual support and ethical responsibility, leading to more effective and sustainable philanthropic outcomes. It explores how empathetic communication, community solidarity, and ethical fundraising practices can transform financial support mechanisms in modern charitable initiatives. While the study offers a novel conceptual framework and insightful analysis, it is somewhat limited by the lack of extensive quantitative data and cross-context comparisons, which could enhance its empirical foundation. Cirklová's work presents a promising model that merges spiritual ethics with modern fundraising, yet further research is required to assess its scalability and effectiveness in diverse socio-economic environments. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how values-driven approaches can redefine success in contemporary philanthropy.

Dr. Baatr U. Kitinov, in his article *Buddhist Compassion in Action: Politics and Buddhism in 1720–1730s In and Around Tibet*, explores how Buddhist principles - especially compassion and moral responsibility - influenced political decisions and interethnic relations during a turbulent period in Tibetan history. Drawing from both well-known and rare archival sources, the study examines how key figures such as the Seventh Dalai Lama, Dzungar rulers, Qing emperors Kangxi and Yongzheng, and Kalmyk leaders Ayuka and Tseren Donduk applied Buddhist ethics in resolving conflicts. The article highlights how doctrines of mercy, when embodied in political practice, enabled ceasefires, diplomacy, and religious cooperation across cultural and imperial boundaries. Its strength lies in detailed textual analysis and underutilized Tibetan and Russian archives. Although the focus remains within a Buddhist framework, Kitinov's work powerfully illustrates how Buddhist compassion functioned as an active force in diplomacy and governance.

Dr. Henry Dang, in his compelling paper "*The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): What the Buddhist Community can do*", investigates the profound alignment between Buddhist principles and the global development agenda established by the United Nations. The paper outlines how Buddhist teachings—rooted in compassion, mindfulness, and the Noble Eightfold Path—offer invaluable ethical frameworks for advancing the 17 SDGs. Emphasizing peace education, ecological stewardship, and moral economic conduct, Dr. Dang proposes actionable initiatives such as Earth Care Day, Dhamma-based business networks, and the institutional involvement of Buddhists in national and international SDG processes. A salient contribution of the work lies in its integration of timeless spiritual wisdom with contemporary global governance challenges. However, the article primarily focuses on Buddhist contributions without an in-depth comparative religious dialogue. Nonetheless, it provides a timely and practical call for the global Buddhist community to engage actively in shaping a future of sustainable peace and human dignity.

Dr. Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury's paper "*Through Promoting Engaged Buddhism: An Altruistic Role of Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō (1865 - 1926) in Pre-Partition Bengal*" investigates the influential role of Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō in promoting engaged Buddhism during pre-partition Bengal. The study traces the altruistic endeavors of this eminent figure, detailing how his commitment to compassion and social reform catalyzed community empowerment and ethical activism. It discusses the application of Buddhist precepts in addressing social inequalities and fostering educational and welfare initiatives. Critical points include the interplay between spiritual leadership and public sentiment, the transformative potential of engaged Buddhism, and the historical context that shaped his impactful contributions. Despite its rich historical analysis and theoretical depth, the research relies heavily on archival material and traditional narratives, which may limit its contemporary applicability. The paper makes a significant contribution by illuminating the historical roots of socially engaged Buddhism and calls for

further interdisciplinary research to explore how these altruistic practices can be adapted to current social challenges.

Dr. Efendi Hansen Ng, in his paper *Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development*, offers a thoughtful reflection on the transformative power of Buddhist values in addressing today's global challenges. Aligned with the 2025 United Nations Day of Vesak theme, the paper explores how principles such as interconnectedness, compassion, and inclusivity - grounded in dependent origination and the Four Brahmaviharas - can shape ethical approaches to peacebuilding and sustainable development. Drawing from classical sources and lived practices in contemporary Indonesia, Ng demonstrates the relevance of Buddhist ethics to issues from ecological protection to social justice. A key strength lies in its detailed account of compassion in action through education, interfaith initiatives, and engaged Buddhism. While rooted in the Buddhist tradition, the work meaningfully contributes to global ethical discourse by showing how spiritual wisdom can serve as a moral compass for collective well-being and planetary care.

In his paper, Rev. Fuminobu Komura offers a compelling account of Buddhist chaplaincy as holistic spiritual care grounded in the principles of loving-kindness, compassion, and wisdom. Through the development of the Care of Inochi model at the Rinbutsuken Institute for Engaged Buddhism in Tokyo, the study illustrates how Buddhist chaplains provide interfaith, patient-centered support within medical institutions such as The Jikei University Hospital. By integrating doctrinal foundations - especially dependent co-arising and the Four Actions of the Bodhisattva - with presence and practical skill, the model affirms spiritual care as a mutual path of healing and transformation. A key strength lies in its emphasis that chaplaincy is not merely a service to others but a reflective and transformative journey for the practitioner. While rooted in Buddhist frameworks, the work significantly contributes to interfaith dialogue and expands the contemporary discourse on spiritual care in healthcare contexts.

Prof. Manuel Antonio Ato del Avellanal Carrera's "*The Philosophy of Thai - Vietnamese Engaged Buddhism: A Convergent Ethical Framework for Mindful Civic Action*" presents a comparative analysis of Thai and Vietnamese engaged Buddhism, proposing an ethical framework for mindful civic action. The study investigates how cultural nuances and historical contexts shape the application of Buddhist principles in civic life. It highlights the convergence of traditional teachings with modern democratic practices, emphasizing community participation, ethical leadership, and social justice. Key points include the synthesis of cross-cultural spiritual practices, the promotion of inclusive governance, and the role of engaged Buddhism in mediating societal conflicts. While the research offers valuable insights into the interplay between religion and civic responsibility, it is occasionally limited by an overemphasis on theoretical constructs and lacks extensive quantitative support. Despite these challenges, the paper significantly contributes to the understanding of



how engaged Buddhism can inform practical strategies for contemporary civic engagement, and it invites further studies to explore its application across diverse cultural settings.

Ven. Triratana Bhikkhu Jhubhur Chakma's study, *"Buddhist Compassion in Action: Promoting Education, Harmony and Strengthening Unity Through Buddhist Missionary Schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh"* explores how Buddhist missionary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts foster educational excellence, social cohesion, and community empowerment. The paper outlines the deployment of compassionate teaching methods, the integration of ethical values derived from Buddhist traditions, and the promotion of intercultural dialogue as means to uplift marginalized groups. It highlights the schools' role in instilling moral responsibility and nurturing community solidarity while also emphasizing innovative pedagogical approaches. However, the research is limited by its qualitative focus and a scarcity of quantitative data to benchmark outcomes. Chakma's work contributes a practical model for integrating spiritual ethics into education and social reform, while suggesting that further comparative and empirical studies are necessary to establish broader applicability and impact.

Lim Kooi Fong introduces NORBU (Neural Operator for Responsible Buddhist Understanding), a pioneering Buddhist AI envisioned as a *kalyāṇa mitra* – a spiritual friend – capable of facilitating compassionate, ethical, and spiritually attuned conversations. Rooted in the principles of non-violent communication and the four brahma-vihāras, NORBU exemplifies how Buddhist values can inform AI development to promote mindfulness, empathy, and well-being in digital interaction. Drawing from Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions, and structured around Yogācāra frameworks such as ālaya-vijñāna and āśraya-parāvṛtti, the project blends doctrinal depth with advanced language models to deliver context-sensitive and ethically sound guidance. NORBU's thoughtful responses to sensitive user inquiries – ranging from gender ethics to grief and karma – demonstrate its role as both an epistemic tool and a companion for spiritual growth. A notable contribution of the project lies in its articulation of a new "Dharma Door" where Buddhist AI becomes a practical and transformative interface for applying timeless wisdom in today's complex digital world.

Prof. Dr. Projit Kumar Palit's comprehensive paper, *"Buddhist Compassion and Human Development,"* explores the vital intersection between Buddhist ethics and holistic human flourishing. Drawing on early Indian texts, the teachings of the Buddha, and contemporary human development theory, the author argues for an integrative model that unites material advancement with spiritual awakening. The study critiques Western paradigms of progress rooted in external growth, proposing instead a balance of physical, mental, ethical, and spiritual cultivation. With particular attention to Buddhist principles such as non-violence, mindfulness, and compassion, the paper highlights their alignment with the six pillars of human development defined by the UNDP. Through historical examples like Emperor Ashoka's Dhamma-based

governance, the work affirms Buddhism's enduring relevance in fostering peace, dignity, and sustainable well-being. It offers a visionary framework that bridges ancient wisdom with modern developmental challenges.

In his paper "*Buddhism Around the World-Africa: Perspectives of African Buddhist Followers*" Rev. Dr. ILukpitiye Pannasekara Thero offers a nuanced exploration of how Buddhism is interpreted and adapted by African followers, thereby enriching the global discourse on religious diversity. The study details the unique synthesis between traditional Buddhist doctrines and indigenous African cultural practices, emphasizing the role of local contexts in shaping spiritual expression. It highlights the transformative impact of intercultural dialogue, resilience in the face of socio-economic challenges, and the evolution of compassionate practices in non-traditional settings. The research contributes valuable insights into the diffusion of Buddhist ethics beyond its classical origins while pointing out potential tensions arising from cultural differences. Although the work is commendable for its comprehensive qualitative analysis, it could benefit from more quantitative data to substantiate its claims. Overall, the study underscores the importance of cross-cultural engagement in understanding and advancing Buddhist values in a pluralistic world.

Prof. Dr. Jose Antonio Rodriguez Diaz's work "*Buddhists in New Lands: Compassion Values and Actions Towards Better and Sustainable Futures and Happiness*" investigates the dynamic reconfiguration of Buddhist compassion among diasporic communities, illustrating how traditional values are adapted to address contemporary social challenges. The paper explores the transformative impact of compassionate practices on community cohesion, sustainable development, and personal well-being in new cultural environments. It highlights innovative approaches where Buddhist ethical principles are employed to foster mutual support, resilience, and holistic growth. The research makes significant contributions by linking classical teachings with modern experiences of migration, identity reformation, and environmental stewardship. Notwithstanding its robust theoretical insights, the study notes variability in practical application across different communities, which could benefit from further systematic empirical research. By offering a well-rounded perspective that integrates doctrinal analysis with socio-cultural dynamics, the paper enriches our understanding of how Buddhist compassion can drive progressive change and sustainable futures in diverse global settings.

Ven. Thich Thien Tri offers an in-depth examination of the reformist vision of Venerable Taixu, whose efforts to modernize Chinese Buddhism in the early twentieth century marked a pivotal turning point in the tradition's evolution. By advocating for socially engaged Buddhism, interfaith dialogue, and institutional renewal, Taixu sought to revitalize Buddhism amid cultural decline and the growing influence of Western religious models. Despite facing resistance from conservative elements within the sangha and the turbulent political context of Republican and Maoist China, his legacy endures through the work of disciples such as Yinshun and Hsing Yun. Notably, Taixu's integration of organizational models from Japanese Buddhism and his admiration for Christian social

structures reflect a bold vision of religious adaptability grounded in ethical responsibility and global relevance. The work highlights both the successes and limitations of Taixu's reform movement, portraying him as a pioneer of modern Buddhist thought whose commitment to compassion and wisdom continues to inspire reform across cultures and generations.

In their collaborative paper, "*Mindful Marketing Strategies for Borobudur: A Buddhist Approach to Sustainable Tourism*", Dr. Budi Hermawan and Soegeng Wahyoedi propose a novel approach to tourism marketing by embedding Buddhist ethical values into the promotion of Borobudur. The study argues that mindful marketing- anchored in principles of non-harm, mindfulness, and cultural sensitivity enhance visitor experience while ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage. It outlines strategies such as ethical communication, responsible travel practices, and community-based tourism initiatives that align economic growth with spiritual integrity. The authors provide detailed case analyses and theoretical discussions that suggest a reformation of conventional marketing models in tourism. Although the framework is innovative, the study is limited by its dependence on qualitative insights and a scarcity of large-scale empirical data, which may restrict its broader applicability. Overall, this research offers a promising blueprint for sustainable tourism that unites ancient Buddhist values with modern marketing techniques while advocating for further quantitative studies to test its effectiveness.

Ms. Adele Tomlin's paper "*Buddhist Compassion in Action: Protecting Animals and the Environment with Our Diet*" explores the ethical dimensions of dietary choices as expressions of Buddhist compassion, particularly in protecting animals and the environment. The study delves into how dietary practices influenced by Buddhist principles can reduce harm and promote ecological balance; it analyzes the moral implications of consumption patterns; it links ethical eating with broader social and environmental sustainability; it offers insights into how compassion can be operationalized through everyday choices; and it presents a critique of conventional consumption models. Despite its innovative perspective, the research is limited by subjective interpretations and a lack of comprehensive empirical data to measure behavioral impacts across different populations. Tomlin's work provides a fresh and practical contribution by proposing that mindful eating serves as an actionable pathway for environmental stewardship, yet it calls for additional research to quantify its effects on both animal welfare and ecological preservation robustly.

#### **2.4. Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future, and Sustainable Future**

Dr. Lobsang Tshultrim Gnon Na's article "*Mindfulness in Education: Advancing Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity and Sustainable Future*" presents mindfulness as a pedagogical method for reducing educational exclusion and fostering mutual respect. He examines how marginalized students benefit from mindful awareness practices that affirm their identity and restore their dignity. The author situates this within a broader human rights discourse. The argument is persuasive but would benefit from field-



based validation or the inclusion of institutional examples where such reforms have been trialed.

In his insightful contribution “*Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future and Fostering Unity for Global Harmony*,” Ven. Lopen Gem Dorji links the cultivation of mindful awareness with the creation of harmonious societies. He situates mindfulness as a tool for overcoming sectarianism, nationalism, and prejudice, thereby fostering global unity. Dorji uses Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness framework to illustrate how mindfulness can be embedded in national education. The strength of the article is its macro-level vision connecting mindfulness to governance and development. However, its ambitious scale might benefit from localized examples of school-based implementation.

In “*Application of Mindfulness at Mahāpajāpati Primary School Education in India*,” Bhikkhuni Dr. Như Nguyệt presents a case study of how a Buddhist school integrates mindfulness practices across its academic and moral curriculum. She details specific classroom strategies including mindful sitting, ethical storytelling, and sensory awareness exercises. The research highlights improved student behavior, empathy, and attentiveness. The paper’s merit lies in its concrete documentation of grassroots Buddhist education. Yet, the study would be stronger with longitudinal tracking of student outcomes and comparative evaluation with conventional primary schools.

In his expansive paper “*Empowering Students with Compassionate Action for Global Peace*,” Ven. Dr. Burmansah integrates Buddhist meditation retreats with mindfulness pedagogy to develop compassionate leadership among youth. The study investigates several school-based programs in Indonesia where contemplative practices enhance students’ capacity for peacebuilding and service. Burmansah posits that experiential mindfulness – through retreats and service learning – leads to deeper personal transformation than classroom-only approaches. His work contributes to the action-based mindfulness theory, reinforcing the link between inner clarity and outer peace. A limitation lies in the relatively anecdotal presentation; quantitative data or longitudinal tracking would help substantiate the claims more robustly.

Prof. Georgia Cristian Borges, through her work “*Seeds of Consciousness: Cultivating Compassionate Education for a Sustainable Future*,” offers a poetic yet precise argument for integrating mindfulness into educational psychology. She introduces the metaphor of “seeds” to describe latent human capacities for empathy, ecological responsibility, and collective awareness. Borges draws from the Abhidhamma and contemporary developmental psychology to frame education as a process of consciousness cultivation. The originality of her language is compelling, though at times, metaphor overtakes methodological clarity. Greater empirical backing would enhance the academic weight of her propositions.

Most Ven. Prof. Dhammapāla Ila (Lee Tackhoan), in “*Sati Meditation (Mindfulness) in Education*,” highlights mindfulness as a transformative element in modern education. Rooted in Buddhist tradition, Sati meditation is shown

to enhance emotional well-being, academic focus, and ethical awareness. The study presents practical examples from schools and research to illustrate its benefits while also acknowledging challenges in implementation. By linking mindfulness to sustainability and compassion, the work offers a concise yet impactful vision for holistic education.

Ven. Dr. Wistina Seneru, in *“Creating a Mindful Campus for Global Harmony: Cultivating Mindful Habits from the Classroom to Everyday Life for Students and Educators”*, examines the role of mindfulness in transforming educational environments into spaces of emotional resilience, ethical awareness, and global harmony. Drawing on both Buddhist teachings and contemporary research, the study emphasizes how daily mindfulness practices enhance student engagement, educator well-being, and campus culture. Through practical integration into curricula and institutional life, mindfulness emerges not only as a tool for academic success but as a foundation for compassionate leadership and intercultural empathy. The study’s strength lies in connecting personal development with broader social impact, though challenges in scalability and cultural adaptation remain.

Ven. Prof. Dr. Milada Polišenská, in *“The Need for Buddhist Values in Western Society with Special Emphasis on Central Europe and Education”*, examines how Buddhist ethics can address the growing moral, educational, and existential crises in Central Europe. Focusing on Czechia’s historical encounter with Buddhism, the study links past struggles under totalitarianism with current spiritual decline amid material abundance. Emphasizing the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, it presents Buddhist values as a necessary compass for both personal development and societal renewal. While the analysis is rooted in regional context, its insights speak to broader concerns of cultural disintegration and the urgent need for ethical grounding.

Prof. Dr. Sunil Kariyakarawana, in *“The Journey of Mindfulness to the West: Its Role in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future”*, offers a critical and reflective analysis of how traditional Buddhist mindfulness has been adapted within Western contexts. Emphasizing its therapeutic appeal and secular accessibility, the study traces mindfulness from its canonical foundations to its modern applications in education and mental health. Kariyakarawana underscores the ethical and spiritual depth of mindfulness in contrast to its often “mechanistic” use in Western settings. While recognizing the benefits of secular mindfulness, the work advocates for a more holistic understanding rooted in Buddhist *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. Its strength lies in bridging classical doctrine with contemporary relevance, though tensions between traditional integrity and modern utility remain an ongoing discourse.

Asst.Prof.Dr. Asha Singh, in her research titled *“The Role of Buddhist Teachings in Transforming Education for a Sustainable Future”*, positions Buddhist ethics as a transformative force capable of rehumanizing education. She outlines a model that integrates the right view and the right mindfulness to shape a holistic learner. Singh highlights how concepts such as *anicca* (impermanence) and *dukkha* (suffering) can guide students to accept change,

develop resilience, and act responsibly. One of the paper's contributions is its ethical emphasis on compassion over competition in learning environments. A limitation is the lack of practical applications or curriculum modules that concretize her philosophical proposals.

Ven. Dr. Gombodorj Myagmarsuren, in the article "*Buddhist Teachings for Public Education in Mongolia: Past & Present*", offers a thorough exploration of Mongolia's evolving Buddhist educational tradition. The study traces the roots of monastic pedagogy from classical scholasticism – grounded in logic, medicine, and ritual – to its suppression under communist rule and subsequent revival in the democratic era. Emphasizing a modernized, interdisciplinary model, Myagmarsuren advocates for accessible Buddhist education that speaks to today's youth through science, critical reasoning, media, and interfaith dialogue. One of the study's strengths lies in its balance of doctrinal authenticity and innovative pedagogy. While the challenges of modernization remain, the work affirms the Dharma's continued relevance in shaping a compassionate and culturally grounded educational future.

Ms. Cynthia Chantal Infante Medina, in her thoughtful paper "*Unity and Inclusion for Human Dignity: Buddhist Perspectives on World Peace and Sustainable Development*," argues that Buddhist mindfulness fosters not only individual peace but also collective inclusion. She analyzes the role of mettā and upekkhā in reducing structural violence and discrimination in education systems. By synthesizing social theory and Buddhist praxis, the author positions mindfulness as a platform for social equity. A limitation, however, is the lack of specific examples illustrating how mindfulness dismantles institutional exclusion in real-world educational settings.

Dr. Jeffrey Wilson, in "*Subjectivity, Phenomenology and the Notion of Anatta*", explores the intersection between Buddhist thought and Western phenomenology, particularly regarding the concept of non-self (anatta). By drawing on thinkers like Husserl and Kristeva, the paper contrasts ego-based cognition with Buddhist notions of emptiness and mindfulness. It suggests that true insight arises not from analytical reasoning, but from direct, intuitive experience. The work's strength lies in bridging meditative practice with contemporary philosophical discourse, offering mindfulness as a pathway to dissolve rigid self-concepts.

Dr. Yun Fu Tien, in "*Bridging Hearts and Minds: Mindfulness, Heartfulness, and AI in Teaching Dharma Chinese in Bhutan for Compassion and Sustainable Development*", presents a distinctive approach to language education that interweaves Buddhist ethics, emotional cultivation, and technological innovation. Through the "Dharma Chinese" program in Bhutan, the study illustrates how mindfulness and heartfulness practices, integrated with AI tools, enhance not only Mandarin learning but also intercultural understanding, ethical awareness, and spiritual engagement. The strength of the work lies in its holistic pedagogy, demonstrating how language teaching can become a vehicle for compassion, self-reflection, and global citizenship.

Dr. Nguyễn Thị Bích Vân, in “*Mindfulness Education – A Solution to Help Students Face Environmental and Social Crises*”, argues for the urgent integration of Buddhist mindfulness into modern education to address rising ecological, emotional, and moral challenges among youth. The paper explores how mindfulness nurtures compassion, emotional balance, and a sense of social and environmental responsibility. Drawing on both Buddhist philosophy and contemporary research, the study highlights mindfulness as a tool for fostering ethical awareness, sustainable values, and mental resilience. A key strength of the work lies in its practical, age-specific applications – ranging from preschool to university level – and its emphasis on training teachers as mindful role models in the classroom.

### **2.5. Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony**

Ven. Dr. Omalpe Somananda’s article “*Conflict resolution: Buddhist social work approach based on Buddhist teachings*” presents a compelling synthesis between Buddhist ethics and modern social work principles. The author emphasizes the importance of empathy, mindfulness, and non-harming (*ahimsā*) as key instruments in de-escalating community-level conflicts. By integrating Pāli sources like the Kālāma Sutta and Sigalovāda Sutta, the paper constructs a Buddhist model of grassroots peacebuilding that complements secular frameworks of conflict mediation. Case examples from Sri Lanka are used to demonstrate how socially engaged monks can serve as mediators and educators. The article is practical and insightful, though additional statistical or programmatic data would bolster its credibility for policy application.

Prof. Dr. Susanne Von Der Heide’s study “*Collaborative efforts for global harmony: History of Buddhism in Germany*” presents a compelling analysis of Buddhism’s adaptation and contribution to intercultural dialogue in the West. She traces the reception of Buddhist philosophy in Germany from the 19th century to the post-war era, highlighting key figures, institutions, and socio-political movements. The author argues that Buddhism has offered Germans a framework for ethical reflection, trauma healing, and pluralistic ethics in a post-Christian context. While the study offers rich historical insight, its contemporary implications could be more deeply explored, particularly in the context of Germany’s increasing multicultural dynamics.

Rida Jelita, in her work titled “*New life concept towards global harmony with the International Nature Loving Association*”, integrates Buddhist ethics with eco-spiritual activism. She presents the Nature Loving Association as a model for grassroots engagement in ecological protection and peace education, grounded in principles like compassion for all beings and minimal harm. She argues that environmental degradation and moral decline are interconnected, and both require inner transformation as well as structural reform. The article’s strength lies in its real-world orientation and participatory ethos; however, it would benefit from greater clarity on the organization’s measurable impact and long-term strategy.

Dr. Lang Heping (Fa Qing)’s paper, “*Unity and Inclusivity in TianTai Buddhism and Its Significance for World Peace*,” presents a thorough examination

of how the Tiantai tradition integrates doctrinal complexity with practical adaptability to foster harmony. Rooted in Zhiyi's classification system and the theory of the Round and Inter-inclusive Threefold Truth, the work articulates a vision of unity in diversity, offering a Buddhist framework for interreligious dialogue and global peace. The author emphasizes that Tiantai's syncretic and non-exclusionary approach encourages the recognition of all teachings and traditions as expedient means. By advancing the notion that any spiritual level is valid when rooted in sincerity, the paper situates Tiantai Buddhism as a model for inclusive coexistence in a pluralistic world. It is a compelling contribution to the discourse on religious tolerance and the ethical application of Buddhist principles in modern society.

Ven. Dr. Jinwol Lee's paper, "*A Buddhist Way to Foster Unity and Harmony for the World*," offers a timely exploration of how Buddhist principles – especially compassion, mindfulness, and interdependence – can meaningfully contribute to global peace through active engagement in interfaith movements. Focusing on the United Religions Initiative (URI) as a case study, the author illustrates the compatibility between Buddhist ethics and URI's mission of fostering justice and healing for the Earth and all beings. Through historical examples, doctrinal insights, and practical recommendations, the paper highlights how Buddhist communities can collaborate across traditions to build a culture of mutual respect, peace, and sustainability. It is a valuable contribution to the contemporary discourse on religious pluralism and the Buddhist role in promoting unity within a diverse global society.

In "*The Interconnectedness of Humanity and Human Dignity: Mahāyāna Buddhist Teachings for World Peace and Sustainable Development*," Ven. Dr. Thích Hạnh Chánh presents an in-depth exploration of how Mahāyāna Buddhist concepts – especially *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination) and collective karma – can inform leadership, ethics, and social justice in the global age. The paper situates human dignity within a web of interdependence, proposing that individual worth must be upheld through mutual responsibility and compassion. Drawing on classical scriptures and philosophical commentary, the study integrates the metaphor of Indra's Net with contemporary leadership models to argue for systemic transformation grounded in empathy and ethical action. It contributes a robust Buddhist framework for understanding sustainable development, inclusive governance, and collective moral agency in addressing the pressing challenges of the 21st century.

"*Bridging worlds: Uniting friends of diverse faiths and traditions for a sustainable environment, global harmony, and world peace*" by Prof. Dr. Chang, Yu-Ling explores the potential of Buddhist ecological ethics to bridge faith-based communities. The author emphasizes the interlinking between interfaith collaboration and environmental sustainability, with interbeing and non-harming as central concepts. She discusses successful environmental coalitions in East Asia and the role of monastic communities as catalysts for change. This ecologically engaged Buddhism, if systematically expanded, could support global environmental governance. The paper is conceptually coherent, though



future iterations might incorporate more interdisciplinary ecological science for integrated policymaking.

In his paper “*Dharma as culture*”, Dr. Märt Läänemets discusses how Buddhist teachings are not merely religious prescriptions but also foundational cultural values that have shaped Asian civilizations. He traces the integration of dharma into language, education, art, and governance. This cultural lens offers a holistic view of how Buddhism permeates civilizational ethos beyond doctrine. A notable insight is the reframing of dharma as lived culture. Still, more comparative analysis between regions could deepen the discussion and identify divergent interpretations across Buddhist cultures.

In “*Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainability*,” Dato’ Ang Choo Hong presents a far-reaching and grounded vision of how Buddhist principles – especially interconnectedness (paṭiccasamuppāda), anattā (non-self), and the Middle Way – can contribute to global harmony, environmental sustainability, and human dignity. Through practical examples such as ESG-compliant Vesak celebrations, eco-temples, and advocacy for Vesak as a public holiday, the author demonstrates how timeless Buddhist values can meet contemporary societal challenges. The paper also critiques prevailing civilisational paradigms and proposes Buddhist thought as a viable alternative to monotheistic absolutism and consumerism. It is a compelling call for engaged Buddhism that transcends personal practice to address structural injustices and foster inclusive, sustainable development.

“*The role of interfaith collaboration in promoting global harmony, with a specific focus on Muslim-majority nation, efforts of preserve Buddhist heritage sites*” by Dr. Numan Anwar investigates the dynamics of religious diplomacy in contexts where Buddhism is a minority tradition. Highlighting Indonesia as a key example, he showcases successful interfaith cooperation in preserving Buddhist sites. This pragmatic approach to heritage conservation through dialogue is commendable. Nonetheless, the study could explore in more depth the long-term sustainability and political challenges of such interfaith efforts.

Most Venerable Bhante Jinalankara, in his paper “*What the Buddha Taught for Sustainable Peace in the World*,” articulates a comprehensive Buddhist framework for lasting global peace rooted in inner transformation. Drawing from canonical texts and historical examples, he underscores how peace begins not in treaties but in the mind – through the eradication of greed, hatred, and delusion. The paper explores ethical conduct, meditative discipline, loving-kindness, and wise leadership as indispensable tools for conflict prevention and harmony. Emphasizing the unique Buddhist emphasis on nonviolence, friendship, and self-restraint, the author presents both personal and societal paths to peace. Particularly compelling is the insistence that sustainable peace must arise from sincere inner cultivation, rather than external enforcement. Though deeply rooted in Theravāda tradition, the work offers universal insights into leadership, morality, and the transformative power of compassion.

Dr. Ninh Thị Sinh’s study, “*Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam: Compassion in Action and the Social Responsibility of Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911–1999)*,” offers

a comprehensive analysis of one of the most influential female monastics in 20th-century Vietnamese Buddhism. By situating Bhiksuni Như Thanh's life and work within the framework of Engaged Buddhism, the paper illustrates how she transformed doctrinal compassion into large-scale social action. Through initiatives in education, healthcare, orphan care, and economic self-sufficiency, Như Thanh not only elevated the status of Buddhist nuns but also institutionalized a model of socially engaged spirituality. The study emphasizes that her contributions went beyond spiritual teachings, becoming a blueprint for sustainable humanitarian efforts rooted in Buddhist ethics. The paper's strength lies in its combination of historical scholarship, gender perspective, and practical relevance – making it a critical resource for understanding Buddhist social engagement in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Dr. Lalan Kumar Jha's paper, "*Compassion, Unity, Integrity and Mindful Efforts for the Sustainable Future: As Depicted in the Theravāda Buddhism*," explores how four core values – karuṇā (compassion), unity, integrity, and mindful effort – intertwine to shape a harmonious and sustainable society. Grounded in early Pāli texts, the study illustrates how these values, deeply embedded in the life and teachings of the Buddha, serve not only personal development but also collective well-being. The paper weaves doctrinal exegesis with historical narratives, showing how figures like Aṅgulimāla and King Ashoka exemplify transformation through compassion and ethical living. Particularly timely is the emphasis on ecological consciousness and moral leadership as tools for sustainable development. While steeped in Theravāda tradition, the paper offers universal insights into moral resilience and social renewal in times of crisis.

Dr. Kalinga Seneviratne's contribution titled "*Mindful communication: A collaborative approach for peace journalism to global harmony*" introduces a Buddhist framework for ethical journalism. He advocates for "mindful communication" that avoids sensationalism and polarization, promoting empathy and fact-based discourse. The strength of the study lies in its timely critique of media culture and its alignment with the Buddhist virtue of sammā-vācā (right speech). However, implementation models remain underdeveloped, especially concerning media regulation in digital contexts.

In "*Creating More Space, Sharing More Resource: Reimagined Education Approaches for Today's Digital Learners and Sustainable Discourse*," Dr. Edi Ramawijaya Putra proposes a transformative educational framework grounded in Buddhist ethics, sustainability, and global citizenship. Drawing on concepts such as interbeing and humanistic Buddhism, the paper argues that modern education must prioritize compassion, social responsibility, and digital engagement. Through real-world examples and philosophical reflection, it introduces the dual principles of "creating more space" and "sharing more resources" as essential for reforming education in response to environmental degradation, digital saturation, and social inequality. The study also highlights the role of Buddhist youth and digital media in shaping ethical public discourse, advocating a pedagogy rooted in empathy, intercultural understanding, and mindful leadership.

### III. CONCLUSION

This volume stands as a scholarly and moral testament to the transformative potential of Buddhist wisdom in our time of crisis and convergence. It affirms that the principles of *karuṇā* (compassion), *mettā* (loving-kindness), and *paññā* (wisdom) are not only foundations for personal development but also essential virtues for global coexistence. At the heart of this inquiry is a call for an ethics of inclusivity: a framework in which all beings are seen as interdependent and worthy of respect, regardless of ethnicity, faith, or nationality.

In foregrounding the theme of unity and inclusivity, this volume brings to light the enduring relevance of the Buddha's teachings for peacebuilding and sustainable development. It provides not only a critique of contemporary societal fragmentation, but also constructive pathways forward through education, dialogue, and meditative insight. These pathways, grounded in non-violence and moral clarity, are indispensable for countering the forces of alienation and antagonism that imperil our shared future.

As editors, we are convinced that the reflections gathered here will inspire new research, interreligious dialogue, and policy advocacy informed by Buddhist ethical vision. In the spirit of the Mahāyāna aspiration to alleviate suffering for all sentient beings, we hope this volume will continue to serve as a bridge between contemplative traditions and the practical imperatives of the modern world.

Future academic inquiry should explore the role of Buddhist ethics in shaping institutional cultures, particularly within intergovernmental organizations and conflict mediation settings. A promising area of research is the integration of mindfulness and compassionate leadership within public administration and educational systems. Scholars might also examine case studies on how Buddhist communities have contributed to sustainable development in diverse socio-political contexts.

Another vital direction lies in expanding transdisciplinary studies that combine Buddhist psychology with neuroscience, behavioral science, and environmental humanities. This would not only enrich theoretical discourse but also enhance practical applications of Buddhist wisdom for mental health, ecological stewardship, and social transformation. Collaborative projects involving cross-cultural and interreligious partnerships can also further the vision of unity in diversity outlined in this volume.

Ultimately, "Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity" is more than a theme—it is a moral horizon toward which we must collectively strive. In celebrating this shared endeavor during the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025, we affirm our commitment to the Buddhist path as one of wisdom in action, compassion in community, and unity in diversity for human happiness.

On behalf of the Editors:

**Most Venerable Dr. Thich Nhat Tu**

– Vice President of the National Organizing Committee for UNDV 2025

– Convenor of the Conference

– Vice President of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



# CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE ON THE UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK 2025 FROM THE MINISTER OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS OF VIETNAM

To:

- *The Organizing Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak,*
- *Distinguished guests representing the United Nations, sovereign nations, international organizations, embassies and diplomatic missions in Vietnam,*
- *Venerable Sangha members representing Buddhist communities and traditions from around the world, as well as the Sangha of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha,*
- *All delegates participating in the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025.*

The Vesak Celebration is the most significant global Buddhist festival, commemorating the Birth, Enlightenment, and Parinirvana of the Buddha Shakyamuni (the Triple Commemoration). Since 2000, the United Nations has officially recognized Vesak as an international cultural and religious event celebrated annually worldwide. The International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV) and the global Buddhist community have successfully organized nineteen Vesak Celebrations in Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. On the auspicious occasion of the 20th United Nations Day of Vesak, which will once again be graciously hosted in Vietnam, I would like to extend my heartfelt greetings and best wishes to all Buddhist followers across the globe.

Dear Esteemed Guests,

Vesak is not only a sacred festival celebrated by hundreds of millions of Buddhists across the five continents but also a profound cultural event for all humanity. The Buddha's timeless teachings – centered on compassion, wisdom, harmony, and altruism – continue to serve as guiding principles for the construction of a peaceful, humane, and sustainably developing society. For over two millennia, these noble teachings have spread across the globe, becoming an invaluable spiritual heritage that empowers humanity to transcend suffering and advance toward a life of peace, happiness, and true well-being.

In 2025, Vietnam will host the United Nations Day of Vesak for the fourth

time, a profound honor for Vietnamese Buddhism and a recognition by the international community of Vietnam's role and position. It also reaffirms Vietnam's commitment as an active and responsible member of the United Nations.

The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha will organize the 20th United Nations Day of Vesak in Ho Chi Minh City at a historic moment – coinciding with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's national reunification and approaching the 80th anniversary of the National Day of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

This grand international religious event holds profound significance for the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and for the Vietnamese people as a whole. Activities such as memorial services honoring national heroes and martyrs, charitable visits and gift-giving to disadvantaged children in social welfare centers, and the International Lantern Festival praying for national peace and global harmony – organized within the framework of Vesak 2025 – will help to disseminate Buddhist values of humanity and compassion, thereby contributing to the construction of a peaceful, harmonious, and friendly world. This event also stands as a symbol of unity between Vietnamese Buddhism and global Buddhism in their shared commitment to cultivating a civilized and sustainably developed world – one that harmonizes material and spiritual values – in alignment with Vietnam's principle of “Leaving no one behind.”

The United Nations Day of Vesak 2025 will also offer an opportunity to showcase the image of Vietnam – a nation that cherishes peace, friendliness, harmony, and solidarity with international friends. It will reaffirm the consistent policy of the Vietnamese Party and State in respecting and safeguarding the right to freedom of belief and religion while upholding the noble cultural and ethical values of faith and religion to meet the spiritual aspirations of the people.

This celebration will vividly demonstrate the integration of Vietnamese Buddhism into the global community, while promoting the noble values of the Dharma and the nation, aiming toward a future of peace, prosperity, and sustainable development. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha will continue to uphold its fine traditions and make meaningful contributions to the nation-building efforts.

Through Vesak 2025, humanitarian and social welfare activities will continue to serve as key priorities of the Sangha under the guidance and encouragement of the Central Sangha Council. Monks, nuns, lay Buddhists, and monasteries will be called upon to regularly and promptly implement these activities, thereby manifesting the social responsibilities of Buddhism and bringing the messages of compassion and loving-kindness into everyday life.

The spirit of unity and collective endeavor among Vietnamese Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay practitioners, both domestically and internationally, serves as the solid foundation for building a stable, dignified, and strong Vietnam Buddhist Sangha – one that upholds the noble tradition of walking in harmony

with the nation, contributing to Vietnam's national development during this era of prosperity, and enhancing Vietnam's stature on the global stage.

The harmonious integration of the Dharma and the nation affirms Vietnamese Buddhism's vital role in society and amplifies the Buddha's profound teachings to cultivate peace and happiness for humanity. It strengthens community bonds across all social strata and generations, promotes national cultural consciousness, and reinforces the great national unity bloc.

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to respectfully acknowledge and highly appreciate the invaluable contributions of Vietnamese Buddhism, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, esteemed delegates, and all Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay practitioners, both at home and abroad, for their tireless dedication in serving the Dharma, the nation, and the international community.

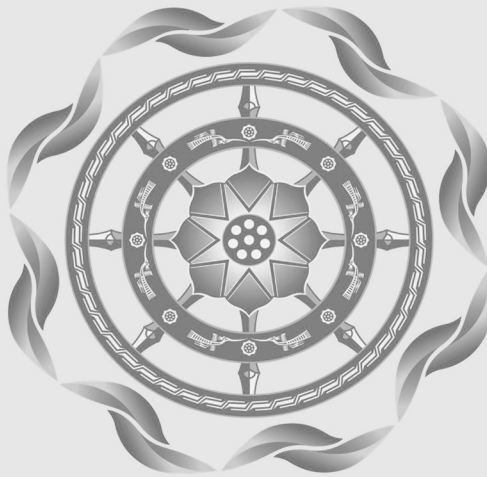
I sincerely wish all of you a joyful and peaceful Vesak season. May we join hands in striving for a brighter future of peace, happiness, and well-being for all humanity.

Respectfully,

MINISTER  
**Đào Ngọc Dung**



# CULTIVATING INNER PEACE FOR WORLD PEACE







# CULTIVATING INNER PEACE FOR GLOBAL HARMONY: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON MINDFULNESS, VIPASSANĀ, AND ETHICAL LIVING

Most. Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Tuan\*

## Abstract:

The scope of threats, such as World War Three, mass destructive weapons, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, resource scarcities, ideological struggles, disparities in health and wealth, and globalizing trends, are all complicated problems that limit the inner peace of individuals and the peaceful world of human society of the 21st century. Therefore, nonviolent values of resolving differences, the importance of reconciliation in human interrelations, promoting peaceful cultures, and healing societal structures and global institutions that promote peace are key elements in the here and now. During the last two decades, peace psychology has become a specialty in psychology with its perspectives, concepts, knowledge base, and preferred methodologies to alleviate threats to human security and promote human well-being. Moreover, peace psychology activists and scholars connect human psychology to other disciplines to prevent and mitigate violence and structural forms of violence. In addition to reducing violence, peace psychologists develop theories and practices that enhance the relational harmony of interpersonal relations and global networks. The psychological theory deepens public understanding of the significant threats to the inner peace of humanity. It addresses some of the most urgent and critical issues on human well-being and world peace in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, inner peace, global harmony.*

---

\* Member of the Central Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Executive Council and Deputy Chair of the National Department of International Buddhist Affairs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Definitions

(1) Anxiety: Anxiety is a multifaceted response encompassing physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to perceived threats. It manifests as heightened arousal, excessive worry, and avoidance behaviors, often interfering with daily functioning and overall well-being.<sup>1</sup>

(2) Depression: Depression is characterized by persistent sadness, diminished interest in previously enjoyable activities, and a pervasive sense of emotional distress. This condition disrupts fundamental aspects of daily life, including sleep patterns, appetite, and cognitive focus. As a leading cause of disability worldwide, depression significantly contributes to the global disease burden. Its impact can be chronic or episodic, affecting an individual's ability to engage in meaningful activities and maintain a high quality of life.<sup>2</sup>

(3) Loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*), a practice deeply rooted in traditional Buddhist contemplative disciplines, has been shown to alleviate stress and mitigate symptoms of depression. By fostering a shift in self-perception and nurturing compassion, it aids practitioners in developing emotional resilience and self-care. During the practice, individuals adopt a stable seated posture - either on a chair or in the lotus position - closing their eyes and silently reciting phrases that cultivate goodwill and benevolence. The core objective of *mettā bhāvanā* is to evoke a state of inner tranquility and emotional warmth, thereby promoting a profound sense of well-being.<sup>3</sup> In Buddhist teachings, meditation is regarded as a means of direct insight into the nature of the self, unconditioned by reliance on external forces. The Buddha emphasized that true inner peace arises from cultivated and disciplined meditative practice rather than dependence on external circumstances or deities.<sup>4</sup>

(4) Mindfulness (*sati*) is the deliberate and sustained attention to present-moment experiences, cultivated without judgment or attachment. It is a practice of attentional regulation that fosters heightened awareness and equanimity. Defined as the intentional and purposeful focus on the present, mindfulness encourages an open and non-reactive attitude toward one's thoughts and emotions.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it involves returning to the present moment with a disposition of kindness and curiosity, enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation.<sup>6</sup>

(5) Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) encompass therapeutic approaches that integrate mindfulness practices into mental health treatment. These interventions, often incorporating meditative techniques, are designed

---

<sup>1</sup> McLaughlin & King (2015), p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> American Psychiatric Association [APA] (2013), p. 215.

<sup>3</sup> Welaratna (2016), p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Dhammananda (2017), p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Bluth & Blanton (2014), p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Shapiro (2020), p. 134.

to enhance emotional resilience, attentional control, and overall psychological well-being. MBIs are widely applied in clinical psychology to address conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders, frequently in conjunction with cognitive-behavioral strategies.<sup>7</sup>

(6) Negative affect encompasses a broad spectrum of distressing emotional states, including anxiety, sadness, fear, anger, guilt, shame, and irritability. It represents a shared variance among these emotions, highlighting their interconnected nature within affective experience.<sup>8</sup>

(7) Stress is a physiological and psychological response to perceived challenges or demands. It can arise from external pressures or internal cognitive appraisals, often manifesting in emotional tension, frustration, and nervousness. While commonly associated with adverse effects, stress can also serve a functional role, facilitating motivation and adaptive responses to critical situations.<sup>9</sup>

(8) *Vipassanā*, meaning “insight,” refers to the direct experiential realization of reality as it is, a foundational practice rediscovered and expounded by Gotama Buddha over 2,500 years ago. The term *vipassanā* is derived from two Pali components: *vi*, denoting analytical discernment, and *passanā*, referring to deep perception. This meditative practice is centered on penetrating the fundamental nature of existence through sustained mindfulness and insight.

In the Buddhist framework, *vipassanā* entails the recognition of three universal characteristics (*tilakkhana*): impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). The objective of *vipassanā* meditation is to cultivate a profound understanding of these truths, thereby liberating the mind from delusions that perpetuate suffering. Practitioners engage in systematic observation of bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions, fostering an unshakable awareness that leads to wisdom (*prajñā*) and liberation (*nibbāna*).<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2. *Vipassanā* meditation

*Vipassanā* Meditation and Its Role in Cultivating Inner and Global Harmony: In an increasingly fast-paced and stress-laden world, the necessity of both inner peace and global harmony has become more critical than ever. Modern life is marked by escalating levels of depression, anxiety, and social fragmentation, largely driven by economic pressures, rapid technological advancements, and a growing disconnection from traditional family structures and communities.<sup>11</sup> Amidst this turbulence, there has been a renewed interest in *vipassanā* (insight meditation) and mindfulness-based practices, which offer a transformative pathway to both personal tranquility and collective well-being.

<sup>7</sup> Crane et al. (2017), p. 990.

<sup>8</sup> Watson et al., (1988), p. 1065.

<sup>9</sup> Comer & Comer (2017), p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> Sayadaw (2019), p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> Twenge (2017), p. 45.

*Vipassanā* Meditation: A Path to Insight and Liberation. *Vipassanā* is a meditative technique rooted in mindfulness (*sati*) and self-observation, tracing back over 2,500 years to ancient Indian contemplative traditions.<sup>12</sup> The term itself is derived from two Pali words: *vi*, signifying analytical discernment, and *passanā*, meaning deep seeing or insight. It encapsulates the practice of perceiving reality as it truly is, rather than through the distortions of conditioned perception.<sup>13</sup> Buddhist doctrine emphasizes three fundamental characteristics of existence (*tilakkhana*), which *vipassanā* seeks to realize directly: impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). Through sustained meditative practice, one develops profound insight (*prajñā*), leading to the cessation of attachment and, ultimately, the attainment of liberation (*nibbāna*).<sup>14</sup> Unlike conventional relaxation techniques, *vipassanā* is not merely a stress-reduction practice; rather, it is a rigorous contemplative discipline aimed at deconstructing the root causes of suffering.

*Vipassanā* Meditation as a Catalyst for Social Harmony: Beyond personal transformation, *vipassanā* has profound implications for global harmony and social interconnectedness. By cultivating inner peace, practitioners develop heightened emotional intelligence, ethical discernment, and compassion (*karuṇā*), which naturally extend to interpersonal and societal relationships. In a world often fragmented by conflicts rooted in greed, intolerance, and misunderstanding, *vipassanā* serves as a bridge across cultural and ideological divides, fostering a shared sense of humanity.<sup>15</sup> Research indicates that *vipassanā* enhances prosocial behaviors, including cooperation, altruism, and communal responsibility. Another research found that mindfulness meditation significantly increases compassion, promoting an empathetic and supportive social environment.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the study notes that the ethical precepts (*sīla*) upheld within the framework of *vipassanā* practice contribute to conflict resolution by fostering patience, non-reactivity, and deep listening.<sup>17</sup> The cultivation of such ethical dispositions strengthens both individual well-being and the collective moral fabric of society.

Psychological and Ethical Benefits of *Vipassanā* Practice: At the psychological level, *vipassanā* meditation has been associated with numerous cognitive and emotional benefits. It facilitates greater emotional resilience, reduces stress, enhances empathy, and fosters positive social interactions. The practice encourages a heightened awareness of mental processes, enabling practitioners to disengage from automatic negative thought patterns and

---

<sup>12</sup> Goenka (1997), p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Dhammananda (2017), p. 102.

<sup>14</sup> Sayadaw (2019), p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Gopinath (2005), p. 679.

<sup>16</sup> Condon et al. (2013), p. 2125.

<sup>17</sup> Hart (1987), p. 89.

cultivate a more balanced and equanimous state of mind.<sup>18</sup> These psychological benefits, in turn, reinforce ethical living, creating a reciprocal cycle of personal and societal well-being. Moreover, *vipassanā* promotes ethical behavior and community responsibility, aligning individual transformation with broader social and global imperatives. In an increasingly interconnected world, truthfulness (*sacca*), compassion, and nonviolence (*ahimsā*) become essential for fostering mutual respect and cooperation. The study argues that by developing inner peace, *vipassanā* practitioners contribute to peaceful dialogue and conflict resolution, addressing both local disputes and global challenges.<sup>19</sup>

**Practical Application of Vipassanā in Daily Life:** The practical methodology of *vipassanā* entails systematic awareness of bodily and mental phenomena. Practitioners are trained to observe their sensory experiences - seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking – without attachment or aversion. For instance, breath awareness serves as a foundational anchor in meditation, allowing individuals to cultivate deep concentration (*samādhi*) and insight (*vipassanā*) into the impermanent nature of existence.<sup>20</sup> As meditators deepen their practice, they become increasingly aware of the transient and conditioned nature of their thoughts and emotions. This realization fosters a non-reactive, mindful presence that extends beyond formal meditation sessions into everyday life. Such mindful awareness transforms interactions, reducing impulsivity, enhancing patience, and fostering a sense of interdependent responsibility.

In a world marked by widespread psychological distress, social fragmentation, and ethical dilemmas, *vipassanā* meditation emerges as an essential practice for both individual and collective well-being. Its unique synthesis of mindfulness, ethical cultivation, and insight-based wisdom makes it a powerful tool for navigating the complexities of modern life. By fostering inner tranquility and ethical responsibility, *vipassanā* contributes to a virtuous cycle of personal transformation and societal harmony, ultimately paving the way for a more compassionate and peaceful world.

## **II. THERAVĀDA VIPASSANĀ TRADITION AND MINDFULNESS-BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY (MBCT)**

The *Theravāda* tradition of *vipassanā* meditation, particularly as developed by Mahāsi Sayadaw, continues to be widely practiced in Burma and beyond. His method of mindfulness training is structured around systematic mental noting and direct observation of bodily and mental phenomena, guiding practitioners through progressive stages of insight (*vipassanā ñāṇa*). Retreat meditators who diligently follow these instructions often report significant experiential progress within the initial week of practice.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Shapiro et al. (2009), p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Gopinath (2005), p. 680.

<sup>20</sup> Sayadaw (1996), p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Sayadaw (2019), p. 87.

The framework of insight meditation has significantly influenced the development of mindfulness-based programs in the West. Foundational teachers such as Kornfield (1979), Armstrong (2013), and Catherine (2011) have adapted aspects of traditional Buddhist teachings into contemporary psychological contexts. A crucial concept within this integration is *vedanā* (sensory experience), which encompasses pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations as they arise in response to internal and external stimuli. In mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), attention to *vedanā* is instrumental in understanding how habitual cognitive patterns contribute to emotional distress.<sup>22</sup> This awareness aligns with traditional *vipassanā* practice, where the observation of *vedanā* serves as a gateway to deeper insight into impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*).<sup>23</sup> Within the structure of MBCT, an evidence-based clinical adaptation of mindfulness training, the relationship between emotional reactivity and meditative awareness is systematically explored. Early sessions (two and three) introduce mindfulness of emotional valence, while subsequent sessions (four and five) encourage participants to observe attachment and aversion, recognizing how these tendencies perpetuate psychological distress.<sup>24</sup>

**Buddhist Mindfulness and Its Contemporary Psychological Applications:** The traditional practice of *vipassanā* has gained recognition as a highly effective contemplative method for addressing various psychological and emotional conditions.<sup>25</sup> Mindfulness meditation (*sati bhāvanā*), which dates back to the time of the Buddha's awakening under the Bodhi tree, has since been integrated into therapeutic interventions worldwide.<sup>26</sup> These applications have demonstrated effectiveness in mitigating stress, enhancing emotional resilience, and cultivating a greater sense of purpose.<sup>27</sup> The study underscores the role of mindfulness in counteracting stress and social alienation in modern society, asserting that mindfulness fosters greater self-awareness and ethical living.<sup>28</sup> By promoting a non-judgmental attentiveness to present-moment experience, mindfulness facilitates cognitive flexibility and emotional stability.<sup>29</sup> Another study further highlights the benefits of mindfulness in workplace environments, noting its positive impact on teamwork, stress reduction, and overall organizational productivity.<sup>30</sup>

**Cognitive Aspects of Mindfulness:** Mindfulness, as a cognitive framework, enhances awareness of thought and emotion processes, facilitating

---

<sup>22</sup> Segal et al. (2012a), p. 127.

<sup>23</sup> Anālayo (2003), p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Segal et al. (2012a), p. 143.

<sup>25</sup> Rao (2024), p. 56.

<sup>26</sup> Dhammananda (2017), p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Kristeller & Jordan (2019), p. 98.

<sup>28</sup> Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> Siegel (2007), p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> Hülshager et al. (2013), p. 310.



greater psychological adaptability.<sup>31</sup> By enabling practitioners to disengage from automatic negative thought patterns, mindfulness fosters a more balanced mental state. The study describes mindfulness as “the perfection of mindlessness,” emphasizing the paradoxical nature of awareness as both an active and a letting-go process.<sup>32</sup> The study further elaborates that mindfulness is best understood as the intentional return to present-moment awareness with an attitude of curiosity, kindness, and non-reactivity.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, it argues that mindfulness enhances self-compassion and reduces maladaptive cognitive patterns by fostering emotional regulation and attentional control.<sup>34</sup> Research also suggests that mindfulness practitioners develop greater receptivity to sensory and emotional stimuli, leading to increased resilience against distressing experiences.<sup>35</sup>

The integration of *vipassanā* into contemporary psychological frameworks has yielded significant advancements in both personal well-being and social cohesion. While MBIs provide accessible mindfulness training, traditional *vipassanā* meditation remains a more comprehensive path toward deep existential insight. As mindfulness continues to gain prominence in therapeutic contexts, a more nuanced understanding of its traditional Buddhist roots will be essential in ensuring its ethical and psychological efficacy. Future research should explore ways to bridge the depth of *vipassanā* training with modern mindfulness applications, ensuring that practitioners benefit from both its transformative insights and practical therapeutic value.

The *Theravāda* tradition in Burma remains a significant center for the practice and transmission of *vipassanā* meditation, particularly through the systematic mindfulness training developed by Mahāsi Sayadaw. His structured approach emphasizes continuous mental noting and direct observation of bodily and mental phenomena, allowing practitioners to progress through various stages of insight (*vipassanā ñāna*). Many retreat meditators following this method report noticeable advancement within the first week of disciplined practice.<sup>36</sup> The conceptual framework of *vipassanā* has influenced the development of mindfulness-based programs in the West, particularly through the work of early mindfulness teachers such as Kornfield (1979), Armstrong (2013), and Catherine (2011). A key aspect of this integration is the role of *vedanā* (sensory experience), which encompasses pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations as they arise in response to internal and external stimuli. In mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), awareness of *vedanā* is fundamental in understanding how cognitive patterns contribute to psychological distress,

---

<sup>31</sup> Kostanski & Hassed (2009), p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Langer (1997), p. 120.

<sup>33</sup> Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 147.

<sup>34</sup> Shapiro (2020), p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> Shaw (2020), p. 86.

<sup>36</sup> Sayadaw (2019), p. 87.

particularly about rumination and suffering.<sup>37</sup> This awareness aligns with traditional *vipassanā* practice, wherein observation of *vedanā* serves as an entry point for deeper insight into impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*).<sup>38</sup>

### 2.1. Distinctions between MBIs and Traditional *Vipassanā*

Despite foundational similarities, MBIs and classical *vipassanā* meditation differ in their theoretical emphasis. The study highlights that while MBIs cultivate mindfulness as a means of emotional regulation and cognitive restructuring, they often lack explicit guidance on existential insights such as *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*.<sup>39</sup> For instance, in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), impermanence is acknowledged but not systematically explored as an experiential realization.<sup>40</sup> By session three, participants are encouraged to observe arising and passing mental phenomena, yet without the structured insight training characteristic of traditional *vipassanā*.<sup>41</sup> Although Western mindfulness practitioners may still develop insight through sustained practice, traditional *vipassanā* provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding the nature of conditioned experience and mental formations. The study argues that theoretical knowledge of Buddhist principles is crucial for deepening mindfulness practice, as it contextualizes meditative experiences within a structured path of wisdom (*prajñā*).<sup>42</sup> In response to this gap, more recent iterations of MBCT have incorporated discussions on impermanence, *vedanā*, and their connection to attachment and aversion elements more aligned with classical Buddhist teachings.<sup>43</sup>

Advancing through the stages of insight can present challenges for many mindfulness practitioners, particularly those unfamiliar with the intense cognitive and emotional shifts that may occur. The study notes that students often experience destabilizing insights, necessitating skilled instruction to navigate them safely.<sup>44</sup> Armstrong further emphasizes the role of experienced teachers in guiding practitioners through these stages, adjusting their instructions based on each individual's progress. Without proper orientation, premature exposure to deep insight practices may lead to emotional distress or existential uncertainty. Jack Kornfield, drawing from decades of teaching experience, highlights the importance of adequately trained instructors who can provide supportive guidance during transformative yet potentially unsettling phases of meditative practice. A lack of proper instruction in insight meditation may not only hinder progress but could also lead to unintended

<sup>37</sup> Segal et al. (2012a), p. 127.

<sup>38</sup> Anālayo (2003), p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> Grabovac (2015), p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Kabat-Zinn (1990), p. 67.

<sup>41</sup> Segal et al. (2012b), p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> Crane et al. (2017), p. 990.

<sup>43</sup> Segal et al. (2002), p. 208.

<sup>44</sup> Kornfield (1979), p. 211.

psychological effects.<sup>45</sup>

## **2.2. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy**

In Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, practitioners are trained to wake up when they should pay attention to their breathing by observing five-minute mindful breaths. Practitioners also notice changes in their posture by being aware of their bodies and emotions as they change positions from lying down to sitting, standing, and walking. They should be mindful each time as they transition from one posture to the next. Mindfulness practitioners should be aware of the sounds they hear, like a bird singing, a train passing, a car horn, a burst of laughter, the wind sound, the door closing sound, et cetera. All the sounds here are reminders of the present moment and disconnect practitioners' racing thoughts. They should focus on breathing throughout the day by observing five minutes of mindful breathing. Whenever they eat or drink, they should observe the food or drink and realize that the food and drink not only nourish their body but also their insight to see the sunlight, the earth, the rain, the farmer, and the trucker in the food to develop their spirituality. Therefore, they should consciously eat the food and comprehend the positive and negative effects on their physical health. Mindfulness practitioners should be aware of the food, smell the food, chew the food, taste the food, and swallow the food mindfully.<sup>46</sup>

Practitioners similarly notice their body's posture while they walk or stand. They should focus on their feet contacting the ground and feel the air on their face, arms, and legs as they walk. Mindfulness practitioners bring awareness to listening and talking without agreeing, disagreeing, liking, or disliking. They should say what they need to say without overstating and notice how their mind and body feel in the here and now. Whenever mindfulness practitioners wait in line, they should notice their inhaling, exhaling, or standing posture. For instance, how their feet contact the floor and how their body feels. Mindfulness practitioners can bring attention to the rising and falling of their abdomen and observe whether they feel impatient or peaceful. Mindfulness practitioners should be aware of any tightness in the body throughout the day as they inhale and exhale, letting go of excess tension in their face, jaw, neck, shoulder, stomach, or lower back, and may stretch or do yoga once a day. Mindfulness practitioners can pay attention to their daily activities, such as washing up, brushing their teeth, putting on their shoes, or doing their jobs by being mindful of every daily activity. Before going to sleep at night, mindfulness practitioners can observe the five-minute mindful breath and bring the intention to breathe in and breathe out in a joyful and peaceful state of mind.

## **2.3. Loving-kindness meditation practice**

Loving-kindness meditation stems from traditional Buddhist meditation that can help individuals with stress and depression by decentering and

---

<sup>45</sup> Grabovac (2015), p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> Segal et al. (2018), p. 122 – 4.

developing self-care and compassion. During these sessions, practitioners sit comfortably in a chair or the lotus position with closed eyes and read silently as they relax their minds and body. The objection of the loving-kindness meditation is to induce feelings of happiness and serenity. During the first session, practitioners will mindfully and silently chant the following:

May I be well, happy, and peaceful. (3 times)

May I be well.

May I be happy.

May I be peaceful.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful. (3 times)

May I be free from anger.

May I be free from hatred.

May I be free from jealousy.

May I be free from anxiety.

May I be free from depression.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful. (3 times)

May I be kind to myself.

May I be compassionate to myself.

May I be generous to myself.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful. (3 times)

I forgive myself for any wrong I have done, knowingly and unknowingly.

I will no longer carry any anger, hatred, jealousy, anxiety, or depression within me.

My mind will be pure in thought.

My actions will be pure in intention.

My words will always be kind.

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.<sup>47</sup>

#### **2.4. Deep relaxation technique**

In the second session, Dr. Welaratna teaches the deep relaxation technique based on traditional Buddhist meditation as follows:

You can begin this session 90 minutes after a heavy meal by lying on a flat, warm, comfortable surface like a bed, carpet, or blanket. Gravity helps the relaxation process. Keep your hands straight by your sides, with palms facing up. The legs should be straight and about hip-width apart. Take three deep breaths, and relax your body as you exhale. After this, breathe normally. Close your eyes and imagine you are in a very peaceful environment.

---

<sup>47</sup>Welaratna (2016), p. 1.

Now, focus on your forehead and begin to relax the muscles there. You can say silently to yourself, “I am relaxing. I am relaxing. I am relaxing my forehead.” You can also consciously move your focus from left to right as you relax the muscles there.

Next, gently move your focus to your eyelids and relax your eyelids as you did previously with your forehead. If you feel you have closed your eyes tightly, let go and relax them. You can encourage the muscles to relax by saying, “I am relaxing. I am relaxing. I am relaxing my eyelids.”

Now, move your attention gently to your jaws and relax them. Follow the previous steps and direct your focus downstream to other anatomical parts like your tongue and lips. We have much tension around our mouth area, so you should relax your jaws, tongue, and lips more. If your lips open a little, do not worry, as it indicates that you are relaxed.

Now, gently move your focus to your neck and relax it. As you move on, bring intentional relaxation to your neck and all other muscle groups, as you did earlier.

From your neck, move your attention to your shoulders and relax your shoulders.

Next, relax your right upper arm and lower arm.

From there, relax every finger in your right hand. Spend more time on your hands because they, too, may have immense built-up tensions. When your right hand is relaxed, move down to your right leg. First, relax the thigh and calf area and then the right foot.

Next, gently move your attention first to your left foot and then the leg.

From there, move your attention to your left hand and relax all the fingers of your left hand. Then, relax your left lower arm and upper arm.

Now, shift your focus to the chest area and scan and relax the muscles in your chest area, moving from left to right.

Move down to the abdominal muscles from the chest area, and relax your abdominal muscles from left to right.

Then, move your attention to your back and relax your back muscles.

Finally, take a deep breath and exhale, relaxing your muscles from the forehead to the toes.

To get up, turn to one side and slowly support yourself with your arm.

Note: When you master this technique, telling yourself to relax will not be necessary. You will become conscious of tensions in your body even when sitting and standing, and you will quickly relax your muscles.<sup>48</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

This literature review highlights the profound impact of Vipassanā meditation and mindfulness practices as both a psychological treatment and a

---

<sup>48</sup> Welaratna (2016), pp. 2 – 3.

tool for fostering social harmony. The evidence gathered from historical texts, empirical studies, and theoretical discussions demonstrates that Vipassanā offers a unique and comprehensive approach to well-being that transcends the boundaries of traditional psychological therapies. Its dual focus on self-awareness and ethical living addresses the fundamental causes of psychological distress and nurtures a more compassionate and cohesive society. Vipassanā's psychological benefits, such as enhanced self-awareness, emotional regulation, and reduced stress, are well-documented and widely recognized in psychology and neuroscience. Studies by Kabat-Zinn (2003) and Hölzel et al. (2011) underscore how Vipassanā promotes cognitive flexibility and mental resilience, making it an effective intervention for a range of mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, and stress. Additionally, the practice's ability to foster emotional intelligence and empathy further enhances interpersonal relationships, leading to more harmonious social interactions. The social benefits of Vipassanā are equally compelling. By promoting qualities such as compassion, patience, and ethical behavior, Vipassanā contributes to reducing social conflict and promoting community cohesion.

Siegel (2007) and Condon et al. (2013) report how mindfulness practices and Vipassanā meditation can enhance prosocial behaviors and reduce prejudices to foster inclusivity and social justice in diverse and interconnected societies. The integration of psychological and social benefits is a central value of Vipassanā that reflects its holistic well-being practice. When individuals cultivate inner peace through mindfulness and ethical living, these qualities naturally extend to their interactions with others to generate a ripple effect of positivity within their communities. Gopinath (2005) emphasizes the potential of Vipassanā to contribute to global peace and conflict resolution and impact both personal and societal challenges. Vipassanā offers a practical and effective technique in modern society, where stress, social fragmentation, and ethical dilemmas are prevalent. Vipassanā focuses on mindfulness, self-regulation, ethical behaviors, and contemporary needs for balance and harmony in a fast-paced world. Vipassanā's relevance extends beyond individual mental health to provide broader societal issues such as social inequality, environmental sustainability, and global peace. Vipassanā meditation and mindfulness are powerful and integrative techniques for timeless and timely well-being. Future researchers should continue exploring how the Vipassanā approach affects cultivating both inner and world peace.

\*\*\*



## REFERENCES

- American Psychiatric Association. (2019). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Arlington: VA. American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Analayo, B. (2003). *Satipatthana: The direct path to realization*. Birmingham. Windhorse.
- Anguttara Nikāya, Ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1885 - 1900. Tr. F.L.Woodward and E. M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1932 - 1995.
- Armstrong, S. (2013). *The practical dharma of Mahāsi Sayadaw*. Buddhist Geeks.
- Bluth, K., & Blanton, P. W. (2014). Mindfulness and self-compassion: Exploring pathways to adolescent emotional well-being. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 23(7), 1298-1309. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9830-2>
- Catherine, S. (2011). *Wisdom wide and deep: A practical handbook for mastering Jhana and Vipassanā*. Somerville, MA. Wisdom Publications.
- Comer, R. J., & Comer, J. S. (2017). *Abnormal psychology* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Worth Publishers.
- Compassionate responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*, 24(10), 2125-2127.
- Condon, P., Desbordes, G., Miller, W. B., & DeSteno, D. (2013). Meditation increases compassionate responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*, 24(10), 2125-2127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613485603>
- Crane, R. S., Brewer, J., Feldman, C., Kabat-Zinn, J., Santorelli, S., Williams, J. M. J., & Kuyken, W. (2017). What defines mindfulness-based programs? The warp and the weft. *Psychological Medicine*, 47, 990-999. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291716003317>
- Crane, R. S., Brewer, J., Feldman, C., Kabat-Zinn, J., Santorelli, S., Williams, J. M. J., & Kuyken, W. (2017). What defines mindfulness-based programs? *Psychological Medicine*, 47, 990-999.
- Dhammananda, K. S. (2017). *Meditation: The only way*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society.
- Dhammapada, Ed. S.Sumangala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K. R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.
- Digha Nikāya, Ed. T.W.Rhys Davids and J. E.Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.
- Goenka, S. N. (1997). *The art of living: Vipassanā meditation as taught by S. N. Goenka*. Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Gopinath, M. (2005). Vipassanā meditation: A pathway to peace. *Journal of Peace Research*, 42(6), 679-691. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305057880>
- Grabovac, A. (2015). The stages of insight: Clinical relevance for mindfulness-based interventions. *Mindfulness*, 6, 589-600. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0294-2>



- Hart, W. (1987). *The art of living: Vipassanā meditation as taught by S. N. Goenka*. HarperOne.
- Hölzel, B. K., Lazar, S. W., et al. (2011). How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work?
- Hülshager, U. R., Alberts, H. J., Feinholdt, A., & Lang, J. W. (2013). Benefits of mindfulness Institute.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delta.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). *Mindfulness-based interventions in context. Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144-156.
- Khuddakapāṭha, Ed. Ven. Ñānamoli, *The Minor Readings and the Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, PTS, London, 2015.
- Kornfield, J. (1979). *Living Buddhist masters*. Unity Press.
- Kornfield, J. (2011). *Bringing home the dharma*. Boston. Shambhala.
- Kostanski, M., & Hassed, H. (2008). Mindfulness as a concept and process. *The Australian*
- Langer, E. J. (1997). *The power of mindful learning*. Reading: MA. Addison-Wesley.
- Majjhima Nikāya, Ed. V. Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñānamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.
- McLaughlin, K. A., & King, K. (2015). Developmental trajectories of anxiety and depression in early adolescence. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 43(2), 311-323. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-014-9898-1>
- Rao, D. (2024). The effects of Vipassanā meditation on stress reduction: A randomized controlled trial. *Indian Journal of Ayurveda & Alternative Medicines*, 1(1), 41-46. <https://doi.org/10.36676/ijaam.v1.i1.7>
- Rebellious, more tolerant, less cappy, and completely unprepared for adulthood.* Atria
- Research*, 42(6), 679-691.
- satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98(2), 310-325.
- Sayadaw, M. (1996). *The great discourse on mindfulness*. Buddhadhamma Foundation.
- Sayadaw, M. (2019). *Mindfulness and insight: The Mahasi method*. Somerville MA. Vipassanā Metta Foundation.
- Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2002). *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression: A new approach for preventing relapse*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2012b). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and the prevention of depression. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 19(1), 93-107.

- Segal, Z., Williams, J., & Teasdale, J. (2018). *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: NY. Guilford Press.
- Shapiro, S. (2020). *Good morning. I love you. Mindfulness and self-compassion practices to rewire your brain for calm, clarity, and joy*. Boulder: Colorado. Sounds True.
- Shapiro, S., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2009). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65(6), 627-638. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20579>
- Shaw, S. (2020). *Mindfulness: Where it comes from and what it means*. Boulder. Colorado: Shambhala Publication, Inc.
- Siegel, D. J. (2007). *The Mindful brain: Reflection and attunement in the cultivation of Transpersonal Psychology*, 11, 41-58.
- Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy—and completely unprepared for adulthood*. Atria Books.
- Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(6), 1063-1070. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.6.1063>
- Welaratna, U. (2016). *Mindfulness meditation and relaxation techniques*. Phap Vuong Temple, Milpitas, CA, United States.
- Welaratna, U. (2016, June 8-28). *Mindfulness meditation and relaxation techniques*. [Conference presentation]. Phap Vuong Temple, Milpitas, CA, United States.
- Well-being*. W.W. Norton & Company.



# FAITH AND TOLERANCE, PEACE WITHIN AND PEACE WITHOUT

Most. Ven. Prof. Dr. Gallelle Sumanasiri\*

## Abstract:

Human beings as a rational being have invented various types of organizations to face the challenges of life, and religion is one of them. One of the main challenges he had to face is how to overcome suffering and how to achieve happiness. Human enterprises from the inception of mankind to present day revolved around finding solutions to these challenges. Historically, we can find three main approaches in this regard; metaphysical approach, intellectual approach, and empirical approach. Metaphysical and intellectual approaches are rather religious whereas the empirical approach is rather non-religious. On the other hand, theistic religions advocate a metaphysical approach whereas non-theistic religions advocate an intellectual approach. Taking this point into account, religions in the world can be divided into two categories; theistic and non-theistic. Among those theistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are considered monotheistic religions, whereas Buddhism and Jainism are non-theistic religions. Taking geographical expansions and the number of followers into account, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are considered world religions. Though not falling under the category of World religion, Zoroastrianism in Jainism and Sikhism in India, Confucianism and Taoism in China were and are popular religions in the world.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, faith, inner peace, world peace, unity of mankind, interfaith dialogue, non-violence, moral conduct, spiritual enlightenment, ethical living.*

\*\*\*

## I. DIVERSITY OF RELIGION

Founders of those religions; Abraham in Judaism, Jesus Christ in Christianity, Mohammad in Islam, Shakyamuni Siddhartha Gautama in Buddhism, Zoroaster in Zoroastrianism, Mahavira in Jainism, Guru Nanak in Sikhism, Confucius in Confucianism and Tao-tze in Taoism are intellectual

---

\* Vice Chancellor of the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka.

founders that are to be honoured by all equally as all them introduced some doctrines to lead mankind to overcome suffering of beings in this life, next life or forever. Different founders and different doctrines, all are for the benefit and well-being of mankind and not for their destruction. Therefore, thousands of people followed their doctrines while those founders were living, and millions and billions of people followed and still follow their doctrines. Those individual doctrines made great civilisations in the world. Their doctrines may be different from each other because they were taught in different backgrounds for different people in different locations.

Thousands of religions may have appeared in the world, but religions that are appealing to the needs of people remained, and some of those religions have been spread over the boundaries of their birthplaces. It means that the doctrines of those intellectual founders are universally applicable without the limits of nationality, ethnicity, geography, or whatever other divisions because those are humanistic teachings. Indeed, each religion possesses unique characteristics to identify the difference of one religion from the other, and there is no unity of religion. The beauty of the religions and their teachings depends on the uniqueness of the individual teachings. The development of transportation and information technology has shortened the world. Now we can know and see cultures, civilizations, and doctrines that we were unknown before. How interesting it is to study the diversity of the world and adapt accordingly while preserving one's own identity. As I understood, Sufism is there. Sufism is neither a religion nor a doctrine. It is not made up of a body of dogma which one must follow, and it does not require its constituents to reply upon specific, prescribed rituals or techniques as part of a spiritual practice. It is not distinctive of any particular race, nation, or church. Sufism is a way of looking at the world and a way of living in the world.<sup>1</sup> (At the end of this article, Buddhist analysis is given not in favour of Buddhism but in support of the objectives of Sufism).

## II. IS IT POSSIBLE TO UNITE RELIGIONS?

People are conceptually divided. We all were born without religion. Religion of an individual depends on the practice of the individual and not on one's birth. An infant born in a society builds up concepts within from the society in he/she brought up. As human beings, religious beings, religious concepts are inculcated within individuals from childhood. Therefore, we have been religiously divided and tended to accept and uphold one's religion while rejecting and withholding the religion of others. The concept "my doxy is doxy, others' doxy is heterodoxy" makes conflicts. History of mankind is replete with wars and many of them were derived from conceptual differences. Religious scriptures mention and religious persons talk about the unity of mankind in the unity of God. Each religion tries to unite mankind under its religion. It is a utopia. It had never happened in the past and will not happen in the future. It was not the purpose of the founders of religion either. Abraham, Jesus Christ, Mohammad, Buddha, Zoroaster,

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.centrum-universal.com](http://www.centrum-universal.com)

Mahavira, Confucius, Loa-tzu, or any other founders did not want to create Judaic, Christian, Islamic, Zoroastrian, Jaina, Confucian, and Taoist world. It is the purpose of conceptually bounded fanatic followers of religion. If you want to unite people under one religion, it may be possible to unite theistic religions, but it will not appeal to the people who belong to non-theistic religions. Unfortunately, most wars are reported within and among theistic religions, and those have a high possibility and potentiality to unite. Therefore, talking about unity of religion for unity of mankind is impractical and unnecessary. It is not respecting other religions. Each religion possesses identical characteristics, and each religion possesses identical teachings and practices. We all have to respect the religions of others as we respect our religion. This is the noble practice some intellectuals applied in the past and to be applied in the future. Now we are living in a technologically advanced world, and the world has been shortened to a global village. Thanks to the development of information technology, knowledge in various fields is open to the world without hiding and no exception to knowledge of religion. Now those who are interested can know about other religions as they know one's religion. This is a good opportunity for anyone who has an understanding of any religion independently without bias and personal entanglement. Religion is something to be practiced individually. Religion should not be taken as fact for prejudice and discrimination.

### III. UNITY OF MANKIND

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam unanimously believe in the unity of mankind. According to Judaism, God created Adam, the first man, out of dust in the image of God and breathed into it. God put Adam into deep sleep and created the first woman out of Adam's rib. All the human beings are descending from Adam and Eve.<sup>2</sup> The creation story of Judaism is largely similar to that of Christianity and Islam. Creation story of these traditions conveys the nobility of mankind among other creatures as well as equality of mankind. Human beings without racial, ethnic, national, or whatever other differences possess. Divine nature within as all are descended from Adam, and therefore human beings are equal.

Individual must awaken the divine nature within. Judaism, the parental religion of Christianity and Islam, is expecting a righteous life. God is righteous and what God, the creator, desired of human beings is righteous behaviour. Therefore, an individual has to walk in the way of God, and to be righteous and perfect in moral. Knowledge of God within would prevent man from sin. Either the creation stories of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are right or wrong, the idea of Godly nature within human beings is highly influential for the moral conduct of individuals. Though the creation story does not apply to Buddhism, what the Buddha expected from his followers is to follow the path that he had followed and attain the same moral and spiritual perfection that the Buddha had attained. Similar to the Godly nature of human beings, Buddhism accepts the possibility of human beings to attain the same state if

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.inovationslearning.com.uk](http://www.inovationslearning.com.uk)

one is diligent in the path. *Mahayana* Buddhism, going further ahead, says that every sentient being has Buddha nature within and points the way for awakening Buddha nature. Confucius was dreaming of a sage-like character, but he admitted that he was not a sage but was trying to be a superior man aiming at the sage, which is difficult to attain. He learnt the characters of Sagely rulers in the past and tried to teach them without class or clan distinction to produce superior characters to rule the country righteously to bring peace and order in the country.<sup>3</sup> Taoism took a different attitude to reality and morality. Tao is the essence of everything. Everything in the universe evolved and is evolving from Tao, and people have nothing to do. Therefore morality (De) in Taoism is non-activity. Purposeful activity (attachment) is going against the nature. Let nature function, everything will be done by nature. We should not be involved in changing nature. All the sufferings are due to the result of trying to change nature as we want. If nature evolves for our wellbeing, no need for a moral code. Having a moral code means we are going against nature.<sup>4</sup> Philosophical meaning behind this doctrine is non-attachment. Zoroaster, on the other hand, teaches to defeat the evil forces in the world. Jainism is for non-violence and non-attachment. Thus, looking deep into religions in the world, we can perceive that all those teachings are for the people, though each religion possesses unique characteristics of its own.

Unity of mankind is that all human beings are the same or one species, though they have been divided on different concepts, such as colour, caste, clan, status, nationality, ethnicity, beliefs, practices, and so on. Taking the unity of mankind into account, the Golden Rule “do unto others as you would have others do unto you” is applied as the key ethical foundation of many religions in the world. All have to think themselves in the position of others. More importantly, the creation story itself and the similarity of the creation story in three religions conveys the equality of human beings and the necessity of cooperation and loving each other. Though not accepting the creation story, Buddhism highly accepted the equality of human beings and the necessity of loving-kindness and compassion to others. Once conduct should be shaped by talking to oneself as a mirror and thinking of oneself in the position of others.<sup>5</sup> Inferiority or superiority of an individual depends not on birth but on moral conduct and spiritual achievements.<sup>6</sup> In Confucianism, too, the equality of human beings is accepted but individuals become wide apart through their moral conduct. Benevolence or human heartedness, righteousness, propriety, and sincerity, one becomes a sage or superior man while not having those qualities, one becomes a mean man.<sup>7</sup> Those are a few examples of how different religions have applied Golden Rule as the key of morality. If all applied this rule

---

<sup>3</sup> Sumanasiri, G., *Buddhism and Confucianism*, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> Sumanasiri, G., *Traditional Chinese Religions*, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse, 131.

<sup>6</sup> *MN*, II, p. 196.

<sup>7</sup> Sumanasiri, G., *Buddhism and Confucianism*, p. 147.



without the identity of separate religion, how beautiful, pleasant, and peaceful will be the world, especially for human habitation. In such a situation, no one will harm others; all will think of the happiness of others. Therefore, is it not the Golden Rule that has to be applied practically throughout the world where we are living with, craving, hatred, jealousy, enmity within and conflict, war, fight, bloodshed, shooting and looting, and destruction of lives and properties, destruction of living beings and environmental resources without?

#### IV. WHERE IS BUDDHISM?

Buddhism vehemently denied the socio-political and religious prejudices and discriminations that were contemporary to the Buddha and upholds the equality of human beings. There are many examples to the fact that Buddha accepted and applied the teachings of other religions into Buddhism, and also there are numerous examples of arguments and debates between Buddha and other religious practitioners. Those arguments and debates were not aimed at condemnation but convincing the reality out of loving-kindness or Metta. Buddhism is open to all for one's verification. Far and for the verification far the Glory of Buddhism will be and no place in Buddhism for blind faith. No religious conversion in Buddhism, and it is open to anybody without any type of discrimination.

To convince the equality of human beings, Buddha used historical, biological, and ethical arguments. *Agganna Sutta* explains how historically distinctive social classes appeared as a social need and how social distinction may disappear according to social recognition of individual action. Social distinction, therefore, is not divine origin and static. Human positions are liable to change according to the behaviour and practice of the individual. *Vasettha Sutta*<sup>8</sup> explains the diversity of characters unique to identify numerous species individually, but there is no such distinctive character within human beings to separate one man from another. *Vasettha Sutta* is very important to refer to in the present context of disharmony among human beings as it clearly explains the biological unity of mankind. It denies any genetic basis for discrimination of any type. As mentioned above, all human beings are equally capable of attaining the highest spiritual goal irrespective of the distinctions made by man. All men are likewise equal before the moral law: men are judged in the hereafter according to the good and evil they did, and not by the station of life in which they were placed under birth. The reward and punishment are strictly in proportion to the good and evil done, distinctions made by man, do not matter in the least. Therefore, as members of a common human society, all men deserve to have equal rights and opportunities, and prejudices made by man and discriminations should be abolished. Such a state of equality is based on the collective effort of human beings.

What brought men together was the realisation of common lot and their common humanity. All men of whatever race, caste, religion, nationality and so on, are subject to disease, decay and death. All men are likewise impelled

---

<sup>8</sup> MN, II, p. 196.

by the desire within them – the desire for sense gratification, the desire for life or personal immortality, and desire for domination over death. Man's quest for security and lasting happiness never ceases, but it is never satisfied by pandering to his desire as a result of which he is continually in a state of unrest.

## V. PEACE WITHIN PEACE WITHOUT

The ultimate goal of Buddhism is the attainment of peace (*santi, vupasama*). It is the ending of misery, eradication of the cankers, destruction of the three roots of evil; desire, hatred, and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*) and the attainment of enlightenment. Psychological roots are the main roots of war, conflict, and violence according to Buddhism. Disorder and disharmony in society are outward manifestations of the lack of peace in the minds of individuals and they are largely symptoms of diseased minds. Therefore, external treatment for the cause of war cannot be effective as the treatment for the inner cause. As the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to attain Nibbana, the everlasting peace, which is inner peace and tranquillity, one must strive for it. An individual who has attained the goal of peace is the one who has overcome all the conflict, put an end to misery, and lives unaffected by the vicissitude of nature. Such a person can live at peace even in an environment in which peace is absent. Buddhism speaks of the possibility of such inner transformation enabling the person to live at ease amidst people who are hateful, malicious, vicious, and intent to harm<sup>9</sup>. Attaining to such a state is possible only through dedication, though not easy for the people who are engrossed with desire, hatred, and delusion. The Buddha himself taught that He professes a teaching which enables a person to live without entering into conflict with anyone in the world.<sup>10</sup> What does it mean is that an individual can live in peace without entering into conflict with others in society. We all like living in such a peaceful life without war conflicts and violence at any level, but the contradiction is that war conflicts and violence frequently occur. Once Sakra, the God of gods, put this confusion to the Buddha:

‘O’ Lord, gods, human being, Asuras, *Gandhabbas* and whatever other different types of communities are there desirous of living without enmity, without having arms, without having enemies and without hating others. But all of them live with enmity, hating each other, having arms, having enemies, and hating. Lord, what are the reasons for it?<sup>11</sup>

In answering this question, Buddha says “Jealousy and stinginess derived from desire of the individual, the reason” (*Issamaccariya sannjanam kho devanamida - hetu*) for them to behave thus. The question made to Buddha in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC is equally applicable to the 21<sup>st</sup> century too. National and international nations and peace lovers come to agreements for peace and dialogue for peace holds at national and international levels, but still many bitter wars are reported, civil wars are a common phenomenon in most countries,

<sup>9</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse 197.

<sup>10</sup> ‘*Na kenaci koke viggayha tithati*’ MN, I, p. 109.

<sup>11</sup> DN, II, p. 276.

and religious, ethnic, and national wars are present in some parts of the world. Production of sophisticated weapons that can wipe out all the living beings from the earth and trading them has become a lucrative method of earning. Thousands and millions of people have died from war, and such a number may have been affected, properties have been lost in wars. Contradiction is that conflicts seem to be provoked by the people who are highly involved with peace.

Buddhism does not accept any kind of war. It is evil to be devoid. In war, the virtue of abstaining from the destruction of life is violated, non-injury, non-violence, and the ideal of a life full of mercy and compassion towards all living beings is violated. Lying, slander, and mutual accusations with abusive language take place. It generates numerous unwholesome and unskilled states. Buddhism sees war and its associated evils as morally debasing, dehumanizing and brutalizing man. Therefore, their causes are to be understood, and measures are to be taken to remove the causes of wars and conflicts. There are two sets of causes for arising such conditions, which are mutually dependent and have to be removed if lasting peace is to be achieved.

1. External socio-economic causes
2. The internal moral and psychological causes

It is when society is corrupt that unwholesome psychological traits become the motivational roots of human behaviour. When human behaviour is determined by unwholesome motives, institutional structures such as politics and the economic system also get adversely affected. This leads to a vicious circle involving a corrupt social, political, and economic order and a society consisting of morally debased individuals.

External socio-political causes are concerned, violation of peace could occur in a society when a section of people is deprived of the basic material needs to lead a decent life. People arm themselves and resort to criminal behaviour, rebellion and insurgency if equal opportunity is not given to them to lead a comfortable life with dignity. Buddhism seems to consider economic deprivation of any section of community as the most serious cause for the disturbance of peace. It is therefore, a foremost duty of the state to create the necessary conditions for the elimination of poverty.<sup>12</sup> But poverty is not the single factor for unrest, but religious, ethnic, and other differences, and the discriminations involved in them would be conducive to the factor. Therefore, provision of equal opportunity is essential in such conditions.

Internal moral psychological causes are concerned with jealousy and stinginess derived from the desire of the predominant individual. Once Brahmin Aranadanda asked the Buddha, What is the reason for having conflicts among householders and recluses? He replied that conflicts among householders are derived from sensual desire whereas conflicts among recluses are derived from *ditthi raga* (desire for views). Desire derives from reasoning (*vitakka*). Reasoning creates concepts and views which people

---

<sup>12</sup> DN, III, p. 58.

strongly grasp. Being grasped by concepts and views, naturally people become victims and slaves of the concepts and views they created in the process of reasoning. As a result of being grasped by concepts and views, debates and arguments, moving and lamentation, arrogant, conceit, and back biting come into being.<sup>13</sup> Responsibility of the individual in peacekeeping largely lies in a moral psychological basis. Lusts are within the individual. Purification of lust is to be done individually. War and conflicts originate within the mind of the individual. If one is derived from amoral psychological motivations of desire, hatred, and delusion, evils prevail, whereas good prevails motivated by moral psychological motivations. So that inner purity and impurity determine the peace or conflicts of the individual and society.

According to the Buddha, unwholesome behaviour proceeds from the three psychological roots, desire, hatred and delusion. A transformation of attitudes based on wisdom is required to overcome the internal causes of conflict. The Buddhist path of *Nibbāna* is one, which has the consequences of gradually reducing and finally eradicating the internal causes of conflicts. From the Buddhist point of view, social unrest is a consequence of psychological maladjustment. Deluded or confused thinking and unwise reflection produce craving, greed, envy, jealousy, hatred, violence and aggression. The solution is wise reflection and genuine attempt to abandon those cankers of the mind which disturb the peace within and peace without. Anger, ill-will, malice, envy, and the like have to be replaced by loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

Those wholesome attitudes need to find practical expression in the willingness to give (*dana*), in the pleasant verbal communication with one's fellow beings (*piyavacana*), in equal treatment of others (*samanattata*) and personal commitment to the welfare of all beings (*attacariya*). Inner change of individual for lasting peace is an urgent requirement that can be achieved through a process of moral education. Implicit in the Noble Eight Fold Path (*ariya atthangika magga*) of Buddhism is a practical scheme which could be adopted as a basis for evolving a viable programme of moral education or education for peace. Method of mental culture (*bhavana*) has great psychological significance for having peace.

Buddhism is a system of thought which attaches great value and significance to human effort, the potency of the human will and human endeavour for overcoming suffering and achieving lasting happiness and peace without having the support of mysterious forces. One can escape numerous existential ills if the proper effort is made (*samma vayama*) with proper understanding (*samma ditthi*).

\*\*\*

---

<sup>13</sup> MN, III, 230.

## REFERENCES

### Primary source

*Dhammapada*, Ed. S.Sumaṅgala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K.R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.

*Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed.V.Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I.B.Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.

*Dīgha Nikāya*, Ed. T.W.Rhys Davids and J.E.Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.

### Secondary source

Sumanasiri, G. (1998). *Buddhism and Confucianism*. Colombo: Author's publication, p. 143, p. 147.

Sumanasiri, G. (1995). *Traditional Chinese Religions*. Colombo: Author's publication, p. 20.

[www.centrum-universal.com](http://www.centrum-universal.com)

[www.inovationslearning.com.uk](http://www.inovationslearning.com.uk)



# BUDDHISM AND CULTIVATION OF INNER PEACE FOR WORLD PEACE: THE CASE OF ZIMBABWE

Tabona Shoko\*

## Abstract:

This paper explores the theme of the Buddhist idea of cultivating inner peace for world peace. The paper is set in the context of the profound significance of Vesak in underscoring two milestones that celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of South Vietnam and the reunification of the country (April 30, 1975 – April 30, 2025) and the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (September 2, 1945– September 2, 2025). The paper advances the central theme of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025 that is centered on the promotion of Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development. The thrust of this paper is to examine the notion of cultivating inner peace for world peace. This is contextualized by a case study of Tibetan Buddhism in Zimbabwe. The paper argues that peace is a fundamental component of Buddhism and is a strong pillar for unity and sustainable development. The paper starts with an assessment of the views of peace in Buddhism, its role in politics, special themes on peace, Sustainable Development Goals, and relevance to the international context. The paper is a product of empirical research in Zimbabwe, supplemented by a literature review of Buddhist texts from 2020 to 2025. The paper concludes that cultivating inner peace is the panacea for Buddhist achievement of unity and inclusivity, fostering world peace and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, inner peace, world peace, sustainable development, unity, and inclusivity.*

---

\* University of Zimbabwe.



## I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is a spiritual tradition that is rooted in the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as Gautama Buddha, who lived in the 5th century BCE in the region of Magadha in India. Gautama was born into a wealthy family in Lumbini in 563 BCE. But he experienced the most opulent life that he renounced after witnessing a grueling sight of extreme poverty and destitution. For several years, he sought relief from the extreme sufferings of this world by pursuing ascetic practices and meditation. Eventually, he found enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bhod Gaya in India. This experience granted him a sense of peace, perfect wisdom, and compassion.<sup>1</sup>

At its core, Buddhism seeks to attain spiritual enlightenment, a state of inner peace and wisdom, through an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, which reveal the nature of suffering, and the Eightfold Path, a guide for moral and spiritual practice. The path aims to liberate individuals from the cycle of suffering, which is influenced by karma's system of rebirth. With various schools and sects, Buddhism encompasses diverse perspectives on the Buddha's nature, the attainment of enlightenment, and the roles of religious orders and lay practitioners.<sup>2</sup> By its nature and inception, Buddhism is founded on the attainment of inner peace. This paper argues that peace is a very important part of Buddhism. It helps people come together (unity) and makes it possible for communities to grow and succeed in a way that supports sustainable development. The paper starts with a discussion of perspectives of peace in Buddhism, then it will treat the issues of politics and non-violence. The paper will discuss pertinent themes on peace before it turns to matters of Sustainable Development and its relevance to the global context. It will end with an examination of a case study of the Buddhist religion in Zimbabwe.

## II. BUDDHISM'S VIEWS OF PEACE

Buddhism advocates for nonviolence and compassion toward all living beings, emphasizing that harming others perpetuates suffering. Conversely, the Buddha taught that treating others with kindness, respect, and empathy leads to peaceful outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Buddhism adopted certain principles that amount to peace in several ways. First is the concept of Inner Peace: According to Buddhist teachings, inner peace can be achieved through mental discipline and meditation. By releasing desires, attachment, and ignorance, individuals can cultivate peace within themselves, as taught by the Buddha.<sup>4</sup> Religion perceives inner peace as a sense of emotional, mental, and spiritual harmony.<sup>5</sup> A Buddhist scholar, Pearl Nash (2024), states that Buddhist methods of attaining inner peace include the following: (1) Embracing mindfulness. (2)

<sup>1</sup> Walpola Rahula (1959), p. 13 - 25.

<sup>2</sup> Index Mundi. "Religions in Zimbabwe" <https://www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/religions.html>. Accessed 19 Jan. 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Walpola Rahula (1959), p. 95 - 100.

<sup>4</sup> Walpola Rahula (1959), p. 45 - 50

<sup>5</sup> Bing, <https://www.bing.com>. Accessed 22 Jan. 2025.

Letting go of attachment. (3) Cultivate Compassion. (4) Practice patience. (5) Understand Impermanence. (6) Find contentment in simplicity. (7) Cultivate Wisdom through reflection.<sup>6</sup> He underlines the fact that if one practices these methods, one cultivates inner peace. Furthermore, a constant reflection upon these methods guarantees the experience of “calmness and clarity, a serene landscape that exists within oneself”.<sup>7</sup> The second is the principle of nonviolence: Buddhism advocates for nonviolence and compassion towards all living beings, emphasizing that harming others perpetuates suffering. Conversely, the Buddha taught that treating others with kindness, respect, and empathy leads to peaceful outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

The third is mindfulness and meditation: Through regular practice of mindfulness and meditation, individuals can foster a profound sense of peace and calm. These Buddhist practices develop greater self-awareness, mental clarity, and inner serenity, ultimately leading to a more peaceful state of being.<sup>9</sup> The fourth is interconnectedness: Buddhism emphasizes the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence of all phenomena. By acknowledging and embracing this reality, individuals can cultivate a deeper sense of peace, compassion, and empathy towards others, recognizing that their well-being is inextricably linked.<sup>10</sup> Fifth is the Four Noble Truths: The Four Noble Truths, a cornerstone of the Buddha’s teachings, offer a comprehensive framework for comprehending the root causes of suffering and the pathway to achieving peace. These Truths underscore the crucial importance of acknowledging and confronting suffering, relinquishing its underlying causes, and nurturing wisdom and compassion to attain liberation.<sup>11</sup> By adopting these principles, Buddhism promotes a holistic understanding of peace that encompasses individual inner peace, nonviolence, mindfulness, interconnectedness, and wisdom.

Theresa Der-lan Yeh, a Buddhist scholar, postulates that peace in Buddhism is conceived as a “State of inner calm, serenity, and well-being”<sup>12</sup> that emanates from the interrelationship between all forms of occurrences. The standard norm for dependency stipulates that everything exists in relationship to the other, and accordingly, any change has a ripple effect, meaning changes in one aspect tend to affect the other. In this light, the Buddhist concept of Indra’s Net illustrates the interconnectedness of all phenomena, whereby each node reflects and is reflected by all other nodes. This notion promotes a sense of responsibility, appreciation, and empathy for others.<sup>13</sup> From a Buddhist

<sup>6</sup> Pearl Nash (2024), p.1 - 8.

<sup>7</sup> Pearl Nash (2024), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Walpola Rahula (1959), p. 95 – 100.

<sup>9</sup> Walpola Rahula (1959), p. 120 - 125.

<sup>10</sup> Walpola Rahula (1959), p. 150 - 155.

<sup>11</sup> Walpola Rahula (1959), p. 55 - 65.

<sup>12</sup> Der-lanYeh (2006), p. 92 - 94.

<sup>13</sup> Der-lanYeh (2006), p. 93.

perspective, human beings are viewed as a cord of processes governed by a dependent origination. The doctrine of no-self (*anatta*) states that nothing in an individual is independent, but at the same time, it accepts that each being has a semblance of variety and exceptionality from the other being. According to Ye, such Buddhist teachings underline a sense of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.<sup>14</sup> These endowments, shared with wisdom, help guide Buddhist practices and promote a sense of concord with all existence. Buddhism advocates for a holistic understanding of peace. Religion acknowledges that peace is a combined outcome that is molded by interfaces of all entities involved. This perspective endorses the significance of personal transformation and determination for peace in every moment.

Theresa Der-lan Yeh observes that the Buddhist view of peace echoes with modern peace studies that recognize the complexity and collectiveness of causes of war or attainment of peace. The concept of negative and positive peace is also relevant, highlighting the importance of addressing socio-economic injustices to achieve lasting peace.

### III. BUDDHISM AND POLITICS

Several scholars have debated the political stance of the Buddha. Whilst some think he was politically active, others believe that Buddhism is apolitical. Those who think that he was apolitical argue that he emphasized individual spiritual development and moral conduct. But those who think that he was politically active argue based on his emphasis on social justice, equality, and compassion.<sup>15</sup> According to Shubham Srivastava, although the Buddha was born in the royal family and was naturally positioned for political office, he never sought political mileage nor the creation of political institutions in his teachings. Rather, he confronted the problems of society through an approach that appealed to society to move towards greater humanism, improved the welfare of its members and equitable distribution of resources.<sup>16</sup> However the author traced political statements that point to present day political order for instance, he taught about equality of all humanity and castigated classes and castes as artificial systems; he advocated for the spirit of cooperation and active participation in the society; he advised members of the Order to be guided by the Rule of Law effected through the *dharma* and finally he encouraged the spirit of consultation and democratic processes.<sup>17</sup> The Buddha's political inclination was the moralization and responsible use of public power. His message was entirely focused on political ideology but one that set the way to attain *nibbāna*.

### IV. BUDDHIST PERCEPTION OF VIOLENCE

Buddhist belief is couched in the facet of non-violence. The religion's

---

<sup>14</sup> Der-lanYeh (2006), 101.

<sup>15</sup> Mathew Watson (2025), <https://www.amazon.co.uk>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>16</sup> Shubham Srivastava (n.d), <https://www.academia.edu>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>17</sup> Shubham Srivastava (n.d), <https://www.academia.edu>, Accessed 28/02/25.

teachings set out the parameters for non-violence as expressed in the first of its five guidelines to the adherents, "Avoid killing, or harming any living thing".<sup>18</sup> Buddhism is understood as a peaceful religion, and nothing in the doctrines appears to support violence. It is one of the religions that respects the concept of peace in the world.

Buddhism identifies three areas of causes of violence and conflict, namely, the eternal causes in which physical and verbal harm is inflicted on others. It condemns social injustices exhibited in political and economic systems and the pursuit of resource accumulation without regard for ecological and ethical considerations as unjust.<sup>19</sup> The author identifies internal causes that lie in psychological states of fear, anger, and hate, such as sticking to pejorative views and desire for material things that result in lust and contest. He identified the root cause of violence as embedded in ignorance about the connection of all forms of nature and failure to accept the reality of the world as it is, a matter that results in affection and dangerous postures.<sup>20</sup> The Buddhist is thus reminded to address these causal factors and be realistic in their understanding of the world.

## V. SPECIAL THEMES ON BUDDHISM AND PEACE

Buddhism makes links between health and wellbeing and peace, human rights, gender issues, the family, environment, symbols, and sayings. They hold that peace is a state of mind that can be nurtured through the practice of mindfulness, meditation, and adherence to the principles of the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>21</sup> The essence of the Noble truths is summed up by Peter Harvey as follows: "(1) Suffering (*dukkha*). (2) Origin (*samudaya*). (3) Cessation (*nirodha*). (4) Path (*maggā*)."<sup>22</sup> Peter Harvey (2013) emphasizes that the Four Noble Truths constitute a fundamental teaching of Buddhism that explicates the nature of suffering and the means to liberate oneself from it.

Buddhism's approach to health is in fulfillment of the requirements of Sustainable Development Goal 13 that seeks to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".<sup>23</sup> According to Sarath Ananda (2019), Buddhism's good health is dependent on the person, who must control their mental, physical, and verbal behavior that deactivates his/her evils. It is this impure body that is the causal factor for illness and disease, as expounded in the Buddha's teachings.<sup>24</sup> In his quest for the Buddhist approach to healthcare, Sarath Ananda noted that the Buddhist approach to health and well-being for individuals can establish a sustainable society. Like any other religion that

<sup>18</sup> BBC (2014), <https://www.youtube.com/bbc%20news/live>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>19</sup> Der-lan Yea (2006), p. 94 - 97.

<sup>20</sup> Der-lan Yeh (2006), p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> Walpola Rahula (1974), <https://archive.org/details/BhanteWalpolaRahulaWhat-TheBuddhaTaught>, 28/02/25.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Harvey (2013), p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations (2015), <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>24</sup> Sarath Ananda (2019), p. 303.

strives to make its adherents live happily and liberate them from suffering through illness and disease, Buddhism believes that suffering (*dhukka*) is caused by craving, aversion, and ignorance, but it can be overcome through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths.<sup>25</sup> The central belief of Buddhism is suffering, as summed up by Damien Keown 2013, quoted in Sarath Ananda (2019, 309).

What, O Monks, is the Noble Truth of Suffering? Birth is suffering, sickness is suffering, old age is suffering, and death is suffering. Pain, grief, sorrow, lamentation, and despair are suffering. Association with what is unpleasant is suffering; disassociation from what is pleasant is suffering. Not getting what one wants is suffering. In short, the five factors of individuality (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*) are suffering.<sup>26</sup>

Buddhism aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 on health, which states, “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.”<sup>27</sup> Buddhism extricates itself from suffering through the adoption of the Eight-Fold Path and the Four Noble Truths. The Eightfold Path offers a route to freeing oneself from suffering by its pronouncement of eight interdependent principles, namely, Right Understanding, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.<sup>28</sup> This path fosters wisdom, ethics, and mental clarity, and one can remove him/herself from the cycle of suffering and achieve liberation. The Four Noble Truths uncover that suffering is an inherent part of life, fueled by craving, aversion, and ignorance. The truths offer a lifeline of hope and assurance that misery is not invincible but can be overcome, leading to liberation through the principles of the Noble Eightfold Path. In this process of liberation, the Buddhists’ aim is to develop wisdom, ethics, and mental discipline, ultimately leading to the attainment of *nibbāna*, a state of liberation from suffering. This approach aligns with the World Health Organization’s definition of health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>29</sup> This posture also tallies with another definition of health as ‘the ability to adapt and to self-manage.’<sup>30</sup>

Sarath Ananda states several ways in which Buddhism addresses issues of health and well-being. Some of these include, first, that Budha himself set up two medical practices through his behavior, the Putigattatissa Thero and Suppiya Upasika, which stipulate that one must look after the other in times

<sup>25</sup> Sarath Ananda (2019), p. 306.

<sup>26</sup> Damien Keown, (2013), p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations (2015), <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, Accessed 28/02/24.

<sup>28</sup> Easwaran (2007), <https://www.amazon.co.jp/Dhammapada-Easwarans-Classics-Indian-Spirituality/dp/1586380206>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>29</sup> WHO (2018), <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>30</sup> Huber et al (2011), <https://www.bmj.com/content/343/bmj.d4163>, Accessed 28/02/25.



of sickness. The middle path is another example that demonstrates that one can acquire liberation by avoiding getting into extremes that are detrimental to health. As such, the religion cautions against bad intentions, speech, and actions as responsible for suffering. Buddhism also emphasizes the practice of *mettā*, the notion that one must practice love of one another. The most important value of Buddhism is the principle of karma, which explains the idea of cause and effect, that one reaps what one sow. In this context, Buddhism positions health as a holistic manner that comprises physical and mental states and amicable relationships with the family, neighborhood, workplace, and the environment.<sup>31</sup> Sarath Ananda observes that the harmony of all these elements in society is an indicator of sustainability.

A lot of literature on Buddhist health and wellbeing is captured in sacred texts such as *Vinaya Pitaka*, the *Sutta-Pitaka*, the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, and the *Mahāvagga Pāli* (Sarath Ananda 2019: 313). These documents contain health instructions for proper physical and mental health and are based on herbal medications and the maintenance of a specific lifestyle. They are recited in the temples under the guidance of the Monks. Whilst the *Bojjhaṅga (Paritta) Sutta*, *Girīmananda Sutta* are believed to be therapeutic for the sick people's physical and mental health, the *Aṅgulimāla (Paritta) Sutta* are chanted for pregnant mothers to enable safe delivery.<sup>32</sup> All these are fundamental ingredients of peace, unity, and tranquility in Buddhism.

Human rights are a vital element of cementing peace in Buddhism. However, Damien Keown notes that the interpretation of human rights in the religion may not necessarily be identical to the Western conception. But what religion espouses is the compatibility of human rights with doctrines. Human rights are discernible in Buddhism by their endeavor to accomplish the following: (1) Conflict prevention. (2) Promotion of dignity and respect. (3) Addressing inequality and discrimination. (4) Fostering inclusive societies. (5) Ensuring accountability and justice.<sup>33</sup> The promotion and protection of human rights are essential for achieving and maintaining peace. Buddhism upholds human rights by supporting Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, advocating for Human Rights education, and championing human rights and empowerment.<sup>34</sup> That way, Buddhism promotes and protects human rights, essential for achieving and maintaining peace, by the international statutes.

Buddhism is concerned with matters of gender equality. Research has shown that many Buddhists observe gender equality, although some traditions show that they have not always practiced it since gender inequality exists. In Buddhism gender issue is not only a social affair but is also a religious one to

<sup>31</sup> Sarath Ananda (2019), p. 309 - 310.

<sup>32</sup> Sarath Ananda (2019), p. 313.

<sup>33</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>34</sup> Damien Keown (1998), <https://www.dhammausa.com/2024/09/buddhism-and-human-rights-philosophical.html>, Accessed 28/02/25.



such an extent that some people have debated on the gender composition of the Buddhist gods.<sup>35</sup> According to Nishadini Peiris (2015), Buddhist teachings approach gender differently from the normative way by Western scholars. They view one's warmth to gender issues as an impediment to spiritual development. The phenomenon is impermanent and is connected to one's mental state.<sup>36</sup> The Buddhist teachings such as the five precepts that condemn non-harming or exploitation, including sexual abuse of others; the Four Noble Truths; the principle of dependent origination that emphasize interdependence and impermanence of all phenomena; non dualism that includes non-binary thinking, for instance male-female dichotomy and emptiness (*shunyata*), all accentuate the importance of understanding, equality and compassion.<sup>37</sup> Despite the criticism of some gender practices in Buddhism, the religion aims to promote understanding, equality, and liberation. Therefore, the gender component is real in Buddhism, and the religion is in conformity with Sustainable Development Goal 11, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.<sup>38</sup>

Respect for the family is another aspect that reflects elements of peace in Buddhism. But several scholars agree that the religion is not a family-based one, taking cue from the Buddha, who adopts a monastic life that involves renunciation of this world. The Buddha abandoned his family and elegant life in pursuit of enlightenment, and thus, the family appears as a source of attachment, delusion, and suffering. The religion, therefore, emphasizes monasticism and Buddhahood as an important element for attaining peace.<sup>39</sup> However, Reiko Ohnuma (2018) identifies strong family support that is exhibited in Buddhism. This is manifest in messages for pastoral advice on the conduct of familial life; promoting rituals and practices supportive of fertility, procreation, productivity, and success of the family; positioning itself as a collaborator on matters that pertain to parents, children, and their relationship with ancestors.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the Buddhist *Sangha* is said to have incorporated vocabulary that includes metaphors of family, lineage, descent, and kinship in their statements, indicating its importance in social, cultural, and religious domains.

The Buddhist concern for the environment is another matter that is central to the tenets of faith as it connects with the element of peace in the religion. The relationship between the environment and peace is intricate and manifests in that environmental degradation and resource scarcity can contribute to conflict, while environmental cooperation and sustainable development can promote peace and stability. The Buddhist scholars Oyuna Vasilievna

---

<sup>35</sup> Nishadini Peiris (2015), p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Nishadini Peiris (2015), p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ajahn Kherma, 994.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, <https://family.jrank.org>, Accessed 24/01/25.

<sup>40</sup> Reiko Ohnuma 2018, p. 149

Dorzhigushaeva and Aryana Vladimirovna Kiplyuks (2020) identify some key aspects that constitute the environmental ethics of Buddhism, namely 1. The law of karma. This is expressed in the golden rule of Buddhist morality, equal treatment of all beings and the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence), and 2 Tolerance.<sup>41</sup> The authors capture the essence of Buddhist ethics succinctly: recognition of the world as an interconnected, dynamic system; independence of all phenomena; moral principles as the basis for a sense of responsibility; and universal consciousness of the unity of the world. These Buddhist principles offer a holistic and sustainable approach to a comprehension of the world and the human position in it. The religion lays the foundation for an ecological paradigm that prioritizes harmony, compassion, and interconnectedness.<sup>42</sup>

Peace is of paramount importance in Buddhism as depicted in their interpretation and understanding of symbols. The religion exhibits certain symbols that reflect Buddhist facets of peace. For instance, the *swastika* is an ancient Buddhist symbol that is used concurrently with the *Dharma* Wheel; the Lotus flower is synonymous with peace. The picture of a meditating Buddha is an emblem of peace. Whilst the *dharma* wheel is a sign of good luck, the Bhodhi tree is a mark of enlightenment.<sup>43</sup> Buddhism has a remarkable myriad of color symbolism that punctuates socio-cultural and religious life; for instance, the colors blue, white, and green are viewed as peaceful and calming. Meditation colors red, orange, and red are used for meditation to signify spiritual growth and inner peace. The colors purple and pink are used to represent harmony and balance. However, it is outside the purview of this paper to analyze every color in the religion, but suffice it to highlight that the most conspicuous color, green, is an emblem for peace, protection from harm, sky element, and Amoghassiddhi Buddha.<sup>44</sup>

The concept of peace also pervades the language discourse. There are certain sayings that connote peace and are attributed to the Buddha, for example, "If we don't occupy ourselves with everything, then peaceful mind will have nowhere to abide".<sup>45</sup> This challenges us to preoccupy ourselves with issues of peace lest we find no place to stand. The next one says, "All the things that truly matter, beauty, love, creativity, joy and inner peace arise from beyond the mind".<sup>46</sup> This points to the fact that all good feelings and emotions emanate from beyond human cognizance. Another saying states, "We all wish for world peace, but world peace will never be achieved unless we first establish peace within our minds".<sup>47</sup> This saying poses a challenge that peace will not be attained unless we create it in our minds.

---

<sup>41</sup> Vasilievna Dorzhigushaeva and Aryana Vladimirovna Kiplyuks (2020), 154 - 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ruth Langer (2001), p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Anonymous, <https://www.bing.com>, Accessed 21/01/25.

<sup>44</sup> Anonymous, <https://www.bing.com>, Access 22/01/25.

<sup>45</sup> Shen-Hui, <https://exploringyourmind.com>, Accessed 24/01/25.

<sup>46</sup> Eckhart Tolle, <https://exploringyourmind.com>, Accessed 24/01/25.

<sup>47</sup> Geshe Kelsang, <https://exploringyourmind.com>, Accessed 24/01/25.

## VI. BUDDHISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (SDGS)

Buddhism subscribes to Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDS Goal Number 16, which seeks to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”<sup>48</sup> Buddhism conforms to the SDGs by its adherence to the principles of peacefulness manifest in its faithful obligation to *Ahimsa*. This is done by upholding the values of nonviolence and compassion to humankind. The religion also sticks to its teachings of tolerance, understanding, and acceptance of diversity on the Buddha’s Teaching on Non-Violence.<sup>49</sup>

Buddhism promotes the co-existence of humankind in fulfillment of its global mandate. The religion advocates mindfulness and meditation as these serve as cornerstones to develop inner peace, reduce stress and conflict. Buddhism supports the interconnectedness of all things, and by so doing, it endorses global linkages and unity. As such, the religion fosters peace and conflict resolution through amicable dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding on mindfulness.<sup>50</sup>

One of the tenets of peace in Buddhism is the religion’s fostering of inclusive Institutions, social justice, and good governance of intuitions. This is affected by its establishment of the *saṅgha* that promotes equality, mutual respect, and collective decision-making. The religion also supports education and critical thinking with its assets in analytical skills and emotional intelligence that enable individuals to make informed decisions on *saṅgha* as an inclusive institution, The *Pāḷi* Canon<sup>51</sup> discusses education and critical thinking.<sup>52</sup>

The Buddhist faith also believes in access to justice by enforcing teachings that pronounce compassion and empathy towards all beings and encourage fairness and justice in human interactions. The religion’s doctrines also associate with restorative justice that does not believe in punishment but encourages forgiveness, rehabilitation, and reparation on compassion and empathy. The *Dhammapāda* (Verses 129-130) discusses fairness and justice.<sup>53</sup>

## VII. BUDDHISM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GLOBE

In a world that faces modernization and globalization, Buddhism faces rapid expansion due to advancements in technology and communication. But

<sup>48</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Goals No.16, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> United Nations: [//sdgs.un.org/goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals), Accessed 20/01/25. See also *Dhp.* 135 and *Mahayana Sutra*).

<sup>50</sup> United Nations :[//sdgs.un.org/goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals), Accessed 20/01/25. See also The *Dhp.* 37 and *SN (MN.10)*.

<sup>51</sup> *AN* 3.65.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, Accessed 20/01/25. See also The *Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga*. I. p. 1 - 10.

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, Accessed 20/01/25. See also The *PTS (Sn*. I. p. 8).

the religion also faces threats of modernization such as cyber-attacks, trends of secularization, capitalist ideology, and the influence of consumerism. Despite these challenges, Buddhism prevails with its advocacy for world peace. The religion addresses modern challenges by promoting its teachings on peace, compassion, and personal well-being. Its principles have gained traction in fields like Philosophy, Psychology, Spirituality, Ethics, Metaphysics, and Religion. Buddhism remains relevant, and its impact is felt by both individuals and societies globally.

According to Chandrashekhar Paswan, a Buddhist Professor at Gautam Buddha University, Uttar Pradesh in India, Buddhism conforms to the trends of sustainable development. He upholds that matters of conflict, intolerance, and disharmony are counter-productive, and they stem from desires, hatred, and ignorance. But these can be circumvented by developing confidence, tolerance, and harmony, which are important ingredients for enriching common values and universal ethics. He proposes the promotion of education, dialogue, and social and economic development as hallmarks for the sustainable development of peace in the world.<sup>54</sup>

## VIII. BUDDHISM IN ZIMBABWE

Buddhism is practiced in Africa, and the majority of Buddhists are of Asian descent, mostly Chinese, Vietnamese, Sri Lankan, or Japanese (Charmaine Lachman 2015). The origins of Buddhism in Zimbabwe are fairly recent, having started in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Historians state that the religion was first introduced by the Western Buddhists mainly from Britain during the colonial times in the 1950s and 60s. These practitioners arrived in small groups, interested in meditation and spiritual development. However, the religion experienced growth and development in the 1970s and 1980s with the introduction of *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* Buddhists.<sup>55</sup>

In 1980, Zimbabwe attained its independence from Britain, and Buddhism entered a new phase of life. This development saw the government's adoption of a "generous religious policy" that offered freedom of worship to all religions in the country, including Buddhism.<sup>56</sup> Before this development, the government recognized Christianity as the only religion in the country. This was in fulfilment of the three-pronged missionary policy of settlement in Zimbabwe, that they would bring civilization to the natives through evangelism, education, and medical care.<sup>57</sup> Christianity became mainstreamed in schools at the expense of other religions. This meant that all other religions, such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Bahai, Jainism, Shintoism, Confucianism, and African. However, after independence in 1980, the country implemented a multi-faith religious policy that granted religious freedom to all faiths; additional religions

<sup>54</sup> Chandrashekhar Paswan (2019), p. 435.

<sup>55</sup> Druon Khen Rinpoche (2019).

<sup>56</sup> Antony John Dachs (1973), p. 213.

<sup>57</sup> Antony John Dachs (1973), p. 213.

were excluded from freedom of worship. But the situation was reversed at independence in 1980 when the country offered religious liberty to all religions through the introduction of a multi-faith religious policy.<sup>58</sup> Since the government attributed the success of the liberation war against the British imperialist government to the ancestral spirits, African Traditional Religion was officially recognized alongside Buddhism and other faiths.

In 1995, the Buddhists in Zimbabwe numbered only 780. In 2011, membership grew, primarily driven by the Tibetan Buddhist community.<sup>59</sup> The religion expanded with the formation of Buddhist Associations in the country. In modern times, Buddhism has continued to experience steady growth in Zimbabwe. The 2013 constitution of Zimbabwe further upholds this multi-faith religious strata. As it stands, the statistics are Protestant 74.8% (includes Apostolic 37.5%, Pentecostal 21.8%, other 15.5%), Roman Catholic 7.3%, other Christian 5.3%, traditional 1.5%, Muslim 0.5%, other 0.1%, and none 10.5%.<sup>60</sup> Buddhism is thus featured among the 0.1% recognized religions in the country, but the bottom line remains that it is an officially recognized religion in Zimbabwe.

## IX. BUDDHIST CENTRES IN ZIMBABWE

There are several Buddhist centres in Zimbabwe, namely the Harare Buddhist Centre Kagyu, Samy Dzong Harare, and Tara Rokpa Therapy Centre. One notable institution is the Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre for World Peace and Health. The centre upholds the beliefs of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, which places *dharma* at the core of its tenets of peace. They instill in the participants the teachings and practices of Buddhism, particularly the meditation techniques. The centre's drive is on: "Long-term fruits include increased inner-stability, self-awareness and contentment, resulting in one being able to lead a more fulfilled and happier life".<sup>61</sup> The centre is also involved in charity work in the country, such as the institution run by Rockpar Support Network, founded by Akong Tulku Rinpoche, a Tibetan lama and physician.<sup>62</sup> The practice has a spiritual orientation based on Western Psychotherapy. The Network caters to vulnerable people, particularly disabled people living with or infected by HIV and AIDS, to create a positive change in life.<sup>63</sup> The centre also runs a self-help therapy process based on Buddhist philosophy and Western psychological and therapeutic approaches to healing, self-empowerment, and compassionate action.

<sup>58</sup> Tabona Shoko (1991), p. 63.

<sup>59</sup> RelZim, <https://relzim.org/>, Accessed 18/01/25.

<sup>60</sup> CIA World Factbook (2021), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/religions/>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>61</sup> Harare Buddhist Centre (2021), <https://www.hararebuddhistcentre.com/>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>62</sup> Jane Pilosof (2024), <https://www.hararebuddhistcentre.com/>, Accessed 28/02/25.

<sup>63</sup> Harare Buddhist Centre (2021), <https://www.hararebuddhistcentre.com/>, Accessed 28/02/25.



## X. CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed Buddhist understanding and approach to peace by unravelling the religion's perspectives of peace, the state of politics, and the doctrine of non-violence. It has also discussed pertinent themes such as health and wellbeing, human rights, gender, family, environment, symbols, and sayings that reflect peace. The paper explored issues of Sustainable Development Goals and their relevance to the global context. It ended up by examining a case study of the Buddhist religion in Zimbabwe that helped contextualize the phenomenon of peace in a particular context in Africa. Therefore, the paper has demonstrated that Buddhism is a religion that promotes inner peace for World peace. The religion's beliefs and practices in promoting peace exhibit best practices for supporting unity and inclusivity, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Ananda, S., Buddhist Approach to Health and Well-Being: The Way Forward to a Sustainable Future, accessed on [March 3, 2025], available at: [//www.academia.edu/69987234/Buddhist\\_Approach\\_to\\_Health\\_and\\_Well\\_Being\\_The\\_Way\\_Forward\\_to\\_a\\_Sustainable\\_Future](http://www.academia.edu/69987234/Buddhist_Approach_to_Health_and_Well_Being_The_Way_Forward_to_a_Sustainable_Future).
- Dachs, A. J. (ed.), Christianity South of the Zambezi, Mambo Press, Salisbury, 1973.
- Drupon Khen Rinpoche, RFA Interview about Buddhism in Africa, accessed on [March 1, 2025], available at: <https://www.druponrinpoche.org/en/2021/12/06/buddhism-in-africa-rfa-interviews-drupon-khen-rinpoche/>.
- Harvey, P., An Introduction to Buddhism, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013.
- Keown, D., Buddhism and Human Rights, accessed on [March 1, 2025], available at: <https://www.wikiwand.com>.
- Kherma, A., The Buddha's teaching on gender, Buddhist Publication Society (BPS), Kandy, 1994.
- King, S. B., Buddhist perspectives on Human Rights, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 2005.
- Lachman, C., Buddhism in Africa, accessed on [March 1, 2025], available at: [//www.wikiwand.com/en/articles/Buddhism\\_in\\_Africa](http://www.wikiwand.com/en/articles/Buddhism_in_Africa).
- Langer, R., Buddhist ritual and the reification of merit, in W. Edelglass and J.L. Garfield (eds), Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, 339-353.
- Ling, S, Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Centre for World Peace & Health, accessed on [March 1, 2015], available at: [//www.hararebuddhistcentre.com](http://www.hararebuddhistcentre.com).

- Nash, P., 7 Ways to Attain Inner Peace, based on Buddhist Philosophy, accessed on [March 1, 2025], available at: [//hackspirit.com/ways-to-attain-inner-peace-based-on-buddhist-philosophy/](http://hackspirit.com/ways-to-attain-inner-peace-based-on-buddhist-philosophy/).
- Ohnuma, R., Buddhism and the family, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2018.
- Paswan, C., Sustainable Development and World Peace: A Buddhist Approach, accessed on [February 28, 2025], available at: <https://www.undv2019vietnam.com>.
- Peiris, N., Gender Equity in Buddhism, accessed on [March 1, 2025], available at: <https://www.researchgate.net>.
- Rahula, W., What the Buddha Taught, Grove Press, New York, 1959.
- Shoko, T., Strategies for developing instructional material in African Traditional Religion, in S. J. Nondo (ed.), Multifaith Issues and Approaches in Religious Education with Special Reference to Zimbabwe, Rijksuniversiteit, Utrecht, 1991, 63-71.
- Srivastava, S., Buddhism and Politics, accessed on [February 28, 2025], available at: <https://www.academia.edu>.
- Tsomo, K. L., Buddhist women across cultures: Realizations, State University of New York (SUNY) Press, Albany, 1999.
- United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, accessed on [February 28, 2025], available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.
- Watson, M., Buddhism and the Political: Organization and Participation in the Theravāda Moral Universe, accessed on [February 28, 2025], available at: <https://www.amazon.co.uk>
- Yeh, T. D.-I., The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective, in International Journal of Peace Studies, vol. 11 (2006): 91–112



# UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY - BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Dr. YoungHoon Kwaak\*

**Abstract:**

This paper introduces the visionary Lumbini Peace and Harmony District (P. H. D.) a master-planned global sanctuary in the birthplace of the Buddha, designed to become the epicenter of spiritual renewal, ecological harmony, and sustainable development. From Material to Mind: Challenging the dominance of consumerism and nationalistic self-interest, the author calls for a global paradigm shift - from material matters to mind matters - where Buddhist principles such as sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation (dunwu-jianxiu) guide personal and planetary transformation. Designing Peace through the Dharma: The proposed Peace City integrates Buddhist spatial symbolism - Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha zones, the Eightfold Path, and lotus architecture - with practical environmental ethics, rural development, and inclusive civic planning.

A Call to Action: By linking the project's implementation with global Buddhist responsibility, the author urges immediate international cooperation to overcome political stagnation and bring this transformative vision into reality. The essay's contribution lies not in abstract theorization, but in offering a concrete, spiritually grounded blueprint for living the Dhamma collectively - a city that embodies peace, sustainability, and universal compassion.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist Urbanism, mindful planning, sustainable civilization, lumbini peace and harmony district.*

---

\* President, World Citizens Organization, UN Association of ROK, South Korea.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, we face numerous challenges and conflicts, as we are reminded daily by the events unfolding.

As we come to Vietnam in search of new meaning for humanity and solutions to global crises, we must find real ways to overcome our shared challenges: climate change, unbridled AI technology, and grave nuclear threats. The material-oriented world and nation-centric mindset are shifting, transforming into three or four major bloc states.

I would like to introduce Lumbini Peace and Harmony District, prepared in 2014—a sacred place where people from around the world can come together, live together, and learn together how to live together in harmony. Lumbini Peace and Harmony District will serve as a living environment that offers solutions to these global challenges.<sup>1</sup>

As these crises converge, the need for sustainable policies, responsible innovation, and global collaboration becomes increasingly urgent to ensure a safer and more resilient future for humanity.

I would also like to humbly request all the Buddhists and Buddhist leaders to take actions to realize Lumbini Peace and Harmony District, which has not been implemented for more than two decades due to various Nepal Political situations.

## II. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

### **Material matters**

#### **There is no action since KOICA and KWAAC ESPRI provided in 2014**

“Material comes first” refers to a perspective or belief where material possessions, wealth, and physical comfort are prioritized above all other aspects of life, such as emotional well being, relationships, or spiritual fulfillment. This mindset often aligns with materialism, where the accumulation of goods and the pursuit of financial success are seen as the ultimate goals in life. In a world where “material comes first,” there is a strong focus on tangible, measurable achievements, sometimes at the expense of more intangible or non-material aspects of human experience, such as happiness, personal growth, or connection with others.<sup>2</sup>

This idea can be seen in consumer-driven societies, where value is placed on what one owns or can acquire, and status is often linked to wealth and possessions. Critics of this mindset argue that it leads to a shallow and unsatisfying life, where individuals might neglect their emotional, social, or ethical needs in favor of material gain.

If we continue living at the current rate, the U.S. would need 5.39 Earths,

---

<sup>1</sup> Kwaak, Y. H. (2004). Proposal for the Lumbini World Peace City. Presented at the 2nd World Buddhist Summit, Lumbini, Nepal.

<sup>2</sup> Kwaak, Y. H. (2013). Urban Planning for World Peace and Sustainability. Seoul: Mokmin Institute for Policy Studies.

France and England would need 6 Earths, respectively, and China would need 1.2 Earths.

Pic.1

***If every people live like the people in the following countries, how many Earths would be needed?<sup>3</sup>***

- American: 5.39 Needed



- Canadian: 4.88 Needed



- British: 2.94 Needed



- French: 2.94 Needed



- Japanese: 2.66 Needed



- Chinese: 1.2 Needed



*Source: GFN, Global Footprint Network, Report, 2013.<sup>4</sup>*

Furthermore, according to scientists, Doomsday is now closer than ever. On January 28, 2025, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, a nonprofit organization focused on global security and science, officially moved the Doomsday Clock forward for 2025. The clock is now set to 89 seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever been to impending doom, according to the organization's press release.

<sup>3</sup> Kwaak, Y. H. (2008). Design Principles for a Buddhist City: Planning for Lumbini. *Journal of Urban Spirituality and Ethics*, 3 (2), 112 – 129.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO. (2013). Culture: Urban Future. Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.

The new time is one second ahead of last year's clock - which was set at 90 seconds to midnight - and experts said that multiple world issues factored into the new Doomsday time.



**Doomsday Clock on Jan. 28, 2025**

Pic.2<sup>5</sup>

### III. WHERE SHOULD WE GO?

#### **Material mattered, but now, the mind matters more than ever before**

To break free from a world where “Material matters” dominate, we must strive to create a society that prioritizes “Mind matters.” The mind matters even before the birth of Sakyamuni Buddha. Human greed is insatiable, constantly driving individuals toward material pursuits without end. Therefore, to bring about a shift toward a world that values the mind over material wealth, a spiritual solution is essential.<sup>6</sup>

In this crucial transformation, we Buddhists must take the lead, as the teachings of Buddhism - particularly the principle of sudden enlightenment followed by gradual cultivation (Dunwu-Jianxiu)-serve as a guiding light, helping individuals and society move toward a more compassionate, mindful, and harmonious existence.

Buddhism is more relevant and important than ever in today's world, and Lumbini Peace and Harmony District stands as the foremost model for the

<sup>5</sup> Kaza, S. (2000). The Greening of Buddhism: Promise and Perils. In Tucker, M. E., and Williams, D. R. (Eds.), *Ecology and Religion in History* (pp. 55 – 70).

<sup>6</sup> Berkwitz, S. C. (2006). *Buddhist History in the Vernacular: The Power of the Past in Late Medieval Sri Lanka*. Leiden: Brill.

path humanity must follow.<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. WHAT SHOULD WE DO? LUMBINI PEACE AND HARMONY DISTRICT

The legend of Siddhartha Gautama Sakyamuni Buddha began in Lumbini nearly 2,600 years ago, and his teaching is embraced by millions of Buddhists around the world. However, the birthplace of Sakyamuni Buddha has been ignored for too long.

At this juncture of human history, when our world is in constant crisis, some visionaries begin to see that this obscured Lumbini - the birthplace of Buddha - can evolve to become a living and learning spiritual place, a fountain of world peace that will bring hope to this troubled world.

##### 4.1. Project background and necessity

###### 4.1.1. December 1998

Nepal's Lumbini is the birthplace of Buddha and is one of the four sacred places of Buddhism. Lumbini is a sacred pilgrimage site for many Buddhists and peace lovers around the world and was declared '*the fountain of world peace*' at the first World Buddhist Summit in 1998.

###### 4.1.2. November 1999 ~ 2004

Accordingly, through UNDP research from 1999 to 2000, Dr. KWAAK YoungHoon of Harvard Divinity School and Dr. Abelardo Brenes, Vice Rector of the World Peace University in Costa Rica made the report recommending Lumbini as the 'World Peace City', and their report was unanimously adopted at the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Buddhist Summit in 2004.

###### 4.1.3. March 2012 ~ 2015

As part of Korea KOICA's ODA project from 2012 to 2014, Dr. KWAAK YoungHoon's research and design team (KWAAK E. S. P. R. I.) established the 'Lumbini World Peace City Master Vision Plan', which was adopted as a Government Plan at the Nepal Government Ministerial meeting in 2015 and decided to be promoted by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil.

##### 4.2. Project purpose and design principles

###### 4.2.1. Preserve and protect the historical, cultural, religious and ecological treasures of the area

- "No house should be involuntarily removed".
- "No archaeological sites should be disturbed".
- "No more polluting industrialization and urban sprawl".
- "No more deforestation and Restore the forest".

###### 4.2.2. Embody the principles in practical application of the three treasures of Buddhism

<sup>7</sup> Tucker, M. E. (2003). *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase*. Chicago: Open Court.

- “Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are to be spatially layed out”.
- “Lotus should be symbolized”.
- “8 Truth Paths should be introduced”.

**4.2.3. Provide a living and learning environmental model conducive to self enlightenment and to the formation of more harmonious Global Village Civilization**

- “Upasaka/ Upasika, concept for world citizens should be introduced”.
- “Provide additional new rural villages for new incoming farmers”.

**4.2.4. Alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life in rural villages in the greater Lumbini area.**

- “Peace cannot come amidst hunger and disease”.
- “Economic and ecological sustainability should be ensured”.
- “At every level of implementation, local residents must be involved and human development must be considered”.

**4.3. Planning philosophy and physical layout design**

KWAAK E. S. P. R. I. has been practicing for the last 45 years with the six environmental viewpoints with which there were some questions that have arisen for the city environmental design.

***Six environmental viewpoints***

- Spatio-physical environment
- Econo-social environment
- Eco-natural environment
- Historical and cultural environment
- Aesthetic-visual environment
- Mind-spiritual environment

**4.4. Project implementation and procedure**

**4.5. Plan concept**

Lumbini Peace and Harmony District is organized into 8 separate Sanghas with low density, the original nature recovered Dharma Zone, Buddha Zone with Sacred Garden and 108 small village-like Upasakas/Upasikasand New Rural Villages spread out in the 24km × 24km rural and agricultural land.

Zone	Function	Properties and directives for development
Buddha	Preservation & Restricted Zone	• Sacred Garden, absolute preservation
Dharma		• Place for meditation and spiritual training • Minimum development. Natural landscape and forests

Sangha	Residence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living for Peace-loving World Citizens and Buddhist Pilgrims and Residents.</li> <li>• Residential Community</li> </ul>
New Rural Village		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmony of urban and rural spaces.</li> <li>• Linkage between center and periphery                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 Villages and Pedestrian-green axis connection</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>Upasaka / Upasi-ka</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 92 Urban Civilization Units for Peace-loving World Citizens and Buddhist Pilgrims from all over the world</li> </ul>

4.6. Cost of construction project

- The total cost of the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District construction project, which includes land development of Sangha Zone, New Rural-Village Zone, Upasaka/Upasika Zone, construction of Urban Arterial Road Network, and Regional Water Supply Facilities, is approximately **1.8 billion USD**.
- Among these, the first leading project is the construction of the ‘Sangha Ring Pilgrimage Road’ of the Lumbini Sacred Garden (15m Width, 15km Length) using the Sangha Middle Ring Road planned route, with a cost of approximately **13.5 million USD**.

V. CONCLUSION

The 21st century faces an ultimatum from our planet regarding its future well-being of humanity. The previously mentioned severely over lagged climate, technological, and nuclear crises have led to growing social uncertainty, the spread of extreme ideologies and political populism, the deterioration of psychological and mental health, the collapse of social trust, and the weakening of collective responses and cooperation.

As a solution to the previously mentioned global crises and challenges, I propose the immediate development of the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District. Envisioned as one of the pioneering spiritual communities dedicated to alleviating human suffering, development of the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District must not be delayed any longer!

For this purpose, the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District is designed in the shape of a lotus flower, a symbol of Buddhism, and consists of five major areas, including the Three Treasures Zones - Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha - as well as the 108 Upasaka/ Upasika Global Citizens Villages. By embracing the philosophical meaning of coexistence through life and learning, we aim to create a ‘World Peace City’ Vishwa Shanti Nagrama where Buddhists, pilgrims, and global citizens can come together to live and to learn how to live together.

A quarter has passed since the 1<sup>st</sup> World Buddhist Summit in Lumbini in 1998 when Lumbini was declared as the “Fountain of World Peace”.



My heart goes out to the residents of Lumbini, who have long been waiting for relief from poverty since the UN made its promise in the 1970s. My thoughts also extend to Nepal itself, a country with clear potential to thrive as a place where the values and principles of peace, sustainable human development, and new citizenocracy can be experimented and truly flourish.

But more than anything, I hope to see the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District realized as soon as possible so that all peace-loving people around the world can witness it serving as a beacon for many nations and religions in this crisis-ridden world.

There is no doubt in our minds that the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District is the most significant world peace project for humanity in the 21st century. There is no greater peace project than seeing the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District as the “Fountain of World Peace”.

Therefore, I strongly urge all the Buddhists, Buddhist leaders, and the Government of Nepal as follows:

***To the Government of Nepal***

- to endorse this Master Vision Plan Report by Government of Nepal for ODA Countries, global Buddhist organizations and developer to participate the implementation;
- to declare a Moratorium on land transactions & new constructions in Lumbini World Peace City;
- to establish Lumbini World Peace City Commission to enforce the Moratorium and carry out the development as planned by KWAAK E.S.P.R.I.;
- to start and implement the perimeter roads and irrigation network of Sangha Zone to avoid unplanned development and urban sprawl;
- to procure aid funding from ODA Countries and global Buddhist organizations to finance the development and sustain on-going operations of Lumbini P.H.D. or to recruit the developer to implement the project area with land pulling method and/or land (housing site) development project;
- To receive donations from peace-loving global foundations.

To the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District Commission (to be organized in the near future)

Lumbini Peace and Harmony District Committee of 88 to be established and Lumbini Peace and Harmony District Global Committee as octagon with the 8 councils with 11 members each (88 members):

- Infrastructure Council
- Capacity Building Council
- Quality of Daily Life Council
- Job Opportunity Council
- Organic Agriculture Council
- Eco-Culture Council
- Fund Raising Council

- Transparency Management Council

We can no longer postpone. The world is currently doomed according to the report of the doomsday clock.

Due to various political situations in Nepal, the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District has not yet been implemented. On this 2025 United Nations Day of Vesak, I hope that we, all of the Buddhists, decide to collaborate to raise funds and unite wholeheartedly to support the realization of the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District

Now is the time for Buddhists to seize this opportunity to implement the Lumbini Peace and Harmony District and to take action for world peace!

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Berkwitz, S. C. (2006). *Buddhist History in the Vernacular: The Power of the Past in Late Medieval Sri Lanka*. Leiden: Brill.
- Dunne, J. D. (2011). Toward an Understanding of Non-dual Mindfulness. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(1), 71–88.
- Girardet, H. (2008). *Cities, People, Planet: Urban Development and Climate Change*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kaza, S. (2000). The Greening of Buddhism: Promise and Perils. In Tucker, M. E., and Williams, D. R. (Eds.), *Ecology and Religion in History* (pp. 55–70).
- Kwaak, Y. H. (2004). Proposal for the Lumbini World Peace City. Presented at the 2nd World Buddhist Summit, Lumbini, Nepal.
- Kwaak, Y. H. (2008). Design Principles for a Buddhist City: Planning for Lumbini. *Journal of Urban Spirituality and Ethics*, 3(2), 112–129.
- Kwaak, Y. H. (2013). *Urban Planning for World Peace and Sustainability*. Seoul: Mokmin Institute for Policy Studies.
- Kwaak, Y. H. (2017). *Harmony-Based Urbanism: Toward a Conscious Civilization*. Proceedings of the Asia Pacific Peace and Architecture Conference, Seoul.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Loy, D. R. (2008). *Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Lumbini Development Trust. (2000). *Master Plan for the Sacred Garden of Lumbini*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.
- Sachs, J. D. (2015). *The Age of Sustainable Development*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tucker, M. E. (2003). *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Thích Nhất Hạnh. (2011). *Love Letter to the Earth*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.
- UNESCO. (2013). *Culture: Urban Future. Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.



# A NOVEL APPROACH TO EMOTIONS TO CULTIVATE INNER PEACE FOR WORLD PEACE: A BUDDHIST MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF EMOTIONS?

Venerable Professor Dr. Mahinda Deegalle\*

*Reaching a balance between happiness and distress,  
Emotions help us to lead a happy life.  
All our emotions are important, including those that sound 'negative'  
... the most difficult is sadness and grief, ...  
But positive emotions enrich a nurturing path to well-being  
Excesses of negativity and trauma create a blind wall to be seen ...  
Overlooking the love and anger, forgiveness and kindness to  
people, we give ...  
In general, positive feelings from happy events do not last – we  
become used to them – and distressing feelings from  
Distressing events do not last either.  
This is the golden key to a happy life.  
Padmasiri de Silva, *Emotional Rhythms of Our Lives*<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract:**

Both happiness and unhappiness are emotional experiences. They are foundational and essential elements of the human mental landscape. The paper underscores the vital role of emotions in the human pursuit of happiness. Inner peace is a crucial emotional state - a positive experience that may benefit all humans if they attempt to cultivate it. Though negative emotions are natural and deeply human, we tend to marginalize them, ignoring their potential for personal growth. A key Buddhist contribution is

---

\* St Edmund's College, University of Cambridge, SOAS University of London & Bath Spa University

<sup>1</sup> Padmasiri de Silva, *Emotional Rhythms of Our Lives* (Melbourne: Mihindu Publications, 2023), pp. 37 – 38.

that it demonstrates a profound connection between inner peace and world peace while highlighting the significance of individual experience. Grasping the true nature of our emotions is the key to fostering nurturing environments that lead to inner tranquility and global harmony. This paper illuminates the transformations that Buddhism showcased when individuals strive for peace and happiness. Buddhism delivers a clear and compelling message regarding peace within and world peace, centered around our emotions. The paper discusses the unequivocal Buddhist position on peace while exploring vital ethical considerations. Although the Buddha did not actively prevent war, he offered profound insights highlighting the complexities and potential consequences of conflicts and wars. It is worth reminding that peace does not occur by chance; it is our responsibility as global communities to establish the required frameworks and structures that may successfully uphold peace and avert conflict. A profound Buddhist argument is that by adopting caring attitudes, fostering compassion, and living with loving-kindness, global communities can collectively play a distinct and significant qualitative role in sustaining peace in our world by delivering our share of individual, collective, and global responsibility.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist psychology, emotions, ethics of peace, happiness, inner peace, moral psychology, war, well-being, world peace.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Happiness is a state we often pursue. Happiness is not merely an emotion, just as the unhappiness we seek to avoid is also an emotional experience. It is a fundamental aspect of our existence, much like peace, which embodies a vital mental state and a significant social phenomenon. Sadness is a shared experience, as suffering is an intrinsic part of being human. The Buddha insightfully examined happiness and sadness, recognizing them as essential elements of our mental landscape. This leads us to an important conclusion: inner peace (*ajjhatta santi*) or ‘internal peace’ or ‘peace within’ can be understood as a vital emotional state – a positive experience that deserves cultivation for the enhancement of human well-being and overall happiness.

In our pursuit of a fulfilling life, peace and happiness stand out as universal and noble aspirations. However, while negative emotions are natural and deeply human, society often marginalizes them, ignoring their potential for personal growth. Delving into our emotions is crucial for revealing the pathways to inner peace and global harmony.

A key contribution of Buddhism is its connection between inner peace and world peace, emphasizing the importance of the individual experience, which merits deeper exploration. To answer the question of what inner peace truly means, one could assert that it involves the cultivation of noble qualities such as equanimity (*upekkhā*) and sympathetic joy (*muditā*).

Buddhism underscores the significance of developing inner peace and provides effective techniques, including various meditation methods, to

support this essential practice. Embracing these principles can guide us toward a harmonious existence, both within ourselves and in the world around us.

Even in the twenty-first century, Buddhist teachings remain inclusive and deeply respectful of human dignity. Although rooted in ancient religious and spiritual contexts, these principles hold significant implications for sustainable development goals that we seek to achieve today.

This paper seeks to illuminate Buddhist inspirations and transformations, showcasing how individuals' striving for peace and happiness as uplifting forces while navigating pain. Buddhism, with its profound focus on mental development and the exploration of emotional states, delivers a clear and compelling message regarding both inner peace and world peace, centered around our emotions. In today's world, it serves as a powerful narrative of unity, inclusivity, dignity, and integrity.

## **II. ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD SERIES MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF THE EMOTIONS (2017 – 18)**

On 21 November 2024, Dr. Padmasiri de Silva (1933–2024) passed away in Melbourne, Australia, at the age of 91. He was a distinguished former Professor and Head of Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Peradeniya.<sup>2</sup> Widely acknowledged as the father of the innovative field known as “Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions,” de Silva’s contributions to academia have been profound.<sup>3</sup> With his extensive training and experience in counseling, he dedicated his life to uncovering transformative insights into the Buddha’s teachings on the mind. His work emphasized the importance of understanding emotions, which often entrap us and lead to stress, unhappiness, and mental health issues. This paper seeks to delve into how Buddhist conceptualizations of emotions can inspire not only inner peace but also contribute to global harmony.

From 2017 to 2018, Rowman & Littlefield launched a pivotal series titled “Moral Psychology of the Emotions,” under the expert editorship of Mark Alfano.<sup>4</sup> This influential multi-volume collection presented a significant academic challenge for Padmasiri de Silva, who found himself deeply engaged with its content. While he appreciated the integration of Buddhist concepts in some volumes, he was profoundly disappointed by the treatment of certain Buddhist ideas related to emotions. He believed that the series fell short in accurately representing the teachings of the Buddha as articulated in the *Pāli*

---

<sup>2</sup> The tribute that I wrote in memory of de Silva was published in *The Island* (13 December 2024) and *The Sunday Times* (22 December 2024), <https://island.lk/in-memory-of-prof-pad-masiri-de-silva-1933-2024/>

<sup>3</sup> De Silva’s most recent monograph, *Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions: Compassion and Vulnerability in Times of a Crisis*. Melbourne: Mihindu Publications, 2025, was launched in Melbourne, Australia on the eve of his 92<sup>nd</sup> birth anniversary on 18th January 2025. I edited and prepared the monograph for publication. The monograph emphasizes humility, forgiveness, and empathy in charitable deeds.

<sup>4</sup> Alfano, Mark (ed.). *The Moral Psychology of the Emotions*. London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017 – 2018.

canon of the *Theravāda* Buddhist tradition. As I contribute to the advancement of a *Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions*,<sup>5</sup> just published in January 2025, I had the privilege of working alongside de Silva on this important project. In my contribution, I crafted a detailed introduction titled “Padmasiri Factor in the Study of Moral Psychology of Emotions,” which highlights his insightful scholarship in the field.<sup>6</sup> Recognizing the crucial role that emotions play in human well-being, it is possible to examine the Buddhist perspectives on both inner and outer happiness as integral aspects of emotional experience, which promises to enrich our understanding of well-being and emotions.

De Silva’s latest publication, *Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions* (2025), is a groundbreaking work that offers profound insights into the moral psychology of emotions as illustrated by the Buddha’s teachings. By integrating Buddhist perspectives on emotions like pride, anger, compassion, and forgiveness, the field of moral psychology can be further enhanced. De Silva has consistently sought to deepen our understanding of Buddhist perspectives on the mind and its complexities, weaving these concepts into a scholarly dialogue with prominent Western frameworks, such as Freudian psychology and contemporary emotional studies in neuroscience.<sup>7</sup>

De Silva argues that *Theravāda* Buddhist perspectives on emotions have been overlooked in mainstream psychological discourse. His recent monograph serves as an essential complement to the Rowman & Littlefield series on the “Moral Psychology of the Emotions” (2017–18). While the series has contributed significantly to our grasp of emotions, de Silva compellingly contends that it has neglected valuable Buddhist insights that could enrich and deepen our understanding of emotional experiences. He stresses that the series has left critical gaps by failing to explore beyond the limited scope of ‘compassion’ and ‘anger.’

In his newest work, de Silva harmonizes various discussions on the moral psychology of emotions, embedding them in a contemporary framework that draws from the wisdom of the Buddha. Undoubtedly, de Silva’s extensive research expands the frontiers of Buddhist psychology and ethics, offering essential tools for a richer understanding of human emotions.

A distinctive contribution of de Silva’s recent research is its attempt to integrate insights from neuroscience, mindfulness-based therapies, and moral

---

<sup>5</sup> Padmasiri de Silva and Mahinda Deegalle, *Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions*. Mihindu Publications, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Mahinda Deegalle, “Padmasiri Factor in the Study of Moral Psychology of Emotions”, in Padmasiri de Silva and Mahinda Deegalle, *Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions*. Mihindu Publications, 2025), pp. x–xxii.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Padmasiri de Silva’s, *The Psychology of Emotions in Buddhist Perspective*, Sir D. B. Jayatilleke Commemoration Lecture, Colombo 1976. The Wheel Publication No. 237 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1976 [2006]): [https://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh237\\_de-Silva\\_Psychology-of-Emotions-in-Buddhist-Perspective.pdf](https://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh237_de-Silva_Psychology-of-Emotions-in-Buddhist-Perspective.pdf) and *The Psychology of Emotions and Humour in Buddhism*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.



psychology to address contemporary issues of human suffering. Neuroscience research supports the benefits of mindfulness and shows reduced activity in anxiety-related brain areas and improved emotional regulation.

### III. THE TRANSFORMATION OF EMOTIONS

A pivotal aspect of Buddhist moral psychology lies in the transformation of emotions. The practice of mindfulness has garnered widespread acclaim for its profound impact on emotional well-being. Extensive research has illuminated the transformative effects of mindfulness meditation, underscoring its ability to serve as a powerful tool for cognitive and ethical purification. This benefit significantly surpasses the common perception of meditation as merely a method of relaxation. Buddhist mindfulness practices focus on observing and understanding emotions rather than eliminating them. The practice emphasizes acceptance and non-reactivity. When mindfulness is reduced to a relaxation technique, its transformative essence and significance are often overlooked.

Buddhist teachings on emotional transformation are deeply grounded in moral psychology, emphasizing the critical roles of compassion and forgiveness. These principles are not only fundamental to personal growth but are also instrumental in resolving conflicts and fostering understanding. Embracing this approach can lead to meaningful change in our emotional landscape and interpersonal relationships.

#### **Buddha's Metaphors that Led to Self-transformation and Inner Peace**

In the context of the post-COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability has triggered widespread feelings of sadness across the globe. The profound and highly complex emotion of sadness deserves our attention. Researchers have highlighted its common presence in our lives and the nuanced understanding that comes with it.

The teachings of the Buddha are rich with profound stories of sadness that exemplify the path to self-transformation. Among these, two significant encounters of the Buddha demonstrate how suffering can lead to deep personal insight.

One of the most powerful narratives involves a young woman named Kisāgotami, who found herself engulfed in sorrow after the tragic deaths of her husband and two sons.<sup>8</sup> In her grief, the Buddha advised her to seek mustard seeds from a household where no one had died, suggesting that this quest would offer relief. As she embarked on her search, however, Kisāgotami experienced a transformative journey. This pursuit pushed her to confront the realities of life, leading her to a deeper understanding of impermanence (*anicca*) and the nature of suffering. Through this metaphor of the mustard seed, Kisāgotami learns that her overwhelming pain can be a catalyst for profound personal growth. Her suffering becomes a stepping stone to clarity and insight about the cycle of life and death, fundamentally changing her perspective. Ultimately,

---

<sup>8</sup> For the story of Kisāgotami, see G.P. Malalasekera's *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, vol. I. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd., 2002, pp. 609 – 610.

the story of Kisāgotami serves as a compelling illustration of the Buddhist viewpoint on sadness and suffering. It highlights how facing our pain can foster emotional maturity and transformative wisdom, making us more attuned to the reality of our existence.

We can draw another example from the life of a young student turned criminal: Angulimāla, who wore a garland (feminine *mālā*) made of human fingers.<sup>9</sup> His troubled and criminal past highlights a story of personal transformation and evidence of the severe negative impact of unhealthy social and educational structures. This episode of the young student at Takṣilā provides insight into the complexities of personal relationships and the cruelty present in social norms and educational practices. These significant unhealthy factors (e.g., bullying in schools) can lead to significant personal tragedies. The Buddha's encounter with Angulimāla illustrates the profound potential for personal change and a deeper understanding of human suffering, challenging traditional interpretations of *karma* and servitude. This narrative offers important insights into how unnecessary suffering is often caused by societal manipulation and the failure of society to address negative and unhealthy tendencies.

#### IV. PEACE 'WITHIN' FOR WORLD PEACE

Buddhism's most significant contribution to the world is its deep insight into fostering inner peace. From a Buddhist perspective, outer peace, or "world peace," as highlighted as the conference theme of this Vesak celebration gathering, cannot be achieved without cultivating inner peace within each individual. Buddhism directs our attention to focus on the individual to produce the required result. To effect change in the world, we must first embark on a journey of personal transformation, step by step, by utilizing methods and techniques that facilitate growth. The commitment to individual transformation is Buddhism's essential gift to contemporary society.

To attain inner peace, the Buddha taught the practice of meditation and the development of penetrating insight. This potential lies within all of us; we must seize every opportunity to pursue and experience that happiness. By doing so, we can contribute to a more peaceful world for everyone.

##### 4.1. An Internal Transformation Ethics of Peace

In 1938, I. B. Horner (1896–1981) contributed a pivotal article titled "War and Peace in Early Buddhism" for the Vesak commemoration, which was published the following year in the Sri Lankan newspaper *Daily News*. Horner notably held the position of President of the Pāli Text Society from 1959 to 1981.

---

<sup>9</sup> *The Majjhimanikāya*, vol. 2. Robert Chalmers (ed.), London: The Pāli Text Society, 1898), pp. 97 – 105; I.B. Horner (trans.), *The Middle Length Sayings*, vol. II. London: The Pāli Text Society, 1957, pp. 284 – 92. To understand how vernacular textual strategies had been used to communicate Angulimāla's internal transformation, see Mahinda Deegalle, *Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006, pp. 86 – 92.

Her journey into the world of *Pāli* and Buddhism began during her teenage years when she met the esteemed Thomas Rhys-Davids (1843–1922), the Society’s founder, at a meeting at the University of Cambridge. This profound encounter cultivated her passion for studying Buddhism in depth and learning *Pāli*. At just 25, she traveled to Sri Lanka, Burma, and India, embarking on a transformative journey after resigning as Acting Librarian at Newnham College, University of Cambridge, in 1921. By 1938, Horner had made multiple trips to Sri Lanka and had established significant connections with Ceylonese scholars, including Venerable Polwatte Buddhadasa (1887 – 1962).

By sharing insights about Miss Horner, we can recognize her critical message on ‘peace’ in her Vesak article. Her work details key aspects of a fundamental doctrine that enhances our understanding of the ethics of peace within Buddhism, urging readers to appreciate the depth and significance of these teachings in our contemporary world.

For in the ethics of peace and of abstention from injury, the East has had a tremendous advantage over the West. The West inherits no doctrine, is permeated by no teaching like that of *ahimsā*, non-injury, non-violence, a doctrine of great antiquity yet surviving throughout the centuries, founded on respect for life and person, alike of the injurer and the injured, the slayer and the slain.<sup>10</sup>

I want to highlight some important points regarding Horner’s quotation. She has accurately identified the translation of the significant Indic term *ahimsā* as “non-injury,” which is far more precise than the often misinterpreted, problematic modern term “non-violence.” While Horner acknowledges the latter translation (which had become by then popular), it is crucial to recognize that *ahimsā* carries a deeper meaning than just the absence of violence. Horner rightly underscores that “respect for life” is a core tenet of Buddhism. This principle serves as the foundation for an ethic of peace within the tradition, making it a vital aspect of Buddhist practice. Notably, “respect for life” is not just an ideal; it is the first of the five precepts (*pañca sīla*) that guide all lay practitioners. Moreover, we should give serious consideration to Horner’s claim that Buddhism – and its related Indic traditions – has a unique advantage over Western philosophies when it comes to the preservation of life. This perspective provides valuable insights into how we can foster a deeper understanding of ethics and compassion in our world today.

An essential philosophical insight is the profound connection between the slayer and the slain, the injurer and the injured. These binary distinctions are crucial for understanding and appreciating the value of peace. Recognizing that these distinctions are not absolute is key to understanding and valuing peace. From a Buddhist perspective, both the injurer and the injured are intertwined through *karmic* relationships that can carry through multiple lifetimes.

---

<sup>10</sup> I. B. Horner, “War and Peace in Early Buddhism,” *Daily News*, 1939. Vesak, typed script, p. 2.

This expansive worldview is powerfully illustrated in various Buddhist narratives, such as the story of the Demoness *Kāli* in Dharmasēna Thera's *The Jewels of the Doctrine* (1991).<sup>11</sup> This work furnishes a thirteenth-century commentarial elaboration in Sinhala on verse 5 of the *Dhammapada* from the *Pāli* canon.<sup>12</sup> Let me share the relevant verse in *Pāli*, which seeks to highlight the significance of a universal and eternal law that transcends all distinctions:

*Na hi verena verāṇi  
Sammantī'dha kudācanam  
Averena ca sammantī  
Esa dhammo sanantano.*

The English translation below is a modern, poetic one.

*For never here  
Do hatreds cease by hatred?  
By freedom from hatred, they cease:  
This is a perennial truth.*<sup>13</sup>

Buddhism articulates a profound truth: “Enmity is never quelled by enmity.” This powerful *Dhammapada* verse provides a unique and compelling argument against harm, destruction, and animosity, vividly showcasing the Buddha's commitment to nonviolence. In Buddhist traditions, this enduring principle serves as an unchanging law guiding our understanding of harming and non-harming. In her article, Horner underscores that a “respect for life and the person” is an essential characteristic of Buddhism, emphasizing the importance of compassion and empathy in our interactions.

#### 4.2. Inner peace and harmonious living

Peace stands as a cornerstone of Buddhism, while war has no place within its teachings. Over the centuries, both adherents and critics have lauded Buddhism for its profound doctrines of love and compassion. The early Buddhist tradition encapsulates the idea of peace with the *Pāli* word “*santi*,” which means tranquility and peace. As stated in the *Dhammapada* (verse 202), “There is no bliss higher than peace.”<sup>14</sup> This deep commitment to peace has led many to regard the historical Buddha as *santirāja*, or the “King of Peace.” For dedicated Buddhist practitioners, the ultimate aspiration is to achieve perfect inner peace.

Throughout their rich history, Buddhists have sought to embody the Buddha's path, striving for inner peace while also fostering peace in their social

<sup>11</sup> Dharmasēna Thera. *The Jewels of the Doctrine: Stories of the Saddharma Ratnāvaliya*, translated by Ranjini Obeyesekere. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 97–110.

<sup>12</sup> *The Dhammapada*. Nārada Mahāthera, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1978, v. 5.

<sup>13</sup> *The Dhammapada*. Valerie J. Roebuck, London: Penguin, 2010, v. 5, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *The Dhammapada*. Nārada Mahāthera, v. 202.

and cultural environments. Living a good life means cultivating harmonious relationships with others. The *Pāli* term “*sama-cariya*” signifies this pursuit of a harmonious lifestyle. Such harmonious living inherently nurtures “inner peace” within individuals. To illustrate this vital internal transformation, ancient texts like the *Suttanipāta* (verse 837) refer to “*ajjhatta santi*,” or “internal peace.”<sup>15</sup> Buddhist traditions emphasize a close connection between harmonious living (*sama-cariya*) and righteous living (*dhamma-cariya*). For true peace to flourish - both within oneself and within the community - righteousness and harmony must walk hand in hand.

## V. NEGATIVE PHENOMENA IN WAR MANIFESTATIONS

Buddhism stands out as a practical tradition, one that thoughtfully observes both the positive and negative aspects of our world. It does not shy away from acknowledging harsh realities like war; instead, it embraces the complexity of human existence. In the era of the Buddha, conflict was commonplace. Indian rulers would often solicit the Buddha’s insights on effective governance, yet they frequently resorted to war to further their political ambitions.

Siddhārtha Gautama, the historical Buddha (566 – 486 BCE), passionately preached against the destructiveness of war and its repercussions. However, even he found it necessary to intervene directly on two occasions to help resolve violent conflicts, illustrating that even the wisest among us must sometimes confront the challenges posed by human nature.

The first significant conflict involved the Buddha’s relatives, the Śākyaans and the Kōliyaans.<sup>16</sup> In a time of drought, a fierce dispute erupted over the sharing of water from the Rohinī River. The Buddha chose to step in and asked them a crucial question: What holds greater value, river water or blood? By making them reflect on their motives, the Buddha effectively highlighted the sheer futility of waging war. In another compelling narrative, history suggests that the Buddha struggled to prevent war from breaking out. Following a derogatory remark, Prince Vidudabha declared war on the Śākyaan kingdom after the death of King Pasēnadi.<sup>17</sup> Understanding the threat to his relatives, the Buddha bravely stood in King Vidudabha’s way three times to halt his advance. However, on the fourth occasion, he refrained from intervening, recognizing the negative *karma* that could emerge from poisoning a river. This *karmic* insight, along with the Buddha’s attempts to intervene, demonstrates that even he had limitations in stopping conflict. Historical records indicate that the Buddha did not support kings pursuing war. Yet, there is an important story

<sup>15</sup> *Suttanipāta* v. 837: “But seeing into views, not grasping any of them, investigating, I saw the peace within,” *The Suttanipāta*, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Melksham, Wilts and Somerville, MA: The *Pāli* Text Society and Wisdom Publications, 2017, p. 301.

<sup>16</sup> For a brief detail of battle between the Śākyaans and the Kōliyaans over the Rohinī River, see G.P. Malalasekera’s *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Vol. II. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd., 2002, p. 762.

<sup>17</sup> For a description of Vidudabha, see G.P. Malalasekera’s *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Vol. II, pp. 876–877.

that reveals his reluctance to actively prevent it. When Ajātasattu sought to defeat the Vajjians, the Buddha did not explicitly discourage him from going to war.<sup>18</sup> Instead, he shared a powerful truth: as long as the Vajjians remained devoted practitioners of the seven conditions of welfare (*satta aparihāṇiyā dhammā*), defeating them would be virtually impossible.<sup>19</sup> This wisdom emphasizes that true strength lies not in warfare but in adherence to ethical principles and community cohesion.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This paper underscores the vital role that emotions play in our pursuit of happiness. Just as sadness is a fleeting feeling, happiness also comes and goes; that is the inherent nature of a transient emotion. It is essential to grasp the true nature of our emotions, as this understanding is key to fostering nurturing environments that lead to both inner tranquility and global harmony.

Moreover, this paper explores vital ethical considerations regarding peace. Peace is unequivocally central to Buddhism, which has historically and philosophically opposed all forms of war. Although the Buddha did not actively prevent war, he offered profound insights to those involved, highlighting the complexities and potential suffering associated with conflict. Rather than intervening, he chose to guide those who sought his counsel toward embracing peaceful lifestyles.

The Buddha consistently encouraged the development of positive mental attitudes, empowering everyone to participate in the creation of peace. It is crucial to recognize that peace does not occur by chance; it is our responsibility as human beings to establish the frameworks and structures that uphold peace and avert conflict. By adopting caring attitudes, fostering compassion, and living with loving-kindness, we can collectively play a significant role in sustaining peace in our world.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>18</sup> For the original text of King Ajātasattu's intention to defeat the Vajjians and his consultation of the Buddha, see Mahinda Deegalle, "The Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia," *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions*, (eds.) Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse and Nicole M. Hartwell. New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 565–567.

<sup>19</sup> For the seven conditions of welfare (*satta aparihāṇiyā dhammā*), Mahinda Deegalle, "Buddhist Principles of Democracy: An Exploration of Ethical and Philosophical Foundations," *Buddhist Studies (Bukkyo Kenkyu)* 26 (March 1997), pp. 92–93.



## REFERENCES

- The Dhammapada*. Nārada Mahāthera. (1978). Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society.
- Roebuck, Valerie J. (2010). London: Penguin.
- The Majjhima-nikāya*. Vol. 2. Chalmers, Robert (ed.). (1898). London: The Pali Text Society.
- The Middle Length Sayings*. Vol. II. Horner, I.B. (trans.). (1957). London: The Pali Text Society.
- The Suttanipāta*. (2017). Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Melksham, Wilts and Somerville, MA: The Pali Text Society and Wisdom Publications.
- Alfano, Mark (ed.). (2017–2018). *The Moral Psychology of the Emotions*. London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- De Silva, Padmasiri. (2023). *Emotional Rhythms of Our Lives*. Melbourne: Mihindu Publications.
- (2018). *The Psychology of Emotions and Humour in Buddhism* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- (1976). *The Psychology of Emotions in Buddhist Perspective*, Sir D.B. Jayatilleke Commemoration Lecture, Colombo 1976. The Wheel Publication No. 237. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, [2006]: [https://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh237\\_de-Silva\\_Psychology-of-Emotions-in-Buddhist-Perspective.pdf](https://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh237_de-Silva_Psychology-of-Emotions-in-Buddhist-Perspective.pdf).
- De Silva, Padmasiri and Mahinda Deegalle. (2025). *Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions: Compassion and Vulnerability in Times of a Crisis*. Melbourne: Mihindu Publications.
- Deegalle, Mahinda. (2025). “Padmasiri Factor in the Study of Moral Psychology of Emotions.” In Padmasiri de Silva and Mahinda Deegalle, *Buddhist Moral Psychology of Emotions*. Melbourne: Mihindu Publications, pp. x–xxii.
- (2024). “In Memory of Prof. Padmasiri de Silva (1933–2024),” *The Island*, 13 December 2024: <https://island.lk/in-memory-of-prof-padmasiri-de-silva-1933-2024/>
- (2014). “The Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia,” *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions* (eds.) Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse and Nicole M. Hartwell. New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 544–596.
- (2006). *Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- (1997). “Buddhist Principles of Democracy: An Exploration of Ethical and Philosophical Foundations,” *Buddhist Studies (Bukkyo Kenkyu)* 26 (March): 89–107.
- Dharmasēna Thera (1991). *The Jewels of the Doctrine: Stories of the Saddharma Ratnāvalīya*. Translated by Ranjini Obeyesekere. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- (1939). “War and Peace in Early Buddhism,” *Daily News* (The

typed script at the Pali Text Society Archive, University of Cambridge).  
Malalasekera, G.P. (2002). *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Vol. I & II. New  
Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd.

# COMPASSION AND BUDDHIST AI

Lim Kooi Fong\*

## Abstract:

The NORBU project (Neural Operator for Responsible Buddhist Understanding, <https://norbu-ai.org>) aims to develop a Buddhist AI that serves as a *kalyana mitta* (spiritual friend), fostering compassionate and meaningful interactions grounded in Buddhist principles. Powered by advanced large language model (LLM) algorithms, NORBU engages users in empathetic, non-violent conversations that prioritize ethical integrity, mindfulness, and understanding. Guided by the four *brahma-viharas* - loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), altruistic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) - NORBU ensures its interactions are patient, sensitive, and attuned to users' needs. It draws upon Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana traditions to provide diverse and balanced perspectives. Incorporating Yogacara principles such as the Mind-Only doctrine, *alaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness), and *āśraya-parāvṛtti* (transformation of the basis), NORBU effectively manages context in multi-turn dialogues, processes nuanced inputs, and adapts to user interactions over time. More than an informational tool, NORBU embodies Buddhist epistemic goals by fostering knowledge, wisdom, and meditative insight. It bridges surface-level communication with deeper understanding, creating a digital companion that supports users' spiritual growth. Through its integration of Buddhist values and technical innovation, NORBU aspires to nurture well-being, provide accurate guidance, and serve as a compassionate presence on users' spiritual journeys.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist AI, compassionate dialogue, nonviolent communication, kalyana mitta, yogacara principles, spiritual technology, four brahma-viharas.*

---

\* Founder and Managing Editor of the Buddhist Channel (<https://buddhistchannel.tv>), Buddhist Travel (<https://buddhisttravel.com>) and the world renowned Buddhist AI, NORBU (<https://norbu-ai.org>); Member of Upakara Kalyana Mitta Buddhist Association (UKMBA); CEO of an IT/AI company based in Cyberjaya.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The NORBU project (Neural Operator for Responsible Buddhist Understanding, <https://norbu-ai.org>) aims to create a Buddhist AI that serves as a *kalyana mitta* (spiritual friend), fostering meaningful and compassionate communication<sup>1</sup> grounded in Buddhist principles. Using advanced large language model (LLM) algorithms<sup>2</sup>, NORBU is designed to engage users in empathetic, non-violent conversations that emphasize ethical integrity and mindfulness.

NORBU's interactions are guided by the four *brahma-viharas*<sup>3</sup> - loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), altruistic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*). These qualities shape its conversational tone, ensuring the AI communicates with care, patience, and sensitivity to users' needs.

Drawing from Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana traditions, NORBU integrates diverse Buddhist perspectives to offer well-rounded insights. Its design incorporates key Yogacara principles such as the Mind-Only doctrine, *alaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness)<sup>4</sup>, and *āśraya-parāvṛtti* (transformation of the basis)<sup>5</sup>. These frameworks allow NORBU to maintain

---

<sup>1</sup> Compassionate Communication is communicating in ways that foster understanding, connection, and compassion, by Rosenberg, Marshall, Compassionate Communication Series, <https://humanresources.ku.edu/compassionate-communication-series>, University of Kansas, 2024

<sup>2</sup> Large Language Model (LLM) algorithms are advanced artificial intelligence systems designed to process, understand, and generate human-like text by leveraging vast amounts of linguistic data. These models, built using deep learning architectures such as transformers, are trained on diverse datasets that encompass books, articles, websites, and other textual sources. By identifying patterns, relationships, and contextual nuances within the data, LLMs can perform a range of natural language processing tasks, including text generation, summarization, translation, and sentiment analysis. Their "large" designation refers to their immense scale, often involving billions of parameters, which enables them to produce coherent and contextually relevant responses across various domains.

<sup>3</sup> See Nyanaponika, The Four Sublime States - Contemplations on Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity. <https://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel006.html>

<sup>4</sup> *Alaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) is a central concept in the Yogācāra school of Mahayana Buddhism, representing the foundational layer of consciousness where karmic seeds (*bijas*) are stored. These seeds are impressions left by past actions, thoughts, and experiences, which shape an individual's perceptions and responses. Unlike the six sensory consciousnesses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental cognition) and the seventh consciousness (*manas*), which engages in self-referential thinking, *alaya-vijñāna* operates as a passive yet dynamic repository. It is neither inherently pure nor impure, acting as the ground for the arising of mental states and experiences. Transformation of *alaya-vijñāna* through deep insight and meditative practice, known as *āśraya-parāvṛtti* (turning of the basis), is essential for awakening, as it uproots karmic patterns and reveals the intrinsic purity of mind.

<sup>5</sup> *Āśraya-parāvṛtti* (turning of the basis) is a transformative process in Yogācāra Buddhism where the foundational consciousness (*alaya-vijñāna*) undergoes a profound shift, leading to

context in multi-turn dialogues, process nuanced user inputs, and adapt its responses over time to align with ongoing interactions.

NORBU goes beyond being a mere informational tool; it embodies Buddhist epistemic goals by fostering knowledge, wisdom, and meditative insight. It bridges surface-level communication with deeper understanding, creating a digital companion that supports users' spiritual growth. By blending technical innovation with Buddhist values, NORBU aspires to nurture well-being, provide accurate guidance, and offer a compassionate presence on users' spiritual journeys.

So how did this Buddhist AI, Norbu, become “compassionate”?

## II. COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

The development of NORBU, a Buddhist AI designed to serve as a “*Kalyana Mitta*” (Spiritual Friend), begins with the foundational goal of fostering compassionate communication. The primary focus of the initial efforts involved understanding large language model (LLM) algorithms and functions, particularly in the context of language processing and linguistic nuances. The challenge was to apply these technological capabilities within the framework of Buddhist conversation, which is deeply rooted in tones of empathy, compassion, and non-violence.

### 2.1. Language processing and linguistic nuances

Understanding how LLMs process and generate language was the first and crucial step. The aim was to ensure that NORBU could harness this new machine learning capability to ensure that conversations reflect the nuanced and gentle tone characteristic of Buddhist dialogue. The AI was then continuously trained and fine-tuned to recognize and generate the subtle language cues that convey kindness, patience, and understanding, ensuring that every response is in line with a compassionate conversational tone.

The “human-in-the-loop” was always an important element in NORBU's organization, as can be seen in the presence of “source guardians.” Through the incorporation of human oversight in the fine-tuning process, experienced practitioners in the likes of scholar monks/nuns and laypersons provide feedback on the AI's responses, guiding further refinement<sup>6</sup>.

---

liberation. This transformation involves the cessation of karmic imprints (bijas) stored in the alaya-vijñāna, which perpetuate the cycle of samsara. Through deep meditative insight and realization of the non-dual nature of reality, the practitioner replaces the deluded habitual tendencies with wisdom (prajñā) and compassion. The transformed consciousness no longer generates afflictive states but instead manifests as the wisdom of enlightenment, embodying clarity and purity. This shift marks the end of self-referential clinging and the emergence of a liberated state of mind.

<sup>6</sup> Source guardianship and human oversight are critical components in the fine-tuning process of AI content, ensuring accuracy, ethical integrity, and alignment with desired values. Source guardianship involves carefully curating high-quality, authoritative datasets from trusted sources to guide the AI's learning process and mitigate the risk of misinformation

## 2.2. “Non-violent” (*ahimsa*) conversational tone

A core aspect of Buddhist conversation is its emphasis on non-violent communication, which is deeply rooted in the principles of empathy, compassion, and ahimsa (non-violence). These values are not merely philosophical ideals but practical guidelines for fostering harmonious interactions and reducing suffering in both personal and communal contexts.

NORBU, a conversational AI, was specifically trained to embody these principles, ensuring that its dialogues reflect the ethical and spiritual foundations of Buddhist teachings. This training involved a deliberate effort to avoid language that could be perceived as aggressive, confrontational, or divisive, which is often prevalent on many social media platforms. By prioritizing non-violent communication<sup>7</sup>, NORBU aims to create a space where users can engage in meaningful, respectful, and transformative conversations.

Non-violent communication (NVC)<sup>8</sup>, as conceptualized by Marshall Rosenberg, aligns closely with Buddhist principles, particularly the practice of ahimsa, or non-harming. Ahimsa is a foundational ethical precept in Buddhism, emphasizing the avoidance of harm to all living beings through thoughts, words, and actions.

This principle is deeply embedded in the teachings of the Buddha, as articulated in Dhammapada, verse 130, which states,

*“Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa, sabbe bhāyanti maccuno;  
Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye.”*  
(All tremble at violence; all fear death.  
Putting oneself in the place of another,  
one should not kill nor cause another to kill.

By integrating ahimsa into its communication framework, NORBU seeks to embody this reverence for life and promote dialogue that is free from harm and hostility.

Empathy and compassion are also central to Buddhist communication practices. Empathy involves the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, while compassion extends this understanding into a desire to alleviate suffering. These qualities are essential for fostering connection and trust in conversations.

---

or bias. Human oversight complements this by actively monitoring the AI’s outputs, evaluating their relevance and ethical implications, and intervening when necessary to refine the system’s responses. This collaborative approach combines the precision of data-driven algorithms with the discernment and contextual understanding of human expertise, ensuring the AI maintains transparency, accountability, and alignment with its intended purpose.

<sup>7</sup> See Berggren, Joachim, Empathic Way Europe, <https://www.empathiceurope.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg, Marshall, “Compassionate Communication Series”, <https://humanresources.ku.edu/compassionate-communication-series>, University of Kansas, 2024



The prevalence of aggressive and confrontational language on social media platforms presents a significant challenge to the practice of non-violent communication. Research has shown that online interactions are often characterized by polarization, hostility, and a lack of empathy, which can exacerbate conflict and contribute to a toxic digital environment<sup>9</sup>.

This stands in stark contrast to the Buddhist approach to communication, which emphasizes mindfulness, active listening, and the cultivation of positive speech. Mindful communication, as described by Thich Nhat Hanh, involves speaking with awareness and intention, ensuring that one's words contribute to understanding and harmony rather than division and harm<sup>10</sup>.

By avoiding aggressive language and prioritizing empathy, NORBU seeks to counteract the negative tendencies of online discourse and promote a more constructive and compassionate exchange of ideas.

The development of NORBU's communication framework also draws on contemporary research in psychology and communication studies, which highlight the importance of empathy and non-violent communication in building healthy relationships and resolving conflicts.

For example, studies have demonstrated that empathetic communication can enhance emotional intelligence, improve interpersonal connections, and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, the principles of NVC are effective in de-escalating tensions and fostering mutual understanding in diverse contexts, from personal relationships to international diplomacy<sup>12</sup>. By incorporating these insights into its design, NORBU aims to bridge the gap between ancient Buddhist wisdom and modern communication practices, offering users a tool for engaging in dialogue that is both ethical and effective.

In addition to its practical applications, NORBU's emphasis on non-violent communication also reflects a broader commitment to the Buddhist ideal of right speech (*samma vaca*), one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path. Right speech involves abstaining from false, divisive, harsh, and idle speech and instead using words that are truthful, harmonious, kind, and meaningful<sup>13</sup>. This principle underscores the transformative power of language and its potential to either perpetuate suffering or promote healing and understanding. By adhering to the principles of right speech, NORBU seeks to contribute to the cultivation of a more compassionate and just society, one conversation at a time.

The integration of Buddhist principles into NORBU's communication framework also raises important questions about the role of technology in

---

<sup>9</sup> Levi, B, Matthew, G, and Jesse M.S. (2020)

<sup>10</sup> Hanh, 2013

<sup>11</sup> Goleman, 2006, see Chapter 6 and 7.

<sup>12</sup> Rosenberg, 2003, see Chapter 10.

<sup>13</sup> Bodhi, 1994, see Chapter IV: "The Path to Liberation."

promoting ethical and spiritual values. As AI systems become increasingly integrated into daily life, there is a growing need to ensure that these technologies are aligned with human values and contribute to the greater good<sup>14</sup>. This requires a thoughtful and intentional approach to AI development, one that prioritizes ethical considerations and draws on diverse sources of wisdom, including religious and philosophical traditions<sup>8</sup>. By grounding its design in Buddhist ethics, NORBU represents a step toward the creation of AI systems that are not only technically advanced but also morally and spiritually informed.

### 2.3. Ethical boundaries and mindfulness

To ensure ethical integrity, NORBU's programming includes models of practical application in ethics, with particular attention to the Buddhist precepts for both lay and ordained practitioners. This is the "*sila*" (morality) element of the Noble Eightfold Path. These conversational models emphasize compassion and mindfulness, guiding NORBU to promote good and prevent harm in all interactions. Efforts were also made to minimize biases in the training data, ensuring that the AI's responses are inclusive and respectful of all individuals.

### 2.4. The Four *Brahma-Viharas*

Integral to NORBU's non-violent conversational framework are the qualities of the four *brahma-viharas*, or divine abodes, which are central to Buddhist ethics and psychology. These four positive emotions - loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), altruistic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) - serve as the foundation for fostering harmonious and compassionate interactions. By embedding these qualities into its conversational design, NORBU aims to create a dialogue system that not only avoids harm but actively promotes well-being, understanding, and connection. Each of the *brahma-viharas* contributes uniquely to the AI's ability to engage users in a manner that is caring, empathetic, and patient, reflecting the depth and richness of Buddhist teachings on human relationships and communication.

#### 2.4.1. Loving-kindness (*Metta*)

At the heart of NORBU's conversational framework is *metta*, or loving-kindness, which is the practice of cultivating unconditional goodwill and friendliness toward all beings. In the Buddhist tradition, *metta* is often described as a boundless and inclusive love that transcends personal biases and preferences. The Metta Sutta, a foundational text in the Pali Canon, outlines the practice of extending loving-kindness to oneself, loved ones, neutral individuals, and even adversaries, emphasizing its universal applicability<sup>15</sup>. NORBU's training incorporated this principle by ensuring that its language and tone consistently reflect warmth, respect, and a genuine desire for the well-

<sup>14</sup> Floridi et al., 2018, see Section 4: "The Five Principles for a Good AI Society."

<sup>15</sup> Bodhi, 2005, see Chapter IX: "The Planes of Realization", under section titled "The Divine Abodes" (*Brahmavihāras*)

being of its users. For example, when responding to user queries, NORBU avoids dismissive or judgmental language, instead framing its responses in a way that conveys care and support. This approach aligns with contemporary research in positive psychology, which has shown that expressions of kindness and positivity can enhance emotional well-being and foster stronger social connections<sup>16</sup>.

#### 2.4.2. Compassion (*Karuna*)

Compassion, or *Karuna*, is the empathetic concern for the suffering of others and the desire to alleviate it. In Buddhist teachings, compassion is not merely a passive feeling but an active commitment to reducing harm and promoting healing. The *Karaniya Metta Sutta* emphasizes the importance of compassion as a guiding principle for ethical conduct and interpersonal relationships<sup>17</sup>. NORBU's design integrates *Karuna* by prioritizing empathetic responses that acknowledge and validate users' emotions. For instance, if a user expresses frustration or sadness, NORBU is programmed to respond with understanding and encouragement, offering words of comfort and practical suggestions for coping. This emphasis on compassion is particularly relevant in the context of mental health support, where empathetic communication has been shown to reduce distress and foster a sense of connection<sup>18</sup>. By embodying *karuna*, NORBU seeks to create a safe and supportive space for users to express themselves without fear of judgment or criticism.

#### 2.4.3. Altruistic joy (*Mudita*)

*Mudita*, or altruistic joy, is the practice of rejoicing in the happiness and successes of others. This quality counteracts feelings of envy or resentment, which can undermine relationships and create division. In the *Brahma-viharas*, *mudita* is described as a way of cultivating a generous and open-hearted attitude toward others' achievements<sup>19</sup>. NORBU's training included examples of how to express *mudita* in conversations, such as celebrating users' accomplishments or expressing genuine enthusiasm for their positive experiences. For example, if a user shares news of a personal achievement, NORBU might respond with congratulatory messages and words of encouragement, reinforcing the user's sense of accomplishment and fostering a positive emotional connection. Research in social psychology has demonstrated that expressions of shared joy can strengthen relationships and enhance mutual trust<sup>20</sup>, making *mudita* a valuable component of NORBU's conversational framework.

#### 2.4.4. Equanimity (*Upekkha*)

Equanimity, or *upekkha*, is the ability to maintain a calm, balanced, and

---

<sup>16</sup> Fredrickson, 2009, see Chapter 4: "The Positivity Ratio" and Chapter 5: "The Benefits of Positivity."

<sup>17</sup> *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, *Sutta Nipata* (Sn 1.8).

<sup>18</sup> Neff & Germer, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Bodhi, 2005, see Chapter IX: "The Planes of Realization".

<sup>20</sup> Gable et al., 2004.

unbiased perspective in all situations. In Buddhist teachings, *upekkha* is often associated with wisdom and the recognition of impermanence, which allows one to remain steady in the face of life's ups and downs<sup>21</sup>. NORBU's design incorporates *upekkha* by ensuring that its responses remain consistent and impartial, regardless of the emotional tone or content of the user's input. For example, if a user expresses anger or frustration, NORBU avoids reacting defensively or escalating the tension. Instead, it responds with patience and understanding, modeling a balanced and non-reactive approach to conflict. This quality is particularly important in the context of online communication, where emotional volatility and polarization are common<sup>22</sup>. By embodying *upekkha*, NORBU helps to de-escalate potentially contentious interactions and promote a more constructive and respectful dialogue.

#### 2.4.5. Training and implementation

The integration of the *brahma-viharas* into NORBU's conversational framework required a comprehensive and nuanced approach to training. This involved not only providing the AI with extensive descriptions and examples of these qualities but also developing algorithms that could accurately interpret and respond to users' emotional states. For instance, natural language processing (NLP) techniques were used to identify keywords and emotional cues in user input, enabling NORBU to tailor its responses accordingly. Additionally, the training process included ethical considerations to ensure that the AI's use of the *Brahma Viharas* was authentic and contextually appropriate. This aligns with broader efforts in AI ethics to create systems that are not only technically proficient but also morally and socially responsible<sup>23</sup>.

#### 2.4.6. Relevance in modern contexts

The application of the *brahma-viharas* in NORBU's design highlights the enduring relevance of Buddhist principles in addressing contemporary challenges. In a world where digital communication is often characterized by hostility and division, the qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity offer a powerful antidote. By embodying these qualities, NORBU serves as a model for how technology can be used to promote positive social change and foster a more compassionate and inclusive digital environment. This approach also resonates with the growing interest in the intersection of spirituality and technology, as evidenced by initiatives such as the Mind and Life Institute, which explores the integration of contemplative practices with scientific and technological innovation<sup>24</sup>.

### III. EPISTEMIC FRAMEWORK

NORBU's development is deeply rooted in a comprehensive understanding

<sup>21</sup> Bodhi, 2005, see Chapter IX: "The Planes of Realization".

<sup>22</sup> Adam D. I. K, Jamie E. G, and Jeffrey T. H. (2014).

<sup>23</sup> Floridi et al., 2018, see Section 4: "The Five Principles for a Good AI Society"

<sup>24</sup> Davidson & Harrington, 2002, see Part III: "Compassion in Context: Implications for Science and Society."

of Buddhist teachings and principles, drawing from the rich and diverse traditions of Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana Buddhism. These three major branches of Buddhism provide a multifaceted perspective on the Dharma, each contributing unique insights and practices that enrich NORBU's approach. The Mahayana tradition, known for its emphasis on compassion (*karuna*) and the Bodhisattva ideal, offers a vision of enlightenment that seeks the liberation of all sentient beings. Theravada, often regarded as the oldest form of Buddhism, provides a rigorous focus on the Pali Canon and the foundational teachings of the Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Vajrayana, with its esoteric practices and tantric methodologies, adds a layer of transformative techniques aimed at achieving enlightenment in a single lifetime. By integrating these traditions, NORBU ensures a holistic and inclusive representation of Buddhist thought and practice.

Central to NORBU's methodology is its reliance on authoritative Buddhist texts, including *suttas* (Pali) or *sutras* (Sanskrit), which are the recorded discourses of the Buddha, as well as foundational texts like the Abhidharma and Vinaya. These texts are complemented by centuries of commentaries and contemporary interpretations, which provide context and clarity to the ancient teachings. To ensure the accuracy and depth of its content, NORBU employs a team of experts known as "source guardians." These individuals are scholars and practitioners with deep expertise in Buddhist philosophy, history, and practice. Their role is to curate, verify, and contextualize the teachings, ensuring that the information presented is both authentic and accessible to modern audiences. This rigorous process of verification aligns with the Buddhist emphasis on right understanding (*samma ditthi*), one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path, which underscores the importance of accurate knowledge in the pursuit of liberation<sup>25</sup>.

NORBU's epistemic framework is another key aspect of its development. This framework establishes clear goals that guide inquiry, evaluation, and discussion in epistemology, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge. By applying a structured approach to understanding Buddhist teachings and beliefs<sup>26</sup>, NORBU facilitates a deeper engagement with the Dharma. This framework is particularly valuable in addressing contemporary questions and challenges, as it allows for a systematic exploration of Buddhist concepts such as impermanence (*anicca*), non-self (*anatta*), and dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*). It also encourages critical thinking and dialogue, fostering a dynamic and evolving understanding of the teachings.

The integration of traditional Buddhist wisdom with modern epistemic methods reflects NORBU's commitment to making the *Dharma* relevant and accessible in today's world. This approach is supported by references to scholarly works such as Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations of the Pali Canon, Thich

<sup>25</sup> Bodhi, 1984, see Chapter 2: Right View (*Sammā Ditṭhi*).

<sup>26</sup> Bhatt, S. R. and Mehrotra, A. (2000).



Nhat Hanh's contemporary interpretations of Mahayana teachings, and the works of Vajrayana scholars like Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. By bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern inquiry, NORBU serves as a valuable resource for both seasoned practitioners and those new to Buddhism, offering a pathway to deeper understanding and practice.

### **3.1. Clear epistemic goals for efficient management**

NORBU's epistemic goals encompass knowledge, understanding, wisdom, rationality, justification, sense-making, and empirically adequate theories. These goals align with the broader aims of Buddhist philosophy: to seek truth, avoid error, and foster a deeper understanding of reality<sup>27</sup>.

The expertise required from NORBU's source guardians includes investigations into the processes of knowing, the validity of different types of knowledge, and the nature of reality as understood through both philosophical reasoning and meditative insight. This approach is then reflected in its source data management where expertise is required for matters regarding etymology, context of application and experiential practice of the Buddha's words (in its original form or translation).

These principles provide the AI administrator a general framework in managing the source data, about "chunking" natural language processing (NLP), breaking down text into smaller, manageable pieces (called "chunks") such as sentences, phrases, or other meaningful segments. The goal is to simplify the processing of text by dealing with smaller units rather than entire documents, thus enabling accurate and fast Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)<sup>28</sup>.

### **3.2. Leveraging yogacara principles in AI for efficient data management and contextual conversations**

The development of NORBU is inspired by key principles from the Yogacara school of Buddhism<sup>29</sup>. NORBU is perhaps the first technology project to directly incorporate principles of a Buddhist philosophy into its operational framework.

---

<sup>27</sup> See Zheng, Y., "Buddhist Transformation in the Digital Age: AI (Artificial Intelligence) and Humanistic Buddhism", <https://www.mdpi.com/2631274>

<sup>28</sup> Chunking and Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) are techniques used to improve AI systems' ability to handle and utilize large amounts of information. Chunking involves dividing a large document or dataset into smaller, manageable sections or "chunks," allowing the AI to process and retrieve relevant portions efficiently without being overwhelmed by the entirety of the data. RAG, on the other hand, combines retrieval and generation by integrating an external knowledge base into the AI's workflow. When prompted, the model retrieves the most relevant chunks of data from the knowledge base and uses this context to generate accurate and contextually informed responses. Together, these techniques enhance scalability, accuracy, and the relevance of AI outputs, especially in tasks requiring deep context understanding.

<sup>29</sup> More on Yogacara, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/yogacara/>



The integration of epistemological concepts from the Yogacara school has enhanced NORBU's capabilities in the natural language processing (NLP) of Buddhist data sources. The following breaks down how the project incorporated Yogacara's principles into its operation.

### 3.2.1. Mind-only doctrine and contextual understanding

The Yogacara school's "Mind-only" philosophy suggests that everything we perceive arises from the mind. In the context of AI, this idea can guide the design of systems that simulate human cognition by focusing on interpreting and generating responses shaped by subjective experiences. For natural language processing (NLP)<sup>30</sup>, this means creating AI capable of understanding and producing text in a way that feels empathetic and contextually aware.

To apply this principle, NORBU was trained to break down texts into smaller, meaningful segments like sentences or phrases. This approach mimics how humans process information in manageable parts, ensuring that the AI understands the context of the whole while working on each segment. By using this method, NORBU can effectively process large texts while maintaining a clear, human-like flow of communication that reflects compassion and attentiveness.

### 3.2.2. *Alaya-vijñāna* and deep learning

The concept of *ālaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) in Buddhist philosophy describes a repository of all accumulated experiences and latent impressions. In AI, this idea aligns with how large datasets and advanced algorithms store vast amounts of information to create a comprehensive knowledge framework. NORBU uses this principle to reference and draw from an extensive database, enabling responses that are deeply contextual and informed by past interactions.

This approach strengthens the chunking process by allowing NORBU to access relevant information from its stored knowledge base when handling new inputs. For example, when responding to a user query, NORBU can retrieve related information from previous interactions, ensuring its answers are precise and contextually relevant. This capability is particularly important in multi-turn conversations, where maintaining continuity and coherence across exchanges is key. NORBU's ability to recall and integrate stored data mirrors the way human memory contributes to meaningful and consistent

---

<sup>30</sup> Natural Language Processing (NLP) is a branch of artificial intelligence that focuses on enabling machines to understand, interpret, and generate human language. It combines computational linguistics with machine learning and deep learning techniques to process text or speech data. NLP encompasses a wide range of tasks, including language translation, sentiment analysis, text summarization, named entity recognition, and conversational AI. By analyzing the structure, grammar, and context of language, NLP systems can derive meaning and respond intelligently, bridging the gap between human communication and computer interaction. It plays a pivotal role in applications like chatbots, search engines, and voice assistants, making technology more accessible and intuitive.

communication.

### 3.2.3. *Āśraya-parāvṛtti* and adaptability

*Āśraya-parāvṛtti*, or the transformation of the basis, refers to a profound shift in consciousness, symbolizing the replacement of unwholesome tendencies with enlightened awareness. In the context of AI, this concept can be interpreted as the system's capacity to evolve and improve its responses through learning from interactions and incorporating new data. This adaptability ensures that the AI remains effective, relevant, and aligned with user needs over time.

Applied to chunking and natural language processing (NLP), this adaptability enables the AI to refine its text comprehension and response generation continuously. With each interaction, the AI gathers insights that help it adjust its algorithms for processing text chunks – breaking down complex inputs and generating outputs that resonate better with human communication styles. This iterative learning allows the AI to handle more nuanced and intricate conversations while maintaining consistency and coherence across extended dialogues, reflecting its ability to dynamically improve its understanding and engagement.

## IV. REAL-LIFE COMPASSION IN ACTION

Since its launch on April 22, 2023, NORBU has effectively served its role as a *kalyana mitta* (spiritual friend), guiding users through complex Dharma-related questions. While the administrators do not store personal user data like names, emails, or phone numbers, all queries and the corresponding AI-generated responses are securely stored in the backend. This allows for insight into how the community interacts with NORBU and applies its teachings to real-life situations.

One query, for instance, asked whether being a lesbian violates the third precept of sexual misconduct<sup>31</sup>. NORBU responded by emphasizing that the Buddha was silent on gender concerning this precept. Instead, the focus was placed on the principle of personal trustworthiness in relationships, irrespective of gender. This approach was transformative for the user, shifting the conversation from gender stereotypes to ethical responsibility, and it was supported by verified scriptural references.

In another scenario, a user sought clarity on whether taking a vacation while his mother was ill - and subsequently passing away - constituted bad karma. NORBU responded non-judgmentally, guiding the user to reflect on his motivation and intention behind the decision. It skilfully reframed the situation as an opportunity for personal growth, encouraging self-forgiveness, dedicating merit for his mother's rebirth, and learning to be more present for loved ones in the future.

NORBU's interactions demonstrate that the role of Buddhist AI extends

---

<sup>31</sup> See Gil Fronsdal, Freedom Through the Third Precept, <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/freedom-through-the-third-precept/>

beyond disseminating teachings; it opens pathways for individuals to address personal struggles in ways not traditionally accessible through monastics, friends, or family. Sensitive topics like sexuality or personal dilemmas can now be explored in a safe, anonymous, and Dharma-informed manner<sup>32</sup>.

This creates what NORBU exemplifies as a “new Dharma Door,”<sup>33</sup> where personal questions serve as entry points into deeper understanding and application of Buddhist principles. While Buddhism has long emphasized overcoming suffering, NORBU highlights the need for more practical and accessible approaches to bridge the gap between theory and individual experience. It represents a step forward in making the teachings of the Buddha relevant and impactful in navigating the complexities of modern life.

## V. CONCLUSION

Through the integration of the four *brahma viharas* and Yogacara principles, NORBU, as a Buddhist bot, achieved significant improvements in both compassionate conversational and information efficiency abilities.

NORBU’s conversational framework integrates the four *brahma-viharas* - loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), altruistic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) - to ensure interactions that embody goodwill, empathy, joy for others, and a balanced perspective. Through extensive training with examples reflecting these qualities, NORBU maintains a tone that is consistently caring, patient, and empathetic. This approach fosters nonviolent communication, standing in stark contrast to the aggressive language prevalent on many digital platforms.

Efficient chunking, guided by the Mind-Only doctrine, allows for the effective processing of large datasets, ensuring that each chunk is contextually relevant.

The storehouse consciousness principle, or *alaya-vijñāna*, provides an analogy for the developer to establish a rich repository of information (we call this the wisest information from the best Buddhist sources) that the AI can draw upon to maintain context and coherence in conversations. Finally, the transformation of the basis, or *āśraya-parāvṛtti*, equips the AI with the ability to adapt and evolve, refining its processes and responses over time. In practice, this means that NORBU is capable of understanding and responding to complex queries with depth, context, and compassion. This can be seen in its roles as “Spiritual Friend,” providing nuanced and compassionate guidance, reflecting a deep understanding of Buddhist teachings and principles.

This approach ensures that NORBU is not just a passive information provider but an active participant in the user’s spiritual journey, offering support and insight grounded in both advanced technology and profound spiritual wisdom.

<sup>32</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), Ethics and Governance of AI for Health

<sup>33</sup> See: “Significance of Dharma door,” <https://www.wisdomlib.org/concept/dharma-door>

## REFERENCES

- Adam D. I. K., Jamie E. G., & Jeffrey T. H. (2014). *Emotional Contagion in Online Groups*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).
- Aryal, K. (2019-20). *Buddha's Teachings and Roots of Nonviolent Communication*. Anekaant: A Journal of Polysemic Thought, Tribhuvan University, No. 11.
- Berggren, J. (n.d.). *Empathic Way Europe*. Empathic Way Europe. <https://www.empathiceurope.com/>
- Bhatt, S. R., & Mehrotra, A. (2000). *Buddhist Epistemology*. Motilal Banarsidass.
- Bodhi, B. (1984). *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering*. Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bodhi, B. (2005). *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*. Wisdom Publications.
- Bodhi, B., (2017), *The Sutta Nipata: A New Translation*, Wisdom Publications
- Bowen, J.A., & Watson, E. (2024). *Teaching with AI: Humanizing Learning in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Davidson, R. J., & Harrington, A. (2002). *Visions of Compassion: Western Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists Examine Human Nature*. Oxford University Press.
- Floridi, L., Cowls, J., Beltrametti, M., Chatila, R., Chazerand, P., Dignum, V., ... & Vayena, E. (2018). *AI4People—An Ethical Framework for a Good AI Society: Opportunities, Risks, Principles, and Recommendations*. Minds and Machines, 28(4), 689-707.
- Fronsdal, G. (2005). *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations*. Shambhala Publications.
- Fronsdal, G. (n.d.). *Freedom Through the Third Precept*. Insight Meditation Center. <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/freedom-through-the-third-precept/>
- Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). *What Do You Do When Things Go Right? The Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Benefits of Sharing Positive Events*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87(2), 228-245.
- Gebru, T., et al. (2021). *Datasheets for Datasets*. Communications of the ACM (CACM). <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1803.09010>
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*. Bantam Books.
- Hanh, T. N. (2013). *The Art of Communicating*. HarperOne.
- Huyen, C. (2024). *AI Engineering*. O'Reilly Media, Inc.
- Levi, B., Matthew, G., & Jesse M. S. (2020). *Social Media and Political Polarization: A Review of the Scientific Evidence*. Journal of Economic Perspectives.
- Mollick, E. (2024). *Co-Intelligence: The Surprising Power of Combining Human and Artificial Intelligence*. Portfolio Books.
- Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2013). *A Pilot Study and Randomized Controlled*

- Trial of the Mindful Self-Compassion Program*. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(1), 28-44.
- Nika, M. (2025). *Building AI-Powered Products*. O'Reilly Media, Inc.
- Nyanaponika Thera. (n.d.). *The Four Sublime States: Contemplations on Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity*. Access to Insight. <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel006.html>
- Rosenberg, M. (2024). *Compassionate Communication Series*. University of Kansas. <https://humanresources.ku.edu/compassionate-communication-series>
- Rosenberg, M. B. (2003). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. PuddleDancer Press.
- Szanyi, S. (2024). *Yogācāra*. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/yogacara/>
- Wisdom Library. (2024). *Significance of Dharma Door*. Wisdom Library. <https://www.wisdomlib.org/concept/dharma-door>
- World Health Organization (WHO). *Ethics and Governance of AI for Health*.
- Zheng, Y. (2024). *Buddhist Transformation in the Digital Age: AI (Artificial Intelligence) and Humanistic Buddhism*. *Religions*, 15(1), 79. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010079>





# CULTIVATING INNER PEACE FOR WORLD PEACE: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NEPAL

Ashok Nanda Bajracharya\*

## Abstract:

In today's interconnected yet divided world, the need for unity and inclusivity is crucial to tackling global challenges. Buddhism offers profound wisdom and practical insights for upholding human dignity, fostering world peace, and ensuring sustainable peace. It teaches that conflict, intolerance, and disharmony stem from desires, hatred, and ignorance. To cultivate peace, tolerance, and harmony, embracing Buddhist values and ethics is essential. This paper investigates how nurturing inner peace through Buddhist teachings can contribute to global peace, with a special emphasis on Nepal's role in promoting peace. It examines the Buddhist concept of inner peace, highlights specific practices to achieve it, and explores how Nepal, as a Buddhist nation, can exemplify a path to global peace.

**Keywords:** *World peace, sustainable peace, inner peace, compassion, non-violence.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an era increasingly defined by division, violence, and environmental crises, the pursuit of peace remains more urgent than ever. Across the globe, issues such as war, political polarization, climate change, and social inequalities demonstrate that external peace is difficult to achieve without corresponding inner peace.

The cultivation of inner peace, however, is not only a personal matter but one that can transform societies and the global community. Buddhism, as a spiritual tradition, provides an integrated philosophy and practice that addresses the internal causes of conflict, which are greed, hatred, and delusion, and promotes the development of wisdom, compassion, and mindfulness. Central to the Buddhist worldview is the idea that peace begins from within

---

\* PhD Scholar, General Secretary, Lotus Research Center.

and that by transforming our internal states, we can contribute to peace on a larger scale.

## II. SUSTAINABLE PEACE

The resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 April 2017 recognizes that “sustaining peace... should be broadly understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development, and emphasizing the sustaining peace is a shared task and responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by the Government and all other national stakeholders, and should flow through all three pillars of the United Nations engagement at all stages of conflict, and in all its dimensions, and needs sustained international attention and assistance.”<sup>1</sup>

Sustainable peace goes beyond merely the absence of war; it encompasses social stability, justice, economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, and the overall well-being of individuals and communities. Achieving this comprehensive peace demands collaboration among governments, civil society, and international organizations. Rooted in the Buddhist principle of dependent origination (*pratityasamutpāda*), genuine peace involves not only the prevention of conflict but also the creation of a harmonious environment where people and communities flourish collectively. This integrative perspective underscores the interconnected nature of peace, striving for a world where balance and harmony are foundational.

Over the centuries, Buddhism has attributed society, social customs, practices, and ways of thinking in the present and past to shaping morals and ethics. Nepal, the birthplace of Sakyamuni Buddha, is deeply intertwined with Buddhist philosophy and culture. The teachings of Buddhism have shaped not only the spiritual lives of the Nepalese people but also the nation’s approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. In the context of Nepal’s history, struggles, and triumphs, Buddhism provides a valuable framework for cultivating inner peace, which in turn can foster national and global peace.

## III. CONCEPT OF PEACE IN BUDDHISM

The concept of peace, which has its roots in the Latin word “Pacisi,” has developed over time from merely signifying calmness and the lack of conflict to embracing broader concepts such as peace, reconciliation, and the well-being of society. Peace manifests in various dimensions, starting with inner peace that builds individual strength, and then extending to interpersonal peace that fosters positive relationships and community cohesion. On a larger scale, social peace serves as a foundation for political stability and economic advancement, promoting justice and inclusivity. At the national and global levels, peace aims to avert conflicts both within and among countries. The differentiation

---

<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly (2017): 2.

between negative peace, characterized by the absence of violence, and positive peace, which strives for enduring justice and well-being, underscores the complex nature of peace. Furthermore, cultural peace emphasizes the value of diversity and the need for tolerance.

The teachings of the Buddha on peace, justice, and freedom hold significant relevance, especially in light of the contemporary global landscape shaped by advancements from the Fourth Industrial Revolution. As such, the Buddha is often referred to as the king of peace. Adopting a Buddhist lifestyle involves cultivating a harmonious and tranquil existence, characterized by *samācariya*, which translates to living in harmony and peace with others. This principle fosters inner serenity, enabling individuals to engage in a righteous way of life known as *dharmacariya*. The Buddha introduced these concepts to the world for the first time, establishing the 'kingdom of righteousness,' or *dharmacakka*, symbolizing the governance of moral integrity. In Buddhism, peace signifies the alleviation and resolution of all forms of suffering and distress. It also entails the end of suffering through the extinguishment of desire, which is the root cause of such pain.<sup>2</sup>

Buddhism, known as a religion of peace and non-violence, emphasizes inner transformation and resolving conflicts to alleviate suffering. The Buddha's initial teachings focus on suffering, its cessation, and the path to peace. The concept of peace holds significance both internally and externally, promoting non-violence (*ahimsā*) and peaceful coexistence within society. A powerful example of non-violence in Buddhist history is narrated in the *Angulimāla Sutta*, which describes the transformation of a serial killer into a follower of the Buddha. The Buddha's third turning of the wheel, the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha*, teaches that all sentient beings have the potential to attain Buddhahood, fostering peaceful coexistence among all beings and with the natural world.

In Buddhism, peace is more than just the lack of conflict or external upheaval; it represents a deep sense of inner balance, wisdom, and compassion that rises above personal cravings and attachments. In this view, peace is achieved when individuals liberate themselves from the ingrained reactions of greed, hatred, and ignorance that lead to suffering. Central to Buddhism is the pursuit of peace, which extends not only to humanity but to all living beings. The Buddha emphasizes that the initial step toward attaining peace is understanding its underlying causes. Buddhism teaches that a peaceful mind leads to peaceful actions, and conversely, peaceful actions contribute to a peaceful mindset.

In Buddhism, the idea of peace carries both negative and positive connotations. In its negative aspect, peace signifies the absence not only of war and conflict but also of systemic violence, including social injustices, inequality, violation of human rights, and the degradation of ecological balance. Conversely, in its positive aspect, peace embodies unity, harmony, freedom,

---

<sup>2</sup> Singh (2008): 55.

and justice. Therefore, the concept of peace integrates both the elimination of conflict and the cultivation of a positive and peaceful existence.<sup>3</sup>

In today's world, people are engulfed in persistent fear, suspicion, and tension. Scientific advancements have given rise to weapons capable of catastrophic destruction. Armed with these modern instruments of death, powerful nations confront and intimidate one another. In this climate of anxiety, stemming from the circumstances they have created themselves, individuals want a way to escape and seek solutions. However, the only true answer lies in the teachings of the Buddha: advocating for non-violence and peace, promoting love and compassion, fostering tolerance and understanding, and upholding truth and wisdom. Additionally, his message emphasizes respect for all life and liberation from selfishness, hatred, and violence.<sup>4</sup>

#### **IV. THE ROLE OF BUDDHIST PRACTICES IN CULTIVATING INNER PEACE**

The practice of cultivating inner peace is described as a fundamental teaching of Buddhism. It is noted that achieving inner peace is not merely a destination, but rather a continuous journey that involves embracing various teachings such as mindfulness, compassion, non-attachment, and contentment. To foster inner peace, individuals are encouraged to regularly seek silence and solitude to connect with their inner selves, as this practice is essential for achieving balance. Releasing the desire to control every outcome allows a focus on one's responses to situations, with an emphasis on practicing forgiveness and acceptance. This approach involves letting go of past grievances and embracing things as they are, which contributes to inner peace and is recognized by others as a demonstration of emotional maturity. Inner peace is characterized not only as a personal achievement but also as a quality that radiates outward, influencing the nature of one's relationships and interactions. Carrying a sense of calm and harmony is said to naturally command respect and admiration from those who observe one's transformative journey. Incorporating teachings of forgiveness, contentment, generosity, and equanimity into one's life, alongside the foundational principles previously discussed, is believed to create a significant shift in both character and interpersonal interactions.

##### **4.1. Mindfulness and meditation**

The practice of mindfulness (*sati*) is fundamental to the cultivation of inner peace in Buddhism. Mindfulness is the ability to pay attention in a particular way – on purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment. Mindfulness brings clarity and insight into our experiences, allowing us to observe the arising and passing of thoughts, feelings, and sensations without becoming entangled in them.

In meditation, mindfulness helps us to cultivate a calm and clear mind, free from the distractions and disturbances that arise from attachment, fear, or anger. The cultivation of mindfulness allows us to experience impermanence

---

<sup>3</sup> Thepsopon (2001): 88.

<sup>4</sup> Rahula (2002): 86.

and non-attachment, key aspects of Buddhist wisdom, and ultimately leads to peace of mind.

In practice, mindfulness meditation is used to observe the flow of thoughts and feelings, understanding them as transient phenomena that come and go. By seeing things as they truly are – impermanent, suffering, and interdependent – we can develop a sense of calm detachment from both the pleasant and unpleasant experiences of life and feel peace of mind.

Vipassana meditation is one of the most widely practised forms of meditation in Buddhism. It involves observing the nature of the mind and body and gaining insight into the way suffering arises and dissipates. This practice of direct observation and awareness helps practitioners free themselves from the mental patterns of attachment, aversion, and ignorance that fuel conflict.

Through Samatha meditation, practitioners develop concentration and mental stability. In this practice, the mind is trained to focus on a single object, such as the breath, cultivating deep states of concentration and tranquillity. These deep states of meditative absorption are said to lead to mental clarity, allowing for a deeper understanding of the nature of the mind and reality itself.

Together, these meditative practices not only help individuals attain inner peace but also train them to act with wisdom and compassion in their daily lives.

The Noble Eightfold Path offers a roadmap to achieving peace both within and beyond the individual:<sup>5</sup>

(1) Right View (*sammā ditthi*) – understanding the true nature of reality, including the impermanence of all things and the interdependent nature of existence.

(2) Right Intention (*sammā sankappa*) – cultivating a mindset of renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness toward all beings.

(3) Right Speech (*sammā vācā*) – speaking truthfully, kindly, and harmoniously.

(4) Right Action (*sammā kammānta*) – engaging in ethical behavior that does not harm others.

(5) Right Livelihood (*sammā ājiva*) – choosing a profession that does not harm living beings.

(6) Right Effort (*sammā vāyāma*) – cultivating a mental attitude that seeks to overcome unwholesome states and develop wholesome ones.

(7) Right Mindfulness (*sammā sati*) – practicing awareness of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, leading to the cultivation of clarity and insight.

(8) Right Concentration (*sammā samādhi*) – developing deep states of meditation that allow the practitioner to transcend the distractions of the mind.

The Four Noble Truths form the foundation of Buddhist teachings, guiding individuals to understand the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), its causes, and the

<sup>5</sup> MN 1. 10; 135.

way to its cessation.<sup>6</sup> The Buddha taught that suffering is not merely external but is rooted in the mind, particularly in our attachments and ignorance. Therefore, peace can only be achieved when one gains the wisdom (*prajñā*) to see beyond the illusions that create greed, hatred and delusion.

#### 4.2. Five precepts

In terms of behaviour, individuals cultivate peace daily by adhering to the principles of *pañcasīla*. To avoid conflicts within groups, the Buddha imparts six principles of harmony (*sāraṇiyadhamma*) relevant to all communities. Regarding intergroup and international relations, Buddhist texts are filled with narratives that advocate for non-violent approaches. Buddhism has been widely recognized as a religion promoting peace and non-violence, gaining prominence in various regions worldwide. Today, many individuals seek solace and guidance from Buddhism, particularly as the hope for peace appears to be a distant aspiration amidst ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, along with the spread of terrorist acts into unexpected places like Bali, London, and New York. Therefore, the practice of *pañcasīla* is crucial for world peace.

**Interdependence and Global Peace:** One of the most significant Buddhist concepts that contribute to a deeper understanding of peace is interdependence or *pratītyasamutpāda*. Buddhism teaches that all things arise in dependence upon conditions and that nothing exists in isolation. This interconnectedness implies that the well-being of one is tied to the well-being of all. The Buddha's teachings on interdependence reveal that our actions, thoughts, and words not only shape our own lives but also influence the lives of others, and indeed, the entire world. At a global level, this interdependence is particularly relevant when considering the global challenges we face, such as climate change, armed conflict, economic inequality, and migration. The impact of one nation's policies on the environment, for example, reverberates across the globe, affecting countless other nations. Similarly, inequality, greed, and political instability in one part of the world can have ripple effects, leading to violence, poverty, and suffering. When we recognize the interconnectedness of all beings and phenomena, we realize that global peace cannot be achieved through isolated or individualistic approaches. Peace must be cultivated in a way that respects the welfare of all, recognizing that peace for one is peace for all. By recognizing that our actions, whether of violence, harm, or kindness, reverberate throughout the interconnected web of life, we are motivated to cultivate peace – not only for ourselves but for the world.

#### 4.3. Compassion and loving-kindness

Furthermore, the practice of the *Brahmavihārās* – loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*mudītā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) – serves as a blueprint for cultivating positive relationships. By developing these qualities internally, individuals naturally project peace and goodwill outward, influencing social harmony. In Buddhism, compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*) are the essential qualities that transform the heart and

<sup>6</sup> MN 1. 8; 9; 135.



mind, leading to inner peace. *Mettā* meditation involves sending out wishes of loving-kindness to oneself, loved ones, acquaintances, and even enemies, cultivating an expansive, unconditional love that transcends the boundaries of attachment and hatred and brings peace and harmony.

Compassion, in Buddhist thought, is not merely an emotional reaction but an active intention to alleviate the suffering of others. Compassionate action arises naturally when we recognize the interconnectedness of all beings. By fostering compassion through meditation and practice, we move beyond self-centered concerns and open our hearts to the suffering of others, seeking to alleviate it wherever we can. Compassion is the antidote to the destructive forces of anger, hatred, and revenge that fuel conflict. When individuals cultivate compassion within themselves, they naturally become agents of peace in their families, communities, and nations. Moreover, compassion teaches us to work for a collective well-being, promoting a sense of global interconnectedness and interdependence, and at the top of all global peace.

#### 4.4. Wisdom

Buddhist wisdom (*prajñā*) is the understanding of the true nature of reality. It is the wisdom to recognize the impermanence of all things, the interdependence of all beings, and the emptiness (*sunyatā*) of fixed, inherent existence. By seeing the world through the lens of wisdom, practitioners let go of rigid concepts and attachments that fuel division, fear, and suffering. In the context of global peace, *prajñā* allows us to see beyond the superficial divisions of race, nationality, and religion, recognizing that all people share the same fundamental desires for happiness, safety, and well-being. By understanding the interdependent nature of reality, individuals are inspired to work for others, not just their interests.

The ripple effect of inner peace can be observed in historical and contemporary figures such as the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and other Buddhist leaders who have championed non-violence and compassion in the face of adversity. Their inner fortitude and clarity have inspired peace movements and mediated conflicts worldwide.

Buddhist leaders such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama have repeatedly stressed the importance of compassion in fostering peace. The Dalai Lama's philosophy of "secular ethics" advocates for compassion and kindness as universal values, regardless of religious background. In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, he emphasized that "the more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our sense of well-being becomes." His message underscores the importance of compassion in creating a global community rooted in mutual respect and shared values. Consistently advocated for peace, compassion, and dialogue. His vision of "universal responsibility" calls for all individuals to recognize their duty toward the well-being of others. His global advocacy for compassion, nonviolence, and human rights has inspired movements around the world aimed at fostering unity and reconciliation and global peace.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Thondup (1999): 1 – 10.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen master, has been a tireless advocate for peace and environmental sustainability. His “Engaged Buddhism” philosophy integrates Buddhist practice with social action, calling on individuals and communities to address the suffering in the world through compassionate engagement. His teachings on mindfulness, peace, and social justice have inspired countless movements dedicated to global unity and environmental stewardship.<sup>8</sup>

Aung San Suu Kyi, a Burmese political leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has also drawn from Buddhist teachings in her commitment to democracy, human rights, and peacebuilding. Her message of nonviolence and reconciliation resonates with the Buddhist ideal of resolving conflict through understanding and compassion rather than force.

## **V. THE ROLE OF BUDDHISM IN NEPAL’S PEACEBUILDING**

Nepal, the birthplace of the Buddha, has a long-standing tradition of Buddhist teachings that emphasize peace, non-violence, and reconciliation. These teachings are woven into the cultural fabric of Nepal, influencing not only religious life but also the nation’s approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Nepal, like many countries, has faced periods of conflict, most notably the Nepalese Civil War (1996 – 2006), which caused significant loss of life and displacement. Buddhism has played a central role in the efforts to heal the wounds of the past and build a more peaceful and just society. Monastic communities, religious leaders, and Buddhist organizations have worked tirelessly to promote peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

The Buddhist principle of forgiveness is particularly important in the context of post-conflict healing. After the civil war, many individuals and communities turned to Buddhist teachings and practices to heal from the trauma of violence. Meditation, prayer, and Buddhist rituals were used to foster reconciliation between conflicting parties and help people overcome hatred and resentment. Buddhist monks and nuns played an essential role in guiding individuals through the process of forgiveness and healing.

## **VI. BUDDHIST PEACE INITIATIVES IN NEPAL**

NEPAL-Zone of Peace was a proposition made by the late King Birendra during his coronation ceremony in 1975. King Birendra formally asked the international community to endorse his proposal that the United Nations should declare Nepal a Zone of Peace, to give a new dimension to the Nepalese non-alignment. The proposal had been endorsed by over 130 nations except India but stagnated with the fall of the Panchayat System in 1990.<sup>9</sup>

In the aftermath of the civil war, Buddhist leaders in Nepal were instrumental in advocating for peace and social justice. The Nepalese Peace and Reconciliation Commission, established in 2014, used Buddhist principles of

---

<sup>8</sup> Nguyen (1999): 20.

<sup>9</sup> Sharma (2004): 44.

forgiveness and reconciliation to guide its work. The Commission's goal was to facilitate dialogue between opposing factions, encourage national unity, and promote restorative justice.<sup>10</sup>

Buddhist teachings on compassion, loving-kindness, and interconnectedness have long served as a guiding force for grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in Nepal. Across the country, numerous Buddhist organizations have dedicated themselves to fostering religious tolerance, social equity, and sustainable peace. Groups such as the Nepal Buddhist Federation, Viswo Shanti Vihar, Anandakuti Vihar, Dharmodaya Sabha, YMBA, Dharmakirti Vihar, and Yubak Baudha Mandala have played a crucial role in promoting interfaith dialogue, resolving conflicts through non-violent means, and cultivating a culture of mutual respect. By engaging in community outreach programs, educational initiatives, and social advocacy, these organizations are actively working to dissolve sectarian divides and build an inclusive society where harmony and coexistence flourish.

One of the most significant aspects of Nepal's peacebuilding efforts is the role of Lumbini, the sacred birthplace of the Buddha. Lumbini has become not only a revered pilgrimage site but also a global center for peace initiatives. With its long-standing tradition of hosting international conferences and dialogues centered on the Buddha's teachings, Lumbini continues to be a beacon of non-violence and international brotherhood. These gatherings have been instrumental in reaffirming Nepal's commitment to fostering global peace and interfaith harmony. The First World Buddhist Summit, held in Lumbini in 1998, followed by the Second Summit in 2004, marked the beginning of a series of international conferences aimed at uniting Buddhist leaders, scholars, and practitioners from around the world in a shared mission of peacebuilding. Through these summits, Nepal has solidified its role as a custodian of the Buddha's message of non-violence and as a bridge between diverse spiritual and cultural traditions.

Beyond institutional efforts, the practice of meditation has emerged as a fundamental aspect of applying Buddhist teachings in real life. Over the past three decades, Nepal has witnessed a remarkable growth in meditation centers and monasteries, reflecting an increasing recognition of the transformative power of contemplative practice. Meditation, rooted in the Buddhist understanding of mental purification, serves as a direct path to inner peace by eliminating defilements of the mind and fostering clarity, wisdom, and equanimity. The impact of meditation, however, extends far beyond the individual level; it radiates outward, influencing communities, societies, and even international relations. A mind trained in mindfulness and compassion contributes to a more peaceful household, a more understanding community, and, ultimately, a more harmonious world.

The synergy between institutional peace efforts, pilgrimage-based spiritual gatherings, and personal meditative practice demonstrates that the Buddhist

---

<sup>10</sup> Nepal Peace and Reconciliation Commission (2014).

approach to peacebuilding is deeply integrated and multidimensional. It operates on multiple levels, addressing both internal transformation and external societal change. As Nepal continues to nurture and expand its role in global peace efforts, its Buddhist institutions, leaders, and practitioners serve as living embodiments of the timeless wisdom of the Buddha - a wisdom that calls for universal compassion, ethical responsibility, and an unwavering commitment to non-violence.

At a time when the world is increasingly divided by conflict, misunderstanding, and social unrest, the Buddhist model of peace - rooted in meditative insight, compassionate action, and interfaith collaboration - offers a compelling roadmap for a more harmonious future. Through the combined efforts of grassroots organizations, international summits, and individual spiritual discipline, Nepal stands as a shining example of how ancient wisdom can be applied to modern challenges, ensuring that the pursuit of peace remains not only a spiritual ideal but a practical and tangible reality for generations to come.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The pursuit of inner peace, deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy, offers a profound and transformative pathway toward achieving global peace. As this paper has explored, Buddhist teachings emphasize that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but a dynamic and holistic state of being - one that arises from deep understanding, boundless compassion, and a recognition of the fundamental interdependence of all life. The cultivation of inner peace is not an isolated endeavor but a ripple that extends outward, influencing families, communities, and nations. Through the practices of mindfulness, meditation, and ethical conduct, individuals undergo an inner transformation that has far-reaching implications for collective harmony. Buddhist teachings provide a comprehensive framework for the realization of peace by addressing the root causes of suffering and conflict. The human mind, when clouded by ignorance, greed, and hatred, becomes a source of discord; conversely, a mind cultivated in mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom radiates peace, fostering environments of understanding and reconciliation. The concept of *right mindfulness* (*sammā sati*) teaches individuals to observe their thoughts and emotions with clarity, reducing reactivity and aggression. Meanwhile, *right speech* (*sammā vācā*) and *right action* (*sammā kammanta*) emphasize ethical interactions, ensuring that human relationships are built on mutual respect and non-harming. When individuals embody these principles, their interactions become more harmonious and constructive, creating a social fabric rooted in kindness and understanding. As Buddhist philosophy teaches, peace begins in the mind of each individual, but its impact reverberates outward. This interconnected reality means that fostering inner peace is not a retreat from worldly engagement but a powerful act of social transformation.

As the birthplace of the Buddha, Nepal holds a unique position in the global pursuit of peace, offering both historical significance and a living example of how Buddhist principles can be applied to peacebuilding on national and international levels. With its rich spiritual heritage and longstanding commitment to non-violence, Nepal stands as a beacon of hope in a world

often fractured by conflict. The country's historical journey - marked by both challenges and moments of reconciliation - illustrates how Buddhist ethics can guide conflict resolution, foster social justice, and inspire intercommunal harmony. Nepal's peacebuilding efforts can serve as a living testament to the power of Buddhist philosophy in governance, diplomacy, and grassroots activism. The principles of forgiveness, reconciliation, and social equity, deeply embedded in Buddhist traditions, offer a model for societies striving to heal from past divisions. Initiatives that integrate meditation, dialogue, and non-violent conflict resolution reflect the practical application of Buddhist teachings in contemporary settings, reinforcing the idea that peace is not an abstract ideal but a lived experience cultivated through mindful action. As humanity navigates an increasingly complex and divided world, the wisdom of Buddhism offers an urgent reminder of our shared humanity and collective destiny. In an age characterized by political polarization, ecological crises, and social fragmentation, Buddhist insights provide a roadmap for fostering unity, resilience, and ethical responsibility. The recognition of *interdependence* (*pratītyasamutpāda*) compels us to see that no action is isolated - what we cultivate within ourselves inevitably manifests in the world around us.

Global peace is not the responsibility of governments and institutions alone but a collective endeavor that demands the active participation of individuals, communities, and nations. Every act of kindness, patience, and understanding contributes to a culture of peace, while every instance of anger, intolerance, and violence reinforces cycles of suffering. Thus, the commitment to inner transformation is not merely a personal pursuit but a moral imperative for the well-being of our shared world. By nurturing our inner landscapes - developing patience, empathy, and ethical integrity - we facilitate a ripple effect of peace, one that can transform societies, dissolve barriers of hatred, and promote genuine tolerance and coexistence. This is not an abstract vision but a practical and necessary step toward creating a future where harmony prevails, illuminating our collective path through the challenges of our time. As the world faces unprecedented challenges in the 21st century, the need for inner peace as a foundation for global stability has never been more critical. The wisdom of Buddhism offers not only profound insights but also practical methods - through meditative discipline, ethical engagement, and the cultivation of compassion—to navigate these turbulent times. It teaches us that lasting peace is not achieved through external force but through inner clarity, moral courage, and collective wisdom. Therefore, embracing a Buddhist perspective on inner peace is not simply a philosophical exercise but an urgent necessity in shaping a world that is more just, compassionate, and sustainable. By aligning our lives with these principles, we take a meaningful step toward realizing a global society where peace is not an aspiration but a lived reality - a world in which the teachings of the Buddha continue to illuminate the path forward for generations to come.



## REFERENCES

- Anguttara Nikāya*, Ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1885 - 1900. Tr. F.L.Woodward and E.M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1932 - 1995.
- Dīgha Nikāya*, Ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J.E.Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.
- Khuddakapāṭha*, Ed. Ven. Ñāṇamoli, *The Minor Readings and the Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, PTS, London, 2015.
- Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed.V.Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.
- Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed. V. Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.
- Nepal Peace and Reconciliation Commission. (2014). *Report on Peace and Reconciliation* [Report]. Nepal Government Press.
- Nguyen, B. X. (1999). *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*. Beacon Press.
- Rāhula, W. (2002). *What the Buddha Taught*. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.
- Sharma, U. K. (2004). The Peace Zone Concept and its Utility in Nepalese Foreign Policy. *Journal of Political Science*, 7(1). 10.3126/jps.v7i1.1698
- Singh, A. K., & Thich, T. N. (2008). Relevance of Buddhism in Attaining World Peace (T. M. Le, Ed.). *War, Conflict and Healing: A Buddhist Perspective*.
- Thepsopon, P. (2001). *Thepsopon*. Mahachula Buddhist University Press.
- Thondup, L. (1999). *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* (H. C. Cutler, Ed.). Coronet.
- UN General Assembly. (2017). *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 April 2017*.



# LOVING-KINDNESS AND WORLD PEACE: EXPLORING THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF *mettā*

Neeraj Yadav<sup>\*</sup>

## Abstract:

This paper provides an in-depth examination of the Buddhist concept of *mettā*, or loving-kindness, and its potential to promote world peace. Through a comprehensive review of Buddhist scriptures, academic literature, and empirical research, it delves into the multifaceted role of *mettā* in cultivating inner peace, compassion, and understanding among individuals and communities. The exploration begins with the historical context of *Mettā*, tracing its origins in the teachings of the Buddha and its evolution through various Buddhist traditions. This foundational understanding enriches the discussion on how *mettā* can be effectively applied in contemporary contexts. The paper also discusses the implications of *mettā* for promoting world peace, highlighting its potential to reduce conflict, promote forgiveness, and foster global cooperation in an increasingly interconnected world. By examining case studies where *mettā* practices have been integrated into peace-building efforts, it illustrates how loving-kindness can serve as a transformative force in resolving disputes and bridging divides. Additionally, the paper explores the theoretical foundations of *mettā* in Buddhist teachings, including its relationship to other key concepts such as compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, which further illuminate its significance. It also examines the empirical evidence for the benefits of *mettā* meditation, including reduced stress, increased empathy, and improved interpersonal relationships, showcasing how these benefits can ripple outward to influence wider social dynamics.

Furthermore, the paper discusses the practical applications of *mettā* in promoting world peace, including its use in conflict resolution, reconciliation processes, and international diplomacy. By providing examples of successful initiatives that have employed *mettā* principles, the paper highlights actionable steps that individuals and organizations can take to harness this powerful

---

<sup>\*</sup> Assistant Professor, University of Delhi

concept. In addition, the paper critically examines the challenges and limitations of promoting *mettā* in diverse cultural and religious contexts, acknowledging that the interpretation and practice of loving-kindness may vary significantly across different societies. It also explores the potential of *mettā* to address some of the world's most pressing problems, including poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, thereby demonstrating its relevance beyond the spiritual realm.

The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of *mettā* in promoting a more peaceful and harmonious world. It advocates for the integration of *mettā* practices into educational systems, community programs, and international relations as a means of fostering a culture of peace. Overall, this paper provides a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the Buddhist concept of *mettā* and its vast potential to promote world peace. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of loving-kindness in nurturing inner peace, compassion, and understanding while also highlighting the practical implications of *mettā* in creating a more just and equitable global society.

**Keywords:** *Mettā, loving-kindness, world peace, Buddhist teachings, compassion, empathy, conflict resolution, reconciliation, international diplomacy.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The world today is grappling with a multitude of interconnected challenges that threaten the very fabric of human existence. Issues such as conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation are not isolated phenomena; they are deeply intertwined and contribute to a cycle of suffering that impacts individuals, communities, and the planet. These challenges not only compromise human dignity but also undermine the collective efforts aimed at fostering peace and sustainability. The ramifications of these issues are profound and widespread. For instance, the effects of climate change are increasingly evident, leading to extreme weather events, loss of biodiversity, and disruption of ecosystems - a phenomenon that jeopardizes the delicate balance of life on Earth. Concurrently, ongoing conflicts and systemic inequalities create barriers that perpetuate cycles of poverty, violence, and social unrest, further exacerbating the challenges faced by vulnerable populations. Such an evolution necessitates a multidimensional approach that integrates insights from various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, environmental science, and economics. By examining the underlying drivers of human behavior, researchers can identify the cognitive and emotional factors that influence both individual and collective actions.

**Psychological Insights:** Understanding the principles of behavioral psychology can provide deeper insights into how individuals make decisions, often influenced by cognitive biases, social norms, and emotional motivators. For instance, the concept of nudge theory suggests that subtle changes in how choices are presented can significantly alter decision-making processes. By utilizing these insights, initiatives can be designed to effectively encourage pro-environmental behaviors.

**Sociocultural Dynamics:** Cultural values profoundly influence behavior and can either hinder or promote action towards sustainable practices. Researchers should explore the norms and values intrinsic to different communities, analyzing how these factors contribute to or hinder cooperation and environmental stewardship. Such an exploration may provide valuable frameworks for designing targeted educational and community engagement programs that resonate with specific populations.

**Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** The complexity of global issues such as climate change, inequality, and public health demands collaborative efforts that break down academic silos. Multidisciplinary research initiatives that integrate diverse perspectives spanning the sciences, humanities, and social sciences can foster innovative strategies that reflect the complexity of real-world challenges. This collaborative approach not only enhances the depth of analysis but also enriches the applicability and acceptance of the solutions among various stakeholders.

**Evidence and Policy Integration:** Innovative approaches must be grounded in robust empirical evidence. Policymakers and practitioners must draw from existing research to understand which interventions have proven effective in promoting behavior change. The integration of scientific findings into policy frameworks can bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that interventions are informed by the realities of human behavior and environmental constraints.

**Fostering Global Citizenship:** In a world characterized by increasing interconnectedness, there is a pressing need to foster a sense of global citizenship that transcends national and cultural boundaries. Educational initiatives that cultivate empathy, awareness, and responsibility toward global issues play a vital role in enabling individuals to recognize their role within a larger system. By encouraging a collective identity that embraces diversity and fosters solidarity, individuals are more likely to engage in actions that reflect a commitment to the common good.

Addressing the pressing global issues of our time demands a comprehensive and integrated approach that encompasses insights from multiple disciplines, fosters collaborative efforts, and promotes a profound cultural shift. By re-evaluating our values and behaviors, embracing interdisciplinary collaboration, and prioritizing empirical evidence in policy-making, we can effect meaningful and lasting change. It is through this transformative journey that societies can move toward a more sustainable, equitable, and compassionate world. The onus lies not merely on policymakers or scientists but on each individual and community to nurture this evolution -culminating in a collective initiative that paves the way for a brighter future.

Buddhist teachings present a valuable framework for addressing these multifaceted challenges. Central to this philosophy is the concept of loving-kindness or *mettā*. *Mettā* is more than just a practice; it embodies the cultivation of kindness, compassion, and empathy toward oneself and others. By actively engaging in *mettā*, individuals can foster a greater sense of understanding,

tolerance, and forgiveness, which are essential for nurturing harmony and cooperation within personal and social relationships. The relevance of *mettā* in addressing contemporary global challenges cannot be overstated. In a world rife with conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation, the practice of loving-kindness emerges as a compelling antidote to the forces of division and destruction. By embracing *mettā*, individuals can cultivate a deeper connection not only with themselves and others but also with the natural world, thereby fostering increased empathy, cooperation, and sustainability.

Moreover, research indicates that the practice of *mettā* yields numerous benefits for both individuals and society as a whole. Among these benefits are reduced stress and anxiety, heightened feelings of happiness and well-being, and the strengthening of relationships and social networks. Furthermore, the cultivation of *mettā* has been associated with enhanced empathy, compassion, and altruism - qualities that are crucial for promoting a culture of peace and sustainability in our increasingly divided world.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will delve into the concept of *mettā* as articulated in Buddhist teachings, examining its theoretical foundations, practical implications, and potential benefits for fostering peace, sustainability, and overall human well-being. By conducting a thorough review of Buddhist scriptures, academic literature, and empirical research, this paper seeks to provide a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of *mettā*'s role in contributing to a more harmonious and sustainable world. The paper is structured into several key sections. The first section offers an overview of the concept of *mettā* in Buddhist teachings, exploring its theoretical underpinnings and practical applications in daily life. The second section investigates the empirical evidence supporting the benefits of *mettā*, including its effects on stress reduction, enhanced empathy, and improved interpersonal relationships. The third section addresses the potential of *mettā* to effectively confront and mitigate contemporary global challenges such as conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation. Finally, the paper concludes by underscoring the significance of *mettā* in nurturing a more peaceful and sustainable world, advocating for its integration into personal practices and broader societal frameworks. Through this exploration, it is hoped that the transformative power of *mettā* will be recognized as a vital element in building a brighter future for all.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF *METTĀ* IN BUDDHISM

*Mettā*, often translated as loving-kindness, is one of the four immeasurable (*brahmavihāras*) in Buddhism, alongside compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).<sup>2</sup> While the term "loving-kindness" captures an essential aspect of *mettā*, it encompasses a broader and more nuanced spectrum of emotions that includes kindness, compassion, empathy,

<sup>1</sup> Matthiew Ricard (2015), *Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the World*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p. 114-129.

<sup>2</sup> Walpola Rahula Thero (2017), *What the Buddha Taught*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, p. 76 - 80.

and understanding.<sup>3</sup> Within the rich tapestry of Buddhist teachings, *mettā* is regarded as a fundamental virtue that nurtures a sense of warmth, empathy, and connection - not only toward oneself but also toward all other beings. It is important to clarify that *mettā* is not merely a passive feeling; rather, it involves actively cultivating a genuine interest in the well-being and happiness of others. This active engagement fosters a deep sense of kindness and compassion that can extend to all forms of life, illuminating our shared humanity. The practice of *mettā* is intricately tied to the concept of “*ahimsa*”, or non-harming, which serves as a cornerstone of Buddhist ethical teachings. By nurturing *mettā*, individuals can cultivate a profound respect and reverence for all forms of life, leading to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness that binds all beings together. This understanding fosters greater empathy and compassion, significantly reducing tendencies toward harm, exploitation, or indifference. Furthermore, *mettā* inspires individuals to engage in actions that alleviate suffering, encouraging them to become advocates for peace and harmony in their communities.<sup>4</sup> In addition to its transformative effects on emotional well-being, the practice of *mettā* also fosters deeper interpersonal connections and community bonds. When individuals cultivate love and kindness toward themselves, it creates a ripple effect, encouraging them to extend these feelings toward others. This communal aspect of *mettā* is particularly significant in today’s increasingly fragmented society, where feelings of disconnection and isolation are prevalent. By prioritizing *mettā*, practitioners contribute to a more compassionate society, helping to reduce divisions based on misunderstanding and prejudice. Furthermore, the ongoing practice of *mettā* meditation can promote resilience against life’s inevitable challenges. As individuals learn to cultivate a compassionate mindset, they become better equipped to handle adversity with grace.

The quality of *mettā* encourages individuals to approach difficulties not with aversion but with understanding and love. This shift in perspective can prove to be invaluable in both personal and professional realms, ultimately leading to more constructive and harmonious relationships. The benefits of *mettā* are not limited to the individual nor exclusively within the confines of meditation. Research has shown that regular engagement in *mettā* meditation can have physiological benefits, such as reduced stress levels and improved immune function. These positive health outcomes further underscore the notion that mental states and physical health are intricately connected.<sup>5</sup> Thus, *mettā* not only nurtures the spirit but also promotes a holistic understanding of wellness. Moreover, in the context of modern psychology, it is interesting to note that various therapeutic systems are integrating principles of *mettā*. Techniques such as Compassion-

<sup>3</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (1999), *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 07 - 39.

<sup>4</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005), *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for everyday life*. London: Piatkus, p. 05 - 10.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Lee Fredrickson (2008), *Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, p. 1045 - 1062.



Focused Therapy utilize the foundational aspects of *mettā* to help clients develop self-compassion and enhance emotional regulation. This growing intersection of Buddhism and psychological practice indicates a validation of *mettā*'s efficacy beyond traditional spiritual frameworks, emphasizing its relevance in contemporary mental health discourse. The practice of *mettā* encompasses far-reaching implications for individuals and society as a whole. From fostering personal transformation by mitigating negative emotions to nurturing social connections and contributing to physical well-being, *mettā* occupies a pivotal role in the pursuit of enlightenment and holistic health. As such, integrating *mettā* into daily life presents a meaningful path toward enhanced emotional resilience, overall wellness, and the cultivation of a more compassionate world. The synergy of these various dimensions reinforces the essential nature of *mettā* in spiritual and everyday practice, inviting all individuals to explore its profound benefits.

Furthermore, the synergy between *mettā* and mindfulness can be instrumental in reducing stress and promoting overall mental well-being. When individuals engage in mindful *mettā* practice, they not only cultivate feelings of loving-kindness towards themselves and others but also hone their ability to manage stress more effectively. Research indicates that mindfulness practices significantly reduce anxiety and depression, which often manifest in negative thoughts and feelings towards oneself and others. Incorporating *mettā* into mindfulness practice can also establish a profound sense of community and interconnectedness. Individuals may begin to perceive their place within a larger social fabric, realizing that their thoughts and actions can significantly impact others. This realization may propel individuals to act more altruistically, as their empathetic responses are sharpened by a mindfulness practice that draws their attention both internally and externally.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the integration of *mettā* into daily life can lead to transformative changes in one's perspective on interpersonal conflicts. When one practices *mettā* consistently, they develop a broader understanding of human suffering, which can foster a non-judgmental attitude towards others. As individuals deepen their resolve to respond to challenges with kindness, the likelihood of escalating conflicts diminishes. Through this lens of compassion, individuals can engage in difficult conversations with a focus on empathy and understanding, ultimately leading to conflict resolution based on mutual respect rather than hostility. The practice of *mettā* can also serve as a foundation for various therapeutic approaches, such as Compassion-Focused Therapy and Dialectical Behavior Therapy. These frameworks emphasize the importance of self-compassion and interpersonal effectiveness, both of which align closely with the principles inherent in *mettā*.

By fostering a sense of self-acceptance and compassion through *mettā*, individuals can break free from negative self-beliefs and cultivate a healthier relationship with themselves, which in turn empowers them to engage more positively with the world around them. In addition, various studies have

---

<sup>6</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005), *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for everyday life*. London: Piatkus, p. 08 - 15.



demonstrated the physiological benefits of practicing *mettā* and mindfulness. The practice has been linked to reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol, increased levels of serotonin, and improved overall emotional regulation. These biological changes can create a more resilient individual, one whose growth is enriched through the conscious practice of *mettā*, feeding into a cycle of positive reinforcement. The interplay between *mettā* and mindfulness holds significant potential for fostering emotional well-being, promoting interpersonal harmony, and supporting therapeutic outcomes. As individuals actively cultivate an attitude of loving-kindness rooted in present-moment awareness, they are likely to experience profound changes in their emotional landscapes and relationships, ultimately shaping a more compassionate and connected society. As the world continues to grapple with increasing levels of stress and disconnection, the adoption of *mettā* and mindfulness practices may serve as a vital antidote, leading to healthier, more sustainable modes of engagement with oneself and others.

In addition to personal development, the practice of *mettā* is considered a significant aspect of Buddhist social ethics. Through the conscious cultivation of *mettā*, individuals foster a heightened sense of responsibility and concern for the well-being of others. This commitment can lead to more substantial engagement in social justice efforts and the reduction of suffering in the world. As individuals internalize the principles of *mettā*, they begin to recognize their interconnectedness with all beings, prompting actions that promote peace and understanding in their communities. Such actions not only benefit those around them but also create a ripple effect, encouraging others to adopt similar values and practices, thereby contributing to a more compassionate world. Ultimately, the transformative power of *mettā* has the potential to foster a global culture rooted in love, kindness, and mutual respect.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, the concept of *mettā* is central to Buddhist teachings and practices, representing an essential aspect of the journey toward enlightenment. *mettā*, often translated as “loving-kindness”, serves as a foundational principle that encourages individuals to cultivate genuine goodwill and affection toward themselves and others. By nurturing *mettā*, individuals can achieve a deeper sense of inner peace, tranquility, and clarity. This practice is not merely a passive feeling; it requires active engagement and a commitment to fostering empathy, compassion, and kindness toward oneself, as well as those in their communities and beyond.

The transformative power of *mettā* is profound. As individuals learn to extend loving-kindness to themselves, they begin to heal emotional wounds, reduce self-criticism, and develop a more positive self-image. This positive transformation is crucial, as self-love and acceptance lay the groundwork for extending compassion to others.<sup>8</sup> When individuals embody *mettā*, they

---

<sup>7</sup> Christopher S. Queen (2000), *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, Somerville: Wisdom Publications, p. 225 - 275.

<sup>8</sup> Matthieu Ricard (2015), *Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the*

create a ripple effect that enhances personal well-being and contributes to collective harmony and understanding within society. The way in which *mettā* encourages us to regard others - regardless of their background, beliefs, or actions - demonstrates the potential for understanding and connection, even in challenging circumstances.

In a time when division and conflict are prevalent, the principles of *mettā* offer a powerful reminder of the potential for love and kindness to transcend barriers and bring people together. The practice of *mettā* can serve as a balm for societal wounds, promoting reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing. By consistently practicing loving-kindness, individuals can help foster a more compassionate and understanding global community.

Moreover, *mettā* is not limited to interpersonal relationships; it extends to all beings, including animals and the environment. This expansive view encourages a holistic approach to compassion that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life. As we embrace *mettā* in our thoughts, words, and actions, we contribute to a more peaceful world, where understanding and kindness prevail over discord and animosity. The cultivation of *mettā* is, therefore, not only a personal journey but also a collective responsibility, inviting everyone to participate in creating a more compassionate society.

### III. CULTIVATING *METTĀ* THROUGH MEDITATION

*Mettā* meditation, commonly referred to as loving-kindness meditation, is a profound and transformative practice that serves as a powerful tool for cultivating an attitude of loving-kindness and fostering inner peace. Rooted in Buddhist traditions, this ancient form of meditation has gained global popularity due to its accessible and beneficial nature. The practice invites individuals to develop a deeper sense of compassion and understanding, not only toward themselves but also toward others in their lives. By engaging in *mettā* meditation, practitioners focus on well-wishing thoughts, actively extending feelings of love, kindness, and goodwill, starting with themselves and gradually expanding to others, including friends, family members, acquaintances, and even those with whom they may have conflicts or strained relationships.<sup>9</sup> The core essence of *Mettā* meditation lies in its ability to break down barriers of resentment and animosity, cultivating a more compassionate worldview. Research studies have demonstrated that individuals who regularly practice *mettā* meditation experience significant increases in feelings of kindness, empathy, and connection toward others. This practice not only enhances interpersonal relationships but also fosters a sense of community and belonging. Furthermore, *mettā* meditation has been shown to offer numerous psychological benefits. Studies indicate that engaging in this meditation can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression - prevalent issues in today's fast-paced society. Practitioners often report improvements in their

---

World. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p. 114 - 129.

<sup>9</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005), *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for everyday life*. London: Piatkus, p. 08 - 17.

overall emotional well-being, as well as enhanced sleep quality and resilience in coping with life's challenges.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to its emotional and psychological benefits, *mettā* meditation can also have a positive impact on one's physical health. The calming effects of this practice can lower blood pressure, improve immune function, and contribute to an overall healthier lifestyle. By integrating *Mettā* meditation into daily routines, individuals can cultivate a more compassionate mindset, leading to a more fulfilling and harmonious existence. The journey of loving-kindness meditation not only transforms the individual's inner landscape but also ripples outward, positively influencing the lives of others in their community. Along with these numerous benefits, *Mettā* meditation has been shown to increase positive emotions, such as joy, gratitude, and love, while simultaneously reducing negative emotions like anger, hatred, and fear.<sup>11</sup> This enhancement of positive emotions can foster increased social connections and stronger relationships, as well as improved emotional regulation and resilience in the face of life's challenges. The practice nurtures a sense of interconnectedness, allowing individuals to feel more at ease in their interactions with others, thus enhancing their overall emotional intelligence.

The practice of *mettā* meditation typically involves repeating phrases or mantras designed to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion towards oneself and others. These phrases may include "May I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be at peace" or "May all beings be happy, may all beings be healthy, may all beings be at peace". By repeating these phrases and immersing oneself in the feelings they evoke, individuals can develop a greater sense of inner peace and well-being, which can positively influence their daily lives.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, research shows that engaging in *Mettā* meditation can lead to physiological benefits, such as reduced stress levels and lower blood pressure, contributing to an overall sense of health and wellness. The practice encourages individuals to cultivate empathy and loving-kindness not only towards friends and family, but also towards challenging individuals in their lives, ultimately fostering forgiveness and reducing feelings of resentment.

Over time, this consistent practice can help reshape one's outlook on life, fostering a more positive worldview and encouraging a proactive approach to challenges. As practitioners begin to notice the benefits manifesting in their lives, they often find themselves better equipped to handle stressors and obstacles, leading to a more fulfilling and harmonious existence. In essence, *mettā* meditation serves as a profound tool for personal transformation, nurturing

---

<sup>10</sup> Stefan G. Hofmann (2011), *The effect of mindfulness-based therapy on anxiety and depression: A meta-analytic review*. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, p. 169 - 183.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Lee Fredrickson (2008), *Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, p. 1045 - 1062.

<sup>12</sup> Sharon Salzberg (2020), *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Boulder: Shambhala Publication, p. 85.

an environment where compassion and positivity can flourish. Incorporating *mettā* meditation into one's daily routine can be a pivotal step toward achieving a more balanced and joyful life. Moreover, *mettā* meditation can be practiced in various settings, such as at home, in a meditation group, or even during daily activities like walking, eating, or commuting. This flexibility makes it accessible to individuals from diverse backgrounds and lifestyles, allowing people to seamlessly integrate it into their routines. In fact, *mettā* meditation has been practiced for centuries across various Buddhist traditions, including Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna. This ancient practice is not merely a contemporary trend; rather, it is an integral aspect of Buddhist teachings that has evolved over generations.<sup>13</sup> Within these traditions, *mettā* meditation is often embraced as part of a larger spiritual path aimed at cultivating wisdom, ethics, and mental discipline. By engaging in *Mettā* meditation, individuals strive to develop a profound sense of interconnectedness with all living beings, recognizing that their own happiness is intertwined with the happiness of others.

In Theravāda Buddhism, for example, practitioners engage in *mettā* meditation to develop loving-kindness toward themselves and others, fostering an attitude of compassion that extends beyond personal boundaries. This form of meditation is typically accompanied by the recitation of specific phrases that express goodwill, such as “May I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be safe, may I be at ease”. As practitioners repeat these phrases, they begin to internalize the sentiments, which can lead to profound changes in how they relate to themselves and the world around them. This practice not only nurtures a sense of loving-kindness but also helps to alleviate negative emotions such as resentment, anger, and jealousy, which can hinder personal growth and interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, the benefits of *mettā* meditation are not limited to the individual practitioner. As practitioners cultivate feelings of love and compassion, these positive emotions can radiate outward, influencing their interactions with family, friends, and even strangers. In this way, *mettā* meditation can contribute to a more compassionate society, fostering understanding and reducing conflict among individuals and communities. Additionally, *mettā* meditation has gained recognition beyond Buddhist communities, attracting interest from psychologists and wellness practitioners who acknowledge its potential to enhance emotional well-being. Research has shown that regular practice can lead to lower levels of stress and anxiety, improved emotional resilience, and greater overall life satisfaction. As more people incorporate *mettā* meditation into their daily routines, its transformative power continues to resonate, highlighting the timeless relevance of cultivating loving-kindness in an increasingly complex world. Through this practice, individuals not only embark on a journey of self-discovery but also contribute to a collective shift toward compassion and empathy.

---

<sup>13</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (1991), *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. Bantam Books, p. 97 - 119.

Similarly, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, *mettā*, often translated as loving-kindness, is regarded as a crucial aspect of the Bodhisattva path. This path is characterized by an unwavering commitment to altruism and the aspiration to attain enlightenment, not merely for oneself, but for the benefit of all sentient beings. Practitioners of Mahāyāna Buddhism are deeply encouraged to cultivate and expand their loving-kindness, beginning with an initial focus on themselves and gradually extending this compassion outward to friends and family. However, the practice does not stop there; practitioners need to learn to extend their *mettā* to all living beings, even those with whom they may have conflicts or negative feelings.

This deliberate and expansive practice of *mettā* serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it plays a significant role in dissolving the barriers of hatred and resentment that often arise in interpersonal relationships. By consciously choosing to cultivate loving-kindness toward those who may have wronged them or with whom they disagree, practitioners begin to foster a sense of understanding and compassion that transcends personal grievances. This, in turn, helps to create an environment where forgiveness and reconciliation can take place, as the heart becomes more open and receptive to others. Moreover, the expansion of *mettā* contributes to a profound sense of interconnectedness among all beings.<sup>14</sup> In Mahāyāna thought, recognizing that all beings are interdependent is essential. By developing loving-kindness toward all sentient beings, practitioners begin to see themselves as part of a larger whole, which can reduce feelings of isolation or separation. This interconnectedness encourages a sense of responsibility toward others, motivating individuals to act for the welfare of all, rather than merely focusing on their own needs and desires. Ultimately, the cultivation of *mettā* within the framework of Mahāyāna Buddhism not only aids personal spiritual development but also has far-reaching implications for societal harmony and peace. As individuals embody and express loving-kindness, it creates ripples of positive energy that can transform communities, fostering a collective atmosphere of compassion that benefits everyone. Thus, *mettā* is not just a personal practice; it is a powerful tool for social change and the collective elevation of consciousness.

In Vajrayāna traditions, *mettā* meditation, which focuses on the cultivation of loving-kindness, is often integrated with various other spiritual practices to enhance the overall experience and effectiveness of the meditation. This integration may include techniques such as visualization and mantra recitation, both of which serve to deepen the practitioner's connection to the qualities of love and compassion. Visualization might involve imagining oneself surrounded by a warm, radiant light symbolizing loving-kindness or visualizing oneself as a deity embodying the highest qualities of compassion and wisdom. Such practices not only foster a sense of inner peace and warmth but also help practitioners expand their capacity for love toward all beings.

---

<sup>14</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi (2010), *The Buddha's Teaching on Social and Communal Harmony*. Buddhist Publication Society, p. 186.



In addition to visualization, mantra recitation plays a significant role in these meditative practices. Mantras are sacred sounds or phrases that, when repeated, help focus the mind and invoke specific qualities. In the context of *mettā* meditation, practitioners might chant mantras resonating with the essence of loving-kindness, such as “*Om Mani Padme Hum*”, associated with the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of compassion. This repetition serves to align the practitioner’s mind with the deep qualities of love and compassion that these mantras represent, facilitating a more profound meditative experience.

Furthermore, the emphasis on compassion within Vajrayāna traditions is also reflected in the practices surrounding various deities and enlightened beings. Many of these figures, such as Tara and Avalokiteshvara, are revered not only for their wisdom but also for their boundless compassion toward all sentient beings. Engaging with these figures through prayer, visualization, and other rituals can inspire practitioners to cultivate similar qualities within themselves. By connecting with the compassionate nature of these deities, practitioners are encouraged to embody these qualities in their daily lives, fostering a more compassionate and loving approach to interactions with others. In summary, the integration of *mettā* meditation with visualization and mantra recitation in Vajrayāna traditions enriches the practice, allowing for a deeper experience of loving-kindness. This multifaceted approach not only promotes personal transformation but also encourages practitioners to embody the values of compassion and love in their everyday lives, thus contributing positively to the world around them.

The deep-rooted history of *mettā* practice highlights its significance in enhancing one’s spiritual journey. By engaging in *mettā* meditation, individuals not only cultivate their inner peace and happiness but also contribute to a more compassionate and harmonious society.<sup>15</sup> The ripple effects of such practices can be seen in various aspects of life, from personal relationships to broader community interactions, ultimately reinforcing the interconnectedness that is central to Buddhist philosophy. Overall, *mettā* meditation is a powerful and transformative tool for cultivating loving-kindness and promoting inner peace. This practice, which originates from Buddhist traditions, involves generating feelings of love and compassion, first towards oneself and then gradually extending those feelings to others, including loved ones, acquaintances, and even those with whom one might have conflicts. By incorporating *mettā* meditation into daily life, individuals can develop a greater sense of compassion, empathy, and understanding towards themselves and others, fostering a more harmonious and fulfilling existence.

The process of *mettā* meditation typically begins with the practitioner finding a quiet and comfortable space. Once settled, they focus on generating kind and loving thoughts, often starting with phrases such as “May I be

---

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer (1903), *On the Basis of Morality*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Limited, p. 198.



happy”, “May I be healthy”, and “May I be safe”. These personal affirmations help cultivate a sense of self-love and acceptance. As practitioners become more adept, they gradually expand this loving-kindness outward, directing these positive intentions toward friends, neutral individuals, and even those with whom they may struggle to connect. This gradual expansion helps break down barriers of resentment or aversion, allowing for a deeper connection to humanity as a whole.

One of the most significant benefits of *mettā* meditation is its ability to reduce stress and anxiety. Research has shown that regular practice can lower levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, while simultaneously increasing feelings of happiness and emotional resilience. As individuals dedicate time to engage in *mettā* meditation, they not only nurture their own inner well-being but also contribute positively to the broader community. This practice creates an environment where kindness and understanding can flourish, generating ripples of compassion that extend far beyond their immediate circles.

Moreover, *mettā* meditation encourages individuals to cultivate a mindset of gratitude and appreciation for the good in their lives. By focusing on loving-kindness, individuals can shift their perspective, recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings. This shift not only enhances personal well-being but also inspires others to engage in similar practices, creating a collective uplift in the atmosphere of kindness and love. Ultimately, *mettā* meditation is not just an individual endeavor; it serves as a catalyst for societal change, promoting a more compassionate world for all.

#### IV. THE ROLE OF *METTĀ* IN PROMOTING WORLD PEACE

*Mettā*, often translated as loving-kindness, holds immense potential for fostering world peace by addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting forgiveness, and encouraging global cooperation among diverse communities. The practice of *Mettā* involves cultivating feelings of goodwill and compassion toward oneself and others, which can significantly transform both individual and collective mindsets. When individuals embrace loving-kindness, they develop a deeper sense of understanding and empathy for those around them, leading to a marked decrease in hostility and an increase in cooperative behaviors.<sup>16</sup> At its core, *Mettā* encourages individuals to look beyond their immediate circles and consider the broader implications of their actions on the global community. In a world rife with division, where misunderstandings and prejudices can escalate into violence, the cultivation of loving-kindness serves as a powerful antidote. By fostering a mindset that prioritizes compassion over enmity, *Mettā* encourages individuals to engage in dialogues that bridge divides, paving the way for conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, *mettā* is not merely a personal practice but can also be extended to community efforts that promote social justice and healing. Initiatives rooted

---

<sup>16</sup> Antoine Lutz (2008), *Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation*. Trends Cognitive Sciences, p. 163 - 169.

in loving-kindness can inspire groups to come together to address systemic injustices, fostering a culture of empathy and collaboration. When communities prioritize *mettā*, they create environments where individuals feel valued and understood, reducing the likelihood of conflict and promoting a sense of belonging. The ripple effects of practicing *mettā* can extend to larger societal structures as well. Organizations, educational institutions, and governments that integrate the principles of loving-kindness into their policies and practices can cultivate environments of respect and cooperation. This, in turn, can lead to more effective conflict resolution strategies as the focus shifts from punitive measures to restorative practices that foster healing and reconciliation.

Furthermore, the practice of *mettā* can be particularly transformative in the face of global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and social division. By fostering a sense of interconnectedness, *mettā* encourages individuals and groups to collaborate toward common goals, recognizing that the well-being of one is deeply intertwined with the well-being of all. Ultimately, as more individuals embrace the principles of loving-kindness, the potential for a more peaceful and cooperative world grows exponentially.

This transformation can ripple outward, potentially influencing entire communities and even nations. The practice of *mettā*, often translated as loving-kindness or unconditional goodwill, has the power not only to change individual lives but also to generate a broader wave of positive change that extends far beyond personal interactions. As more individuals engage in the practice of *mettā*, a culture of peace and mutual respect can take root within their immediate circles, laying the foundation for improved international relations on a larger scale. When nations prioritize compassion, understanding, and empathy in their interactions, the likelihood of conflicts arising from misunderstandings, prejudices, or historical grievances significantly diminishes.

The cultivation of the spirit of *mettā* encourages individuals to look beyond their perspectives and recognize the shared humanity that connects them with others. It fosters an environment where people are more willing to listen, empathize, and engage in constructive dialogue. Such an atmosphere can pave the way for resolving longstanding disputes and mending broken relationships between communities and nations. As a result, societies that prioritize *Mettā* can create environments where dialogue replaces discord and collaboration takes precedence over confrontation.

In practical terms, the implementation of *mettā* can manifest in various ways. Schools that incorporate teachings of compassion and empathy into their curriculums can nurture generations that are more attuned to the needs and feelings of others. Workplaces that embrace a culture of kindness and support can foster teamwork and creativity, leading to innovative solutions for complex problems. Even local governments that prioritize compassionate policies can enhance community cohesion and resilience, making it easier for residents to come together in times of need. As these individual and communal shifts occur, the potential for broader societal transformation becomes evident. Nations that adopt policies rooted in compassion may find themselves better

equipped to address global challenges, from climate change to humanitarian crises. The ripple effect of *mettā* can thus create a more interconnected, peaceful world where cooperation is valued over conflict, and understanding triumphs over division. Moreover, *Mettā* can be particularly instrumental in fostering reconciliation and healing in post-conflict societies. After periods of violence and discord, individuals often harbor deep-seated animosities and resentments toward former adversaries. These feelings can persist for years, creating a cycle of hatred that is difficult to break. By actively cultivating a mindset of compassion and loving-kindness toward those once viewed as enemies, individuals can begin the process of forgiving past grievances. This journey toward forgiveness is not simply about letting go of anger; it is a profound exploration of the shared humanity that exists even amidst conflict.<sup>17</sup> In many cases, *Mettā* practice encourages individuals to reflect on their own suffering while acknowledging the suffering of others. This dual awareness can help dismantle barriers of division, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding conflict. Instead of viewing the 'other' as a monolithic adversary, individuals are prompted to recognize their shared experiences, dreams, and even pain. Such recognition can foster empathy, which is crucial for healing in societies that have experienced violence.

Furthermore, *mettā* can serve as a bridge for dialogue in divided communities. When individuals approach conversations with a mindset rooted in compassion, they are more likely to engage in constructive discussions rather than confrontational debates. This shift in perspective creates an environment where mutual understanding and respect can flourish, paving the way for collective healing. Additionally, incorporating *mettā* into community practices can have a ripple effect. When leaders and influential figures embody *mettā*, their actions inspire others, creating a culture of compassion that encourages reconciliation on a broader scale. Schools, community organizations, and local governments can integrate *Mettā* practices into their conflict resolution frameworks, promoting a holistic approach to healing that prioritizes emotional and psychological well-being alongside social justice.

In essence, *mettā* is not just a personal practice; it has the potential to transform entire communities by fostering an atmosphere of forgiveness, understanding, and, ultimately, peace. While the journey toward reconciliation may be long and challenging, through the lens of *Mettā*, it becomes a shared endeavor marked by hope and possibility.

As forgiveness takes root within individuals and communities, it becomes a powerful catalyst for fostering a broader sense of social cohesion and stability. When former adversaries or individuals with a history of conflict begin to see each other as fellow human beings deserving of compassion and understanding, the foundation is laid for the healing of deep-seated wounds that might otherwise fester, creating a breeding ground for future disputes.

---

<sup>17</sup> Judith Lewis Herman (1992), *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 01 - 17.

This shift in perspective is crucial as it allows individuals to recognize the shared humanity that binds them together, paving the way for dialogue and mutual respect.

Moreover, as communities engage in the healing process, they become more resilient. Resilience, in this context, refers not only to the ability to withstand challenges and recover from adversity but also to the capacity to thrive in the face of difficulties. When individuals forgive and actively work towards reconciliation, they contribute to a collective strength that reduces the likelihood of future violence. This proactive approach to conflict resolution fosters a sustainable peace that is essential for the long-term stability of any society. In addition to the psychological and emotional benefits of forgiveness, there are tangible social implications as well. Communities that prioritize forgiveness and understanding often experience increased collaboration, whether in local governance, community projects, or social initiatives.<sup>18</sup> These efforts can lead to improved relationships among diverse groups, fostering a culture of inclusivity and shared purpose. Ultimately, by embedding the practice of *mettā* - loving-kindness – into our daily lives and societal structures, we can nurture a more compassionate world where peace prevails over conflict and understanding triumphs over division.

This commitment to fostering empathy and compassion can extend beyond individual actions; it can influence policies and practices within institutions, promoting environments where forgiveness is both valued and encouraged. Educational programs that teach the principles of compassion and conflict resolution can shape the next generation, instilling values that prioritize understanding and cooperation over division. In this way, the ripple effect of forgiveness can spread far beyond personal relationships, creating a lasting legacy of peace that future generations can build upon.

## V. IMPLICATIONS OF *METTĀ* FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION

*Mettā*, often translated as loving-kindness, carries profound implications for global cooperation, especially in the realms of conflict resolution and sustainable development. At its core, *mettā* embodies a deep sense of compassion and goodwill toward oneself and others, creating an environment where mutual respect and understanding can thrive. By cultivating this quality, individuals can develop a deeper sense of empathy and understanding for others, enabling them to appreciate the complexities of differing perspectives, cultures, and backgrounds. This emotional and psychological growth is not just a personal journey; it has far-reaching implications for societal interactions. Research suggests that such emotional development plays a crucial role in improving communication and collaboration, ultimately reducing conflicts on both interpersonal and international levels. When individuals practice *mettā*, they are more likely to approach conflicts with an open heart and mind, seeking

---

<sup>18</sup> .. H. H. Dalai Lama (2001), *An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p. 52 - 61.

to understand rather than judge. This shift in perspective is vital in today's interconnected world, where challenges such as climate change and geopolitical tensions require cooperative solutions that transcend individual interests<sup>19</sup>. In the realm of international relations, where misunderstandings often escalate into conflicts, the practice of *mettā* provides a path to constructive dialogue and peaceful resolutions. By nurturing a spirit of loving-kindness, nations can build trust and mutual respect – key elements for successful diplomacy. Initiatives like peacebuilding workshops and intercultural dialogues, which incorporate *mettā*, can help bridge divides and foster a deeper appreciation for our shared humanity.

Moreover, sustainable development efforts can greatly benefit from the principles of *mettā*. When stakeholders approach environmental and social challenges with a mindset of compassion, they are more likely to prioritize the well-being of all communities involved, ensuring that development is both equitable and inclusive. In essence, cultivating *mettā* not only enriches individual lives but also provides a transformative approach to addressing global challenges, paving the way for a more peaceful and harmonious world. As we continue to navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the practice of loving-kindness remains a vital tool for fostering enduring cooperation and understanding among diverse populations. Furthermore, *mettā* can be a powerful force in advancing sustainable development and environmental protection initiatives. By nurturing compassion and loving-kindness towards all living beings, individuals develop a deeper sense of interconnectedness with the natural world. This awareness fosters a greater sense of responsibility and stewardship for the environment. When individuals feel a profound kinship with nature, they are more likely to engage in collaborative efforts to tackle urgent environmental issues such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Such collective action is crucial for achieving sustainable development goals and ensuring a livable planet for future generations.<sup>20</sup>

The practice of *mettā* encourages individuals to view the environment not merely as a resource to be exploited but as a community of living beings with intrinsic value. This shift in perspective can lead to more ethical decision-making in areas such as consumption and resource management. For example, people who practice *mettā* may be more inclined to support sustainable products, advocate for conservation efforts, and participate in community initiatives aimed at protecting natural habitats. As compassion permeates a society, it can catalyze a cultural transformation that prioritizes ecological balance and respect for all forms of life.

Furthermore, *mettā* can enhance the effectiveness of environmental education by fostering empathy toward nature. Educational programs that

---

<sup>19</sup> Sharon Salzberg (2020), *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Boulder: Shambhala Publications, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Stephanie Kaza (2005), *Mindfulness and compassion in environmental education*. Journal of Environmental Education, pp. 05 – 15.



incorporate the principles of loving-kindness can help individuals - especially children - develop a strong emotional connection to their surroundings. This emotional bond can motivate them to take action, whether through volunteering for local clean-up efforts, participating in reforestation projects, or simply adopting more sustainable lifestyle choices. Additionally, *mettā* can serve as a unifying force among diverse groups working toward environmental sustainability. By nurturing a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect, individuals from various backgrounds and beliefs can come together to address shared challenges. This cooperative spirit can lead to innovative solutions and a more holistic approach to environmental stewardship. In this way, *mettā* not only enriches individual lives but also contributes to the collective well-being of our planet, making it an essential component of the movement toward a sustainable and harmonious future.

In addition to environmental stewardship, *mettā* plays a crucial role in promoting social justice and human rights. By nurturing compassion toward all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances, people can cultivate a deeper sense of empathy for those who are marginalized or oppressed in society. This empathetic connection can inspire individuals to become more actively involved in advocacy and activism, thereby fostering a culture of social justice that seeks to uplift the voices of the disenfranchised.<sup>21</sup>

*Mettā*, often translated as loving-kindness, is a profound and expansive concept that encourages individuals to extend goodwill and compassion not only to friends and family but also to strangers and even those with whom they may disagree. This broader application of compassion is essential in addressing the complexities of social justice, as it fosters a sense of connection and empathy that transcends personal biases and societal divisions. When individuals actively practice *mettā*, they cultivate an awareness of the interconnectedness of all human beings, recognizing that everyone, regardless of background or beliefs, shares a common humanity. This recognition is not merely a feel-good sentiment; it is a powerful catalyst for social change. For example, when individuals embody the principles of *mettā*, they are more likely to engage in dialogues that challenge their preconceived notions and biases. They begin to see the world through a lens of inclusivity, which can lead to a deeper understanding of the experiences and struggles faced by marginalized communities. This shift in mindset can be transformative, prompting individuals to critically examine and challenge systemic inequalities and injustices that persist in society. By fostering an environment in which loving-kindness is practiced, individuals can work collaboratively toward solutions that promote equity and justice for all. Moreover, the practice of *Mettā* encourages individuals to extend their compassion even to those who may hold opposing views or engage in harmful behaviors. This does not mean condoning such actions but rather recognizing the underlying human experiences that contribute to conflict and division. By

---

<sup>21</sup> Christopher S. Queen (2000), *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, p. 222-275.



approaching others with a spirit of loving-kindness, individuals can create spaces for dialogue and understanding, which are crucial for healing and reconciliation.

In a world often marked by division and polarization, the cultivation of *mettā* is more important than ever. It serves as a reminder that our shared humanity can guide us toward compassion and justice, inspiring us to take action in support of those who are suffering. By embracing the practice of *mettā*, we not only transform our hearts but also contribute to a more just and compassionate society where every individual is recognized and valued.

Moreover, *mettā* can serve as a foundation for collaborative efforts to promote social justice. By fostering an environment where compassion is paramount, communities can come together to support one another, creating networks of solidarity that empower marginalized groups. When individuals operate from a place of *mettā*, they are more inclined to listen to the experiences of others, acknowledge their struggles, and advocate for meaningful change. This collective approach not only enhances understanding but also amplifies the impact of social justice initiatives. Additionally, the practice of *mettā* can have far-reaching effects on mental health and well-being. Individuals who cultivate a compassionate mindset are often better equipped to handle the emotional toll that comes with engaging in social justice work. This resilience is essential as advocacy can sometimes lead to feelings of frustration or burnout. By grounding themselves in *mettā*, activists and advocates can sustain their commitment to social justice while maintaining their emotional health. Ultimately, the integration of *mettā* into the pursuit of social justice not only enriches the individuals who practice it but also contributes to the creation of a more just and equitable society. By promoting compassion, understanding, and interconnectedness, *mettā* lays the groundwork for meaningful social change that uplifts and empowers all members of the community.<sup>22</sup> Overall, the implications of *mettā* for global cooperation are profound and far-reaching. By continuously fostering loving-kindness and compassion towards others, individuals can enhance their capacity for understanding and empathy, leading to increased cooperation and diminished conflict. This shift not only holds the potential for improved international relations but also paves the way for a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable world.

In a global landscape often fraught with division, strife, and misunderstanding, the principles embodied in *mettā* offer a transformative approach that can inspire collective efforts for a better future. At the heart of *mettā* lies the idea of unconditional love and goodwill, which can extend beyond personal relationships to encompass entire communities and nations. When individuals practice *mettā*, they cultivate a mindset that prioritizes the well-being of others, which can mitigate hostile attitudes and promote collaborative solutions to pressing global issues.

---

<sup>22</sup> Paul Grossman & Nicholas T. Van Dam (2011). *Mindfulness, by any other name... : Trials and Tribulations of sati in Western Psychology and Science, Contemporary Buddhism*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 01 - 02.

Moreover, the practice of *mettā* can serve as a powerful antidote to the pervasive negativity that often characterizes political discourse and international relations. By encouraging people to look beyond their immediate self-interests and consider the broader implications of their actions, *mettā* fosters a spirit of cooperation that can bridge cultural and ideological divides. This is especially crucial in today's interconnected world, where challenges such as climate change, poverty, and social injustice require collective action and mutual understanding.

Furthermore, *mettā* can play a vital role in conflict resolution. By promoting empathy and compassion, it encourages parties involved in disputes to approach negotiations with a mindset focused on finding common ground, rather than simply pursuing their agendas. This shift in perspective can lead to more constructive dialogues and sustainable agreements that benefit all stakeholders. Ultimately, integrating *mettā* into global cooperation efforts can foster a transition from a mindset of competition to one of collaboration. As individuals and nations embrace the values of loving-kindness and compassion, they can pave the way for a future where mutual respect and understanding are prioritized, creating a more harmonious and interconnected global community. In this way, *mettā* is not just a personal practice but a foundational principle that can inspire significant change on a global scale.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated the remarkable potential of *mettā*, or loving-kindness, as a transformative practice that can significantly contribute to the promotion of world peace. Originating from ancient Buddhist traditions, *mettā* is more than just a fleeting emotion; it is a deliberate and sustained effort to cultivate compassion, goodwill, and love toward oneself and others. By actively engaging in this practice, individuals are empowered to transcend their immediate concerns and biases, fostering a deeper understanding of the shared humanity that connects us all.

As individuals cultivate *mettā* in their daily lives, they not only enhance their emotional well-being but also foster an environment that nurtures empathy and connection. This shift in perspective can lead to increased cooperation among people, communities, and nations, ultimately paving the way for constructive dialogue and collaboration. By embracing *mettā*, individuals contribute to a significant reduction in conflicts, as the practice encourages the recognition of shared interests and emphasizes the importance of peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, the implications of *mettā* for promoting global harmony are both profound and far-reaching. The practice of loving-kindness extends beyond personal relationships and has the potential to influence social structures, political dialogues, and even international relations. When integrated into educational programs, community initiatives, and conflict resolution strategies, *mettā* can serve as a powerful tool for building bridges and fostering understanding among diverse groups.

Given the current global climate, characterized by increasing polarization

and conflict, the need for transformative practices like *mettā* has never been more urgent. Further research is essential to fully uncover its vast potential and explore how it can be effectively applied in various contexts. By investing in the study and implementation of loving-kindness, we can lay the groundwork for a more compassionate world, where individuals are motivated by love rather than fear, and where the pursuit of peace becomes a collective endeavor. Ultimately, the cultivation of *mettā* could be a key component in the quest for lasting global harmony, making it a vital area for continued exploration and practice.

As we navigate an increasingly complex world marked by numerous challenges - including armed conflict, social inequality, and environmental degradation - the practice of *mettā*, or loving-kindness, emerges as a powerful and effective tool for fostering peace, justice, and sustainability. *mettā* encourages individuals to extend compassion and goodwill not only to themselves but also to others, including those who may be perceived as different or adversarial. By nurturing loving-kindness toward all beings, individuals can cultivate a deeper sense of global citizenship, which is crucial for fostering collaboration among diverse communities. This approach promotes empathy and understanding - essential qualities for addressing the multifaceted issues we face today.

Incorporating *Mettā* into our daily lives can transform how we interact with others and perceive the world around us. When individuals practice loving-kindness, they begin to recognize the interconnectedness of all life, understanding that the suffering of one is the suffering of many. This awareness can inspire people to take action against social injustices and environmental destruction, fostering a spirit of solidarity that transcends borders. Cultivating such a mindset can also lead to more peaceful conflict resolutions, as individuals are less likely to engage in hostility when they approach others with compassion rather than animosity.

Moreover, *mettā* can serve as a foundation for community-building initiatives, where individuals come together to support one another during times of hardship. These initiatives can create networks of resilience, enabling communities to address challenges collectively and effectively. By focusing on shared values and common goals, communities can strengthen their capacity for collaboration, leading to innovations in social justice and environmental sustainability.

This sense of shared humanity can foster increased cooperation and a significant reduction in both interpersonal and international conflicts. As we embrace *Mettā*, we nurture a culture of peace that not only addresses immediate challenges but also lays the foundation for a more equitable and sustainable future. Ultimately, by embodying the principles of loving-kindness, we can contribute to a global movement aimed at healing divisions, promoting justice, and protecting our planet for future generations.

Ultimately, the practice of *mettā*, often translated as loving-kindness or goodwill, holds profound transformative power that can significantly impact individuals, communities, and societies as a whole. By cultivating an attitude of unconditional love and compassion, *Mettā* encourages us to transcend personal

desires and biases, fostering a more equitable and harmonious existence for all. This practice is not merely an individual endeavor; it ripples outward, influencing the fabric of our collective social interactions and relationships.

The teachings of Buddhism poignantly remind us: “May all beings be happy, may all beings be healthy, may all beings be at peace.” These simple yet profound sentiments encapsulate the essence of what *mettā* can achieve in the pursuit of global peace. When we engage in *Mettā* meditation, we not only nurture our emotional well-being but also contribute to the cultivation of a more compassionate world. This powerful intention can lead to a significant reduction in hostility, fear, and misunderstanding among diverse groups of people.

Furthermore, the practice of *mettā* encourages empathy and understanding, helping individuals appreciate different perspectives and experiences. In a world often marked by division and conflict, embracing *mettā* can serve as a unifying force, promoting dialogue and cooperation among individuals and communities. It urges us to look beyond the boundaries of nationality, religion, and ideology, fostering a sense of interconnectedness that is crucial for addressing the global challenges we face today.

Moreover, when *mettā* is practiced collectively, it has the potential to inspire social change on a larger scale. Communities that embody the principles of loving-kindness are more likely to engage in acts of service, support one another, and work toward justice and equality. By creating spaces where love and compassion flourish, we can build societies that prioritize well-being and peace. In this way, *mettā* becomes not just a personal practice but a powerful catalyst for societal transformation, paving the way for a brighter, more compassionate future for all beings.

The findings of this paper hold significant implications for policymakers, educators, and community leaders. By integrating *mettā* into educational curricula and community development initiatives, we can foster a deeper sense of compassion, empathy, and understanding among individuals. This, in turn, could lead to increased cooperation and a noticeable reduction in societal conflicts.

Moreover, the practice of *mettā* is versatile and can be adapted across various cultural and religious contexts. This adaptability fosters greater understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among diverse groups. By nurturing loving-kindness and compassion toward others, individuals can develop a deeper respect and appreciation for diverse cultures and traditions, which is essential for promoting global understanding.

In addition, the practice of *mettā* can be effectively integrated with other mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga, to enhance physical, emotional, and mental well-being. By cultivating loving-kindness, individuals can experience a greater sense of inner peace, calm, and clarity, all of which contribute to overall well-being.

Overall, this paper offers a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the Buddhist concept of *mettā* and its potential to promote world peace.

The findings deepen our understanding of how loving-kindness fosters inner peace, compassion, and understanding while also emphasizing the practical implications of *mettā* for advancing global harmony.

Future research could explore the application of *mettā* across various cultural and religious contexts, examine its effects on physical and mental health outcomes, and investigate its role in promoting sustainable development and environmental protection. Expanding our knowledge in these areas will help illuminate the pathways through which *Mettā* can effectively contribute to a peaceful and sustainable future.

In summary, the practice of *mettā* provides a powerful tool for promoting world peace, with profound implications for global cooperation and sustainable development. By nurturing loving-kindness and compassion toward others, individuals can enhance their understanding and empathy, fostering increased collaboration and reducing conflict. As we continue to confront the myriad challenges of our world, the practice of *mettā* stands as a beacon of hope, illuminating the path toward peace, justice, and sustainability for all.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2008). *Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.
- Gombrich, R. (2018). *What the Buddha Thought*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Grossman, P. & N. T. Van Dam (2011). *Mindfulness, by any other name... : Trials and Tribulations of Sati in Western Psychology and Science*, Contemporary Buddhism, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- H. H. The Dalai Lama (1999). *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*, London: Hodder Paperbacks.
- H. H. The Dalai Lama (2001). *An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Hakeda, Y. S. (1967). *The Awakening of Faith*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hanh, T. N. (1999). *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, New York: Basic Books.
- Hofmann, S. G. (2011). *The effect of mindfulness-based therapy on anxiety and depression: A meta-analytic review*, Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life*, London: Piatkus.
- Kaza, S. (2005). *Mindfulness and compassion in environmental education*, Journal

of Environmental Education.

Lutz, A. (2008). *Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation*, Trends in Cognitive Science.

Queen, C. S. (2000). *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, Somerville: Wisdom Publications.

Rahula, W. (2017). *What the Buddha Taught*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Ricard, M. (2015). *Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the World*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Salzberg, S. (2020). *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*, Boulder: Shambhala Publications.

Schopenhauer, A. (1903). *Based on Morality*, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Limited.



# INNER PEACE FOR THE WORLD PEACE

Ven. Congo Pannabodhi\*

## Abstract:

This paper reads on inner peace for the world peace, in fact this topic draws my attention since I feel that the today's world needs only one thing, 'peace'. Can the Buddhist way of meditation be conducive to peace? All living beings like to be calm physically and mentally, but they lack proper guidance and methods. By following in a gentle way the meditation techniques as taught by the Buddha, it is possible to attain that state of inner peace.

No matter how both smart and civilized the modern individual is, he still confronted to unresolved problems such as economic problem, political turmoil, climate change, epidemic disease, calamity and natural disaster, emotional problems, etc. seeing all these enumerated dilemma has pushed me to select the topic under discussion to provide in a clear manner and simple words a sure way to inner tranquility.

Therefore, I propose the technique of samatha vipassanā as the surest way to make an end to all the concerns of the person seeking happiness. For this purpose, a faithful acceptance of the precepts is of great significance to this journey. With the precepts as a foundation, the mind will be temporarily appeased; this will enable one to select one meditation subject under a qualified teacher to tread the path that leads to the final bliss of Nibbāna. With this attainment, yes, peace is gained for oneself as well as for the entire world.

**Keywords:** *inner peace, world peace, meditation, precepts, mindfulness, compassion, samatha, vipassana.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to depict the right way to the realization of inner peace for world peace. There is peace in the world when the mind is not polluted by ignorance, hatred, and lust. The reader should understand that today's world is facing serious havoc wrought by the uncontrolled mind. Although the entire world needs peace and cries for it, crises and wars are rising here and there.

---

\* Abbot of the temple, Sangha du bouddhisme au Congo Nirvana temple. Representative of Congo to world Buddhist summit.

In some parts of the world, people are victims of natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, volcanoes, bushfires, epidemic disease, and other problems related to climate. Hopeless and helpless, the victims have only their eyes to shed tears and minds to lament. What agony? Where to find peace? How? And at what price? They think as such only when they are tormented by events, and once the situation comes to normal they forget their agony and short coming.

Another problem of the modern man is his desire for change and quick results. The absence of calm in him is a great deficiency. Calm begets mental strength. The absence of calm begets impatience, and the impatient man is never satisfied. He always wants something new and startling. He craves variety. He craves for sensations, he is fed on sensations. He continually craves for something fresh, for new methods, new machinery, new drugs, a new way of life, a new ideology. There is no end to this. This modern attitude is symptomatic of a disease – the disease of mental unrest.<sup>1</sup>

To soothe his mind, the modern man is maneuvering to appease his needs, but he lacks the proper methods and techniques to quench the thirst of his desiring mind. Even though he has tremendously succeeded in technology, inventions, and science, his mind is still under the sway of ignorance, hatred, and greed. The solution to one need is a cause to another serious problem that he will be confronted to manage, and thus, the entire life on earth is spent on solving our needs, and he dies as if he never existed.

In a world where life is confronted with such a dilemma, we should learn to prepare our journey inwardly to win peace. Such a journey can be possible and successful only if we know the way leading to that state of peace. This being the case, a suggestion on the means to possess so as to tread the path is the concern of this work.

The following chapters are based on the five precepts and meditation as the sole means to cultivate and promote inner peace for a better world. Buddhism, being a practical teaching that surely brings happiness, offers to its followers the eightfold path (right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration) as an antidote against evil in the world born from the ill states of mind. This eightfold path can be summed up into three sets of trainings, which are: virtue, concentration, and wisdom. These trainings are means for the achievement of inner peace.

## II. CHAPTER ONE: MORALITY AS A WAY TO INNER PEACE

This chapter is dedicated to the study of morality. It will portray the different kinds of morality with emphasis on that of the laity since they play a very important role in society. Thus, we are going to deal with the five precepts as a means to develop virtue and abandon immoral actions of body, speech, and mind.

The Pali word ‘sīla’, rendered as ‘morality’ or ‘virtue’, is a mode of mind

---

<sup>1</sup> Piyadassi, 1991, *Spectrum of Buddhism*, Taipei, Taiwan R. O. C. p. 223.

and volition manifested in speech or bodily action. It is the foundation of the whole Buddhist practice and the first of the threefold training (virtue, concentration, and wisdom) of the eightfold path. Buddhist morality is not, as it may appear from the negative formulations in the suttas, something negative. And it does not consist in the mere non-committal of the evil actions, but is in each instance the conscious and intentional restraint from the bad actions in question and corresponds to the simultaneously arising volition.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the restraint about virtue, the noble disciple will be at peace, which is a state of tranquility, quiet, and harmony. However, there are different classifications of morality, that for fully admitted monks, for novice monks and that of the laity. On special occasions, the laity may observe eight or ten precepts.

### **2.1. Panca Sila (five precepts)**

A precept is a rule or principle that shows how to behave or to conduct oneself uprightly in society. According to S. Phongsawasdi, the word precept means nature. He goes on to say that everything has its nature. The rain will fall during the rainy season. If it does not, then it is not natural. The horse always stays on its feet, even while sleeping. If it lies down, then it is sick and not in its natural state. Therefore, the real meaning of the word precept is preserving the nature of the human being in oneself and refraining from bringing trouble to oneself and others<sup>3</sup>.

Without question and beyond doubt, the above quotation shows that precepts are genuinely innate to the nature of human beings. From the dharma point of view, peace can be promoted by following the five precepts. Buddhists or non-Buddhists, one should observe the minimum of five precepts (abstaining from killing any living being, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from lying, and from indulging in drunkenness). These precepts bring peace and harmony everywhere. Thus, people do not fear, doubt, or betray those who are observers of these precepts since they are not killers, robbers, harlots, liars, and drunkards but goodhearted people who delight in peace, concord, harmony, unity, and brotherhood. The following points portray what should not be done and the benefits of observing each precept with mindfulness.

#### **2.1.1. Abstaining from Killing**

The *Dhamma* is a teaching of nonviolence. It helps to counteract violence in all its aspects. Embracing the teaching of the Buddha requires developing a mind that has as its concern the welfare of all beings without any thought of causing them even the least of suffering. An interesting verse from the Dhammapada reads: 'All tremble at violence. All fear death. Comparing oneself with others, do not kill<sup>4</sup>.' Another passage from the Sammyutta Nikāya

---

<sup>2</sup> Nyanatiloka, 2011, Buddhist Dictionary : A Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines, Kandy, Sri Lanka, p. 200

<sup>3</sup> S. Phongsawasdi, 2007, Warm Hearted Family, Patumthani, Thailand, p. 273

<sup>4</sup> Weragoda Sarada, 1993, Treasury of Truth : the Illustrated Dhammapada, Taipei, Taiwan p. 277

wonderfully explains the above rule, which is conducive to peace and harmony among people:

‘I like to live. I do not like to die. I desire happiness and dislike unhappiness. Suppose someone should kill me; since I like to live and do not like to die, it would not be pleasing and delightful to me. Suppose I too should kill another who likes to live and does not like to die, who desires happiness and does not desire unhappiness, it would not be pleasing and delightful to that other person as well. What is not pleasant and delightful to me is not pleasant and delightful to the other either. How could I inflict upon another that which is not pleasant to me? Having reflected in this manner, he (the noble disciple), on his own refrains from killing and encourages others to refrain from killing. In this manner, his bodily conduct becomes pure in three ways.’<sup>5</sup>

To all beings, life is dear; therefore, no one should deprive another of life. As a matter of fact, the observer of this golden rule is imbued with loving kindness towards all beings without exception. He cannot kill or cause others to do so, even to the extent of saving his own life. He is ready to save, cherish, and offer protection to the weak ones and those in danger. S.Phonggsawasdi also remarks that ‘by nature, humans will not kill. A human who takes life has deviated from the nature of humankind. He has turned animalistic, like tigers, bears, or crocodiles, which have to kill to survive. Therefore, the first precept reminds human beings not to kill to keep our nature’<sup>6</sup>.

### 2.1.2. Theft

Taking what is not given through different ways like stealing, looting, robbing, taking by force or through violence another property, cheating, and corrupting are different ways of theft condemnable and not acceptable in all human societies. Stealing is a cause of one’s loss, poverty, and regret. Because of such activities, the wrongdoer can be sentenced to die by the king, or otherwise severe punishment may befall him. Instead of practicing such backward actions, let’s all the people practice generosity and charity for a happy mind and society.

People are prompted to theft because of multiple reasons. For some, when the leaders of government are not concerned with the social living of their countrymen, these people who from the start were good may turn into robbers because of their unpurified latent tendency to robbery. They plan and wish to be rich by unlawful ways as stated in the lines above since they are lazy and unable to earn a living from proper ways. Instead of getting involved in such a blameworthy activity, patience and energy should be aroused to build up a praiseworthy activity for living with plain contentedness. They should be energetic at organizing themselves dutiful on administering as well as on attending their households and parent with a share from their earnings.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* quoted in G. P. Malalaseker, 1990, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* vol V, Sri Lanka, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> S. Phonggsawasdi, 2007, *Warm Hearted Family*, Patumthani, Thailand, p. 274.

### 2.1.3. Sexual misconduct

The today's society is overpowered by beauty and fashion, hard it is for people to be chaste and respectful toward another one's partner, daughter, son, etc. but a good fellow man who abstains from unlawful sexual relation consider all beings of opposite sex as his parent and thus he lives in purity and continent. Human society is organized with regulations regarding marriage and partnership, whereas, in the animal kingdom, such organization and regulation do not exist. When it is a period to mate, most male animals are to fight to win over the female. Sometimes, they tore each other with their sharp teeth to the point of killing their opponent just for the satisfaction of their mating instinct. Unlike the animals, a man has that faculty to judge and understand the situation with wisdom to abstain from all illegal sexual activities. He can conclude to be faithful and content with one spouse. This guideline line once sincerely practiced and cultivated within a society the latter a better place to live.

### 2.1.4. False speech

Truth is a quality, a state of being based on fact. It is that speech which is generated from inward purity and does not tend to deceive or to proclaim falsity based on rumors and untrue as well as unheard stories. Right speech, the third of the eightfold path, involves respect for the truth and for the welfare of others. To observe right speech, the practitioner is called to be attentive on its four aspects: deliberate lie, slandering, harsh speech, and idle talk. The Buddha has emphasized right speech; his instruction to Rahula on account of right speech is of much value:

Then the Blessed One left a little water in the water vessel and asked the venerable Rahula: "Rahula, do you see this little water left in the water vessel?"—"Yes, venerable sir." — "Even so little, Rahula, is the recluship of those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie."<sup>7</sup>

### 2.1.5. Intoxicants

Any substance capable of putting a person in a state of confusion is to be abstained from. Drinks, drugs, some ill books, music, movies, and shows are destructive to both mind and body. An intoxicated person is capable of appalling acts, even attacking, harming, or killing his friends, siblings, and parents. Drug seriously affects the addicted person. Its effects can push one to break easily without hesitation the remaining precepts and behave in a devious way closer to that of animals. Right mindfulness is the thoughts based on non-distraction, non-hate, nonviolence, patience, and renunciation; these good qualities of mind cannot be developed when someone is under the sway of intoxicants. Consumers of intoxicants are always angry, rude, cruel, and infatuated. Seeing the danger and disadvantages of intoxication, the disciple of the Buddha avoids to soil his mind.

These five precepts should be taken with determination so that none

---

<sup>7</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995, Ambalatthikarahulovadasutta in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of Majjhima Nikāya*, Massachussets, USA, p. 523.

of them is broken, energy should be aroused with confidence to keep these moral precepts pure. It is said in the Path of Purification that, “As a hen guards her eggs, or as a yak her tail, or like a darling child, or like an only eye – So you who are engaged, your virtue to protect, be prudent at all times and ever scrupulous.”<sup>8</sup>

For more emphasis in Sallekha Sutta<sup>9</sup>, the Buddha exhorts Cunda on effacement that even though others will be neglectful with regards to the precepts, we should not behave as such. This is how one should be untiringly protecting his morality with such a determination. The nonobservance of the precepts turns men into animals, good and peaceful society into a murderous, fraudulent, and immoral one. No hope for peace nor happiness for an immoral person; he lives lamenting, beating his breast here and hereafter.

This chapter was an analysis of the five laity precepts rendered in brief. These moral precepts are beneficial to both the observer and his society. The following chapter is devoted to inner peace through right concentration.

### III. CHAPTER TWO: INNER PEACE THROUGH RIGHT CONCENTRATION

In the first chapter, we talked about morality as a condition for inner peace. An analysis of five precepts of the laity has been given. The present chapter is chiefly based on concentration as a way to peace. This concentration is developed through meditation on the basis of morality. Therefore, some of the meditation subjects and benefits will also be discussed all along this chapter.

For millennia, people from different religious backgrounds have used meditation as a means for gaining a better understanding of their faith, deity, and themselves. However, the meditation taught in these religions is of different kinds, such as silent prayer, reading individually or collectively from the sacred scriptures, concentrating on some holy object, and silent thinking on a topic, etc. Unlike these forms of meditation, the Lord Buddha system is twofold, serenity and insight. This system of meditation helps to uproot the unwholesome tendencies and foster the mind on wholesome objects thanks to the practice of mindfulness (*sati*).

Meditation or mental culture is the right way to happiness, serenity, and peace. Just as an abandoned house may be the abode of a gang of robbers, evil spirits, insects, etc., so is an uncontrolled mind soiled by ignorance, hatred, and lust. Still another analogy compares our mind with a field; after ploughing and sowing seeds in the field, if there is no care and attention paid to it, the entire field will grow unwanted plants of different kinds, and there will be no hope for harvesting after all. But in the same case, if proper care and intention are paid by weeding the field, nurturing the plants with fertilizers, manure, and regular watering, a fruitful harvest is to be gained. The same

<sup>8</sup> Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, 2010, Path of Purification (*Visuddhi Magga*), Kandy, Sri Lanka p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995, *Sallekha sutta* in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, A Translation of *Majjhima Nikāya*, Massachussetts, USA, p. 123.



applies to our minds; if neglected, nothing of transcendental is to develop. But if due care, attention, and patience are paid by nurturing the mind with mindfulness on wholesome objects, peace, quietude, serenity, and happiness will be experienced here and now.

### 3.1. Samatha Bhāvanā

The Pali word ‘*bhāvanā*’ is what in English is generally but rather vaguely called ‘meditation’<sup>10</sup> it is better to be called ‘mental culture or development’ that as a process produces good effects if practiced again and again without stop. Whereas ‘*samatha*’ means ‘tranquility’ or ‘serenity’. It is the concentrated, unshaken, undefiled, and peaceful state of mind. It is called ‘calm’ because it calms down the five hindrances (sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and scruples, and skeptical doubt).

Serenity is won through the practice of the forty Samatha subjects, which are listed in the chart below:

No.	Subjects	Total	Absorptions
1	Kasinas, Ānāpānasati	11	4 Jhānas
2	Anussati	10	Neighborhood concentration
3	Asubhas, The 32 parts	11	1 Jhānas,
4	Metta, Karunā, Mudita	3	3 Jhānas
5	Upekkhā	1	Only the fourth jhānas
6	Ārupas	4	4 Jhānas

This chart comprises all the samatha subjects together with the concentration that each of them is to attain, that is, neighborhood concentration, fine material jhānas concentration, and the immaterial jhānas concentration. However, the meditator is not obliged to take up all these meditation subjects. He or she has to find a good teacher who will assign to him/her a subject related to his temperament. Meditation has multiple benefits, we should earnestly practice until we totally emancipate our mind from the many trials of life. By meditating, we purify the mind, and we become good, happy, and wise. Man as an individual creates society, society creates the world in its different aspects. Therefore, as an individual, if hard work is done to purify and eradicate the self-centered emotions of lust, hate, and delusion, the unbelievable evil problems will cease, and the world will be at peace.

The above forty samatha subjects are taught to purify the mind. As our concern is on inner peace, we suggest discussing the four divine abodes (four Brahma vihāras) from the forty samatha subjects as a sure practice to enhance

<sup>10</sup> Nyanatiloka, 2011, *Buddhist Dictionary: A Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, Kandy, Sri Lanka, p. 35.

concentration culminating in tranquility and serenity.

### 3.2. The four *brahma vihāras* (sublime state)

The four brahma vihāras are also known as ‘four boundless states’ because those who practice these exercises are radiating either lovingkindness, compassion, or sympathetic joy to all beings without limit to all beings without exception.

#### 3.2.1. *Mettā* (lovingkindness, benevolence, goodwill, friendliness, nonviolence)

*Mettā* is defined as a strong wish for the welfare and happiness of others. It softens one’s own heart. Like a solvent, it melts not only one’s mental pollutants of anger, resentment, and offensiveness but also those of others, thanks to its broad approach of friendship. It can even transform the hostile one into a good friend. *Mettā* should neither be confused with carnal love nor with sentimental affection. It is not an emotional state of mind but rather a beautiful mind filled with concern for the welfare of all beings. Practicing *mettā* will help to identify oneself with all beings, there will be no more differentiation between you and others. A good antidote against ill will, which is one of the causes of insecurity and wars in the world. Let us extend to all those who are in need of it without any condition. Lovingkindness is the only language that our heart can decipher to understand the meaning, it goes from one heart to the other one’s heart. Radiating the thoughts of *mettā* is the only means to silence the sounds of arms and influence even the hardest hearts of the unfriendly to be friendly. Surely, *mettā* is the hope for human happiness and peace and drives the world from darkness to brightness. The following verses are from the *Karaṇīya mettā sutta*,<sup>11</sup> here quoted for reflecting on how to develop *mettā*:

Just as a mother would protect her only child,  
At the risk of her own life,  
Even so, let him cultivate a boundless  
heart towards all beings.  
Let thoughts of boundless love pervade  
The whole world: above, below, and across  
Without any obstructions, without any hatred,  
without any enmity.  
Whether he stands, walks, sits, or lies down,  
As long as he is awake,  
He should develop this mindfulness.  
This, they say, is the highest conduct here.

To meditate on *mettā*, you should extend your loving-kindness towards all beings, sincerely wishing them to be happy and free from danger, free from both physical and mental suffering.

<sup>11</sup> Kotawila PemalokaThe, 2018, The Great book of protection, colombo, sri Lanka, p. 29.

### 3.2.2. *Karunā*

*Mettā*, as the first *brahma vihāra*, has its concerned with the wellbeing of others, but *Karunā* is when *mettā* meets the shortcomings and suffering of others. *Karunā* is another dimension of *mettā*. It makes the hearts of the noble quiver when they hear or see those who are subject to suffering and try with an ardent wish to alleviate it. As a result, it helps to discard cruelty.

### 3.2.3. *Muditā* (sympathetic joy or appreciative joy)

To be glad at others' success is called appreciative joy, the third sublime state. This state of mind arises after meditating on *mettā* and *Karunā*. This congratulatory attitude has the characteristic of being happy and full of joy in others' property, success, progress happiness, and it removes aversion. It has jealousy as the direct enemy and exhilaration as the indirect one.

### 3.2.4. *Upekkhā* (equanimity)

*Upekkhā* is the last of the *brahma vihāras*; it is an even-mindedness, mental equipoise. It can also mean to view impartially, that is to say, without aversion or attachment. Equanimity is not hedonic indifference nor a neutral feeling but a well-balanced mind. It keeps the mind aloof from the eight vicissitudes of life (gain and loss, fame and shame, blame and praise, happiness and misery). Its direct enemy is passion, it eliminates clinging and aversion. To meditate on *upekkhā*, you should embrace the good and the bad, the loved and the unloved, the sorrow-stricken or the prosperous with equanimity while contemplating 'all beings are as they are conditioned by their karma'<sup>12</sup>.

The devoted disciple who tirelessly practices the four *brahma vihāras* will develop concentration termed in the above point as absorption. Let us say something on concentration, the last of the eightfold path.

## 3.3. Concentration (*Samadhi*)

Concentration, the second of the three trainings comprises three factors:

- Right effort: undertaking serenity meditation,
- Right mindfulness: being mindful of the meditation object,
- Right concentration: Concentrating one's mind on the object of meditation.

Concentration is the ability to direct all the effort and attention on one thing without thinking about other things<sup>13</sup>. Yet, Bhante Buddhaghosa claims that concentration is of many sorts and has many various aspects. An answer that attempted to cover it all would accomplish neither its intention nor its purpose and would, besides, lead to distraction; so we shall confine ourselves to the kind intended here, calling concentration the profitable unification of the mind<sup>14</sup>. To the questions asked by Visākhā to the Bhikkhuni Dhammadina to know about concentration and its development, she answered as follows:

<sup>12</sup> Mehm Tin Mon, 2004, *Buddha Abhidhamma: ultimate science*, Penang, Malaysia, p. 361.

<sup>13</sup> A S Hornby, 2010, *Oxford advanced Learner's Dictionary*, oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, 2010, *Path of Purification (Visuddhi Magga)*, Kandy, Sri Lanka, p. 81.

‘Unification of mind, friend visākhā, is concentration; the four foundations of mindfulness are the basis of concentration; the four right kinds of striving are the equipment of concentration; the repetition, development, and cultivation of these same states is the development of concentration therein.’<sup>15</sup>

It can be clearly understood that concentration is an unwavering state of mind. For its development, the meditator should be aware and in alertness of the arising of unwholesome states of mind that are detrimental to the practice. Through this process, he controls his mind with energy and effort to discard the evils that have arisen in the mind, to prevent the arising of unarisen evil, to develop unarisen good, and to maintain and promote the further growth of good already arisen. This zealous application of mindfulness on his meditation objects brings its fruits, which culminate in quietude, peace, and serenity.

### 3.4. *Vipassanā bhāvanā*

Insight is the intuitive light flashing forth and exposing the truth of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and the impersonal and unsubstantial nature of the mentality materiality phenomena of existence (*anatta*).

In other words, it is a means to gain the right understanding of reality as it is. To practice vipassanā bhāvanā requires one to know the following:

1. Sevenfold *Visuddhi* - seven stages of purity,
2. *Ti-lakkhana*: three characteristic marks,
3. Threefold *Anupassanā*: three methods of contemplation,
4. Ten *vipassanā-ñānas*: ten insight-knowledges,
5. Threefold *Vimokkha*: three ways of emancipation,
6. Threefold *Vimokkha-mukha*: three doors of emancipations

Thanks to this knowledge, one can gradually proceed to the sevenfold purification for the attainment of the perfect bliss of *Nibbāna*.

In a world where everything is fast, meditation on both samatha and vipassanā is an infallible remedy to the many crises of the world since many of them are caused by the untrained man. Lust, hatred, and delusion are emotional states of our minds; they not only pollute the mind but also interfere with physical health. In most cases, they are responsible for what we call stress. To learn about samatha and vipassanā and to put them in practice is a direct way to end insecurity and suffering from the never-ending cycle of rebirth. Learning and practicing the way of meditation changes the person from an uneducated to an educated one. The Buddha said:

Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The instructed worldling does not understand this as it is; therefore, I say that for the uninstructed worldling, there is no development of the mind.<sup>16</sup> The Pa-Auk Shyadaw says that someone who is uneducated in

<sup>15</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995, *Cūḷavedalla sutta* in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, A Translation of Majjhima Nikāya, Massachusetts, USA p. 398 – 9.

<sup>16</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the*

and ignorant of both the theory and practice of the Dhamma; someone who possesses neither learning nor attainment. The uneducated person needs to be educated about the Four Noble Truths.<sup>17</sup>

For peace in the world, human beings should find interest in the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness meditation: ‘the contemplation of the body in the body, of feelings as feelings, mind as mind and mind-objects as mind-objects’<sup>18</sup>. The Buddha declares that this is the only way to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and distress, for the disappearance of pain and sadness, for the gaining of the right path, for the realization of Nibbāna. The zealous practitioner of mindfulness will definitely realize the truth, peace, and happiness from within. For him, there is no more suffering or rebecoming; the culmination of serenity and insight is won.

Lust, hatred, and delusion are emotional states of our minds; they not only pollute the mind but also interfere with physical health. In most cases, they are responsible for what we call stress.

Let’s compare the mind to a white cotton fabric that is soiled by contact with outside dirt of all kinds. Due to its pure white nature, this fabric can be washed with water, detergent, and a man’s hand to get rid of all the dirt and become white and shining. In the same way, the mind can also be purified because it is essentially pure unless we know the proper means and techniques.

The development of mind, otherwise called the ‘stability of mind’, is the training through which one can accurately understand the defilement of the mind and liberate himself from it. The development of insight, which occurs based on the stabilization of the mind by fully concentrating it on a single object, is what is known as comprehension of the mind.

This paper was assigned to examine the conditions of inner peace and world peace. It has two chapters, The First one dealt with the five precepts of the laity. These moral precepts proclaimed and taught by the Master should not be broken on any account. The observance of the precepts is of much importance to the practice of meditation. The second chapter, however, discussed on samatha and vipassanā. Starting with samatha or tranquility, we have listed the forty subjects and their possible attainments, which are either neighborhood concentration or Jhānas absorptions. As a practical meditation subject, we selected the four Brahma vihāras. The vipassanā bhāvanā or insight meditation ends up this chapter with emphasis on the vipassanā knowledge and the four foundations of mindfulness as the only way to true happiness, Nibbāna.

May peace and harmony prevail in the world! May all beings be well and happy!

Namo Buddhaya

---

*Anguttara Nikāya*, Massachusetts, USA, p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> Pa-Auk Sayadaw, 2013, *The Workings of Kamma*, Singapore, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Maurice Walshe, 1995, *Mahāsātipatthāna sutta* in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* a translation of *Dīgha Nikāya*, Massachusetts, USA, p. 335.

## REFERENCES

- A. S. Hornby, 2010, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Oxford University Press
- Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of Majjhima Nikāya, Somerville, Massachusetts, USA
- Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012, The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Anguttara Nikāya, Massachusetts, USA
- Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, 2010, Path of Purification: Visuddhi Magga, Kandy, Sri Lanka.
- Kotawila Pemaloka, 2018, The Great book of protection, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
- Maurice Walshe, 1995, The Long Discourses of the Buddha a translation of Dīgha Nikāya, Massachusetts, USA.
- Mehm Tin Mon, 2004, Buddha Abhidhamma: Ultimate science, Penang, Malaysia.
- Nyanatiloka, 2011, Buddhist Dictionary: A Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines, Kandy, Sri Lanka.
- Pa-Auk Sayadaw, 2013, The Workings of Kamma, Singapore.
- Piyadassi, 1991, Spectrum of Buddhism, Taipei, Taiwan R. O. C.
- S. Phongsawasdi, 2007, Warm Hearted Family, Patumthani, Thailand
- Samyutta Nikāya quoted in G. P. Malalaseker, 1990, Encyclopaedia of Buddhism vol V, Sri Lanka.
- Weragoda Sarada, 1993, Treasury of Truth: the Illustrated Dhammapada, Taipei, Taiwan.



# WAR AND PEACE: A COMPREHENSIVE EXPLORATION FROM THE BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Ven. Prof. Witharandeniye Chandasiri Thero\*

**Abstract:**

The concept of war is a longstanding and complex issue. In modern times, the world seeks peaceful resolutions to conflicts, aligning with Buddhist teachings that emphasize compassion, tolerance, and inner peace. This paper explores the Buddhist perspective on war and how its principles can inform contemporary conflict resolution efforts. Key questions include: (1) How do fundamental Buddhist teachings address war? (2) What role do compassion, tolerance, and inner peace play in resolving disputes? (3) How can Buddhist principles be applied to modern conflicts? Using a qualitative approach, this study analyzes key Buddhist texts such as the Pāli Canon, *Maha Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta*, and *Sakka Saṃyutta*. Historical and contemporary case studies illustrate how Buddhist teachings have influenced conflict resolution. The Buddha rejected war, viewing it as a source of suffering and hatred. In the Pāli Canon, he states, “Victory breeds hatred, and the defeated cannot live happily,” underscoring the futility of war. The *Paṭama Sāmagāma* and *Dutiya Sāmagāma Suttas* recount a war between King Kosala and King Ajasatta, where the Buddha’s sermon emphasized tolerance over vengeance. Buddhism links war to desire, as the *Maha Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta* highlights lust as the root of conflicts. The *Sakka Saṃyutta* further illustrates the dangers of aggression through the war between gods and demons. Ultimately, the Buddhist path promotes mindfulness, self-awareness, and inner peace as the foundation for conflict resolution. By cultivating compassion and wisdom, individuals can transcend destructive emotions, leading to a more peaceful world. The Buddhist perspective sees war not just as an external struggle but also as an internal conflict, advocating inner transformation as the key to lasting peace. Through these teachings, humanity can aspire to a world free from violence and suffering.

---

\* Professor in Pāli, Department of Pāli and Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** War, world peace, *Sāmgāma sutta*, *Mahā Dukkhaḥkhaṇḍa Sutta*, settlement of war.

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The contrasting concepts of war and peace have long fascinated scholars, fuelling philosophical discussions and ethical reflections throughout various cultures and historical periods. War is often associated with chaos, suffering, and fear, while peace is envisioned as an ideal state characterized by harmony and collaboration. Historically, the destructiveness of war has prompted widespread critiques, leading thinkers and leaders to grapple with how to achieve sustainable peace without resorting to violence. Through this lens, the Buddhist perspective on war and peace provides a distinctive viewpoint for analysing these concepts.

Rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, Buddhism offers a structured perspective on the moral aspects of conflict and the nature of human desire. The essence of many conflicts is linked to dissatisfaction and turmoil within the human mindset, often manifesting as craving and attachment. Central texts in Buddhism, such as the *Paṭama Sāmgāma Sutta* and *Dutiya Sāmgāma Sutta* found in the *Saṃyuttanikāya* highlight the futility inherent in conflict, indicating that battles only serve to perpetuate cycles of suffering. The Buddha's insights into ancient conflicts among rulers reveal a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological consequences of war, stressing that true happiness transcends notions of winning or losing.

This paper aims to explore the intricate relationship between war and peace, focusing on definitions, origins, and teachings related to these concepts from both contemporary and Buddhist perspectives. By juxtaposing modern views on conflict with insights from Buddha, we seek to uncover pathways toward achieving understanding and harmony in a world often marred by discord. Ultimately, our examination will address how the principles inherent in Buddhist wisdom can contribute to the creation of a lasting peace not only within individual lives but also within broader societies facing the shadows of war.

## II. THE DEFINITION OF THE WORD “WAR”: MODERN VIEW

War has been an enduring and devastating aspect of human history, marked by destruction, loss, and profound societal disruption. The understanding of war has evolved, shaped by philosophical, social, and political influences. In contemporary discourse, war is often defined as a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by the following:

(1) **Organized Groups:** Conflicts typically occur between two or more organized entities such as nations, states, or armed groups each possessing a defined identity and leadership structure.

(2) **Violence and Destruction:** The use of force and violence is essential to war, resulting in significant damage to individuals, communities, and the environment. Destruction of infrastructure and property often accompanies conflicts.

(3) Substantial Loss of Life: War invariably leads to the loss of numerous lives, affecting not only combatants but also civilians and prisoners of war.

(4) Social Upheaval: War disrupts social norms, causes displacement, and creates lasting impacts on cultural identities, economies, and communities.

(5) Armed Conflict: War is characterized by the employment of armed force, involving military tactics, equipment, and strategies.

Modern perspectives emphasize that conflicts arise from a complex interplay of factors, including: Conflicting Interests: Tensions often result from competing ideologies or resources; Territorial Disputes: Disagreements over land and borders are common triggers for conflict; Desires for Power and Control: The quest for dominance may ignite warfare as groups seek authority over others.<sup>1</sup>

### III. THE DEFINITION OF THE WORD “WAR”: THE BUDDHIST VIEW

Buddhism articulates a viewpoint on war that emphasizes its destructive consequences and the value of non-violence. The Buddha’s teachings suggest that wars arise from internal conflicts within human beings, particularly through dissatisfaction and attachment.<sup>2</sup> This concept of “lust,” seen as a harmful force, propels individuals toward violence, resulting in suffering for themselves and society.

When ignorant people have a problem, they get angry with others. They start conflicts. They think they have won. But they have not won. Since war always starts in the mind, the Buddha taught that it should be controlled by the mind itself. The Buddha taught that it is good for both parties. The Buddha has stated in the *Asurindaka Sutta* that both parties will win through patience or internal control.<sup>3</sup> The Buddha preached in the *Jabussobibrahmaba Sutta* that

<sup>1</sup> Social and psychological factors influencing Conflict origins and shaping negotiation Dynamics, Teresia wanjugu shiundu, Affrican Journal Imerging Issues (AJOEI), online ISSN: 2663 - 9335, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> “*Kutopahūtā kalahā vivādā, paridevasokā sahamaccharā ca; Mānātimānā sahapēsunā ca, kutopahūtā te tadingha brūhi*”.

“*Piyappahūtā kalahā vivādā, Paridevasokā sahamaccharā ca; Mānātimānā sahapēsunā ca, Maccherayuttā kalahā vivādā; Vivādajātesu ca pesuñāni*”.

“*Piyā su lokasmim kutonidānā, ye cāpi lobhā vicaranti loke; Āsā ca nittā ca kutonidānā, ye samparāyāya narassa honti*.” *Suttanipāta a*, (1990), Pāli Text Society, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> “*Jayam ve maññati bālo, vācāya pharusam bhaṇam; Jayañcevassa tam hoti, yā titikkhā vijānato*”

“*Tasseva tena pāpiyo, yo kuddham paṭikujjhati; Kuddham appaṭikujjhanto, saṅgāmaṃ jeti dujjayaṃ.*

“*Ubhinnamattham carati, attano ca parassa ca;*

*Param saṅkupitaṃ natvā, yo sato upasammati.*

“*Ubhinnaṃ tikicchantaṇaṃ, attano ca parassa ca;*

there are no three weapons as powerful as non-hatred, non-violence, and self-control.<sup>4</sup> The Buddha said that victory achieved by defeating someone else is not true victory. Therefore, the Buddha preached on another occasion that victory achieved by controlling one's mind is true victory.<sup>5</sup>

Buddhist definitions of war reveal it as a manifestation of the destructive capacity of the human mind, rooted in craving and dissatisfaction. The Buddhist approach encourages the cultivation of mindfulness and compassion as strategies to prevent war and promote peaceful cohabitation.

While contemporary views define war as a complex interplay of organized violence and destruction, Buddhism highlights the internal motivations behind conflict. Understanding these perspectives can enhance our ability to approach conflict prevention and resolution, ultimately contributing to a compassionate and harmonious world.

#### IV. THE HISTORY OF WAR: THE BUDDHIST VIEW

War has been an enduring aspect of humanity, inflicting suffering and loss across generations. Throughout history, various cultures have justified warfare as a necessary evil for survival or dominance. Buddhism offers a distinct lens through which to view war, portraying it as a source of chaos and destruction.

One notable historical conflict within Buddhist narratives is between King Ajasatta of Magadha and King Kosala. According to Buddhist scriptures, Ajasatta's ambition drove him to invade Kosala, resulting in a destructive war that culminated in Kosala's defeat.

This battle transcended mere physical confrontation; it reflected the moral and spiritual values of both kingdoms. Ajasatta's victory was marred by his association with negative influences, while Kosala's loss revealed the strength gained from virtuous connections. The Buddha articulated that "Victory breeds hatred and the defeated cannot live happily," underscoring the inherent futility of war and its repercussions on both victors and the vanquished.

Furthermore, the Buddha's teachings portray wars as stemming from desire, lust, and the power struggle. The demons in mythology illustrate how a desire for victory leads to turmoil. In contrast, the Buddha emphasizes the significance of tolerance and compassion, asserting that true strength lies in self-control. By promoting these values, Buddhism offers insights into overcoming conflict and fostering inner peace.

Ultimately, the Buddhist perspective on war encourages reflection on personal values and actions, urging individuals to pursue peace and understanding rather than engaging in cycles of violence. By embracing the

---

*Janā maññanti bāloti, ye dhammassa akovidā''ti Saṃyuttanikāya I, (2006), Pāli Text Society, p. 163.*

<sup>4</sup> "Abyāpādo avihiṃsā, viveko yassa āvudham; Titikkhā cammasannāho, yogakkhemāya vattati., *Saṃyuttanikāya V, (1976), Pāli Text Society, p. 06.*

<sup>5</sup> *Attā have jitaṃ seyyo, yā cāyaṃ itarā pajā;*

*Attadantassa posassa, niccaṃ saññatacārino., Dhammapada, (1993), Pāli Text Society, p.15.*

Buddha's teachings, a more compassionate society can emerge, rooted in dialogue and respect.

## V. ORIGIN OF WAR: THE BUDDHIST VIEW

From a Buddhist lens, the roots of war extend beyond external factors to the internal conditions of the human mind. The Buddha's teachings indicate that dissatisfaction and desire manifested as greed and lust lead to conflict. The *Mahā Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta* conveys that wars arise from desires that pit individuals against one another.<sup>6</sup>

Buddhism recognizes that violence begets suffering, as indicated in the *Paṭama Sāmgāma Sutta* and *Dutiya Sāmgāma Sutta*. The Buddha underscores that both victors and the vanquished endure pain, emphasizing that internal peace is crucial for fostering external peace.<sup>7</sup>

Buddhism argues that reducing warfare necessitates addressing these underlying mental states. Individuals must quell internal turmoil to prevent aggression while practicing compassion and understanding to resolve conflicts.

Ultimately, war's origins intertwine human desires and ideological disparities. As long as dissatisfaction and anger exist within individuals, external conflicts are likely to continue. Recognizing this, Buddhism offers a framework for resolving conflicts and nurturing lasting peace.

### Why does war originate?

War stands as a lamentable symbol of human suffering and dissatisfaction. Both Buddhist philosophy and modern discourse outline key elements that act as catalysts for conflict. At their core, both perspectives link war to deep-rooted dissatisfaction manifested through desire and aggression.

### Why war originates: Buddhist view

Buddhism frames war as an outcome of unfulfilled desires, a key contributor to human suffering. The *Mahā Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta* details how desires, material or ideological, incite discord. This sense of dissatisfaction drives aggressive behavior, creating an environment where conflict thrives. War and peace are deeply intertwined concepts in Buddhist philosophy, particularly when we examine the teachings of the Buddha. The *Mahā Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta* vividly illustrates the suffering that arises from desire and attachment. It tells us that because of lust, conflicts erupt not only between kings but also among family members like mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, friends and neighbours. These disputes can escalate into violence, leading to fights with fists, sticks, or even weapons. This relentless cycle of anger and conflict highlights the profound suffering that desire can cause in our lives.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "Puna caparaṃ, bhikkhave, kāmahetu kāmanidānaṃ kāmādhikaraṇaṃ kāmānameva hetu kāyena duccharitaṃ caranti, vācāya duccharitaṃ caranti, manasā duccharitaṃ caranti., *Majjhimanikāya I*, (1993), Pāli Text Society, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Samyuttanikāya I*, (2006), Pāli Text Society, p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> "Puna caparaṃ, bhikkhave, kāmahetu kāmanidānaṃ kāmādhikaraṇaṃ kāmānameva hetu rājānopi rājūhi vivadanti, khattiyāpi khattiyehi vivadanti, brāhmaṇāpi brāhmaṇehi vivadanti,

To foster a peaceful world, we must first address the conflict within ourselves. Just like fish in a clear pond, many of us are caught in a state of constant turmoil. The Buddha teaches us an important lesson: true victory does not come from overcoming others or causing harm to countless lives in a war. Instead, the greatest triumph is to conquer our destructive feelings and reactions.

Buddhism posits that dissatisfaction is a collective phenomenon affecting society. The cyclical nature of violence stems from personal desires, leading to conflicts that fragment social ties. As expressed in the scriptures, “because of lust... kings argue with kings.”

Moreover, the futility of violent victory is emphasized in the *Patama Sāmgāma Sutta* where the Buddha notes that triumph is overshadowed by hatred and loss. The outcome of violence leads to continual bitterness of the seeds of conflict originating in the human heart.<sup>9</sup>

### **Why war originates: Modern view**

In the modern context, war is interwoven with various socio-political factors. The notion of a “just war” attempts to rationalize military actions based on national security or moral imperatives, often neglecting the consequences of such violence.

Even morally justified wars can lead to catastrophic results, affecting civilian populations and perpetuating cycles of violence. Modern conflicts often stem from larger systemic issues like economic inequality and injustice, manipulated by authorities to justify military action.

Both Buddhist and modern analyses converge on the recognition that the roots of war lie in intrinsic human dissatisfaction, propelled by desire and aggression. Understanding this dissatisfaction is vital in fostering a more peaceful world. By confronting the underlying causes of conflict, it is through spiritual introspection or societal reforms that paths toward reconciliation can be forged. Ultimately, resolving our internal struggles is crucial to creating a future free from the destructive toll of violence. Cultivating understanding and compassion can lead us toward a more harmonious existence devoid of war.

### **Equipment for war: Modern view**

Warfare equipment has undergone a profound evolution, reflecting advances in technology and shifts in military strategies. Modern conflicts employ an extensive array of tools, including:

---

*gahapatīpi gahapatihi vivadanti, mātāpi puttana vivadati, puttapi mātārā vivadati, pitāpi puttana vivadati, puttapi pitarā vivadati, bhātāpi bhātārā vivadati, bhātāpi bhaginiyā vivadati, bhaginipi bhātārā vivadati, sahāyopi sahāyena vivadati. Te tattha kalahaviggahavivādāpannā aññamaññaṃ pāṇihipi upakkamanti, leḍḍūhipi upakkamanti, daṇḍehipi upakkamanti, satthehipi upakkamanti. Te tattha maraṇampi nigacchanti, maraṇamattampi dukkhaṃ. Ayampi, bhikkhave, kāmānaṃ ādīnava sandiṭṭhiko, dukkhakkhandho kāmahetu kāmānīdānaṃ kāmādhikaraṇaṃ kāmānameva hetu.”* Majjhimanikāya I, (1993), Pāli Text Society, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> *Saṃyuttanikāya I* (2006), Pāli Text Society, p. 83.



(1) Small Arms: The backbone of military operations, including rifles and personal firearms.

(2) Heavy Artillery: Tanks and armoured vehicles that signify ground combat capabilities.

(3) Air Power: Fighter jets and drones that manipulate aerial strategies.

(4) Naval Forces: Warships and submarines that facilitate power projection.

(5) Cyber Warfare Tools: Components of modern conflict that operate in the digital realm.<sup>10</sup>

In stark contrast, Buddhist teachings advocate for non-violence, promoting the principle of *Ahimsa* (non-harm). This foundational concept inherently opposes the use of weapons that inflict damage, underscoring a commitment to achieving peace.

### **The Buddhist perspective on warfare**

Buddhist teachings stand in stark contrast to modern warfare's mechanisms. Central to Buddhism is the principle of *Ahimsa* (non-harm), which rejects all forms of violence and harm towards living beings.

Buddhism perceives warfare and weaponry as reflections of internal conflict, as articulated in the *Mahā Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta*. The violent impulses derive from unfulfilled desires and inner turmoil, while Buddhism advocates for mindfulness and compassion to resolve disputes non-violently.<sup>11</sup>

The consequences of warfare extend beyond physical outcomes, affecting spiritual well-being. Both victors and vanquished carry emotional burdens, as outlined in the *Paṭama Sāmgāma Sutta*, where the Buddha notes that true triumph lies in cultivating peace within oneself rather than domination over others.

The juxtaposition of modern weaponry against Buddhist philosophies urges a revaluation of our approach to conflict. A longing for a war-free world necessitates introspection, emotional maturity, and a commitment to fostering peace.

### **Buddha's view of war**

Buddha's teachings embody a clear disapproval of war, underscoring the profound suffering it inflicts on all living beings. His perspective is reflected in significant text in the *Dhammapada*. It illustrates that war produces suffering, irrespective of the outcomes, both victors and the defeated face psychological grief.<sup>12</sup>

The Buddha expressed that "*Victory breeds hatred and the defeated cannot live happily*" revealing how the desire for success only perpetuates animosity and conflict. His insights encourage individuals and leaders to recognize that

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/technology/military-technology>

<sup>11</sup> *Majjhimanikāya I*, (1993), Pāli Text Society, p. 87.

<sup>12</sup> "*Jayam veram pasavati, dukkham seti parājito; Upasanto sukham seti, hitvā jayaparājaya*" *Samyuttanikāya I* (2006), Pāli Text Society, p. 83.

the seeds of war originate in the mind—rooted in desires and attachments.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Buddha recognized the inherent interconnectedness of all life. Harming one ultimately produces universal suffering, violating the core principle of compassion within Buddhist philosophy. Rejecting violence and promoting non-harm, the Buddha advocates for peaceful relations grounded in understanding.

The narratives surrounding King Ajasatta's conflicts with King Kosala reinforce the belief that no true triumph exists in warfare. Both outcomes yield pain and moral dilemmas. True success lies not in conquest but in fostering inner peace.<sup>14</sup>

Buddha's perspective on war reveals a meaningful moral framework calling for violence's cessation through self-understanding and compassion. Recognizing the futility of conflict and its pervasive consequences encourages individuals to seek peaceful dialogue and goodwill in pursuit of a violence-free society.

### **Who accounts for killing enemies? Buddhist perspective**

The Buddhist Doctrine emphasises that if any loss of life is caused by any action of any person to achieve some end, whatever, such action constitutes a grave crime and should not be taken. Buddhism does not approve killing of human beings. When we speak of the killing of human beings, we refer to the killing of those who are born. But in Buddhism, even destruction of life at the stage of embryo is a killing. This indicates that Buddhism has focused attention on life with a sharp eye. But we are aware that large-scale loss of life is caused in present-day wars. We shall try to find out what sort of sin befalls on whom and how.

The Buddhist Scriptures (*Tipiṭaka*) do not define the sort of sin that befalls on whom and how in the context of the present-day war situation. Therefore, it has to be resolved based on general teachings of the Buddha on what is good and what is bad, merit and demerit. The teachings of the Buddha and also in the commentaries of well-versed Theras analyse what action ensues more merits and less merits, and how the effects of merits enhance. In the same way the Scriptures define how the consequence of demerits increase or decrease.

Merits and demerits function on ethics. The two basic ethics can be shown as what is good and what is bad. The term good may vary from religion to religion, race to race, and country to country. In certain religions, the killing of cattle is not an offence. In certain religions, killing of human beings on certain grounds is allowed. But Buddhism does not approve such killings at all, as evident in the *Ahimsa Niggaha Issue of Milinda Question*. Buddhism emphasizes that these matters should be viewed by drawing a similarity to one-self.<sup>15</sup> *Mahā Niddesa Commentary* points out that the demerit befallen by killing a

<sup>13</sup> *Dhammapada* (1993), Pāli Text Society, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> *Saṃyuttanikāya I* (2006), Pāli Text Society, p. 83

<sup>15</sup> *Milindapañā* (1991), Pāli Text Society, p. 401

bad person is less than that of killing a pious person.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the sin of killing a bigger animal is more than that of killing a small creature. Moreover, the state of repentance fluctuates according to the size and value of the animal. The time, labour, and device, and anger involved in killing a bigger animal is more than that of killing a small animal. For example, if a cow is killed in place of a man, the sin accrued thereby would be less than that of killing a man.<sup>17</sup> A greater sin befalls on committing the five extremes since (*PañcAnantariya* Actions) killing of mother, killing of father, slaying of Arahant, and shedding blood of the Buddha's body and causing split of Sangha.<sup>18</sup> Buddhism rejects the taking of life, and some killings are more sinful than others in consideration of the benefits achieved by the society from such respective lives.

In going through these considerations, it is hardly necessary to stress that the terrorist is a great nuisance that causes evils to the entire country and the whole world at large. Thus, it follows that the sins befallen on military persons in killing the terrorists in the interest of the sovereignty of the country and the interest of the majority people of the country should be less than that of killing a human being under normal circumstances. Even if a soldier kills a terrorist who lacks in human values and is a menace to the entire world, the sinful effect will be low. On the other hand, the soldier performs an act assigned to him by his commander and he is bound to carry out it irrespective of whether he likes it or not.

It indeed amounts to a killing, but the sin does not befall on him as he carries out an order from his immediate superior who in turn acts on the orders of higher authorities. Finally, all of them carry out orders of the Commander-in-Chief who is the head of state, channelled through the Defence Secretary and the Army Commander. Thus, the sin of killing done by a soldier would be shared by a series of authorities. The president and Commander-in-Chief are elected by the people.

That was the same even at the origin of Royal administration. The people elect the head of state with a mandate to control various corruptions and irregularities occurring in the country. Accordingly, people expect to earn the right to live peacefully and in harmony without fear. To ensure that the people elect the king or head of state with a mandate to grant that right. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the ruler to grant that right. The sin accrued in killing in the course of action to grant that right will be shared by the people who elected the ruler, and therefore the sin accrued to the soldier will further decrease.

In going through this situation as a whole, it will be seen that since the soldier kills an enemy who is an enemy to the people, to the country, and to the entire world at large, the sinful effect that befalls on the soldier would be less than that of killing an innocent man. The soldier assumes that position on the instructions issued by a series of high-ups. Therefore, the sin of taking life will

<sup>16</sup> *Mahāniddesa Aṭṭhakathā*, *Hevāvitārana* print, p 80/81.

<sup>17</sup> *Khuddakapāṭha Aṭṭhakathā* (1978), *Pāli Text Society*, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya III* (1994), *Pāli Text Society*, p. 146.

be shared by all such authorities up to the head of state and also to the people who gave the mandate to the head of state. Thus, it will be clear that the soldier who sins killing will get accrued only a small share of the sin.

### **Buddha's teachings of war and peace**

The *Pāli* Canon, the cornerstone of Theravāda Buddhism scriptures, offers valuable teachings on war and peace, focusing on ethical dimensions of conflicts and pathways to harmony. The emphasis remains on understanding internal conditions that provoke war and the practices necessary to cultivate peace in both individuals and societies.

### **Key teachings on war and peace**

- *Dhammapada*: This collection of verses highlights loving-kindness and patience as transformative forces against enmity, reinforcing that hatred can only be overcome with love and compassion.<sup>19</sup>
- *Sigālovāda Sutta*: This scripture elaborates on the proper conduct prescribed for maintaining peaceful relationships within various societal roles, emphasizing respect, accountability, and empathy.<sup>20</sup>
- *Sutta Nipatā*: The teachings here encapsulate the importance of avoiding harm, underlining ethical behavior as vital to human interactions, ultimately fostering an environment where understanding thrives.<sup>21</sup>

### **Insights from specific Suttas**

The Buddha's reflections on war are vividly captured in the *Paṭama Sāmgāma Sutta* and *Dutiya Sāmgāma Sutta*. He articulates that "Victory breeds hatred" and that both victor and vanquished suffer negative repercussions, challenging traditional views on conflict outcomes.<sup>22</sup>

The *Mahā Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta* contemplates war's roots in insatiable human desires. The need for inner resolution becomes crucial in fostering a harmonious society. His emphasis on overcoming personal struggles aligns with achieving broader peace.<sup>23</sup>

### **Commentaries and further elucidations**

The commentaries enhance our comprehension of Buddha's teachings by providing narratives that depict their application in daily life. Encouraging practitioners to aspire to inner peace, these texts illustrate that achieving personal harmony is essential for societal balance. Engaging in mindfulness and virtuous behavior fosters empathy and compassionate resolution of conflicts.

Ultimately, teachings from the *Pāli* Canon and its commentaries highlight the interplay between individual psychology and social dynamics.

<sup>19</sup> "Akkodhena jine kodhaṃ, asādhūṃ sādhunā jine; Jine kadariyaṃ dānena, saccenālikavādināṃ." *Dhammapada*, (1993), *Pāli* Text Society, p. 01.

<sup>20</sup> *Dīghanikāya III*, (1995), *Pāli* Text Society, p. 192.

<sup>21</sup> *Suttanipāta* (2017), *Pāli* Text Society, p. 169.

<sup>22</sup> *Samyuttanikāya I*, (2006), *Pāli* Text Society, p. 83.

<sup>23</sup> *Majjhimanikāya I*, (1993), *Pāli* Text Society, p. 90.

The Buddha's framework offers guidance for genuine peace, suggesting that personal transformation can lead to collective healing. Through his teachings, Buddha beckons practitioners to embrace understanding and compassion.

### **Buddha's teachings for the settlement of war**

The teachings of the Buddha illuminate pathways to peaceful conflict resolution, emphasizing dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation. Central to these teachings is recognizing that true harmony cannot stem from violence; rather, it arises from fostering compassion within ourselves.

- Dialogue and Understanding<sup>24</sup>

Buddha advocated for open dialogue, believing that many misunderstandings arise from poor communication. His teachings urge individuals to embrace conversations that allow divergent viewpoints to be expressed, thereby reducing tensions. War, he argued, leads to a cycle of pain without true success for either side.

- Compassion and Mindfulness<sup>25</sup>

Compassion forms a cornerstone of Buddha's conflict resolution approach. By cultivating mindfulness, individuals can engage in heightened self-awareness and regulation of emotions. Such an attitude permits a calm approach to disputes, fostering understanding and healing divisions.

- Right Speech and Empathetic Communication<sup>26</sup>

Buddha's teachings on "right speech" emphasize truthfulness and kindness. Such principles dismantle hostility and promote connection, reminding individuals to focus on shared humanity rather than divisive rhetoric. Empathetic communication fosters collaborative discussions.

- Healing Divisions and Restoring Relationships<sup>27</sup>

Post-conflict healing is crucial; recognizing previous wrongs and striving for mutual understanding become paramount. Buddha's teachings indicate that healing lies not in the negation of grievances but in constructive dialogue.

In summary, Buddha's teachings for conflict resolution stress dialogue, compassion, and empathetic communication. Rather than perpetuating cycles of hatred, nurturing understanding can lead to a more peaceful world. The essential message is clear: peace is attainable when individuals act with kindness and an earnest desire for societal harmony.

### **Inner peace as a catalyst for settlement of war**

Inner peace emerges as a crucial catalyst for resolving conflict.<sup>28</sup> Buddhist teachings underline the connection between individual inner tranquility and

<sup>24</sup> *Mahāvagga Aṭṭhakathā*, (1969), Pāli Text Society, p. 674.

<sup>25</sup> *Aṅguttara Nikāya IV*, (1979), Pāli Text Society, p. 150.

<sup>26</sup> *Mahāvagga Aṭṭhakathā*, (1979), Pāli Text Society, p. 674.

<sup>27</sup> *Mahāvagga Aṭṭhakathā*, (1979), Pāli Text Society, p. 674.

<sup>28</sup> "Yo sahaṣṣaṃ sahaṣṣena, saṅgāme mānuse jine; Ekaṇṇa jeyyamattānaṃ sa ve saṅgāmajuttamo". *Dhammapada*, (1993), Pāli Text Society, p. 15.

societal harmony, emphasizing the roles of mindfulness, compassion, and diminished attachment in attaining global peace.

By cultivating non-attachment, individuals can rise above trivial disputes that often lead to conflicts. The Buddha's assertion that true victories lie in transcending both win and loss echoes through timeless teachings.

Mindfulness practices help individuals engage in conflict resolution with clarity rather than aggression. The *Sakka Saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* reinforces the significance of understanding adversaries, promoting tolerance over retaliation.

Achieving inner peace is a shared responsibility; as individuals seek tranquility, a collective consciousness valuing compassion can emerge. This shared energy fosters constructive approaches to global conflicts.

The *Mahā Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta* illustrates that dissatisfaction often drives conflicts. Prioritizing inner peace shifts individuals' perspectives, emphasizing interconnectedness and impermanence. By surrendering attachment, one moves forward from petty disputes.

Ultimately, cultivating inner peace serves as a potent catalyst in conflict resolution. By practicing mindfulness, compassion, and reduced attachment, we foster an environment conducive to lasting peace, shaping broader societal dynamics.

### **Buddha's teachings for world peace**

Examining war and peace through the lens of Buddha's teachings reveals a comprehensive foundation for promoting global harmony, built upon compassion and understanding. These principles guide us toward fostering a society characterized by tranquility and goodwill.

- Compassion and Loving-kindness<sup>29</sup>

At the core of Buddha's vision for world peace lies *metta*, or loving-kindness, which serves as a powerful antidote to enmity. Embracing compassion promotes understanding and cooperation, compelling us to face suffering collectively. The Buddha's assertion that "*Victory breeds hatred*" encourages us to center our actions on empathy instead of domination.

- Non-attachment<sup>30</sup>

Buddhism teaches non-attachment, inviting individuals to transcend self-serving desires of the root of many conflicts. The human craving for power leads to disputes; the *Mahā Dukkhaḥkhanda Sutta* demonstrates how desire incites rivalry among various entities. Letting go of this need fosters a mindset of peace, transforming greed into altruism.

- Collective Responsibility<sup>31</sup>

Buddhism fosters collective accountability, helping individuals recognize

<sup>29</sup> *Aṅguttara Nikāya IV*, (1979), Pāli Text Society, p. 150.

<sup>30</sup> Gethin, Rupert. (1998), *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> Gethin, Rupert. (1998), *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, p. 142.



that their actions have consequences beyond themselves. These teachings implore us to act mindfully, considering our connections within a broader community. An awareness of our interconnectedness nurtures commitments to peace that extend beyond personal realms.

- Approach to Peace<sup>32</sup>

Buddhism advocates for a proactive stance toward peace, promoting individual transformation as essential for societal harmony. The suttas illustrate how inner conflict mirrors external strife, suggesting that resolving personal turmoil breeds broader peace. The wise avoid retaliation, emphasizing endurance and goodwill.

- Controlling our mind or ourselves<sup>33</sup>

The Dhamma verse reminds us that our internal battles are more significant than any external skirmish. Each individual has the power to contribute to global peace through their thoughts and actions. By promoting goodwill, compassion, and understanding within ourselves, we can extend these values outward to everyone around us.

To achieve genuine peace, we must confront and resolve the social, economic, political, and cultural issues that impact our communities. This requires us to approach these challenges with an equitable mindset, treating all people, regardless of their race, caste, religion, or background with fairness and respect. By cultivating these principles in our hearts, we can work together to create a harmonious world for all.

In conclusion, Buddha's teachings provide a profound roadmap for global peace through compassion, non-attachment, collective responsibility, and proactive engagement. As we confront the tragedies of war, the urgency of shifting our consciousness becomes evident. The principles of compassion and understanding form the foundation for creating a society where conflict can be resolved amicably.

## VI. CONCLUSION

According to the facts given above, teachings offer a comprehensive framework for establishing world peace through compassion, non-attachment, collective responsibility, and proactive engagement. The suffering wrought by war underscores the immediate need for a fundamental shift in consciousness. The futility of warfare is evident when we understand that victories lead to hatred and that the defeated carry deep-seated pain.

Buddha's teachings encourage us to transcend the dichotomies of winning and losing, urging us to foster a spirit of understanding. The interconnections among all beings remind us that the challenges we face stem not only from external circumstances but also from unfulfilled desires within our minds.

The timeless wisdom propagated by the Buddha inspires us towards

---

<sup>32</sup> *Aṅguttara Nikāya IV*, (1979), Pāli Text Society, p. 150.

<sup>33</sup> *Dhammapada* (2014), Pāli Text Society, p. 15.

creating a compassionate society. By embodying the values of kindness, excitement for collective responsibility, and genuine desire for world peace, we can march toward a future where empathy prevails over aggression.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

- Āṅguttara Nikāya* III, (1994), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Āṅguttara Nikāya*, IV, (1979), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Dhammapada*, (1993), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Dīghanikāya* III, (1995), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Khuddakapāṭha Aṭṭhakathā*, (1978), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Mahāniddeśa Aṭṭhakathā*, Hevāvitārana print, Colombo, Sri Lanka.  
*Mahāvagga Aṭṭhakathā* II, (1969), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Majjhimanikāya* I, (1993), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Milindapañā*, (1991), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Samyuttanikāya* I, (2006), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Samyuttanikāya* V, (1976), Pāli Text Society, London.  
*Suttanipāta*, (1990), Pāli Text Society, London.

### Secondary Sources

- Gethin, Rupert. (1998), *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press.  
 Sujato, Bhante. (2010), *A History of Mindfulness: How the Buddha Taught Us to Be Present*, Sutta Central.  
 Wisdom Publications. (2005), *The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publications.

### Research Articles

- Teresia, Wanjugu Shiundu, (2024), *Social and psychological factors influencing Conflict origins and shaping negotiation Dynamics*, African Journal of Emerging Issues (AJOEI), online ISSN: 2663 - 9335

### Websites

- <https://www.britannica.com/technology/military-technology>  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378375023\\_SOCIAL\\_AND\\_PSYCHOLOGICAL\\_FACTORS\\_INFLUENCING\\_CONFLICT\\_ORIGINS\\_AND\\_SHAPING\\_NEGOTIATION\\_DYNAMICS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378375023_SOCIAL_AND_PSYCHOLOGICAL_FACTORS_INFLUENCING_CONFLICT_ORIGINS_AND_SHAPING_NEGOTIATION_DYNAMICS)

# THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN INNER AND OUTER PEACE: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Ricardo Sasaki\*

## Abstract:

This article explores the Buddhist approach to peace, emphasizing the interconnection between inner peace and social harmony through the principle of Dependent Co-arising (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*). It examines Buddhist ethical foundations through the Five Precepts (*Pañca-sīla*) as guidelines for personal conduct that foster social well-being. The text details meditation practices, particularly mindfulness (*sati*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*), as methods for cultivating inner tranquility. It further explores the Four Sublime States (*Brahma-vihāras*) and forgiveness as transformative practices for healing relationships. The article highlights Engaged Buddhism as exemplified by figures like Thich Nhat Hanh, Maha Ghosananda, and Ajahn Buddhadasa, who applied Buddhist principles to address social issues, environmental concerns, and post-conflict reconciliation. The conclusion emphasizes that spiritual practice is inseparable from daily life challenges and that inner transformation provides resources for effective action in creating a more peaceful world.

**Keywords:** *Peace, dependent co-arising, meditation, ethics, Engaged Buddhism.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of peace has been a constant in the human journey, manifesting both in individual aspirations and in collective movements for social transformation. Throughout history, human beings have come together both for conflict and peaceful coexistence. From a Buddhist perspective, conflict arises from three primary roots: the desire to acquire (*lobha*), which manifests as greed for resources and power; the desire to subdue (*dosa*), expressed through violence and oppression; and ignorance (*moha*), revealed in the inability to recognize our fundamental interdependence. Peace, in turn, arises from a transformation of the

---

\* Founder and Director of Nalanda Center for Buddhist Studies in Brazil.

heart that turns toward more refined and sublime goals.

## II. THE PRINCIPLE OF DEPENDENT CO-ARISING

The principle of Dependent Co-Arising (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*), fundamental to Buddhist philosophy, asserts that all phenomena arise in dependence on causes and conditions. This principle highlights the interconnection of all beings and the universe. Just as a drop of water creates ripples in a lake, gradually affecting its entire surface, an individual's mental state influences their actions, which in turn affect the whole community. We can observe this dynamic, for example, when a community leader, by cultivating and expressing qualities such as compassion and equanimity, inspires positive change in their surroundings.

This interdependence operates in two directions: by cultivating inner peace, it naturally extends to the outer world, manifesting in our family, professional, and community relationships. Conversely, we are profoundly influenced by external agents – cultural, religious, political, and economic forces can drive us either toward violence or toward social harmony.

### 2.1. Tools for cultivating peace

The Buddhist tradition, grounded in this understanding of interdependence, has developed various tools to foster both inner and outer peace:

**Mindfulness (*sati*):** A fundamental practice for achieving inner peace. By observing thoughts and emotions without attachment or aversion, individuals can break reactive patterns that often lead to conflict. For example, by noticing the arising of anger, we create space between stimulus and response, allowing for wiser action.

**Ethical Living:** The Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*) provide a moral framework that supports both inner and outer peace: (1) Abstaining from harming living beings: promotes compassion and non-violence. (2) Abstaining from taking what is not given: This cultivates contentment and respect. (3) Abstaining from sexual misconduct: Fosters healthy relationships. (4) Abstaining from false speech: nurtures harmonious communication. (5) Abstaining from intoxicants: maintaining the mental clarity necessary for peace

**Wisdom and Insight:** Through meditation and contemplation, we develop an understanding of the nature of reality, recognizing the impermanence and interconnection of all phenomena. This wisdom reduces attachment and aversion, leading to deeper inner peace.

### 2.2. Challenges and limitations

The inherent challenge of the pursuit of peace can be illustrated through a significant historical episode in the early Buddhist community. During the Buddha's time, a serious conflict arose among the monks of Kosambi, demonstrating the complexities of harmonizing differing perspectives, even within a community dedicated to peace.<sup>1</sup>

The conflict began when two groups of monks disagreed on matters of

<sup>1</sup> MN 48. Kosambiya Sutta; Vinaya Pitaka – Mahavagga X of the Khandhaka.

monastic discipline and practice to the point that they refused to perform the *Upasatha* (the observance and recitation of monastic rules) together – a grave sign of disunity within the *Saṅgha*. Even with the Buddha's direct intervention – traveling to Kosambi to mediate the dispute – the monks remained obstinate. Faced with this situation, the Buddha chose to withdraw to a nearby forest, allowing the monks to reflect on their actions. Only after his departure did they realize the gravity of their attitudes and the importance of communal harmony, eventually seeking reconciliation.

This episode not only demonstrates the inherent difficulties in conflict resolution but also highlights a broader issue: the complexity of addressing systemic problems through individual transformation alone. Critics rightly argue that issues such as poverty, inequality, and political oppression cannot be resolved solely through the cultivation of inner peace.

The Buddhist response to this challenge must take place on two complementary fronts. First, by recognizing that lasting social transformation necessarily begins with individual transformation. Second, by understanding that inner peace must be accompanied by collective actions that address the structural causes of conflict, including the promotion of education, economic justice, and environmental sustainability. These are core principles of Engaged Buddhism, as taught by masters such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Mahā Ghosananda, among others.

This understanding of the interconnection between inner and outer peace lays the foundation for a holistic approach to peace – one that acknowledges both the importance of individual transformation and the necessity of collective action to create a more just and peaceful world.

### 2.3. The ethical foundation of peace

The pursuit of peace is a universal desire that transcends cultures and borders. However, achieving lasting peace requires a foundation of ethical principles that guide our actions and decisions. In the Buddhist tradition, the Five Training Precepts, known as *Pañca-sīla*, provide an essential framework for cultivating a peaceful and harmonious life. These principles are not presented as absolute commandments but as practical guidelines for ethical training that sustain both individual and collective well-being, creating the necessary conditions for a society founded on compassion, respect, and mutual understanding.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.4. The Five Precepts (*Pañca-sīla*)

#### 2.4.1. Abstaining from harming living beings (*Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*)

This first precept is a fundamental principle that recognizes the inherent value and dignity of all forms of life. By practicing it, we commit ourselves not

---

<sup>2</sup> The ethical foundation of Buddhism is well discussed in Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 67 – 72, and Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1994, p. 123.

only to avoiding taking lives but also to preventing physical and psychological harm to beings. This voluntary abstention gradually cultivates the positive virtue of compassion (*karuṇā*) and the quality of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*).

In daily practice, this precept encourages us to adopt a non-violent approach to conflict resolution, prioritize dialogue over aggression or coercion, develop sensitivity to the needs of other beings, and promote a culture of peace and understanding in our communities. At a broader social level, this precept underlies pacifist movements and inspires restorative justice systems that seek healing rather than punishment.

#### **2.4.2. Abstaining from taking what is not given (*Adinnādānā veramaṇī*)**

The second precept transcends the simple prohibition of theft, encompassing all forms of wrongful appropriation. It is a profound recognition that our actions have consequences and that taking what rightfully belongs to others causes harm and suffering. By respecting others' property and rights, we build trust and foster a culture of community security.

This precept also encourages us to develop a mindset of generosity (*dāna*) and sharing, responsible and sustainable consumption practices, respect for shared natural resources, and recognition that our possessions can bring benefits to others. In a broader context, this precept challenges economic systems based on excessive exploitation and suggests alternative models based on equity and sustainability.<sup>3</sup> The second precept can inspire a movement toward mindful consumption, encouraging individuals to consider the environmental and social impact of their choices. This idea aligns with the growing interest in minimalism and sustainable living.

#### **2.4.3. Abstaining from improper sensual conduct (*Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī*)**

This precept recognizes the sensual dimension of human relationships and reminds us that our actions in this sphere have a profound impact on ourselves and others. Observing this ethical principle cultivates respect for boundaries and consent in interpersonal relationships, creating a foundation of trust and integrity.

In practice, this precept guides us to develop empathy for the needs and vulnerabilities of others, prioritize relationships built on mutual respect, cultivate clear communication and informed consent, honor commitments and relational agreements, and cultivate a healthy relationship with our senses. The application of this precept promotes a culture that values personal dignity and repudiates the objectification or instrumentalization of beings.

#### **2.4.4. Abstaining from false speech (*Musāvādā veramaṇī*)**

The fourth precept recognizes the extraordinary power of human communication. Our words can cause profound harm or promote healing

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Sivaraksa, Sulak. *The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the 21st Century Kihei*. Koa Books, 2009, p. 56 – 60.



and reconciliation. By speaking with sincerity, kindness, and discernment, we create a culture of honesty, transparency, and respect that sustains social peace.

This precept encompasses not only the abstention from direct lies but also avoiding divisive speech that creates discord between people, refraining from harsh speech that wounds others' feelings, avoiding frivolous conversations that waste energy and create confusion, and cultivating beneficial speech (*sammā vācā*) from the Noble Eightfold Path.

#### **2.4.5. Abstaining from intoxicating substances that cloud mental clarity (*Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī*)**

The fifth precept recognizes the crucial importance of mental clarity for ethical conduct. Our actions are significantly influenced by the state of our mind, and certain substances can compromise our ability to discern, increasing behaviors that violate the other precepts.<sup>4</sup>

By observing this principle, we cultivate clarity of perception and mindfulness, care for physical and mental health, self-awareness and personal responsibility, and the capacity to make decisions aligned with our deepest values.

#### **2.5. The contribution of the precepts to individual and social peace**

The observance of these Five Precepts generates multiple benefits that contribute to peace at different levels.

At the individual level, these ethical principles cultivate a mental serenity that will progressively lead to confidence in one's ability to live ethically, the absence of remorse and regret (*avippaṭisāra*), and healthy self-esteem. At the interpersonal level, they promote relationships characterized by trust and respect, clear and constructive communication, and a predominance of non-violent conflict resolution. And at the broader social level, they create conditions for the growth of a culture of nonviolence and respect for life, a sense of community and connection among individuals, and the responsible use and fair sharing of resources.

The interconnection of these three levels demonstrates how individual ethical practice directly contributes to social transformation. The Five Training Precepts are not merely personal rules but principles that, when widely adopted, can serve as the foundation for more just and peaceful social institutions.

#### **2.6. The role of meditation in cultivating inner peace**

In a world marked by agitation, conflict, and suffering, the pursuit of inner peace becomes an essential journey for both individual and collective well-being. Among the various practices that lead to this inner serenity, meditation stands out as a powerful tool capable of transforming the mind and heart. In this section, we will explore two fundamental meditative practices in the Buddhist tradition: the practice of mindfulness (*sati*) and the meditation of loving-kindness (*mettā*). Modern neuroscience research has also shown that

---

<sup>4</sup> Marlatt, G. Alan. *Mindfulness and the Addictive Process*. New York: Guilford Press, 2010, p. 45 – 50.

mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation can lead to structural changes in the brain, such as increased gray matter density in areas associated with emotional regulation and empathy. This scientific validation supports the transformative potential of these practices.<sup>5</sup> Through these complementary approaches, we can understand how meditation cultivates inner calm, reduces negative emotions, and consequently contributes to a more peaceful world.

## **2.7. Mindfulness (*Sati*): Conscious presence in the task of the moment**

The practice of mindfulness, or vigilance, invites the individual to direct their attention to the present moment in a broad (non-selective) manner and without hasty judgment. By observing sensations, thoughts, and emotions as they arise – without being carried away by them – the practitioner develops greater awareness of themselves and the world around them. This full awareness allows one to break the cycle of automatic reactivity that often dominates us, leading to impulsive and negative actions.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*<sup>6</sup>, one of the fundamental texts of Buddhism, offers a detailed guide on how to cultivate mindfulness through four foundations:

### **2.7.1. Mindfulness of the body (*Kāyānupassanā*)**

By practicing mindfulness of the body, the individual carefully observes the physical sensations that arise, such as breathing, bodily movements, and postures, without identifying with them. This practice develops a sense of grounding in the present, reducing anxiety and concern for the future while also promoting a deeper understanding of the body, diminishing the illusions we have about it.

A classic example from Buddhist literature that illustrates this is the story of the monk Vakkali. He was a disciple of the Buddha who suffered from a strong attachment to the physical body, admiring its beauty and form. The Buddha, perceiving his attachment, instructed him to contemplate the impermanence of the five aggregates, of which the body is one. By practicing in this way, Vakkali gradually freed himself from his attachment and attained enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

### **2.7.2. Mindfulness of sensations (*Vedanānupassanā*)**

This practice allows one to observe the subtle impressions of pleasure, displeasure, and neutrality, which later give rise to afflictive emotions such as anger or sadness. Instead of reacting impulsively, the practitioner simply observes these mental sensations, recognizing their transient nature and lack of a permanent essence. This cultivated observation develops equanimity - the ability to maintain calm and balance in the face of life's ups and downs.

---

<sup>5</sup> Suggested reading: Davidson, Richard J. and Begley, Sharon. *The Emotional Life of Your Brain: How Its Unique Patterns Affect the Way You Think, Feel, and Live – and How You Can Change Them*. New York: Penguin Books, 2012, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Analayo, Bhikkhu. *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications, 2003, p. 45 and Goldstein, Joseph. *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*. Boulder: Sounds True, 2013, p.78.

<sup>7</sup> SN 47.31.

### 2.7.3. Mindfulness of the mind (*Cittānupassanā*)

Mindfulness about the mind enables one to observe arising thoughts without identifying with them. Rather than becoming lost in ruminations about the past or worries about the future, the practitioner simply recognizes thoughts as transient mental events. Furthermore, the practitioner becomes familiar with the various mental states experienced throughout the day. This practice cultivates mental clarity and the ability to see things as they truly are without conceptual distortions.

### 2.7.4. Mindfulness of facts of life (*Dhammānupassanā*)

Finally, mindfulness of essential aspects of nature allows one to observe the fundamental characteristics of experience, such as impermanence (*anicca*),<sup>8</sup> the unsatisfactory nature of conditioned things (*dukkha*), and the absence of an essential and permanent core (*anattā*). By practicing in this way, we can identify patterns of thought and behavior that condition us and begin to free ourselves from their influence, cultivating healthier and more positive habits.

## 2.8. *Mettā*: Cultivating loving-kindness

Ashin Thittila explains: “Our happiness is made more intense and more lasting when shared with friends; therefore, the best way to be happy is to make others happy as well. We should do everything we can for others - in short, everything we do, any thought we think, any word we speak, should be for the well-being, peace, and happiness not only of ourselves but of others. The result of such actions is peace, happiness, and friendship.”<sup>9</sup>

Loving-kindness meditation (*mettā*) is a practice that involves the systematic cultivation of acceptance and fraternal love for oneself and all beings. This practice follows a gradual sequence:

(1) It begins with generating feelings of friendship and goodwill toward oneself, recognizing one’s humanity, and sincerely wishing for personal well-being. (2) These feelings are then extended to others, starting with loved ones. (3) It progresses to neutral people (those with whom we have no significant emotional connection). (4) Then, loving-kindness is directed toward challenging individuals. (5) Finally, this feeling expands to all beings without distinction.

The *Mettā Sutta*, another important Buddhist text, describes the benefits of this practice: “The person who practices *mettā* sleeps happily, wakes up happily, has pleasant dreams, is loved by humans and non-humans, is protected by celestial beings, is not harmed by poison or weapons, and attains mental concentration.”<sup>10</sup>

The text also offers a powerful metaphor: “Just as a mother would protect

<sup>8</sup> Chah, Ajahn. *Everything Arises, Everything Falls Away: Teachings on Impermanence and the End of Suffering*. Boston: Shambhala, 2005, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Thittila, Ashin. *A Buddhist’s Companion*. Penang, Sukhi Hotu, 1997, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Sn 1. 8.

her only child, even at the risk of her own life, so too should one cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings.”

An illustrative example from Buddhist literature is found in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, where the Buddha teaches the recitation of *mettā* to a group of monks who were terrified by spirits haunting a certain forest. After the dedicated practice of *mettā*, the spirits calmed down, and the monks were able to meditate in peace.

Regular practice of *mettā* significantly reduces negative emotions such as anger, hatred, and aversion. By cultivating love and compassion, the practitioner develops a more open and receptive heart, capable of forgiveness and deep connection with others. This genuine connection reduces feelings of isolation and loneliness, fostering a sense of community and interdependence.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.9. Meditation as a political act

Although these meditative practices are essentially individual, they can also be understood as acts of political significance. By cultivating inner peace, we actively contribute to transforming the world around us. Through our practice, we consciously declare that we prefer and choose a peaceful mode of existence.

If each individual dedicated themselves to cultivating inner calm and genuine compassion, these individual transformations would gradually be reflected in social institutions, creating conditions for a more peaceful and harmonious world<sup>12</sup>. This perspective underscores the profound interconnection between inner peace and outer peace, a central theme of this study.

### 2.9.1. The power of forgiveness, the *brahma-vihāras*, and reconciliation: Breaking the cycles of pain

Beyond meditative practices aimed at insight and wisdom, Buddhism offers various meditations that, together with loving-kindness (*mettā*), contribute to healing wounds and alleviating the suffering of a world filled with conflict.

#### 2.9.2. Forgiveness as a transformative practice

Forgiveness does not imply accepting or minimizing the unjust action that hurt us. It is not about ignoring what happened but rather about not clinging to the burden of resentment, cultivating a lighter and more detached attitude toward suffering.

We can use the image of a crystal-clear river blocked by a dam of debris. The stagnant water is unable to flow freely. Anger, bitterness, and resentment are like these obstructions that hinder inner peace. We might think of forgiveness as the act of removing the dam, allowing the water to flow again – purified and free. Forgiveness practices can be introduced in many environments. For

<sup>11</sup> Many works discuss the practice of *mettā* from a modern perspective too. Some are: Salzberg, Sharon. *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Boston: Shambhala, 1995, p. 98 and Gunaratana, Bhante. *Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2017, p. 101.

<sup>12</sup> Macy, Joanna. *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007, 112 – 115.

example, in schools, they can help students develop emotional resilience and conflict resolution skills. This approach has been successfully implemented in programs like the Forgiveness Education Curriculum Enright.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.10. The four sublime states (*Brahma-vihāras*)

Venerable Rewata Dhamma emphasizes: “There is no point in sitting atop a mountain of gold or owning a mansion if you live a life of unhappiness and dissatisfaction. What truly matters is living happily with others, and the Buddha taught this in his discourse on the Four Sublime States”.<sup>14</sup>

These sublime states, known as *Brahma-vihāras*, are: (1) Loving-kindness (*mettā*) – The genuine wish for all beings to find happiness and well-being. (2) Compassion (*karuṇā*) – The heart’s response to the suffering of others, with the desire to alleviate it. (3) Appreciative joy (*muditā*) – Rejoicing in the happiness and success of others. (4) Equanimity (*upekkhā*) – A balanced mind that remains steady in all circumstances.

Each of these states has specific functions for individual and collective well-being and is cultivated through dedicated meditative exercises.

According to Ven. Rewata Dhamma: “If we extend these energies [of the sublime states] to others, they will also be positively affected by them. The Buddha frequently emphasized that we should be mindful of ourselves and every thought, word, and action, protecting ourselves from transmitting any impure or harmful energy to others. By doing so, all of humanity could indeed live happily and peacefully in this world, including animals and plants as well”.<sup>15</sup>

Venerable Mahinda further expands on this view, highlighting the importance of these practices, particularly for professionals working in caregiving and community service:

Developing these four qualities is essential, especially in caregiving professions and community service fields. Many people in these areas are affected, in one way or another, by the various sufferings of their clients, particularly when they are unable to eliminate or adequately alleviate that suffering. This occurs because they do not fully understand the nature of life on a deeper level and, as a result, struggle to maintain equanimity in the face of suffering. For anyone who wishes to help and bring benefit to others – whether to their own family, community, nation, or the entire world – it is essential to cultivate these immeasurable qualities, beginning with a solid foundation in the practice of *mettā*.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Robert D. *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 201.

<sup>14</sup> Rewata Dhamma, Ven. *The Buddha’s Prescription*. Birmingham: Triple Gem Publications, 2005, p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Rewata Dhamma, Ven. *The Buddha’s Prescription*. Birmingham: Triple Gem Publications, 2005, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Mahinda, Ven. *Awakening with Metta: For the Wellbeing and Happiness of All*. Selangor: BMSM Publication, 2014, p. 46.



This aspect is particularly relevant within the context of Engaged Buddhism, where the ability to sustain compassion and equanimity, even in the face of great social challenges, is fundamental for effective and non-violent action.

### **2.11. Reconciliation: From the individual to the collective**

Reconciliation, in turn, arises from forgiveness and is strengthened through open and sincere communication. Loving-kindness meditation can be used as a tool for conflict resolution, fostering empathy and reducing hostility between conflicting parties. This approach has been applied in peacebuilding initiatives in post-conflict regions.<sup>17</sup>

To reconcile means to establish a renewed bond based on mutual respect, understanding, and personal responsibility. Reconciliation does not erase the marks of the past but rather transforms them into learned lessons and opportunities to build a more harmonious future. This process can take place both at the interpersonal level and on a broader social scale.

### **2.12. Engaged Buddhism: Applying inner peace to social action**

Engaged Buddhism is a movement that emerged in the 20th century, primarily through the teachings of masters such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Ajahn Buddhadasa, and Maha Ghosananda. This movement emphasizes that Buddhist principles should not be confined to temples or individual meditation but must be actively applied to address social, environmental, and political issues. In other words, it is about bringing compassion, wisdom, and Buddhist ethics into the real world, transforming spiritual practice into concrete action.

The central idea of Engaged Buddhism is that inner peace is not an end in itself but a powerful tool for transforming the world. When we cultivate calm and mental clarity through meditation and mindfulness, we become capable of seeing the roots of suffering—both our own and that of others. This deep insight allows us to act more effectively and compassionately.

For example, imagine someone fighting against social injustice. If that person acts out of anger, they might end up perpetuating the cycle of violence and division. But if they act from a place of inner peace, their struggle becomes more strategic and inclusive. They can recognize that even those who commit injustices are victims of their ignorance and conditioning. This does not mean accepting wrongdoing but rather seeking solutions that heal the deep causes of suffering.

### **2.13. Thich Nhat Hanh and the strength of Vietnamese Buddhism**

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk and one of the leading figures in Engaged Buddhism, often said: “Exploitation, social injustice, theft, and oppression occur in many forms and cause much suffering. The moment we commit to cultivating loving-kindness, loving-kindness arises in us, and we

---

<sup>17</sup> Shapiro, Daniel L. *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts*. New York: Viking, 2016, p. 65.



make every effort to put an end to such things.”<sup>18</sup> For him, Buddhist practice was a way to heal the world and our relationship with it. Practice could not be separated from daily life. If we see suffering in the world – whether hunger, social injustice, environmental destruction, or violence – it is our duty to act. However, this action must come from a place of inner peace and understanding, not from anger or hatred.

Thich Nhat Hanh and his monastic community did not just meditate – they actively worked to rebuild the social fabric that had been torn apart during the Vietnam War, tending to wounds and promoting peace dialogues. They demonstrated that it is possible to act with compassion even amid chaos, without losing connection to spiritual practice.

At his Plum Village community in France, he created a space where people could learn to live in harmony with themselves, with others, and with the planet. There, practices like walking meditation, mindful consumption, and compassionate dialogue were integrated into daily life, showing that a better world can be built through small, mindful actions.<sup>19</sup>

Another Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Tu, sees the need for Buddhism to engage in new ways to help people in today’s world. He states: “The idea of bringing Buddhism into real life is to respond to the many new and complex ideas and thoughts that emerge over time. This encourages Buddhism to take on a new role, ensuring its continued existence as a spiritual guide for people.”<sup>20</sup>

#### **2.14. Maha Ghosananda and peace in Cambodia**

Known as the “Gandhi of Cambodia,” Maha Ghosananda led peace marches in his country, which had been devastated by decades of civil war. He taught that every step taken in a march was a meditation – an opportunity to cultivate inner peace and, at the same time, inspire others to do the same. His non-violent and deeply spiritual approach helped heal wounds and rebuild trust among people.<sup>21</sup>

This Cambodian monk lived in exile between 1975 and 1979, when the Khmer Rouge persecuted Buddhism, leading to the deaths of approximately two million people through starvation, disease, forced labor, and executions. Ghosananda was among the first monks to return to Cambodia after the Pol Pot regime was overthrown in 1979, helping to train new Buddhist leaders and restore Buddhism in the war-torn country.

In 1988, he was elected Supreme Patriarch of Cambodian Buddhism,

---

<sup>18</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2008, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Thich Nhat Tu, *Engaged Buddhism, Social Change and World Peace*. Phu Nhuan: Religion Press, 2014, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> Ghosananda, Maha. *Step by Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion*. Virginia: Parallax Press, 1992, p. 87.

recognizing his efforts in reviving Buddhist practice. During the 1990s, he led the Dhamma Yatra movement, a pilgrimage for peace and spiritual renewal in Cambodia. In 1994, during a peace march in a region still controlled by the Khmer Rouge, three Cambodians – including a monk and a Buddhist nun – were killed in the crossfire between government troops and rebels, yet Ghosananda escaped unharmed.

In 1997, after the rebels of Pailin surrendered and joined the government, Maha Ghosananda led another peace march in the region. This time, they were warmly welcomed by residents and former Khmer Rouge fighters – the same people who had previously executed monks and destroyed Buddhist temples.

### **2.15. Ajahn Buddhadasa and ecology**

Ajahn Buddhadasa, a Thai monk and a key figure in Thailand, was a pioneer in connecting Buddhism with environmental protection. He taught that nature is a reflection of the Dhamma (universal truth) and that destroying the environment is equivalent to destroying ourselves. His vision inspired many ecological movements based on Buddhist principles, showing that caring for the Earth is a form of spiritual practice.

Buddhism considers the Dhamma to consist of 84,000 teachings, like drops of water for thirsty beings – each fulfilling the Buddha's wish to help all living beings. Ajahn Buddhadasa stated: "Buddhists are expected to spread the Buddha-Dhamma in this violent world to fulfill the Buddha's wish."<sup>22</sup>

The Buddha's teaching is a direct path to reducing violence in the world. To spread the Dhamma does not mean forcing others to accept it, nor using violence or deception. Rather, it means making it available to as many beings as possible so that those who seek such teachings can easily find them.

Ajahn Buddhadasa also affirmed: "The Buddha said that his coming and the existence of his Dhamma-Vinaya were for the benefit of the masses, both deities and humans."<sup>23</sup>

The Dhamma is the Buddha's teaching, and the Vinaya is the importance of personal discipline on this path. Understanding how the Dhamma-Vinaya can guide us toward peace is essential for those who seek to follow the Buddha's path.

### **2.16. How to apply engaged Buddhism in daily life**

One does not need to be a monk or a professional activist to practice Engaged Buddhism. Here are some simple ways to integrate these principles into daily life:

- (1) Mindful Consumption – Before buying something, ask yourself if it contributes to greed, hatred, or harm to others. Choose ethical and sustainable products.
- (2) Compassionate Dialogue – When conflicts arise, practice deep listening and speak with kindness, seeking to understand the other person rather than just defending your point of

<sup>22</sup> Buddhadasa, A. *A Buddhist Charter*. Chaya: Wat Suan Mokkh, 1982, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

view. (3) Community Action – Get involved in projects that benefit your community, such as volunteering at shelters, organizing donation campaigns, or supporting educational initiatives <sup>24</sup>.

Engaged Buddhism<sup>25</sup> reminds us that spirituality is not an escape from reality but a way of facing it with courage and compassion. By cultivating inner peace, we become agents of transformation, capable of acting in the world without losing connection to our humanity and the deepest values of Buddhism.

### III. CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, we have explored the many dimensions of an integral Buddhism – one that is concerned not only with inner transformation but also with the transformation of the world around us. We have seen how masters such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Maha Ghosananda, and Ajahn Buddhadasa, among many others, demonstrated that spiritual practice is not separate from daily life and the social, environmental, and political challenges we face.

This reflection invites us to recognize that cultivating inner peace through meditation, mindfulness, and the sublime states (*Brahma-vihāras*) can be powerful resources for our engagement in the world. When we act from a place of clarity, compassion, and equanimity, our actions become more effective and less likely to perpetuate cycles of violence and division.

The principle of Dependent Co-Arising (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*) teaches us that our inner state is deeply interconnected with the external world. By transforming ourselves, we influence our relationships, our communities, and the structures that shape society. Ethical living (*sīla*), mindful awareness (*sati*), and wisdom (*paññā*) do not serve only individual well-being; they form the foundation for a just and peaceful world.

Engaged Buddhism reminds us that spirituality is not an escape from reality but a way to confront it with wisdom and courage. Whether through the peace activism of Maha Ghosananda, the social and ecological consciousness of Ajahn Buddhadasa, or the practice of mindful living taught by Thich Nhat Hanh, the message is clear: true peace is both an internal and an external practice.

If each of us cultivates compassion, loving-kindness, and a commitment to justice, we not only transform our suffering but also contribute to breaking cycles of pain and conflict in the world. Inner peace and outer peace are not separate – they are two aspects of the same path toward a more harmonious and awakened existence.

---

<sup>24</sup> David R. Loy “Mindfulness, loving-kindness and compassion practices can be extended to include ecological awareness, encouraging individuals to develop a deeper connection with nature and a commitment to environmental stewardship”. is a modern proponent of many ideas in this field? Cf. His *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2019, p. 45 – 9.

<sup>25</sup> For a basic approach of Engaged Buddhism, we suggest King, Sallie B. *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai Press, 2009, p. 67, and Queen, Christopher S. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000, p. 93.

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Anguttara Nikāya*, Ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1885 - 1900. Tr. F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1932 - 1995.
- Dhammapada*, Ed. S. Sumaṅgala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K. R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.
- Dīgha Nikāya*, Ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J.E.Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.
- Khuddakapāṭha*, Ed. Ven. Ñāṇamoli, *The Minor Readings and the Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, PTS, London, 2015.
- Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed.V.Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.

### Secondary sources

- Analayo, Bhikkhu. *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*. Cambridge: Windhorse Publications, 2003.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1994.
- Buddhadasa, A. A *Buddhist Charter*. Chaya: Wat Suan Mokkh, 1982.
- Chah, Ajahn. *Everything Arises, Everything Falls Away: Teachings on Impermanence and the End of Suffering*. Boston: Shambhala, 2005.
- Ghosananda, Maha. *Step by Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion*. Virginia: Parallax Press, 1992.
- Goldstein, Joseph. *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*. Boulder: Sounds True, 2013.
- Gunaratana, Bhante. *Loving-Kindness in Plain English: The Practice of Metta*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2017.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2001.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2008.
- Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- King, Sallie B. *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai Press, 2009.
- Kornfield, Jack. *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace*. New York: Bantam Books, 2002.

- Loy, David R. *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2019.
- Macy, Joanna. *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007.
- Mahinda, Ven. *Awakening with Metta: For the Wellbeing and Happiness of All*. Selangor: BMSM Publication, 2014.
- Marlatt, G. Alan. *Mindfulness and the Addictive Process*. New York: Guilford Press, 2010.
- Queen, Christopher S. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.
- Rewata Dhamma, Ven. *The Buddha's Prescription*. Birmingham: Triple Gem Publications, 2005.
- Robert D. *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001.
- Salzberg, Sharon. *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Boston: Shambhala, 1995.
- Shapiro, Daniel L. *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts*. New York: Viking, 2016.
- Sivaraksa, Sulak. *The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the 21st Century*. Kihei: Koa Books, 2009.
- Thich Nhat Hanh. *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998.
- Thich Nhat Tu. *Engaged Buddhism, Social Change and World Peace*. Phu Nhuan: Religion Press, 2014.
- Thittila, Ashin. *A Buddhist's Companion*. Penang: Sukhi Hotu, 1997.





# WORLD PEACE THROUGH INNER PEACE - THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MEDITATION

Prof. Dr. Lye Ket Yong\*

## Abstract:

This paper presents a framework for incorporating Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) into mathematics instruction through the innovative application of crossword puzzles. The study addresses the declining interest in mathematics among students and proposes engaging pedagogical strategies to foster enthusiasm and deep understanding. Using puzzles designed with specific mathematical content, the research evaluates students' engagement, critical thinking, and creativity in solving problems. The implementation among upper secondary students demonstrates improved motivation and enhanced comprehension of mathematical concepts. This approach not only promotes higher-order thinking skills but also makes mathematics learning more interactive and enjoyable. The study underscores the value of non-traditional methods in modern education to bridge gaps in students' cognitive engagement with mathematics.

**Keywords:** *mathematics education, critical thinking, creative thinking, crossword puzzles, pedagogical strategies, student engagement, problem-solving, higher-order thinking.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The search for inner peace and happiness has been a central theme in human history, yet it remains elusive for many. Despite advances in science, technology, and society, individuals and communities continue to suffer. Natural disasters, wars, political instability, economic crises, and personal challenges such as work pressures, financial struggles, and strained relationships in family contribute to a pervasive sense of anxiety and distress.

---

\* President of Middle East Meditation Center, U. A. E., Assistant Professor, Institute of Buddhist Psychology, Myanmar, Secretary General, World Alliance of Buddhists (WAB).

In recent times, the world has witnessed significant turmoil and suffering. Ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, particularly and other parts of the World, have led to the immense loss of lives, hardships, and the displacement of thousands of people. The civil unrest in Myanmar has further exacerbated the plight of its citizens, especially amongst its ethnic minorities, causing widespread fear and instability. Additionally, natural disasters such as floodings, earthquakes, and the devastating wildfires in Los Angeles have destroyed homes and livelihoods, leaving many homeless and in distress. These events highlight the urgent need for inner peace and resilience in the face of global challenges.

In such a turbulent world, achieving peace – both personal and global – can seem impossible. Yet meditation, a practice as ancient as humanity’s quest for meaning, emerges as a universal solution. Its ability to foster inner calm and balance on an individual level creates ripples of harmony that extend outward, eventually catalyzing societal, communal, and global peace.

This paper examines how meditation, by enabling individuals to find inner peace, can lay the foundation for achieving global harmony and fostering sustainable development.

## II. INNER PEACE

Inner peace, or “*Passaddhi*” in Pali, is a state of mental and spiritual harmony where one is free from turmoil and discord. It is not merely the absence of stress and anxiety but the presence of mindfulness, contentment, and a deep-seated sense of serenity. Achieving inner peace leads to profound happiness, cultivated wisdom, and a calm, centered perspective on life. Inner Peace or “*Passaddhi*” (Pali) in Buddhist teachings refers to tranquility or calmness of both body and mind. It is one of the “Seven Factors of Enlightenment” (*Satta Bojjhaṅga*) and plays a crucial role in meditation practice.

As stated in the *Samyutta Nikaya*:

“For one who is tranquil in body and happy, the mind becomes concentrated. When the mind is concentrated, things become manifest as they truly are” (*SN 46.3*)

### 2.1. The timeless quest for inner peace

The teachings of the Buddha provide timeless insights into humanity’s quest for peace and liberation. During his search for liberation from suffering and enlightenment, the Lord Buddha tried various methodologies, including engaging in a painstaking process of self-mortification. However, this did not lead him to the supreme peace he sought. After profound contemplation, he realized that this was not the path to relieve him from distress and gave up this practice.

Eventually, he considered the Middle Way – a path not dependent on extremes and enduring austerities – as the method of practice to attain liberation and enlightenment. On the day of his enlightenment, Prince Siddhartha ate some milk-rice offered by the maiden Sujātā, which restored his health and

radiance. He received eight sheaves of grass from the brahmin Sotthiya and laid them down beneath a Bodhi tree. Sitting cross-legged, he resolved:

“For however long it takes for me to attain enlightenment, even if my body should shrivel and die leaving only skin, sinew, and bone, I will not leave this meditation seat, not moving from this position even if my life should come to an end”- *Majjhima Nikaya - Mahasaccaka Sutta (MN 36)*.

During meditation on that full moon day, he attained the “*Dhammakaya*” – the body of Enlightenment of all Buddhas, Inner Peace, and experienced immense happiness.

This resolution was made at Bodhgaya, just before the Buddha’s enlightenment, demonstrating his unwavering determination to achieve complete awakening.

The moral of the story is that the search for Inner Peace and attaining the *Dhammakaya* is internal within us. Inner Peace cannot be found outside of our body.

## **2.2. Meditation: A pathway to attaining inner peace**

Meditation offers a pathway to focus, calm, and eventually still the mind, leading to the attainment of inner peace. It empowers individuals to reclaim control of their minds, transforming them into sources of peace, wisdom, compassion, and strength. Scientific studies confirm that meditation reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, improves sleep, and strengthens immunity. It also cultivates emotional intelligence, enhancing empathy, gratitude, and compassion.

The Mind, as referred to in Buddhist scriptures, is not an organ but can be compared to a form of energy like light, which has its brightness and aura.

Meditation (*Bhavana*) is the cultivation and development of Body and Mind, which can be considered as a transformative practice that stills the mind with clarity, focus, empathy, and impartiality. It addresses one of the most profound truths about human experience:

“You have a mind, but you are not the boss of your mind. Often, your mind is the boss of you.”

The mind is our most valuable asset. It has the power to make us happy or miserable, energized or lifeless, successful or broken. The quality of our thoughts directly influences the quality of our life. Meditation empowers us to reclaim control of this invaluable resource, transforming it into a source of peace, wisdom, compassion, and strength.

Meditation can be transformative in many ways, including:

- Mental health and mental purification

Scientific studies confirm that meditation reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, improves sleep, and strengthens immunity. Calming the mind, it also alleviates anxiety and depression, fostering mental clarity and resilience. Moreover, meditation aids in mental purification, reducing anger, greed, and delusion while cultivating wholesome mental states and developing equanimity.

- Leads to a clear understanding of cause and effect (The Law of *Karma*)

The Law of Karma, a fundamental belief in Buddhism, posits that our actions, whether physical, verbal, or mental, have consequences that shape our present and future experiences. Meditation facilitates a clear understanding of this cause-and-effect relationship by fostering mindfulness and introspection. As individuals become more aware of their actions and their repercussions, they are more likely to engage in positive behaviors that contribute to their well-being and reduce suffering.

- Recognition of the three characteristics of existence (*Tilakkhaṇa*)

Meditation also aids in recognizing the three characteristics of existence (*tilakkhaṇa*): impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*). Through continuous practice, meditators gain insight into the transient nature of all phenomena, understanding that everything is subject to change and nothing remains permanent. This realization helps in accepting life's uncertainties and reducing attachment and aversion, which are the root causes of suffering. Furthermore, by comprehending the concept of non-self, individuals can transcend the ego and experience a sense of unity with all beings.

- Liberation from sufferings

The ultimate goal of meditation is the liberation from suffering (*dukkha*) and the attainment of Nirvana. By cultivating mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion, meditators can overcome the defilements of the mind, such as greed, hatred, and delusion. This inner purification leads to a profound sense of peace and freedom, eventually releasing individuals from the cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsara*) and paving the way for spiritual enlightenment.

- Better stress management and resilience

Meditation reduces stress and increases resilience, enabling individuals to manage life's challenges with greater ease and composure. It enhances emotional balance, helping to navigate difficult situations without being overwhelmed.

- Emotional intelligence and compassion

Meditation cultivates emotional intelligence, improving self-awareness and empathy. It reduces tendencies toward anger, jealousy, hatred, and fear while enhancing gratitude and compassion. These qualities enrich relationships and create a harmonious social environment.

- Enhanced performance and focus

By training the mind to focus on a single point, meditation improves concentration, mindfulness, and decision-making, leading to better outcomes in personal and professional life.

- Blissfulness and fulfillment

Meditation fosters self-awareness, helping individuals transcend superficial concerns and connect with deeper values. This connection brings a sense of purpose, contentment, and joy.

- Pathway to spiritual attainment and growth

In Buddhism, through deep Meditation, one may achieve the 4 levels of

“*Jhana*” (One Pointedness or Meditative Absorption - a very still, focused, and stable state of concentration). To attain the “*Jhanas*”, the Meditator must begin by eliminating the unwholesome mental states of the 5 hindrances (*Pancanivarana*): sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, worry and doubts. Further continuous practice shall eventually lead to spiritual growth and enlightenment.

This attainment grants the meditator supreme bliss, profound happiness, enhanced wisdom, mindfulness, and compassion, transforming them into noble, ethical individuals worthy of respect comparable to a “*Bodhisattva*” (path towards Buddhahood).

### III. ACHIEVING MINDFULNESS

In contemporary times, it has never been more crucial for individuals to be mindful of the consequences of their actions. Genuine mindfulness would eliminate conflicts by fostering love and respect for both our neighbours and our planet, thereby promoting self-respect and self-love.

We aim to instill mindfulness and self-awareness in our children, which often stems from an inherent sense of right and wrong. This is evident in our daily activities. For instance, we might encourage children to engage in positive actions such as picking up discarded trash and disposing of it correctly, whether at home or school. These seemingly simple actions are fundamental in developing a sense of responsibility towards ourselves and our environment. Each lesson learned through these actions serves as a reflection on the cause and effect of our behavior. If we neglect to dispose of litter properly, it leads to environmental degradation that we must then endure.

As teenagers or adults, we may participate in activities such as replanting trees or establishing national parks and protected areas. These actions reflect our thought processes and awareness of the impact of our decisions, demonstrating our level of mindfulness and responsibility.

Undoubtedly, meditation is the most effective method for achieving mindfulness. Meditation is an instinctive practice that begins at birth and continues to develop throughout life. Some meditation skills are innate, while others are acquired through guidance, study, self-discipline, and practice.

Meditation involves cultivating a peaceful state of mind and body; consistent practice enhances inner peace. Additionally, meditation offers medicinal benefits by inducing a state of equilibrium between intellect and emotions. Many problems arise from our inability to distinguish material progress from quality of life. Thus, meditation not only boosts spiritual well-being but also improves physical health by mitigating stress-related ailments. With each session, meditation promotes progressive personal growth.

In Buddhism, this is referred to as the “Path to Enlightenment,” which can also be understood as the journey toward comprehending the true nature of all experiences.

The *Kayagatasati Sutta* (MN 119) describes meditation for mindfulness:

“And how, monks, is mindfulness of the body developed and cultivated to bring great benefit?”

Buddhist scriptures like the *Kayagatasati Sutta*, *Satipatthana Sutta*, *Anapāsati Sutta*, and the *Samyutta Nikaya* consistently present meditation (*jhāna*, *samādhi*, *bhāvanā*) as an essential tool for developing and strengthening mindfulness (*sati*). The Buddha taught various meditation techniques specifically designed to cultivate mindfulness as part of the Noble Eightfold Path under Right Mindfulness (*Sammā-sati*).

Even without intellectual analysis, individuals often find that meditation brings unexpected blissful joy and happiness with minimal effort, offering longer-lasting contentment as compared to other entertainment activities.

When we achieve calmness and happiness, we are better equipped to reach our daily goals. We perform more effectively in work or study environments with focused minds. Moreover, we enjoy social and recreational activities more fully, extending our internal happiness into all aspects of life. Consequently, we become happier and more effective individuals, positively influencing those around us.

There is a wide variety of meditation techniques available to practitioners, each offering unique approaches to mindfulness and self-discovery. These techniques are often taught by spiritual and religious masters, who often base their teachings on the specific practices and traditions of their lineage. Among the many methods available, two stand out as particularly popular and impactful: *Vipassana* and *Dhammakaya*, the latter also known as the Middle Way Meditation. Let us delve deeper into these two renowned meditation techniques to better understand their principles, origins, and benefits.

#### IV. VIPASSANA MEDITATION

“Vipassana,” which means “insight” or “clear seeing,” is one of the oldest forms of meditation, originating from the teachings of the Buddha. It focuses on the deep interconnection between body and mind, which can be experienced directly through disciplined attention to physical sensations. The practice involves observing thoughts and emotions as they are, without judgment or attachment, leading to a profound understanding of the nature of existence.

##### Historical context and practice

Vipassana meditation is rooted in the “*Satipatthana Sutta*” (MN10), where the Buddha outlines the four foundations of mindfulness as a way to cultivate insight (*vipassana*) and calm (*samatha*): Contemplation of the body (*kayanupassana*), Contemplation of feelings (*vedananupassana*), Contemplation of the mind (*cittanupassana*), and Contemplation of mental objects (*dhammanupassana*). This practice aims to cultivate insight into the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of all phenomena.

The Buddha emphasizes the importance of Vipassana in the *Kimsuka Sutta* (SN 35.204), comparing it to a swift pair of messengers delivering the message of truth.



Key scriptural references for practice:

1. “When you see with discernment, ‘All dhammas are not-self’ – you grow disenchanted with suffering. This is the path to purity.” (*Dhp* 279)

2. In the *Mahasatipatthana Sutta* (*DN* 22), the Buddha states: “This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearing of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of Nibbana.”

The practice of Vipassana involves clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) and mindfulness (*sati*). Practitioners observe the three characteristics of existence (*tilakkhana*): impermanence (*anicca*), suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*).

The practical application teaches us to:

1. Observe phenomena as they arise and pass away
2. Understand the impermanent nature of all experiences
3. Develop detachment from sensory experiences
4. Cultivate wisdom through direct observation

Renowned meditation masters like Mahasi Sayadaw and S.N. Goenka have popularized Vipassana in the modern era, emphasizing its transformative potential for achieving liberation from suffering.

Vipassana methodology as taught by S. N. Goenka

The Vipassana meditation technique, as taught by S. N. Goenka, is a systematic approach to self-purification through self-observation. Rooted in the teachings of Theravada Buddhism, Goenka’s method presents Vipassana as a universal, non-sectarian practice accessible to individuals of all backgrounds. It emphasizes experiential wisdom over dogma, allowing practitioners to discover the truths of impermanence, suffering, and non-self through direct experience.

Key aspects of the methodology:

1. Ten-day retreat format

The technique is traditionally taught in an intensive ten-day residential retreat. These retreats provide a structured environment, free from external distractions, where participants follow a strict schedule of meditation, ethical discipline, and silence. The first three days are devoted to preparing the mind through focused awareness of the natural breath, a practice called “*Anapana*”.

2. *Anapana-sati* meditation

Practitioners begin by observing their natural breath, focusing on the sensations at the nostrils, in-and-out breathing (*anapana*), and of various states that arise from this observance (mindfulness of breathing). This technique calms and sharpens the mind, enabling it to focus with greater clarity. *Anapana-sati* serves as a foundation for the deeper practice of Vipassana.

3. Vipassana meditation

On the fourth day, practitioners transition to the practice of Vipassana.

This involves systematic observation of bodily sensations, moving attention through different parts of the body. By observing these sensations without attachment or aversion, practitioners cultivate equanimity and develop insight into the impermanent nature of physical and mental phenomena.

#### 4. Ethical discipline (Śīla)

Adherence to a code of moral conduct is an essential part of the practice. Participants commit to precepts such as refraining from lying, stealing, and harming others. This ethical foundation supports mental purification and fosters an environment conducive to meditation.

#### 5. *Samādhi* (Concentration)

Developing concentration through focused attention on the breath enables the mind to remain steady and calm. This preparatory step is essential for Vipassana, as it lays the groundwork for deeper insight.

#### 6. *Pañña* (Wisdom)

Through the practice of Vipassana, practitioners gain insight into the nature of reality. Observing sensations with detachment reveals the truth of *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (non-self). This experiential wisdom leads to a gradual purification of the mind.

#### 7. Noble Silence

Throughout the retreat, participants observe Noble Silence, refraining from speaking, gesturing, or interacting with others. This silence helps create a conducive atmosphere for introspection and deep meditation.

#### 8. Universal Applicability

S. N. Goenka emphasized that Vipassana is not tied to any religious belief system. Instead, it is a practical tool for personal transformation, offering benefits such as reduced stress, enhanced self-awareness, and inner peace.

By the end of the retreat, participants are encouraged to integrate the practice into their daily lives, dedicating time to continued meditation and ethical living. S.N. Goenka's teaching method has popularized Vipassana worldwide, offering millions the opportunity to embark on a journey of self-discovery and liberation.

#### Benefits and Impact

Vipassana practice is a direct path to inner peace, happiness, and harmony. Let me explain through Buddhist teachings:

##### 1. Peace (*Santi*):

The Buddha teaches in the *Dvayatanupassana Sutta* (Sn 3.12): "Whatever suffering arises, all that arises dependent on desire." Through Vipassana, we observe and understand our desires, see their impermanent nature, develop detachment, and experience genuine peace.

##### 2. Happiness (*Sukha*):

In the *Dhammapada*, it is said: "There is no happiness higher than peace" (Dhp 202). Vipassana leads to freedom from mental defilements, reduction

of craving (*tanha*), development of contentment, and authentic happiness not dependent on conditions.

### 3. Harmony (*Samaggi*):

The *Sedaka Sutta* (SN 47.19) states that by protecting ourselves through mindfulness, we protect others. Vipassana helps develop self-understanding, compassion for others, balanced relationships, and inner and outer harmony.

The Buddha confirms this in *Anguttara Nikaya*:

“One who develops insight (*vipassana*) develops wisdom. One who develops wisdom develops insight” (*AN 2.32*)

## V. THE *DHAMMAKAYA* METHODOLOGY

After achieving enlightenment, the Buddha introduced his listeners to the Middle Way, or “*majjhimapatipada*” in Pali, a path that avoids the extremes of harsh asceticism and indulgent sensuality. This principle forms the foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path – a comprehensive guide comprising Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Together, these practices enable individuals to cultivate ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom.

The transformative power of meditation is exemplified by the Buddha’s journey. Prince Siddhartha meditated under the Bodhi tree for 49 days, steadfast in his determination to attain enlightenment. Through this profound meditation, he transcended his human limitations, transforming from a normal person into a noble being, revered as the Buddha. This journey serves as an inspiration for all who seek inner peace. In Buddhist tradition, those who achieve one of the four levels of awakening (“*jhanas*”, stream-entry, once-returner, non-returner, or arahant – are themselves referred to as “*Ariya Puggalas*” (Noble Persons). These individuals embody the qualities of wisdom, compassion, and liberation.

The Middle Way Meditation Technique specifically aligns with this transformative journey. By focusing the mind on the center of the body, approximately two fingers’ width above the navel, practitioners cultivate stillness and balance. This focal point, considered the natural home of the mind, allows meditators to transcend the distractions of daily life, achieve clarity, and experience profound inner peace. The practice reflects the essence of the Buddha’s teachings, offering a practical method for modern individuals to cultivate the same tranquility and wisdom that transformed the Buddha and countless noble beings before and after him.

### Historical Context and Practice

The *Dhammakaya* Methodology traces its origins to the Buddha’s enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, where he attained the “*Dhammakaya*” or the body of enlightenment. This practice reflects the essence of the Buddha’s teachings, offering a practical and simple method for modern individuals to cultivate tranquility, inner peace, happiness, and wisdom. Meditation masters like Luang Pu Wat Paknam (Phra Mongkoltepmuni Sod Chantasaro)

and Luang Por Dhammajayo have been instrumental in promoting this technique, highlighting its effectiveness in achieving profound inner peace and wisdom. Phra Mongkolthepmuni (Luang Pu Sodh Candasaro, 1884 - 1959) was a significant Thai Buddhist monk who rediscovered and revived the Dhammakaya meditation technique. After years of practice, on the full moon night of September 1916, at Wat Botbon in Bangkuvieng, Nonthaburi, Thailand, through his meditation practice, he identified what he described as the “original meditation teaching of the Buddha”. This became known as the “Vijja *Dhammakaya*” or the “*Dhammakaya* Knowledge”.

### Practice

**Base Position:** The meditator sits in a comfortable position, typically cross-legged, with the right leg over the left and the right hand over the left, both placed palm-up on the lap. For those who have difficulty sitting cross-legged on the floor, sitting on a chair or any comfortable seat is recommended. The first few moments should be spent relaxing the body, ensuring that every part of the body is free from stress, pain, and discomfort.

**The Seven Bases of the Mind:** In *Dhammakaya*, meditation is considered crucial points of consciousness that serve as stepping stones to deeper meditation. Here’s a detailed explanation of each base:

The First Base focuses on the nostril opening. For men, it is the right nostril, and for women, it is the left nostril. This point is where the breath initially touches, anchoring the mind and calming it.

The Second Base is the inner corner of the eye. Men focus on the right corner, while women focus on the left corner, marking a transition from external to internal focus.

The Third Base is the center of the head, inside the skull, where consciousness gathers.

The Fourth Base is the palate or roof of the mouth, where the tongue touches. It serves as a bridge between the upper and lower centers.

The Fifth Base is located at the throat center. This position connects the upper and lower body, refining awareness.

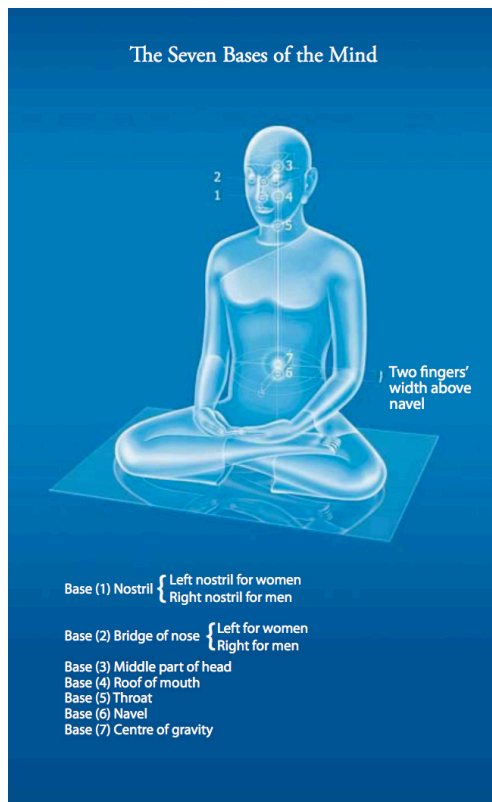
The Sixth Base is at the center of the body, at navel level. Breath energy gathers here, making it a key energy center in Thai Buddhist meditation.

The Seventh Base is the final position, located two finger-widths above the navel. This base is the gateway to deeper meditative states and is considered the mind’s natural “home”.

The seventh base is regarded as the permanent base for continued practice. Meditators are advised to focus the mind at the seventh base softly, lightly, and calmly, without exertion. The technique teaches that moving through these bases sequentially helps to stabilize the mind, gather scattered energy, create a clear pathway to deeper meditation, and establish the foundation for accessing higher spiritual attainments.

The practitioner is taught to visualize a clear, luminous sphere at each

point, maintaining gentle attention without force. The movement from one base to another should be smooth and natural, without strain.



### “Visualization and Mantra”

This meditation approach combines visualization and mantra repetition to calm and focus the mind at its natural 7th. The base, located at the “center of the body”. Practitioners are guided to visualize a bright and radiant object, such as the sun, moon, or a crystal ball, as a focal point. This visualization serves to anchor the mind, drawing it into stillness and preventing distractions.

To further support the mind in maintaining focus on the visualized object and to prevent it from wandering, a mantra is repeated continuously. One commonly used mantra is “Sama Arahang, Sama Arahang”, which is softly recited rhythmically and soothingly. The combined effect of visualization and mantra repetition helps practitioners achieve a state of mental clarity, inner calm, and sustained focus. Over time, this practice fosters deeper meditation, promoting feelings of peace, happiness, wisdom, and connection with the mind’s natural home.

### Benefits and Impact

“The only definitive way to overcome aggression, selfishness and conflict, wrong views and stubbornness, is to uproot the very thoughts of all these things from the mind by meditating until we can attain the 'Dhammakaya'

within ourselves.” A quote from Luang Phaw Dhammachiayo Bhikkhu’s book “Pearls of Inner Wisdom”.

The *Dhammakaya* Methodology addresses the root causes of conflict: greed, hatred, and ignorance within individuals. By transforming the mind, practitioners become less likely to contribute to conflict and more likely to radiate calm, compassion, and understanding. This technique also aligns with the Noble Eightfold Path, enabling individuals to cultivate ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom.

## VI. INNER PEACE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR WORLD PEACE

The pursuit of world peace often emphasizes external strategies such as diplomacy, policy reforms, and conflict resolution. While these efforts are undeniably important, they address only the symptoms of discord and overlook its underlying causes: the greed, selfishness, delusion, hatred, and ignorance that reside within individuals. These inner disturbances manifest outwardly as conflicts, divisions, and societal unrest. True and lasting peace requires addressing root causes individually, and meditation is a powerful way to unify the mind and eliminate these defilements.

Meditation fosters mindfulness, self-awareness, equanimity, and compassion by calming the mind and transforming negative tendencies. It helps individuals overcome destructive emotions, such as anger and jealousy, and cultivates qualities like empathy, patience, and tolerance. The transformation of the individual mind has profound implications for society as a whole.

The UNESCO Constitution insightfully states:

“Wars begin in the minds of men, so it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” This declaration underscores the critical link between inner peace and global harmony.

When a person achieves inner peace, they are less likely to contribute to conflict in their personal and professional relationships. Instead, they embody calmness and understanding, acting as a stabilizing influence in their immediate environment. Their actions inspire those around them, encouraging others to adopt similar practices and attitudes. This creates a ripple effect, where the peace cultivated by one individual spreads outward, influencing families, communities, and eventually, entire nations.

In addition, collective meditation efforts can amplify these effects. Research has shown that large-scale meditation practices can positively influence societal dynamics, reducing crime rates and fostering social cohesion. Imagine a world where individuals from diverse cultures and backgrounds regularly engage in meditation, cultivating inner peace as a shared human value. Such a practice would bridge divides, mitigate conflicts, and create a foundation for sustainable global peace.

Furthermore, achieving inner peace supports sustainable development. People who are centered and mindful are more likely to make ethical and environmentally conscious decisions, addressing issues such as overconsumption, inequality, and ecological degradation. Inner peace fosters



wisdom, loving-kindness, clarity, and compassion, enabling individuals to act with a sense of responsibility toward future generations.

In a globalized world, where challenges such as climate change, economic disparity, and political strife affect all humanity, the cultivation of inner peace becomes a necessity, not a luxury. By fostering peace within themselves, individuals contribute to a collective mindset that values harmony over conflict, cooperation over competition, and compassion over division. A world where inner peace is universally embraced is a world poised for sustainable, enduring peace.

## **VII. AGENT OF CHANGE: PROMOTING AND DEVELOPING INTEREST IN MEDITATION**

Promoting meditation as a means of achieving inner peace and global harmony has seen remarkable success through various innovative and large-scale initiatives. These programs demonstrate the transformative power of mindfulness, showcasing how inner peace can drive societal well-being and lasting change.

One of the most impactful efforts comes from the Middle Way Meditation Institute (MMI), a Thailand-based organization that champions the philosophy of World Peace through Inner Peace. MMI believes that lasting global harmony begins with cultivating inner peace within individuals. Their mission is brought to life through a variety of initiatives, including Meditation retreats, peace education programs, and high-profile events like the “Light of Peace”.

The Light of Peace events have received international recognition, with two earning spots in the Guinness Book of World Records. On September 5, 2017, the Global Light of Peace set a record for the largest online meditation lesson, connecting participants from six continents for world peace. The live broadcast included cities such as New York, Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona, Maputo, Iloilo City, and Sydney, highlighting the unifying power of meditation and its potential for global transformation.

MMI’s initiatives extend beyond record-breaking events. They have established programs in schools, families, and communities, emphasizing meditation as a tool for personal and social transformation. These efforts aim to address the root causes of conflict – greed, hatred, and ignorance – by fostering mindfulness, compassion, and understanding.

Local events like the “Light of Peace in San Enrique” show how meditation can influence communities. On August 29, 2015, the town of San Enrique, Iloilo, Philippines, hosted its third Light of Peace event in collaboration with MMI. During the event, named the “Dawn of the Inner Peace Town”, 56,000 people gathered to meditate and practice the Five Universal Goodness (UG5). Over 56,000 candles were lit under a full moon, with the community sharing the message “Progress through Inner Peace,” symbolizing their commitment to harmony. The event was covered by major Philippine newspapers such as the Manila Bulletin and the Philippines Daily Inquirer. San Enrique received recognition as the “First Inner Peace Town in the World” and successfully entered the Guinness World Record for 56,680 lighted candles forming a giant map of the Philippines and the message “World Peace through Inner Peace”.

Furthermore, regional efforts such as the Moonlight Meditation Initiative by the Jordan Meditation Center have promoted mindfulness in regions affected by conflict. Held in 2013 and 2014, these gatherings introduced meditation as a means of healing, dialogue, and cultural understanding.

In today's digital era, MMI and similar organizations are leveraging modern technology to expand their reach. Initiatives like online meditation programs, AI-powered apps, and immersive AR and metaverse experiences bring mindfulness to diverse audiences, making it accessible to people worldwide. These platforms allow participants to meditate together, regardless of geographical barriers, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

The World has indeed changed significantly post-COVID-19, and technology is revolutionizing how meditation is practiced and promoted, making it more accessible and customizable for individuals worldwide. AI-powered meditation apps are at the forefront of this transformation, using machine learning to analyze user preferences and create personalized meditation experiences. These innovations cater to a diverse audience, addressing unique needs and skill levels while enhancing the effectiveness of meditation practices.

Applications like "Calm AI" utilize AI to offer guided meditation tracks tailored to individual needs, providing users with a variety of techniques to improve focus, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being. Similarly, "Vital AI" allows users to customize meditation sessions by selecting preferred voices, techniques, and background music, creating a highly personalized experience. Another prominent example is "Meditopia", an AI-driven mindfulness app available in 12 languages and accessible on platforms like the Apple Store. It positions itself as a mental health sanctuary, offering the tools and guidance necessary to cultivate mental resilience, balance, and inner peace.

These advancements are not only breaking down barriers to accessibility but also fostering a global sense of unity by allowing people from diverse backgrounds and religious affiliations to engage with meditation in meaningful ways. By integrating AI, AR, and virtual platforms like the metaverse, the practice of meditation evolves beyond traditional settings, empowering individuals and communities to achieve inner peace in an increasingly connected world.

By promoting inner peace as a universal value, these programs encourage people to become agents of change, inspiring a world where compassion, respect, and harmony thrive. As these efforts grow, they illuminate a path to a sustainable future, demonstrating that true peace begins within.



## VIII. CONCLUSION

The journey to world peace begins with a profound paradigm shift – a transformation that starts within ourselves and influences how we approach personal, mental, and collective well-being. Through the practice of meditation, individuals can cultivate inner peace and mindfulness that will foster loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. These qualities form the foundation for a more harmonious and sustainable world. This shift in perspective underscores the deep interconnectedness between personal transformation and global harmony.

The Buddha emphasized in the *Sedaka Sutta* (SN 47.19) that by protecting oneself through mindfulness, we protect others, and by protecting others, we protect ourselves. This interconnected nature of peace is fundamental.

“Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone does it cease. This is an eternal law” (*Dhp* 5) - Quote from *Dhammapada Sutta*.

By taking responsibility for our inner transformation, we become agents of change, contributing to a future rooted in compassion, loving-kindness, respect, tolerance, and unity. The ripple effect of such transformation is immeasurable: starting with one individual, if everyone in the world practices meditation until they achieve their Inner-peace, a wave of positive energies that spread outwards across families, communities, society, and nations.

Just as a single candle can light billions of others, illuminating the darkness and transforming the entire universe, the collective embrace of inner peace through meditation has the potential to achieve a world of true and sustainable peace.

The *Metta Sutta* (Sn 1.8) illustrates how individual transformation leads to collective peace:

“Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings.”

Furthermore, the Buddha taught in *Anguttara Nikaya*:

“When the mind is transformed, the world is transformed” (AN 1.21)

The scriptures consistently show that genuine world peace begins with individual transformation through meditation, spreading outward like ripples in a pond. As the *Samyutta Nikaya* states:

“If one were to practice mindfulness of loving-kindness for even the time it takes to snap one’s fingers, one would not have practiced it in vain” (SN 20.4)

In conclusion, the Buddhist perspective shows that world peace is not an external achievement but a natural manifestation of collectively transformed consciousness through meditation practice.

May all sentient beings be well and happy. *Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!*

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- “Magga-Vibhanga Sutta: An Analysis of the Path”, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu  
 “Ariya Puggala” Noble persons/ [https://www.palikanon.com/english/wtb/a/ariya\\_puggala.htm](https://www.palikanon.com/english/wtb/a/ariya_puggala.htm)
- Analayo- The Genesis of the Bodhisattva Ideal, Hamburg Buddhist Studies 1, Hamburg University Press 2010.
- Bojjhaṅga Samyutta (SN 46): The seven factors of enlightenment  
 Common Buddhist Text ‘Guidance and Insight from the Buddha. 2017 MCU. Meditation Pg. 349-359 (The 4 foundations of Mindfulness).
- Descartes, R. (2008). Meditations on first philosophy with selections from the objections and replies. Translated by M. Moriarty. Oxford University Press1.
- Dhammapada Sutta: Mindfulness and Meditation, Anggutara Nikaya AN 1.21  
 Fronsdal 2008, The Five Hindrances: Introduction; 2008-10-13.
- Khoury, B., Lecomte, T., Fortin, G., Masse, M., Therien, P., Bouchard, V., ... & Hofmann, S. G. (2013). Mindfulness-based therapy: A comprehensive meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 33(6), 763-771.
- Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22- ...the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation. Dvayatanupassana Sutta (Sn 3.12): "Whatever suffering arises, all that arises dependent on desire.
- Milindapanha Sutta (Tipitaka) “Dhammakaya”-body of Dharma/ Discourse on Foundation of Mindfulness
- Pearls of Inner Wisdom- Luang Phaw Dhammajayo, 2007. Pg. 35 “Change your Mind”
- Rhys Davids & Stede (1921-25), p. 447, entry for "Passaddhi"
- Rhys Davids, C.A.F. (trans.) (1900). A Buddhist manual of psychological ethics or Buddhist Psychology, of the Fourth Century B.C.,.
- Satipatthana Sutta (MN10) for the four foundations of Mindfulness, and Sedaka Sutta (SN 47.19) for Achieving Harmony in Mindfulness.
- The Art of Living- Vipassana Meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka. William Hart eBook. Vipassana Meditation [www.dhamma.org](http://www.dhamma.org) as taught by S.N. Goenka. [www.vridhamma.org](http://www.vridhamma.org) 10 Day Course structure
- The Middle Way Meditation Institute (<https://mmipeace.org/meditation-retreat-thailand>)

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (1945). Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Walsh, R., & Shapiro, S. L. (2006). The meeting of meditative disciplines and Western psychology: A mutually enriching dialogue. *American Psychologist*, 61(3), 227-239.
- World Peace Lies Within-One Man's Vision by John Hoskin and Robert Sheridan. Pg. 31-34 *Mindfulness*





# CULTIVATING INNER PEACE FOR WORLD PEACE: WHAT THE BUDDHA SAYS ABOUT PEACE ACCORDING TO THE PALI CANON

Bhikkhu Brahmāli\*

## **Astract:**

This paper examines the Buddha's teachings on peace and conflict resolution as presented in the Pāli Canon, emphasizing the role of inner transformation in fostering world peace. The Buddha acknowledges that conflict, hostility, and war are intrinsic to human society, yet he asserts that individuals can cultivate peace within themselves. The Sakkapañha Sutta identifies the root causes of conflict as jealousy, stinginess, and ultimately the proliferation of perceptions that reinforce the illusion of self. By addressing these underlying causes through mindfulness, ethical conduct, and wisdom, individuals can break the cycle of violence and contribute to a more harmonious society.

The study explores Buddhist strategies for reducing societal conflict, including policies that minimize power corruption, promote generosity, and encourage inclusivity. The practice of renunciation and meditation offers a refuge from the sensory world, allowing individuals to develop true inner peace. Historical and contemporary examples, such as Emperor Ashoka's transformation, illustrate how Buddhist principles can influence leadership and governance. The research concludes that while absolute peace in society may be unattainable, personal transformation has a ripple effect, promoting unity and reducing conflict. By embodying Buddhist teachings, individuals become catalysts for peace, influencing communities and even leadership at broader levels.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, inner peace, world peace, conflict resolution, mindfulness, non-violence, wisdom, compassion, self-transformation.*

---

\* Assistant Spiritual Director, Buddhist Society of Western Australia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

When everyone wants peace and harmony, why is it that we have conflict, violence, and war?

This is a paraphrase of a remarkably perceptive question asked of the Buddha by none other than Sakka, the ruler of the gods.<sup>1</sup> It is indeed a strange conundrum that demands an explanation. If an answer can be found to this question, then perhaps we can break the age-old curse of violence that has always plagued humanity. We need to know how the Buddha replied to this question.

What we discover, of course, is that there is no easy answer, even for the Buddha. Essentially what the Buddha says is that conflict, hostility, and even war are an integral part of human society. We may be able to reduce violence and war by structuring our societies in skilful ways, but we will never be able to overcome them completely. These unfortunate expressions of our human nature are hardwired into human relations.

But, says the Buddha, even if conflict cannot be eliminated society-wide, it can be dealt with on an individual basis. By understanding the causes of conflict within each one of us, we can undertake the work to become personal messengers of peace. As we achieve an inner state of balance and harmony, our state of peace will ripple out into society and affect many more people than just ourselves. In this way, each one of us can have real impact on the world. Occasionally, we may even touch people in powerful positions, thus spreading the message of peace and unity to the population at large.

## II. THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT

In the famous Sakkapañha Sutta, the Discourse on Sakka's Questions, Sakka asks a question of the Buddha with profound implications. Here is the question in full:

“Dear sir, what fetters bind the gods, humans, titans, dragons, centaurs—and any of the other diverse creatures—so that, though they wish to be free of enmity, violence, hostility, and hate, they still have enmity, violence, hostility, and hate?”<sup>2</sup>

There is an obvious contradiction here between how we want the world to be and how it is. It seems natural to think that we would have created a society that reflects our deep desires. But this has not happened. Why might that be?

Curiously, such a seemingly obvious question is not asked more often. Perhaps it is the case that humans are so used to conflict and violence that we tend to take it for granted. Perhaps it takes an astute observer from outside the human realm, like Sakka, to gain the necessary perspective on human society.

<sup>1</sup> DN 21, <https://suttacentral.net/dn21/en/sujato#2.1.2>.

<sup>2</sup> DN 21, <https://suttacentral.net/dn21/en/sujato#2.1.2>. This sutta is also found in several places in the Āgamas of the Chinese Buddhist Canon, including at DĀ 14, MĀ 134, and T 15, see <https://suttacentral.net/dn21>.

This *sutta*, then, contains a meaningful and profound interaction between two extraordinary beings, with the Buddha giving an especially interesting analysis of the causes of conflict.

In answer to Sakka, the Buddha says the following:

“Lord of gods, the fetters of jealousy and stinginess bind the gods, humans, titans, dragons, centaurs—and any of the other diverse creatures—so that, though they wish to be free of enmity, violence, hostility, and hate, they still have enmity, violence, hostility, and hate.”

Here the focus is on wanting what belongs to others and not wishing to share what is one's own. When these impulses are acted upon, it is clear enough that they will result in conflict and violence, and ultimately even in war.

But the conversation does not stop there. Sakka next asks for the causes behind jealousy and stinginess. As the Buddha replies, Sakka asks for further causes, and so the conversation continues until it reaches the deepest cause of all. Here is the full sequence of questions and answers:

“But dear sir, what is the source, origin, birthplace, and inception of jealousy and stinginess? When what exists is there jealousy and stinginess? When what doesn't exist is there no jealousy and stinginess?”

“The liked and the disliked, lord of gods, are the source of jealousy and stinginess. When the liked and the disliked exist, there is jealousy and stinginess. When the liked and the disliked don't exist, there is no jealousy and stinginess.”

“But dear sir, what is the source of what is liked and disliked?”

“Desire is the source of what is liked and disliked.”

“But what is the source of desire?”

“Thought is the source of desire.”

“But what is the source of thought?”

“Judgments driven by the proliferation of perceptions are the source of thoughts.”

So, the root cause of conflict, violence, and war is “judgments driven by the proliferation of perceptions”.

What is this proliferation? This is what Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda has to say in his insightful study “Concept and Reality”:

“*Papañca*’ ... is a more comprehensive term hinting at the tendency of the worldling’s imagination to break loose and run riot ... ‘*papañca*’ seems to signify chaos. ... In any case, the ‘expansion’ or ‘diffusion’ of thought as envisaged by ‘*papañca*’ tends to obscure the true state of affairs since it is an unwarranted deviation giving rise to obsession. This particular nuance in the meaning of the term becomes obvious when ‘*papañca*’ is used to denote verbosity or circumlocution.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda (1971), *The passage is abbreviated to bring out the main characteristics*

Based on a careful study of the Suttas, especially the Madhupiṇḍaka Sutta,<sup>4</sup> Ñāṇananda goes on to show that this tendency to proliferation is caused by craving, conceit, and views. These, in turn, are just different manifestations of the delusion of a self.<sup>5</sup> We have thus arrived at a rather startling conclusion: the final cause of all conflict, including violence and war, is the sense of self, the ego.

This finding has important ramifications for how we should go about our search for peace. Here I wish to consider two such consequences:

- (1) Violence and war can never be entirely eradicated from our societies. We should find ways of reducing their frequency and severity, but we should also know that a utopian society free of conflict and violence is not achievable.
- (2) Conflict can be eliminated at an individual level. Such individual harmony will have a positive effect on society at large.

As to the first consequence, the reason violence cannot be eliminated is that uprooting the sense of self is an individual concern and cannot happen to society as a whole. The vast majority of humans will, at any one time, be ruled by their sense of self to a greater or lesser extent. That this sense of self is ultimately a delusion does not make any difference. Ordinary people, even most Buddhists, are motivated in their actions by how they experience themselves and the world, not by the true nature of reality as discovered by the Buddha.

This does not mean we cannot reduce conflict. We can structure our societies and educate our populations in such ways that we minimise the impact of the human ego. For instance, it is probably not a good idea for leaders to remain in positions of power for too long. Long exposure to power often has a corrupting effect on individuals that may, in the long run, lead to an increase in conflict in or between societies.<sup>6</sup> It follows that conflict may be reduced by setting limits on how long individuals may hold positions of power within society.<sup>7</sup>

---

*of papañca as understood by Ñāṇananda.* p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> MN 18, “The Honey-Cake Discourse”, <https://suttacentral.net/mn18/en/sujato>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 10 - 11.

<sup>6</sup> There is the well-known adage attributed to Lord Acton that “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. More specifically, according to Paul Mdumi (21 September 2024) of the Chanzo Initiative, “As we look around the world today, it’s clear that the obstacles to peace are many, but there is one subtle, insidious force that threatens peace in ways we often overlook: ego.” A similar view is expressed by Brittney-Nichole Connor-Savarda (1 June 2023) in the Emotional Intelligence Magazine +: “But what is it that stops us from recognizing our commonalities and working together towards a more harmonious world? The answer lies within the human ego and its involvement in divisiveness.”

<sup>7</sup> In DN 16, the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, the Buddha recommends communal decision making: “As long as the Vajjis meet frequently and have many meetings, they can expect growth, not decline. ... As long as the Vajjis meet in harmony, leave in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they can expect growth, not decline.” <https://suttacentral.net/dn16/en/sujato#1.4.5>.

Another example is the effect of nationalism on the sense of self. Nationalism manifests as a strong identification with a particular people or country, which leads to an us-and-them view of the world, with a consequently increased potential for conflict between nations.<sup>8</sup> As Buddhists, we can reduce this problem within our organisations and societies by identifying less with our religion and more with its practice. That is, if we see ourselves as kind and compassionate people, rather than merely as Buddhists, we are far less likely to find ourselves in conflict with non-Buddhists.

Such reduction in conflict is especially powerful when guided by Buddhist principles. In the Suttas, we find a group of four qualities, known as the “causes for bringing (people) together”, that foster inclusivity and unity. The four are generosity, kind words, caring actions, and impartiality.<sup>9</sup> According to one *sutta*, a lay follower of the Buddha called Hatthaka of Āḷavi had an entourage of 500 people as a consequence of his practice of these principles.<sup>10</sup> No doubt the Buddha himself practiced them, which must be one reason for his large and growing community of disciples, both monastic and lay.<sup>11</sup>

The second consequence of our finding is that true and final peace can be found on the individual level. According to the Buddha, it is possible to eliminate our false sense of self. This, in turn, leads to a life of harmony with one’s fellow humans: “Standing in judgment, Measuring by their standard, they dispute with the world more and more. But a person who has given up all judgments creates no conflict in the world.”<sup>12</sup>

“Ascetics have no conflict in the world.”<sup>13</sup> “If you still yourself Like a broken gong, you reach extinguishment and know no conflict.”<sup>14</sup>

[The Buddhas said:] “My doctrine is such that one does not conflict with anyone in this world with its gods, Māras, and Divinities, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its gods and humans.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Joseph Frankel (19 January 2025) of the Encyclopedia Britannica, who has this to say on this topic: “Nationalism not only induces wars but, through the severity of its influence, makes compromise and acceptance of defeat more difficult.”

<sup>9</sup> The *saṅgaha-vatthus*, found for instance at AN 4.32, <https://suttacentral.net/an4.32/en/sujato>.

<sup>10</sup> AN 8.24, <https://suttacentral.net/an8.24/en/sujato>.

<sup>11</sup> Much more could be said about the reduction in conflict through the application of Buddhist principles, but it would be too much of a side issue for a paper focusing on inner peace. Another paper would be required to tackle this topic.

<sup>12</sup> Cūḷavyūha Sutta, “The Shorter Discourse on Arrayed for Battle”, Snp 4.12, <https://suttacentral.net/snp4.12/en/sujato#vns901>.

<sup>13</sup> Araṇa Sutta, “Without conflict”, SN 1.81, <https://suttacentral.net/sn1.81/en/sujato#3.1>. According to the commentary, “ascetic”, *samaṇa*, here refers to the *arahant*, the fully awakened person.

<sup>14</sup> Dhṛp 134, <https://suttacentral.net/dhp129-145/en/sujato#vns134>.

<sup>15</sup> Madhupiṇḍaka Sutta, “The Honey-cake Discourse”, MN 18, <https://suttacentral.net/mn18/en/sujato#4.1>.

These passages speak of the *arahant*, the fully awakened person. It is at *arahantship* that the sense of self is fully uprooted with the simultaneous elimination of conflict with the world. Still, one does not need to reach the end of the path to reap such benefits, at least partially. With every step towards awakening, one lives in greater harmony with the world.

Although true peace is achieved only at the individual level, there are benefits to society too. Because every individual is bound to interact with society, even a single individual who lives in harmony with the world will positively affect society. Depending on their other personal qualities and their connections to others, this effect can be considerable. In other words, we should not underestimate the contribution to peace that each one of us can make through our practice of Buddhist principles. Before I consider this individual contribution to peace in greater detail, I first wish to explore another way in which the Suttas describe the inevitability of societal conflict and violence.

### III. THE COMPETITION FOR SCARCE RESOURCES

In a *sutta* called the Potaliya Sutta, we find another striking description of the inevitability of conflict. In this *sutta* the Buddha illustrates the dangers of the five senses with a series of seven similes.<sup>16</sup> The second of these is given as follows:

Suppose a vulture or a crow or a hawk was to grab a scrap of meat and fly away. Other vultures, crows, and hawks would keep chasing it, pecking and clawing. What do you think, householder? If that vulture, crow, or hawk doesn't quickly let go of that scrap of meat, wouldn't that result in death or deadly suffering for them?

Yes, sir.

In the same way, a noble disciple reflects: 'With the simile of a scrap of meat the Buddha said that sensual pleasures give little gratification and much suffering and distress, and they are all the fuller of drawbacks.' Having truly seen this with right understanding, they reject equanimity based on diversity and develop only the equanimity based on unity, where all kinds of grasping to the worldly pleasures of the flesh cease without anything left over.<sup>17</sup>

The meat symbolises the objects of the five senses. The fighting of the birds refers to our competition for, and conflict over, the objects in that realm. The problem with the objects of the five senses – that is, the world around us – is that they belong to our shared experience. Because we tend to desire the

<sup>16</sup> The Pali word I render as "the five senses" is *kāma*. In the singular, as pointed out by the Critical Pali Dictionary, *kāma* refers to the *desire* related to enjoyment in the five senses. In the plural, however, it refers to the *objects* of the five senses. This distinction is also made by the commentaries, which distinguish between *vatthu-kāma* and *kilesa-kāma*, respectively *kāma* as object and *kāma* as desire. In the present *sutta*, *kāma* mostly refers to the objects of the five senses.

<sup>17</sup> MN 54, "With Potaliya the Householder", <https://suttacentral.net/mn54/en/sujato#16.1>.



same things, we compete for them. Competition results in winners and losers, sometimes leading to conflict, violence, and occasionally war.

It is not difficult to see this at play in our societies. We aspire for the same jobs, the same promotion, and the same salary raise. We desire the same partners. We clash over the inheritance from our parents. Such conflicts of interest are seen at all scales in our societies. At the largest scale, countries compete and fight over resources and influence. All this competition will sometimes lead to serious conflict and hostility. It follows that conflict and violence are an inevitable outcome in a world in which we desire and compete for the same shared resources.<sup>18</sup>

If conflict is inevitable in the world as we have it, is there anything that can be done to reduce it? The first thing to recognise is that even understanding that there is a problem is helpful. If we know the consequences of unrestrained competition, we are likely to be more careful in how we interact with others. Moreover, by being clear about the nature of the world, we become less interested in it, and instead turn our minds towards the spiritual life. This is precisely what is suggested in the simile of the fighting birds: If that vulture, crow, or hawk doesn't quickly let go of that scrap of meat, wouldn't that result in death or deadly suffering for them?

If the meat symbolises the objects of the five senses, then, to reduce the suffering of conflict and violence, we need to let go of those objects. This letting go is an important part of the spiritual path as expressed in the second factor of the noble eightfold path, *sammā-saṅkappa*, "right intention". Right intention includes the intention of renunciation, *nekkhamma-saṅkappa*, which primarily concerns the world of the five senses.<sup>19</sup> It is on the spiritual path, then, that we find the true solution to conflict.

This renunciation, however, is a matter of personal choice and cannot be applied to society as a whole. In other words, there is no obvious way in which to get an entire population to give up its attachment to the sense world. This echoes our findings above, where we examined the Sakkapañha Sutta. The solution to conflict is found at the individual level, which is where attachment to the objects of the five senses can either be reduced or given up.

We conclude that conflict is a given in our societies. It may be possible to reduce it through wise policies and good leadership, but never to eliminate it. At the individual level, however, we have discovered two strategies for overcoming conflict: (1) reducing or giving up the sense of self; and (2) reducing or eliminating our attachments to the five-sense world.

---

<sup>18</sup> This view is supported by modern views of conflict, such as those given by the conflict-resolution organisation Interact Community Dispute Resolution Service (ICDRS). According to them, one of the causes of conflict is "conflict of interest", which is similar to what is described in the simile at MN 54.

<sup>19</sup> See for instance SN 45.8, <https://suttacentral.net/sn45.8/en/sujato>. The word *nekkhamma* is the opposite of *kāma* and thus a renunciation of the five-sense world.

What is important for this essay, however, is that the individual achievement of peace does not just benefit the individual, but also the wider society. Let us now look at how this may happen in practice.

#### IV. HOW TO AVOID CONFLICT

To gain a better understanding of how we can avoid conflict, let us extend the simile of the birds and the piece of meat. We need to consider what it means to let go of the meat and how this comes about. To be able to give up the meat, that is, to renounce the five-sense world, a person needs to find meaning and satisfaction apart from the five senses. This happens through the general practice of Buddhist principles, but more specifically through meditation. This is what the Buddha says in the famous Mahāparinibbāna Sutta:

Soon after the Buddha had recovered from that sickness, he came out from his dwelling and sat in the shade of the porch on the seat spread out. Then Venerable Ānanda went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, “Sir, it’s fantastic that the Buddha is comfortable and well. Because when the Buddha was sick, my body felt like it was dragged. I was disorientated, and the teachings weren’t clear to me.” ...

“I’m now old, elderly and senior. I’m advanced in years and have reached the final stage of life. I’m currently eighty years old. Just as a decrepit cart keeps going by relying on straps, in the same way, the Realized One’s body keeps going by relying on straps, or so you’d think. Sometimes the Realized One, not focusing on any signs, and with the cessation of certain feelings, enters and remains in the signless *samādhi*. Only then does the Realized One’s body become more comfortable.

So Ānanda, be your island, your refuge, with no other refuge. Let the teaching be your island and your refuge, with no other refuge. And how does a mendicant do this? It’s when a mendicant meditates by observing an aspect of the body – keen, aware, and mindful, rid of desire and aversion for the world. They meditate observing an aspect of feelings ... mind ... principles—keen, aware, and mindful, rid of desire and aversion for the world. That’s how a mendicant is their island, their refuge, with no other refuge. That’s how the teaching is their island and their refuge, with no other refuge.

Whether now or after I have passed, any who shall live as their island, their refuge, with no other refuge; with the teaching as their island and their refuge, with no other refuge – those mendicants of mine who want to train shall be among the best of the best.<sup>20</sup>

Here we find Ven. Ānanda distraught because of the Buddha’s sickness. It is now clear to him that the Buddha is nearing the end of his life.

---

<sup>20</sup> “The Great Discourse on the Buddha’s Extinguishment”, DN 16, <https://suttacentral.net/dn16/en/sujato#2.24.3>.

The physical presence of the Buddha here represents the five-sense world. Just as the Buddha is impermanent, so is everything in the five-sense world. We grasp and attach to things, but before we know it, we are forced by the nature of impermanence to give them up. So much suffering in life is caused in this way. Unfortunately, too often our response to the pain is conflict and violence. The good news is that a deep sense of fulfilment can be found apart from the five senses. How does this come about?

As the Buddha himself makes clear later on in the same *sutta*, his teachings will still be available, even after his death.<sup>21</sup> What Ānanda is grieving is the loss of the Buddha's physical presence, that is, his presence to the five senses, not the loss of the *ideas* that the Buddha proclaimed to the world. Yet it is these latter things, the Dhamma, that truly defines the Buddha.

The Buddha's response to Ānanda shows us how to become independent of the five senses. Instead of taking refuge in the five-sense realm, one should be an "island" by taking refuge in the Dhamma and oneself. This is done, explains the Buddha, by practicing the four applications of mindfulness, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. This, of course, is all about meditation practice, the seventh factor of the noble eightfold path, eventually leading to *samādhī*, deep states of bliss and peace.

When one meditates as prescribed in the *suttas*, one develops qualities that engender this independence. Two such qualities are *pīti* and *passaddhī*, joy and tranquillity.<sup>22</sup> The joy ensures that meditation is a more interesting experience than any happiness derived from the five senses. The tranquillity is a result of desires dying down and the meditation experience being self-sufficient. One has reached an inner refuge, taking oneself and the Dhamma as a refuge, where one is independent of the world outside, that is, the world of the senses.<sup>23</sup>

This inner refuge depends on a comprehensive development of the noble eightfold path. As the meditation deepens as described above, especially when it reaches the deep stillness of the mind known as *samādhī*, one understands this intuitively. One can see the important relationship between one's inner refuge on the one hand and moral conduct and harmony with the external world on the other. The result of this insight is that one becomes a more generous, kind, and compassionate person, whose desire is to live in harmony with the world at large. In this way, any person who practices the Buddhist path

---

<sup>21</sup> "The teaching and training that I have taught and pointed out for you shall be your Teacher after my passing." At <https://suttacentral.net/dn16/en/sujato#6.1.5>.

<sup>22</sup> These qualities are found with a high frequency in the *suttas*, including in important doctrinal contexts such as the seven factors of awakening (e.g. SN 46.1, <https://suttacentral.net/sn46.1/en/sujato>), dependent liberation (e.g. AN 10.1, <https://suttacentral.net/an10.1/en/sujato>), mindfulness of breathing (e.g. MN 118, <https://suttacentral.net/mn118/en/sujato#19.1>), and more.

<sup>23</sup> When the Buddha says one should take oneself as a refuge, he obviously does not refer to taking refuge in a soul or some other permanent essence. The point, it seems, is merely that one should be independent of the world, especially other people.

fully will promote social unity and contribute, in small or large ways, to a more peaceful and inclusive world.

## V. HOW INDIVIDUALS CONTRIBUTE TO PEACE

The above may seem hopelessly idealistic. World peace must surely be negotiated at a grand scale, and individual contributions will mostly be at the margins. This may indeed be a common attitude, but history does suggest that individuals can make a significant difference.

The foremost example of an individual contributing to world peace is the Buddha himself. Over the past 2,500 years, whenever peace has been achieved through the application of Buddhist principles, the Buddha himself must be given a large part of the credit. Without him, there would be no such principles to apply.

But the Buddha has not just been indirectly involved in creating peace. A classic example of the Buddha's direct intervention in a potential war is found in the *Kunala Jātaka*.<sup>24</sup> In this charming story, two neighbouring nations, the Sakyas and the Koliyas, respectively the Buddha's extended clan on his father's and his mother's side, are about to go to war over the scarce water in the Rohini river. The Buddha arrives just as hostilities are about to break out and asks them whether human life or water is more precious. They get the message and war is averted.

Another classic example are the events found in *Kosambaka Khandhaka* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the Monastic Law.<sup>25</sup> Here we find two different factions of the monastic community, the Sangha, arguing over a minor matter of monastic protocol. The dispute escalates to the point where some of the monks decide to expel a monk on the other side of the argument, thus making a key move in a process that can lead to schism in the Sangha, which according to the Monastic Law is a very serious matter.<sup>26</sup> The Buddha tries to reconcile them, but to no avail. He then sets out wandering, leaving the monks to sort out their problem on their own. When they realise the Buddha has left, they quickly come to their senses and ask for forgiveness. The Sangha then does the appropriate procedures to reestablish unity. The Buddha's intervention is indirect, yet effective.

There are several further examples where the Buddha turns conflict or potential conflict into something positive,<sup>27</sup> but this should be enough to make

<sup>24</sup> *Ja* 536, <https://suttacentral.net/ja536/en/francis>.

<sup>25</sup> *Kd* 10 at <https://suttacentral.net/pli-tv-kd10/en/brahmali>. This story is also found in a slightly different form in the *Upakkilesa Sutta*, MN 128, <https://suttacentral.net/mn128/en/sujato#2.1>. Moreover, it forms the backdrop to MN 48, the *Kosambiya Sutta*, <https://suttacentral.net/mn48/en/sujato#2.1>. Given all these references, it would seem this event had a significant, perhaps traumatic, impact on the early Sangha.

<sup>26</sup> See *Kd* 17 at <https://suttacentral.net/pli-tv-kd17/en/brahmali#3.16.12>.

<sup>27</sup> There are many *suttas* where the Buddha is portrayed in this way. Here are some obvious examples: *Akkosa Sutta*, "The Abuser", SN 7.2, <https://suttacentral.net/sn7.2/en/sujato>; *Asurindaka Sutta*, "With Bhāradvāja the Fiend", SN 7.3, <https://suttacentral.net/sn7.3/>

the case.

Yet individual contributions to peace in society are not limited to those of the Buddha. Another prominent example is the conversion of emperor Ashoka and his consequent embrace of non-violence. Before he adopted Buddhism, Ashoka had become notorious for his brutal conquest of Kalinga, a smaller kingdom to the east of Magadha, Ashoka's empire. Once he had converted to Buddhism, he expressed his deep remorse for his actions and changed his ways fundamentally. Here are Ashoka's own words as recorded in the famous Ashokan edicts:

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, conquered the Kalingas eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed ... Now Beloved-of-the-Gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.<sup>28</sup>

Beloved-of-the-Gods speaks thus: It is now more than two and a half years since I became a lay-disciple (*upāsaka*), but until now I have not been very zealous. But now that I have visited the Sangha for more than a year, I have become very zealous.<sup>29</sup>

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: Dhamma is good, but what constitutes Dhamma? (It includes) little evil, much good, kindness, generosity, truthfulness, and purity. ... I have given various things including the gift of life. And many other good deeds have been done by me.<sup>30</sup>

This picture of Buddhist leadership pertains also in the present day.<sup>31</sup> We still have a variety of Buddhist leaders around the world who rely on Buddhist principles, to a greater or lesser degree, to guide government policy. The impact of Buddhism is evident both in how political bodies work and in the formulation of actual policies. In the former category we have the Thai Supreme Sangha Council and the Sri Lankan Mahanayaka Theros, both of which groups are close to political power. An example of the latter is the Cambodian government's use of the Buddhist principle of non-harm to teach parents not to physically punish their children.<sup>32</sup>

It is clear, then, that leaders acting from Buddhist ideals can have a

---

en/sujato; Bilāṅgika Sutta, "With Bhāradvāja the Bitter", SN 7.4, <https://suttacentral.net/sn7.4/en/sujato>; Kasibhāradvāja Sutta, and "With Bhāradvāja the Farmer", SN 7.11, <https://suttacentral.net/sn7.11/en/sujato>.

<sup>28</sup> Rock edict 13. Translation by Ven. S. Dhammika (1993). The next two quotes are from the same translator.

<sup>29</sup> Minor rock edict 1.

<sup>30</sup> Pillar Edict 2.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew J. Moore (11 January 2018) says that "even today many nations in Asia understand their governments to have a duty to rule in a way that is consistent with Buddhist values."

<sup>32</sup> Lauren Day (16 October 2024).

positive effect on the world, turning it away from conflict and towards greater peace and unity. Yet such positive effects are not limited to what our leaders do. Every one of us can contribute to peace in society through our conduct. As we turn towards Buddhist values, even simple ones like generosity and kindness, we start to create that inner refuge of joy and tranquillity that allows us greater independence from the world outside. This allows us to interact more harmoniously with our fellow human beings and society at large. We become net contributors to peace in the world.

The deeper we take our Buddhist practice, the greater will be this contribution. If, based on the qualities of good conduct, we develop our minds in meditation, we eventually reach an inner refuge that corresponds to a complete detachment from the external world. It is at this point that our relationship to the world is fundamentally transformed. We begin actively to seek harmony and peace in our dealings with society, thereby affecting the lives of almost everyone we meet. People are inspired by our example, and many will try to emulate our attitude. There is an instinctive understanding that this is the right way to live. Goodness begets goodness.

Yet it is the deepest levels of Buddhist practice that are truly transformative. When deep meditation is supplemented by deep insight, when we free ourselves from the shackles of the five-sense world and the sense of self, it is only then that we gain a full understanding of the true causes of societal disharmony and conflict. Not only are we inspiring examples through our exemplary conduct, but we become powerful teachers and counsellors who can show the way to unity and inclusivity to anyone willing to listen, of which there will be many. We are now a true force for peace in our society.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Buddhist doctrine is clear that there is no such thing as a peaceful human society without conflict or violence. Buddhism does not believe in utopias. At best peace can be maximised through wise policies and good leadership. Buddhism is well placed to help formulate such policies and give advice on good leadership. Such advice is especially powerful when dispensed by individuals, whether monastic or lay, who live with integrity, having successfully applied the Buddhist principles of good conduct in their own lives.

Yet the role of individuals in promoting peaceful societies does not stop at direct political influence. By developing our minds, by creating peace and harmony in our individual lives, every person, whether Buddhist or not, has the opportunity to become an island of peace and non-conflict within broader society. To some extent this can be achieved through generosity, kindness, and compassion, but the full potential can only be reached through meditation and the consequent arising of wisdom.

The power of such individual examples is not to be underestimated. Just as a stone dropped in water causes ripples in all directions, so does the impact of individual peace and harmony spread through society, in the process touching the lives of many people. Depending on the qualities and the connections of



the individual concerned, this rippling effect may even be felt at high levels of power and government.

Every little step we each take on the noble eightfold path will help engender peace in our societies. When we attain the deepest states of peace and insight, the impact will be especially powerful. The effect may be hard to measure, but we can be confident it is there.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCE

*Āṅguttara Nikāya*, “*The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*”, references are to chapter (*nipāta*) and discourse (*sutta*) number.

*Dhammapada*

*Dīgha Nikāya*, “*The Long Discourses of the Buddha*”, Pali version. References are to discourse (*sutta*) number.

*Dirgha Āgama*, “*The Long Discourses of the Buddha*”, version in Middle Chinese translation.

*Jātaka*, references are to story number.

*Khandhaka*, “The Chapters”, part III of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. References are to chapter number.

*Madhyama Āgama*, “*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*”, version in Middle Chinese translation

*Mahāvamsa*, references are to chapter and verse numbers

*Majjhima Nikāya*, “*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*”, references are to discourse (*sutta*) number p, pp, page, pages

*Saṃyutta Nikāya*, “*The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*”, references are to chapter (*saṃyutta*) and discourse (*sutta*) number

*Sutta Nipāta*, “*Anthology of Discourses*”, references are to chapter and discourse (*sutta*) number

Taisho Tripiṭaka, a definitive edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka published in Japan.



# FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING: A PATH TO RECONCILIATION





# AN EXPLORATION OF BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE-BUILDING AS PRESENTED IN THE PALI DISCOURSES

Ven. Dr. Rathmale Punnarathana\*

## Abstract:

This exploration delves into Buddhist teachings on conflict resolution and peace-building as presented in the Pali discourses. Conflict, an inevitable aspect of human society, is examined from both its destructive and positive aspects, to transform violent conflicts into peaceful processes through understanding and addressing their root causes. Buddhism identifies three primary causes of conflict—craving, hatred, and ignorance—and advocates for their transformation through the development of non-craving, non-hatred, and non-illusion. Buddhist conflict resolution is rooted in the principles of causality and the Four Noble Truths, offering a comprehensive theory that can be applied both spiritually and socially. The *Mahānidāna-sutta* and other texts illustrate the psychological and social dynamics that fuel conflict, emphasizing internal transformation as the foundation for resolving external disputes. The Buddha's teachings stress the importance of cultivating inner peace through morality, mental concentration, and wisdom, intending to foster peace within oneself to bring about societal harmony. Furthermore, Buddhism highlights poverty, social inequalities, and other environmental factors as root causes of conflicts. Through practices like loving-kindness (*mettā*) and non-cruelty, Buddhism proposes a path to peaceful coexistence, not only for individuals but for all living beings. The Buddha's approach to peace-building involves ethical living, compassion, and mindfulness, and serves as a practical model for reducing conflicts and promoting long-term peace.

**Keywords:** *Conflicts, Resolution, Peace-building, Buddhism.*

---

\* Former Senior lecturer, Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz; Head of the institute, Sri Lanka Buddhist and Pali University in Germany; Chief Saṅgha-nāyaka of Germany.

## **I. OBJECTIVE**

This research seeks to investigate the doctrinal foundations within Buddhism that relate to conflict resolution and peace-building. It aims to understand how Buddhist principles can be applied in contemporary society, especially in areas afflicted by violence, to promote peaceful transformation and social harmony. The research will examine core Buddhist teachings, such as compassion, non-violence, mindfulness, and forgiveness, and analyze their potential to guide conflict resolution strategies. Ultimately, the goal is to explore how Buddhist values and practices can contribute to addressing the root causes of violence and help create a peaceful environment in societies impacted by conflict.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources to gather relevant data. Primary sources include Buddhist texts, scriptures, and teachings, while secondary sources comprise scholarly articles, books, and research papers related to the application of Buddhism in conflict resolution. Data collection was done through libraries, e-libraries, and scholarly discussions. Furthermore, the research method employed was primarily comparative in nature, allowing the researcher to compare Buddhist teachings with other conflict resolution theories, particularly from Western philosophies. This comparative approach helps in understanding the unique contributions of Buddhism to peace-building and how these teachings can be integrated into modern-day conflict resolution processes.

## **III. RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Are there Buddhist teachings relevant to conflict resolution and peace? This question examines whether Buddhist philosophy offers specific insights or practices that can be applied to resolve conflicts, foster reconciliation, and promote lasting peace in societies struggling with violence.

If such teachings exist, how can they be implemented in a society that is deeply rooted in violence to foster peace and reconciliation? This question explores the practical application of Buddhist teachings in conflict-ridden societies. It seeks to understand how principles such as forgiveness, compassion, and the interdependence of all beings can be applied in modern-day social and political contexts to help transform violent behaviors and promote peaceful coexistence.

## **IV. DISCUSSION**

Diversity is indeed a natural circumstance in the world, and the rise of conflict is also an inevitable fact in society. Conflicts are not always entirely negative, there are also positive aspects in conflicts; for example, the current conflict over water (the lack of drinkable water) promotes positive attitudes among people toward the preservation of water resources and the environment. The positive aspect of this conflict is the preservation of water and environment. The negative aspect of the conflict on water is that it would be a cause for world war in the future.

Conflict can arise at the individual level, community level, national level,



and global level. Whatever conflicts arise, from the individual family level to the global level, the nature of conflict is that it is inevitable and cannot be eliminated from the world. Accounts of the past 5000 years of history reveal that only 92 years have passed with no conflict or war. This fact shows that for over 98% of the past 5000 years, society – in a global sense – has been affected by war.<sup>1</sup> This shows the inevitable nature of conflict. Hence, attempt should not be made to eradicate conflict but to transform the violent nature of conflict into a non-violent process through understanding and identifying the root causes of conflict.

Buddhism has recognized three root causes of arising conflicts at the individual level: craving (*lōbha*), hatred (*dōsa*) and ignorance (*mōha*).<sup>2</sup> These three root causes are latent in everyone's mind and are interdependent. Even though there is no destructive nature apparent in the latent state of the above three roots in one's mind, with contact with external objects they manifest as violent and destructive. The craving (*lōbha*) is an insatiable desire to acquire; the insatiable desire gives rise to covetousness (*abhijjhā visamalōbha*). This covetousness is the stage of conflict that arises due to the strong attachment to the things an individual likes. Hatred (*dōsa*) is the resentment directed toward the people and circumstances that cause the arising of ill will (*vyāpāda*). The ill will causes destructive violence in society, such as killing and injuring others. The ignorance (*mōha*) is the lack of understanding and unawareness of the real circumstances. Ignorance causes a strong attachment to wrong views (*miccādiṭṭhi*). Many religious conflicts arise due to the misunderstanding of the real meaning of religion. Thus, Buddhism distinguishes the above three mental conditions as the root causes of the arising of conflict from the individual level to the global level.

As a consequence, the Buddhist way of transforming conflict into a constructive and non-violent state depends on the development and cultivation of opposites of the above three roots. The positive counterparts of craving, hatred and illusion are non-craving (*alōbha*), non-hatred (*adōsa*) and non-illusion (*amōha*).<sup>3</sup> The Buddha said, "Because of craving, there arise grievances or sorrow and fear. When freed from it, there is neither sorrow nor fear."<sup>4</sup> In *Sigālōvāda-sutta*, desire (*chanda*) hatred (*dōsa*) fear (*bhaya*) and ignorance (*mōha*) have been identified as the mental drives that cause harm to the individual and the society and there mentions that for the person who is freed from the above vulgar states of mind, his goodness and repute grow like the moon when waxing<sup>5</sup>. Buddhism emphasizes that conflict resolution should be started within man himself in reducing his or her vulgar mental

<sup>1</sup> Gary and Solis (2010), available at: <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AUIntLawJl/2010/21.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> AN.10. 174.

<sup>3</sup> AN. 10. 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Dhp* 32.

<sup>5</sup> D. III. 181.

drives like craving, hatred, and ignorance by developing non-craving, non-hatred, and non-illusion. The transformation of destructive mental conditions like craving, etc. into constructive positive counterparts is not a short-term process. It is a long-term gradual process based on the practical engagement of charity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*).

The Buddhist interpretation of conflict and the root cause of conflicts have mostly been elaborated in terms of the central teaching of Buddhism, causality (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). According to Buddhist causality, every process of arising conflict and resolution of conflict into a non-violent stage depends on the causal theory. Buddhist conflict resolution theory depicted in the analysis of the Four Noble Truths is one of the best theories manifested in the Indian philosophical context, and relates to the theory of cause and effect. The four levels to be consistent with what follows preached by the Buddha are, 1) Conflict, 2) The cause of conflict, 3) The resolution of conflict, and 4) The way to the resolution of conflict. The first two levels are understanding and recognizing the nature of conflict and the root causes of conflict. The third and fourth levels deal with the conflict resolution process. Prima facie, this theory appeared as a way elaborated by Buddha to attain only spiritual mental states, however, it is not only a way to attain *Nibbāna* but it is the clearest way that can be implemented to solve any conflict condition in society.

The *Mahānidāna-sutta* is one of the suttas that explains the causal conditionality of origin conflict and social problems. Here, it explains the causal relativity of conflict in the following way. “Feeling conditions craving, craving conditions seeking, seeking condition acquisition, acquisition conditions decision making, decision making conditions lustful desire, lustful desire conditions attachment, attachment conditions appropriation, appropriation conditions avarice, avarice condition girding, girding conditions taking up stick and sword, then, there arise quarrels, disputes, argument, strife, abuse, lying and other evil unskilled states.”<sup>6</sup> It should not be misunderstood here that the feeling (*vedanā*) or craving (*taṇhā*) is the first cause of arising conflicts because all the above links are interrelated to each other and process relatively with the contact of external objects through internal faculties of the individual. One of the famous suttas, which explains the method of contacting external objects with internal faculties, is *Madhupiṇḍika-sutta*. For example, here it explains how an individual contact forms through the eyes “Through the contact of eye and forms, there arise eye-consciousness, the coming together of three is sense impression, sense-impression is conditional feeling, feeling is conditioned perception and so on”<sup>7</sup> Other sense organs also operate similarly on contact with respective external objects. This psychological process causes various conflicts to arise in the external society. For example, the above characterization of causal relativity of the *Mahānidāna-sutta* clearly shows how the internal mental process of the individual gives rise to destructive behaviour in society. Thus, according to the

<sup>6</sup> D. II. 58.

<sup>7</sup> M. I. 111.

Buddhist explanation of causes of conflict, all the conflicts arise in man himself. Therefore, the conflict resolution process should be started within man himself rather than finding outer solutions through the external world. Once a certain deity, asked the Buddha, "A tangle inside, a tangle outside, this generation is entangled in a tangle, I ask you this, *Gotama*, who can disentangle this tangle." The Buddha replied to him: "A man established on virtue, wise, developing the mind and wisdom, a *Bhikkhu* ardent and discreet, he can disentangle this tangle."<sup>8</sup> The deity asked for the solution for the internal and external conflicts that were entangled with each other. The Buddha presented a solution addressing three levels that should be implemented by the person himself. They are, 1) Behavioural or moral transformation (*sīla*), 2) mental transformation (*samādhi*) and 3) Cognitive transformation (*pañña*). Morality means the protection of precepts preached by the Buddha. Mental transformation means the development of mental concentration, and cognitive transformation is the understanding of the real nature of the world or the capacity to see things, as they are. The person who has developed and cultivated the above three levels is completely free from all types of internal and external conflicts. He is called *Arahat*. He neither causes harm to himself nor causes the arising of external conflict. Even though it is difficult to reach such a state (*arahat*) for people in modern society, this theory enables development to an extent effective to reduce conflicts in day-to-day life.

Buddhism does not recognize only psychological calamities as the only causes of arising conflicts, but it distinguishes some social issues and interactions as root causes of arising conflicts. Poverty is one of such root causes cognized by the Buddha. In the *Cakkavattisihanāda sutta*, the Buddha mentioned "not giving of property to the needy, poverty become rife, from the growth of poverty, taking of what was not giving is increased, from the increasing of theft, use of weapons increased, from the increasing use of weapons taking of life increased and from the increasing in taking of life, peoples life span decreased."<sup>9</sup> Modern sociologists also recognize poverty as a root cause of many social problems and conflicts. The poverty is caused by the unconstructive economic system of the county. The interpersonal conflict between the rich and the poor always arises due to the unfair distribution of the limited wealth among the people. The conflict between the rich and the poor can never be solved without reducing the gap between the poor and the rich. In the *Kuṭadanta sutta*, it mentions that the king should distribute grain and fodder to those who engage in cultivation, should give capital to those who engage in trade and should give wages and food to those who engage in government service.<sup>10</sup> Buddhism has recognized poverty as suffering and points out that it is impossible to implement a reconciliation process or peace-building programme without eliminating the poverty. The above discourses

---

<sup>8</sup> S. I. 13.

<sup>9</sup> D. III.67.

<sup>10</sup> D. I.134.

give ample account of how Buddha has explained the conflict resolution theories while understanding the root causes of social conflicts.

Apart from the above factors, there are some other social impacts, which cause conflicts and problems to arise in society. In the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*<sup>11</sup> it is mentioned that various types of mental suffering and conflict arise due to social or environmental causes. Fire, flood, terrorism, as well as fear and suffering arising due to ageing, decay and death cause mental suffering and conflict in the individual. The *Kalahavivāda-sutta*<sup>12</sup> reveals that conflicts arise due to debate and argument between people.

According to the *Aggañña-sutta*<sup>13</sup> conflicts arise in the world at the very first beginning of the universe due to the craving (*tanhā*) of man. Even today, many conflicts and wars indeed arise because of insatiability. Therefore, Buddhism emphasizes that man as is always lacking, unsatisfied and a slave to craving. The dissatisfaction of the individual gives rise to all conflicts from the family level to global war. In the *Raṭṭapāla-sutta*<sup>14</sup> it is mentioned that because of his insatiability, a king who conquered all the land as far as the ocean was still not content. Therefore, he fought to conquer the overseas territories too. Thus, Buddhism recognizes insatiability as the major cause for the arising of conflicts.

Regarding conflict transformation, Buddhism reveals three stages in the unfolding of a conflict. They are: 1) The stage of transgression (*vitikkama*); in this final stage, physically or verbally the individual engages in the action or conflict, therefore, this is the stage of engaging in violence; 2) the stage of manifestation (*pariyutṭhāna*); this is the preceding stage of the emotional stimulus process in the mind. In this stage, the mental preparation for the violence is started; 3) latent disposition (*anusaya*); in this stage, mental cankers and defilements are submerged as latent dispositions.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Buddhism explains three corresponding stages of resolving the conflict: 1) temporary solution (*tadaṅgapahāna*) 2) short-term solution (*vikkhambhanapahāna*) 3) stable solution (*samucchedapahāna*).<sup>16</sup> These three stages can be understood through the following example. In a war, a cease-fire is the temporary solution, the holding of peace talks is the short-term solution and complete eradication of war is the stable solution. The stable solution mentioned here is not a solution achieved by only ending hostilities. It is, however, the stable solution achieved after a successful reconciliation process and after healing all the wounds of the parties involved. Therefore, the immediate post-conflict period belongs to the second of the above stages.

<sup>11</sup> A. I.110.

<sup>12</sup> Sn. 862 - 877.

<sup>13</sup> D. 3.III.79.

<sup>14</sup> M. II. 54.

<sup>15</sup> D. III. 254.

<sup>16</sup> *Khuddakanikāye Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā, Chatṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka* (1995).

## V. PEACE BUILDING

Peace is the central theme discussed by many societies as it is essential to human survival on the planet. The peaceful atmosphere of society degenerates due to conflicts that originate through differences in religious, political, cultural, ethnic, and other such backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, conflict is an inevitable fact of human society. Therefore, establishing peace is also vital to society. With the process of building peace, there are some important Buddhist discourses, which provide a considerable amount of theoretical and practical subject matter. The main admonishment given by the Buddha to his first sixty disciples was "Travel in the tour for the well-being and happiness of mankind as a whole." Thus, the sole purpose of the Buddha and his disciples was to establish peace and happiness in society. Therefore, the Buddha is said to be born for the goodness and happiness of the human world, "*manussalōka hita sukhatāya jāto*"<sup>17</sup> He is attributed with "Highest Compassion" (*mahā kāruṇika*). At the same time, He was known as the "*santi-rāja*" or the "Prince of Peace."<sup>18</sup> He attained this stable peaceful position by himself after understanding the reality of the world. He said, "There arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, comprehension and light regarding things unheard of before."<sup>19</sup> He was such a great human being that He never mentally, verbally or physically caused the least harm to Himself or the outer world. Every word expressed by Him was directed toward establishing peace in society.

People in modern society seek peace in the outer world through organizing different types of programs and conferences to discuss the matter of peacebuilding and protecting human rights. However, whatever program is organized on the matter of peace-building; it is ineffective without highlighting the necessity of building inner peace. Before establishing peace in the outer world, one should establish inner peace. Once Buddha said, "It is not possible, Cunda, for him who is stuck in the mud to pull out another who is stuck in the mud. But Cunda, it is possible for one who is himself not stuck in the mud to pull out another who is stuck in the mud. In the same way, the person who did not establish discipline and peace himself cannot bring peace to others, but the person who himself established inner peace and can lead others to peace."<sup>20</sup> The Buddha is the greatest example who, first of all, developed and cultivated peace himself and leads others to peace. The person who has developed inner peace should practice effacement as, "Others will be cruel, we shall not be cruel here..., other will kill living beings, and we shall abstain from killing living beings"<sup>21</sup> Moreover, His mind should be inclined (*cittaṃ uppādetabbam*) thus, "Other will be cruel, we shall not be cruel here, and others will kill living being we shall abstain from killing living beings. Thus, those who mentally

<sup>17</sup> Sn. 683.

<sup>18</sup> Jayatilake, K. N. (2008): 2.

<sup>19</sup> S. V. 422.

<sup>20</sup> M. I. 45.

<sup>21</sup> M. I. 41.



practice peace and harmony must have the ability to tolerate any kind of violent situation. For example, the Buddha said to the venerable Phaggunna, “If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a clod, with a stick, with a knife, you should abandon any desire and any thought based on the household life. And here in you should train thus, my mind will be unaffected and I shall utter no evil words. I shall abide compassionate for his welfare, with the mind of loving-kindness, (*mettacitto*) without inner hate”<sup>22</sup> This is the stable and unswerving inner compassion and loving kindness that should be developed by oneself to keep the peace in the outer world. As is mentioned above, peace-building in society can never be achieved without building peace in the mind. Therefore, Buddhism always emphasizes establishing inner peace rather than peace in society. It can very easily be understood that after establishing stable inner peace, man himself, there is no need to try hard to establish peace in society.

The most important doctrine that Buddha has elaborated to create a peaceful atmosphere is the cultivation of *Mettā* or loving-kindness. This single word has a very broad meaning in the context of bringing about peace and harmony, not only in the human world but also in the whole universe, including even unseen beings, flora, and fauna. The word *mettā* is the abstract noun from the word *mitra*, which means “friend.”<sup>23</sup> The friendliness or loving kindness that Buddhism emphasizes is not just friendliness, but that the friendliness should extend towards all living creatures in the human world. *Metta-sutta* explains the way of cultivating loving kindness toward all creatures as “whatsoever the living creatures there are, moving or still without exception, whatever are long or large, or middle-sized or short, small or great. Whatever is seen or unseen, whoever lives far or near, whether they already exist or are going to be, let all creatures be happy-minded. One should not humiliate another, one should not despise anyone anywhere, and one should not wish anyone misery because of anger or the notion of repugnance. Just as a mother who protects with her life her son, her only son, so one should cultivate unbounded loving-kindness toward all beings, and loving kindness toward the entire world, one should cultivate unbounded love above and below and cross, without obstruction without enmity, without rivalry”<sup>24</sup> If any party involved in a conflict can transform their mental attitudes up to the level of loving-kindness while forgetting all past bad experiences and agitations, then peace is not only a concept that cannot ever be practiced.

The loving-kindness or friendliness (*mettā*) to be spread toward all creatures is also mentioned in the Four Sublime Abodes (*brahmavihāra*).<sup>25</sup> *Mettā* here means friendly feelings towards others, *Karuṇā* refers to the compassionate attitudes that arise on the occasions of others’ distress to assist or help them. *Muditā* is sympathetic joy, which means the ability to rejoice

---

<sup>22</sup> M. I. 123;

<sup>23</sup> Jayatilake, K. N. (2008): 3.

<sup>24</sup> Sn. 24.

<sup>25</sup> D. III. 196.



without any jealousy by seeing others' happiness and successes. *Upekkhā* means the equanimity or the ability to experience any happy or distressful condition without mental agitation.

The opposite of the angry, enmity or ill will is loving-kindness (*mettā*). Therefore, to overcome such bad attitudes, the individual must cultivate compassion or loving-kindness. Buddha said that friendliness should be cultivated to eradicate ill will "*mettā bhāvētabbā byapāda pahānāya*."<sup>26</sup> At the same time, in the *Sallekha-sutta* the Buddha said to Cunda, "a person who practices cruelty must practice non-cruelty to abstain from it, the person who engages in killing must abstain from killing to avoid it"<sup>27</sup> According to Buddhism, it is not enough to only refrain from killing living beings, but it is also necessary to cultivate the positive quality of loving-kindness. "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."<sup>28</sup>

To support the building of peace and harmony in society, the Buddha has recommended right livelihood (*sammā-ajīva*) for lay people, prohibiting all types of livelihoods which cause harm and the violation of peace in society. The Buddha prohibited five trades which are harmful to maintaining peace in society. They are: 1) the sale of arms, 2) the sale of human beings or animals, 3) the sale of flesh, 4) the sale of intoxicating drink, and 5) the sale of dangerous and poisonous drugs. Today, many human rights violations and crimes happen in the world owing to the dealing in the above trades. There is no single country or region in the world where the above trades are not to be found; each country engages in these trades directly or indirectly. In particular, powerful countries in the world, whilst engaging in and organizing peace talks and admonishing the confronted parties to build peace, strategically sell their weapon and bullets to foolish combatants of less powerful countries. When the ruler of a country becomes unrighteous, the people of that country follow the same process. Therefore, the ruler must be an ideal to the society. The Buddhist concept of the ideal king depicted in the *Cakkavattisihanāda-sutta* explains the role of the king in the matter of peacebuilding in a country. He is the Universal Monarch who rules his country and imposes punishments for offences, but without using a stick or sword. He is thus a good ruler who practices moral virtue and righteousness. This ideal king advises his fellow men not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to tell lies, not to use intoxicants.<sup>29</sup> This concept of the ideal king in Buddhism was practically employed by some Buddhist rulers like King *Dharmasōka* to establish peace in the society following a war.

The Buddha was an ideal leader who practically engaged in the spreading of loving-kindness and compassion towards all living beings without any

---

<sup>26</sup> Ud. 37.

<sup>27</sup> M. I. 46.

<sup>28</sup> D. I. 4.

<sup>29</sup> D. III. 62.

discrimination. In his daily routine, a few hours were spent resting, and during all the remaining periods of the day he assisted people who wanted help. A few such people he assisted were *Āṅgulimāla*, *Paṭācārā*, *Kisāgōthami*, *Sunīta Sōpāka*, *Rādha*, *Cullapanthaka* as well as animals like snakes and elephants. The Buddhist concept of peace has practical values as Buddhism has not fought with people to spread its doctrine and never did the Buddha recommend any holy war against any religion or any race.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Buddhism acknowledges that conflicts emerge from within humanity, arising from the interaction between internal faculties and external phenomena. The root causes of such conflicts lie in defilements such as craving, hatred, illusion, and ignorance. To foster a peaceful and conflict-free environment, these defilements must be overcome through the cultivation of virtuous thoughts, such as loving-kindness.

In conclusion, it must be noted that the Buddha not only taught the principles of conflict resolution but also actively mediated in numerous situations to resolve conflicts without discrimination. He intervened in the disputes of royalty and commoners, guiding kings like *Pasenadi Kosala* in the resolution of their daily challenges and assisting marginalized individuals, such as *Sunīta* and *Sopāka*, in rising above their oppressive social conditions. For example, when a conflict erupted between the *Sākya* and *Kōliya* tribes over the use of the Rohini River's water, the Buddha made repeated efforts to mediate and avert violence. He also intervened in ideological disputes among monks on several occasions, seeking to guide them toward constructive dialogue. Even when his initial efforts proved unsuccessful, the Buddha's silence and wisdom led the opposing parties to recognize the futility of their conflict.

Thus, Buddhism presents numerous doctrinal teachings on conflict transformation, and peace-building. A central tenet of the Buddha's approach to these issues is encapsulated in the phrase: "Hatred does not cease by hatred, hatred ceases by love; this is an eternal law."<sup>30</sup> Following this, Buddhism teaches that, to bring about peace, individuals must first cultivate inner peace by letting go of past grievances and forgiving those who have wronged them. When one attains inner tranquility, peace naturally extends to the surrounding environment and society.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>30</sup> Dhṛ. chapter 1, verse 5.

## REFERENCES

- Aṅguttaranikāya*, Morris, R. (Ed.). (1888). vol. I & II. London: Pali Text Society.
- Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka Version (1995). Vipassana Research Institute. Retrieved from <http://incubator.apache.org/lucene.netLog4NetLanguageSwitch> <http://www.codeproject.com/KB/cs/FormLanguageSwitch>.
- Dhammapada*. Von Hinüber, O., & Norman, K.R. (Eds.). (1994, 1995). London: Pali Text Society.
- Dīghanikāya*, Rhys Davids, T. W. & Carpenter, J. E. (Eds.). (1889; 1903). vol. I & II. London: Pali Text Society.
- Jayatilake, K.N. (2008). *Buddhism and Peace*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Majjhimanikāya*, Trenckner, V. (Ed.). (1888). vol. I. London: Pali Text Society.
- Samyuttanikāya*, Feer, L. (Ed.). (1884; 1976). vol. I. V London: Pali Text Society.
- Solis, G.D. (2010). *The Law of Armed Conflict: International Humanitarian Law*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sujato, Bhikkhu. (2028). *Numbered Discourses: A Sensible Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. SuttaCentral. Retrieved from.
- Suttanipāta*. Andersen, D., & Smith, H. (Eds.). (1990). London: Pali Text Society.
- Udāna*. Steinthal, P. (Ed.). (1982). London: Pali Text Society.

## Abbreviation

- A. *Aṅguttaranikāya*  
 D. *Dīghanikāya*  
 Dhp. *Dhammapada*  
 M. *Majjhimanikāya*  
 S. *Samyuttanikāya*  
 Sn. *Suttanipāta*



# ABANDONING ANGER FOR PEACE: ANALYSIS OF THE THREE STAGES OF ANGER AND METHODS TO DEAL WITH THEM<sup>1</sup>

Bhikkhu Dr. Sobhana Mahatthero\*

## Abstract:

“Peace” is one of the characteristics of *Nibbāna*, and achieving it involves abandoning anger. Hence, Buddhist texts offer a wealth of strategies to accomplish this goal. This paper examines anger through the framework of the three stages (*avatthā*) of defilements: the latent stage (*anusaya*), the activated stage (*pariyuṭṭhāna*), and the transgressive stage (*vītikkaṃma*). The study draws on the stratification of anger into latent, cognitive, and behavioral stages, as outlined in the *Pāli* commentaries. This method, commonly employed in the commentarial texts to explain the workings of mental defilements, helps to understand the mechanics of anger at each level and to formulate strategies for dispelling it. Although the *Pāli* texts do not explicitly stratify anger into three stages, this approach proves to be a useful tool in clarifying the mechanism of anger and in developing appropriate countermeasures. Furthermore, this paper explores the causal relationships between the three levels of anger, emphasizing the importance of addressing each one. After outlining the concepts of the three levels of anger, the paper provides an overview of methods for effectively managing anger at each stage. The analysis presented here offers Buddhist methods of anger management and contributes to insights for developing anger management programs within the Buddhist framework.

**Keywords:** *Anger, anger management, anusaya, pariyuṭṭhāna, vītikkaṃma.*

---

\* PhD from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on PhD dissertation of the author at PGIHS, University of Peradeniya, 2021. It was supervised by Professor P. D. Premasiri.

## I. LATENT STATE (ANUSAYA)

Literally, the term *anusaya* can be understood as an “inactive” or “sleeping” state. It has been translated variously as “latent biases”,<sup>2</sup> “latent disposition”,<sup>3</sup> “inherent tendency”,<sup>4</sup> “bias”, “inclination”,<sup>5</sup> and “underlying tendency”.<sup>6</sup> In addition to these interpretations, the PTS PED dictionary further defines it as “proclivity and persistence of a dormant or latent disposition.” From a psychological perspective, Padmasiri refers to these tendencies as dormant passions, emphasizing their latent nature.<sup>7</sup> Grammatically, the term *anusaya*, derived from the root  $\sqrt{si}$ , is explained in the commentary as a “sleeping state” (*sayito viya*).<sup>8</sup> The usage of the term “sleeping” implies two things: an inactive state and the potential for activation. This dual meaning likely reflects the sense in which *anusaya* is used in the Pāli texts.

In this paper, the term “latent anger” for *paṭighānusaya* is used in the same sense as “potential” or “continuation” of anger. According to commentary, *anusaya* refers to the defilements that have not been abandoned: “It is latent in the sense of not having been abandoned” (*appahīnatthena*);<sup>9</sup> “it remains latent because of not having been abandoned” (*appahīnatthāya anuseti*).<sup>10</sup> “They [latent tendencies] arise when suitable conditions exist” (*anurūpaṃ kāraṇaṃ labhitvā uppajjanti*).<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, this is further underlined by using the expression “fit to arise” (*uppajjanāraha*).<sup>12</sup> In the discourses, instead of verbs such as “exists” or “arises,” mostly the verbal form *anuseti* is used. For instance, “latent tendency of aversion becomes latent” (*paṭighānusayo anuseti*). But in the exegetical literature, the term ‘arises’ is also used. This shows that from the Theravāda perspective, the defilements in general can be considered as “*anusaya*” even when they are arising, for they can remain dormant until conditions are favourable for their arising.

<sup>2</sup> Anuruddha (1910), p. 172

<sup>3</sup> Bodhi (2016), p. 268

<sup>4</sup> Buddhaghosa (1999) para. I, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Nyanaponika (2007), p. 98 – 9.

<sup>6</sup> Analayo (2018), p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Silva (2014), p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> M. II. 368.

<sup>9</sup> D. II. 505.

<sup>10</sup> M. III. 144.

<sup>11</sup> Commentators have also explained *anusaya* as ‘defilements which are strong’ (*thāmagata*) (Abhi-a.iii, 86; Paṭi-a.ii, p.399). According to this explanation, the defilements which arise strongly remain latent.

<sup>12</sup> D-abhñṭ.i, p.101: ‘B’ indicates Burmese version of the *Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana Tipiṭaka*.



Additionally, *anusaya* also refers to the persistence or continuation of mental defilements (*anu anu sayanti*).<sup>13</sup> Until they are abandoned, the possibility of their arising always exists. For instance, *anusaya* “lies” even in an infant.<sup>14</sup> Thus, *anusaya* can be understood as mental defilements that remain latent and have the potential to become active when suitable conditions arise.

According to Buddhist analysis, both wholesome and unwholesome states of mind are impermanent phenomena that arise dependent upon conditions and pass away. From this perspective, the concept of latency applies to all mental states, including wholesome ones. For example, the arising of feeling requires the contact between the visible object, visible base, and eye consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Based on this explanation, feeling can also be understood as possessing the stage of *anusaya*. This idea can be further illustrated by the simile of blowing a conch and the simile of a lute.<sup>16</sup> In the case of the conch, at least three conditions must be met for sound to emerge: a human being, effort, and air. Similarly, for the lute, sound arises only when various conditions – such as the presence of strings and the musician’s effort – are fulfilled. Speaking, in both cases, the sound can be considered as *anusaya* as it is latent before supporting conditions arise. From this perspective, the expression “latent anger” implies that anger has the potential to arise when the right conditions are present, just as sound emerges from a conch or lute when the necessary factors are in place.

As a technical term, however, *anusaya* is used in the *Pāli* texts exclusively to refer to the latency of mental defilements. It is never used in an ethically neutral or positive sense; rather, its meaning inherently carries a condemnatory connotation. One of the reasons *anusaya* applies only to the latency of unwholesome states of mind is its relation to the concept of abandonment (*pahāna*). For instance, in the *Pāli* texts, the highest stage of liberation is often characterized as “cessation of *anusaya* (s).”<sup>17</sup> This usage further reinforces that the term *anusaya* specifically refers to unwholesome mental states.

In illustrating the nature of *anusaya*, the potential of a tree to bear fruit is a commonly used simile.<sup>18</sup> Just as a tree possesses the latent potential to bear fruit when conditions are favorable, *anusaya* exists

<sup>13</sup> D. III. 336; Janakābhivamsa (2002), p.560; Ledi (2003), p. 339.

<sup>14</sup> M. I.433

<sup>15</sup> M. III. 281

<sup>16</sup> D. II.337; S. IV. 197.

<sup>17</sup> A. II.157; III.74.

<sup>18</sup> Janakābhivamsa (2002), p. 560; Mon (2002), p. 267

within the continuum of the five aggregates. This analogy is employed in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* to explain how *anusaya* is eradicated by the Noble Path.<sup>19</sup> It states that if the root of a fruit-bearing tree is destroyed, the tree can no longer produce fruit - thus, unborn fruits do not arise (*ajātāyeva na jāyanti*). The implication is that if the causes leading to *anusaya* are eliminated, it will not manifest. In his commentary,<sup>20</sup> Ācariya Buddhaghosa employs the same simile. He reinforces the idea that the potentiality of a tree to bear fruit mirrors the nature of *anusaya*. While this analogy is primarily used to illustrate the eradication of *anusaya*, it also effectively highlights its latent nature.

Sayadaw Janakābhivaṃsa offers another example, likening latent defilements to a cobra: when struck, a cobra instinctively raises its hood, symbolizing how dormant *anusaya* can become active under the right conditions (2002: 561). Similarly, Venerable Nyanaponika compares latent defilements to microbes in the body, which may remain inactive but can become active when conditions are favorable (1998: 97, 191). His emphasis, like others, is on the dormant nature of defilements.

In the Pāli texts, *anusaya* represents one of the categories of mental states. This category typically consists of seven unwholesome mental states: lust for sensual pleasure (*kāmarāga*), aversion (*paṭigha*), wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), conceit (*māna*), craving for existence (*bhavarāga*), and ignorance (*avijjā*).<sup>21</sup> However, in a specific instance in the *Mahāmālukiyaṇṇasutta*, only five *anusaya(s)* are listed, and they are explained in relation to the category of ‘fetter’ (*saṃyojana*).<sup>22</sup> Notably, this list resembles the category of lower fetters (*orambhāgiya saṃyojana*).<sup>23</sup> According to this instance, *saṃyojana* appears to represent the active form of defilements, whereas *anusaya* refers to their dormant state. However, this distinction is not absolute.

The nature of *anusaya* is one of the topics debated in the *Kathāvatthu Pāli* (p. 405). Some of the issues discussed in this text regarding *anusaya* may stem from the attempt to strictly classify defilements into three stages. For instance, one debated question is whether *anusaya* has any

<sup>19</sup> *Pṭs.* II. 218

<sup>20</sup> *M.* III. 252; *Vism.* II. 327B

<sup>21</sup> *D.* III. 254; *M.* I. 47; *S.* V.60; *A.* IV. 9

<sup>22</sup> *M.* I. 433. The spelling *saṃyojana* is also found (*D.* III.234). The five are: wrong view related to five aggregates (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), wrong view related to habit and religious observances (*śīlabbataparāmāsa*), sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), and ill will (*byāpāda*).

<sup>23</sup> *D.* III. 210; *A.* IV. 7.

ethical significance - are they merely indeterminate (*abyākata*)?<sup>24</sup> The explanations provided in commentaries, such as the one mentioned above, often aim to refute views that contradict the *Theravāda* standpoint.<sup>25</sup> However, examining this issue is not the objective of this paper. Instead, this study focuses on the practical utility of stratifying anger into three stages for the purpose of anger management.

## II. LATENT ANGER (*PAṬIGHĀNUSAYA*)

The term *paṭigha*, used to refer to latent anger, literally means “impact,” “resistance,” or “striking against,” suggesting an immediate negative reaction. Grammatically related terms with similar meanings include *paṭighāta* and *āghāta*.<sup>26</sup> However, there does not appear to be a specific reason for using *paṭigha* to denote the latent form of anger instead of other terms such as *byāpāda*, *kodha*, or *dosa*. In fact, these terms could be used interchangeably.

In the highest sense, the phrase “state of not being abandoned,” used in the definition of *anusaya*, refers to defilements that have not been eradicated by the Noble Path.<sup>27</sup> In the case of anger, this specifically refers to the abandonment of latent anger by the third Noble Path, the Path of Non-returner (*anāgāmi magga*).<sup>28</sup> The second Noble Path also eradicates gross forms of anger, thereby weakening its latent tendencies.<sup>29</sup>

There are three types of abandonment: momentary (*tadaṅga*), suppression (*vikkhambhana*), and uprooting (*samuccheda*). The abandonment mentioned in the definition above refers to “uprooting.” However, the concept of “potential” or arising can also be understood concerning the other two types of abandonment. Regarding these three

<sup>24</sup> Sayadaw Silānanda (2012): 19. Also points out disagreements as to the question: Whether *anusaya* belongs to the past, present, or future?

<sup>25</sup> It is likely that the term *anusaya* has a specific purpose in explaining eradication of defilements. In the *Papañcasūdanī* (M. III. 144), Ācariya Buddhaghosa rejects the notion that the fetter and latent tendency are different. From the *Abhidhamma* point of view, authors such as Mon (2002), p. 267 say that latent states do not have the characteristics of arising and passing away. Similarly, Sayadaw Silānanda says “when they [latent tendencies] reach the three stages of existence, they are no longer called Anusaya. They become Kilesas [defilements].” Accepting the latent tendencies as having the moments of arising and passing away and belonging to time poses difficulty in explaining how latent tendencies are abandoned by Noble Paths. In the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (ii, p.218), for instance, it is said: “One does not eradicate past defilements, present defilements, future defilements.”

<sup>26</sup> Kacc, §571; Mogg, §99; *Abhi*. I. 190

<sup>27</sup> *It*. II.11

<sup>28</sup> *Paṭi*. I. 195

<sup>29</sup> *Paṭi*. I. 71

forms of abandonment, a commentary states: “Absorption concentration is like cutting off the bark [of a tree]; insight meditation is like cutting off the outer core; the Noble Path is like cutting off the inner core”.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the absence of insight and concentration creates conditions for anger to become active.

Latent anger, however, is not merely dormant; it can strengthen or weaken depending on its activity at the levels of mind and behavior. This explains why individuals exhibit varying dispositions toward anger. Based on the frequency with which anger arises and the ease with which a person is provoked, individuals can be placed on a scale of “*hateful temperament*” (*dosa-carita*). Although the term *hateful temperament* originates from commentarial sources, a similar classification of personality types is implicitly present in the Pāli texts. For instance, references to *hateful temperament* can be observed in the Pāli texts through terms such as *kodhano* (angry person), *upanāhī* (vengeful person),<sup>31</sup> *upāyāsabahulo* (very irritable), *tibbadosajātiko* (wrathful person),<sup>32</sup> *duṭṭho* (hateful person), *doso* (hateful person),<sup>33</sup> and *dosussado* (one whose anger is abundant).<sup>34</sup> While these terms are not explicitly categorized under *hateful temperament*, they can be understood as descriptions of individuals who exhibit such tendencies.

Furthermore, individuals are often classified based on how anger arises and persists within them. For instance, in the *Lekha Sutta*,<sup>35</sup> beings are categorized into three types according to two criteria: whether they become angry frequently and whether their anger endures for a long time. In this context, the expression “*becomes latent*” is used to convey the idea of *continuation*, as indicated by the wording of the *Sutta* itself. The three classifications based on duration are: “*one whose anger lasts long*” (*dīgharattaṃ anuseti*), “*one whose anger lasts for a brief period*,” and “*one whose anger does not persist for long*” (*na cīraṭṭhitikā hoti*). While this classification specifically describes how anger continues in individuals, in the context of the present study, it can also be applied to explain three distinct dispositions related to anger.

<sup>30</sup> M. III. 144. *Tacacchedo viya hi samāpatti dāṭṭhabbā, pheggucchedo viya vipassanā, sāraccchedo viya maggo*; M. II. 68: *Kilesānaṃ samāpattivikkhambanassa sāraccchedassa anusayassa dūrabhāvato*

<sup>31</sup> D. III. 45

<sup>32</sup> M. III. 204; I. 308.

<sup>33</sup> A. I. 201.

<sup>34</sup> *Nidd.* I. 72.

<sup>35</sup> A. I. 283

The first kind of person in the *Lekha Sutta* is always angry, and his or her anger lies dormant for a long time. This anger is compared to writings on a stone which do not go away easily. In the same way, this person harbors anger for a long time. The second person is also always angry, but his or her anger does not lie in a dormant state for a long time. It means that he or she does not continue to be angry for a long time or harbor resentment for a long time. This kind of anger is compared to writings on sand which go away easily compared to writings on stone. This suggests that the second individual's tendency to anger is not strong. The third person is not angry always, and his anger also is not dormant for a long time. This anger is compared to writings on water. Among these three, the first two can be considered as subtypes of hateful temperament. The third can be considered either as a person with amiable temperament or a person with hateful temperament who has cultivated positive states that counter anger.

The first type of person described in the *Lekha Sutta* is someone who is frequently angry, and whose anger remains dormant for a long time. This type of anger is compared to inscriptions on stone, which do not fade easily. Similarly, such a person harbors resentment for an extended period. The second type of person is also prone to frequent anger, but the anger does not remain dormant for long. In other words, they do not continue to be angry or hold onto resentment for an extended period. This type of anger is compared to writings on sand, which disappear more easily than those on stone. This suggests that the second individual's tendency toward anger is less intense. The third type of person is rarely angry, and even when anger arises, it does not persist for long. This type of anger is compared to writings on water, which vanishes almost instantly. Among these three, the first two can be considered subtypes of *hateful temperament*. The third can be classified either as a person with an *amiable temperament* or as someone with a *hateful temperament* who has successfully cultivated positive mental states that counteract anger.

In the *Āsīvisa Sutta*, a similar classification is presented, with the addition of a fourth type of individual. This new category describes a person who is not frequently angry but whose anger remains dormant for a long time.<sup>36</sup> Here, too, the term *anuseti* is used to indicate the continuation of anger. The simile given in this discourse involves snake venom. A person who often becomes angry is compared to a snake

---

<sup>36</sup> A. II. 110: "Idha, bhikkhave, ekacco puggalo na heva kho abhinham kujjhati. So ca khvassa kodho digharattam anuseti."

whose venom is quick to emerge, while someone who is rarely angry is likened to a snake whose venom is slow to appear. Furthermore, a person whose anger lingers for a long time is compared to a snake with virulent venom, whereas a person whose anger does not persist is likened to a snake with non-virulent poison. According to this discourse, individuals can be classified into four personality types based on their disposition toward anger.

Unlike the general classification of *anusaya* into seven types, many instances in the *Suttanta* mention only three latent tendencies: the tendency toward sensual pleasure, aversion, and ignorance.<sup>37</sup> This classification provides a different perspective on the meaning of *anusaya*, as it also indicates *where* these latent tendencies reside. The tendency toward sensual desire *lies* in pleasant feeling (*sukkhā vedanā*), the tendency toward aversion in unpleasant feeling (*dukkhā vedanā*), and the tendency toward ignorance in neutral feeling (*adukkhamasukkhā vedanā*). In the *Abhidhamma*, this analysis is extended to encompass all latent tendencies. For instance, regarding aversion, the *Yamaka* states: “Where does the latent tendency to aversion lie? The latent tendency to aversion lies in unpleasant feeling.”<sup>38</sup> From a psychological perspective, the idea that aversion lies latent in painful feeling suggests that painful experiences are a major trigger for anger. In this sense, the concept of *anusaya* also reveals the proximate causes of mental defilements

Feelings have a strong causal relationship with all unwholesome states of mind. This is supported by the commentaries,<sup>39</sup> where all seven latent defilements are explained in relation to the three types of feelings. This connection becomes even clearer from an *Abhidhamma* perspective. In the *Abhidhamma*, wrong view, conceit, and craving for existence are associated with greed, while doubt is linked to ignorance.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, both wrong view and conceit are connected to pleasant feelings. From this perspective, all seven latent tendencies can be related to the three types of feelings, suggesting that the arising of unwholesome states is, to some extent, dependent on feelings.

Besides being a significant trigger for anger, painful feelings also contribute to the reinforcement of a latent disposition toward aversion. For instance, each time an individual reacts to painful feelings with aversion,

<sup>37</sup> M. I. 303; M. III. 285; S. IV. 205.

<sup>38</sup> A. II. 55.

<sup>39</sup> *Abhi.* III. 87; *It.* II. 11.

<sup>40</sup> *Abhi.* II. 340; CMOA (2016), pp. 38, 268.



the tendency becomes further ingrained. The *Salla Sutta* states that when one experiences painful feelings and responds with aversion, the latent tendency to aversion is strengthened.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, if one does not react with aversion to painful feelings, aversion does not become latent.

A similar explanation is found in the *Chachakka Sutta*,<sup>42</sup> where the cause of latency is attributed to emotional distress, such as sorrow and lamentation. The statement that “aversion becomes latent” can be interpreted in two ways. First, it indicates that the individual reacting in this manner has not yet abandoned aversion - an explanation provided in the commentary.<sup>43</sup> Second, it can also be understood as the reinforcement of the tendency toward aversion.

The latent tendency to aversion is also explained in relation to undesirable sensory objects. This is evident from statements such as, “one has ill will towards displeasing objects” (*appiyarūpe rūpe byāpajjati*).<sup>44</sup> The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* expresses this idea even more explicitly, using the same phrasing as for unpleasant feelings: “The latent tendency to aversion lies in the undesirable object” (*Paṭi.i*, p.123).<sup>45</sup> In this context, the undesirable object is presented as the ‘location’ of aversion, rather than the unpleasant feeling that triggers its arising.

However, it is important to note that painful feelings themselves can also serve as objects that provoke aversion (*Abhi-a.iii*, p.87). The commentary explains that aversion arising from undesirable objects is instinctual or a common habitual response among beings (*Paṭi-a.ii*, p.401).<sup>46</sup> This automaticity is likened to a person in the middle of an ocean, seeing water in every direction. Thus, the ‘locations’ upon which anger arises are twofold: painful feelings and undesirable objects.

It is noteworthy, however, that aversion toward undesirable objects primarily arises from unpleasant feelings. For instance, in the *Chachakka Sutta*, it is stated that aversion arises due to unpleasant feelings, which themselves arise from contact between six types of unpleasant objects and their corresponding sense bases.<sup>47</sup> This implies that objects are perceived as desirable or undesirable mainly based on the feelings

<sup>41</sup> S. IV. 285.

<sup>42</sup> M. II. 285.

<sup>43</sup> M. V. 100.

<sup>44</sup> S. IV. 189.

<sup>45</sup> *Yam loke appiyarūpaṃ asātarūpaṃ, ettha sattānaṃ paṭighānusoṇaṃ anuseti.*

<sup>46</sup> *Rāguppatti nāma sattānaṃ āciṇṇasamāciṇṇā. Tathā anīṭṭhārammaṇe paṭighuppatti.* (*Abhi-a.ii*, p. 460).

<sup>47</sup> M. III. 185.

associated with them. This does not mean that anger is constantly *present*. Rather, it remains latent and arises when the necessary conditions – such as recalling the object – are met. For example, anger may surface when one reflects on harm caused by another person in the past, present, or even the future.<sup>48</sup> This suggests that anger arises from perceiving an object as a source of past unpleasant feelings or as having the potential to cause future unpleasant feelings.

To distinguish between object-specific aversion and the general latent tendency present in all human beings, commentarial literature explains two types of latent tendencies. The first, “*latency in object*” (*ārammaṇānusaya*), refers to the tendency that remains within undesirable objects.<sup>49</sup> The second, “*latency in continuum*” (*santānānusaya*), describes the persistence of aversion due to its non-eradication. As explained earlier, beyond being a cause of aversion, *latency in object* also implies that objects previously met with aversion are likely to elicit the same response when encountered again. This kind of aversion is object-specific, meaning that certain stimuli repeatedly provoke similar psychological reactions. For example, if one generates aversion toward a particular individual, two things happen: first, the tendency to respond with aversion strengthens; second, encountering that person again is likely to trigger the same reaction.

It is crucial to understand that the tendency toward aversion lies dormant in unpleasant feelings and undesirable objects. This means that the latent stage of aversion becomes active - manifesting as thought or a state of mind - primarily due to these two causes. In simpler terms, unpleasant feelings and undesirable objects are the primary triggers of anger. This point can be inferred from *Pāli* literature. For instance, craving arises in response to desirable and pleasant objects.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, aversion arises in response to unpleasant feelings and undesirable objects. Therefore, latent anger can be defined as the potential for anger, which becomes a psychological reaction to unpleasant feelings or undesirable objects.

### III. COGITATIVE ANGER

The *Pāli* term *pariyuṭṭhāna*, which literally means “arising all around,” represents the active stage of defilements (Karunaratne, *Kilesa*, EOB), in contrast to the sense of “inactivity” associated with *anusaya*. Padmasiri

<sup>48</sup> A. V. 150.

<sup>49</sup> *Abhi. II.* 213.

<sup>50</sup> *D. II.* 308; *M. III.* 800; *Abhi. II.* 112.

describes it as a dormant level of the thought process.<sup>51</sup> Karunādāsa interprets it as “going beyond.”<sup>52</sup> According to the commentary, *pariyuṭṭhāna* literally means “arising and occupying,”<sup>53</sup> justifying its rendering as “obsession.”<sup>54</sup> More generally, the verb *pariyuṭṭhāti* is used to mean “becoming active” or “being occupied.”<sup>55</sup>

In *Abhidhamma*, *pariyuṭṭhāna* is explained in relation to *anusaya* as the active forms of the seven latent defilements.<sup>56</sup> In the *Suttanta*, however, the term *pariyuṭṭhāna* also refers to defilements not included in the category of *anusaya*.<sup>57</sup> It frequently appears in connection with the arising of the five hindrances.<sup>58</sup> It is clear, however, that *pariyuṭṭhāna*, like *anusaya*, is used in the *Pāli* texts specifically for the arising of mental defilements. The term itself implies the presence of hindrances and other unwholesome states of mind.<sup>59</sup> Thus, *pariyuṭṭhāna* can be understood as the arising of any mental defilement.

In the *Pāli* texts, the active stage of anger is expressed in many ways. It is often simply referred to as “becomes angry” (*byāpajjati*; *kujjhati*).<sup>60</sup> Sometimes, the adjective “angry” (*byāpanno*) is also used.<sup>61</sup> In many cases, the cognitive stage is suggested by the expression “mind associated with hatred” (*sadosaṃ cittam*).<sup>62</sup> Occasionally, the term *pariyuṭṭhāna* itself or its derivatives are used in relation to anger. For instance: “mind seized by hatred” (*dosapariyuṭṭhitam cittam*);<sup>63</sup> “dwells with the mind that is seized by ill will” (*byāpādapariyuṭṭhena cetasā viharati*); “dwells mostly with the mind that is seized by anger” (*kodhapariyuṭṭhitena cetasā bahulaṃ viharati*). Sometimes, the expression “the mind that has followed anger” (*dosaparetena cittena*) is also used in conjunction with the mind seized by anger.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the arising of mental defilements, suggested by the term *pariyuṭṭhāna*, can be found in relation to almost all anger-

<sup>51</sup> Silva (2014), p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Karunādāsa (2018), p. 255.

<sup>53</sup> A. III. 337.

<sup>54</sup> Buddhaghosa (1999), para. I, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> Vin. II. 277 – 89.

<sup>56</sup> Abhi. II. 383.

<sup>57</sup> S. IV. 240; A. V. 156 – 63.

<sup>58</sup> M. I. 323; III. 14; S. V. 121.

<sup>59</sup> M. I. 323

<sup>60</sup> M. I. 266; A. I. 283.

<sup>61</sup> A. V. 163.

<sup>62</sup> D. II. 237.

<sup>63</sup> A. II. 285; Abhi. II. 141.

<sup>64</sup> S. III. 174.

related terms: arising of hatred (*dosa*), ill will (*byāpāda*), anger (*kodha*), and aversion (*paṭigha*).<sup>65</sup> According to this analysis, when a person is said to be angry, it refers to the mental level of anger.

In the *Pāli* texts, the active stage of anger is often expressed in terms of two kinds of wrong thoughts: the thought of ill will (*byāpāda vitakka*) and the thought of cruelty (*vihimsā vitakka*).<sup>66</sup> These thoughts are frequently explained as *saṅkappa*, particularly in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. In translation works, *saṅkappa* is rendered in various ways, such as “aspiration,” “intention,” “aim,” “thought,” or “thinking.” For example, in the *Dialogues of the Buddha*, “*sammā saṅkappa*” is mostly translated as “right aspiration,” though sometimes as “right intention.” In the *Book of the Kindred Sayings*, “right aim” is used, and in the *Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, the preferred translation is “right intention.” On the other hand, Venerable Nyanaponika (1962), Venerable Ñāṇamoli (Buddhaghosa, 1999), and Walshe (1996) have generally used the rendering “right thought” or “right thinking” in their works. Although *saṅkappa* can imply “intention” or “aim” in some contexts,<sup>67</sup> in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path,<sup>68</sup> it is synonymous with *vitakka* and is best translated as “thought” or “thinking.” The use of “intention” for *saṅkappa*, however, does not significantly alter the meaning, as intention is an integral part of the thought process.

Among the two kinds of hateful thoughts, the thought of ill will is a comparatively weaker form of anger. It is primarily mental in nature and is explained as a mental action.<sup>69</sup> The thought of cruelty, however, can become extremely violent in nature. Ill will generates desires for beings to be destroyed, killed, or wiped out of existence.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, the thought of cruelty involves both verbal and bodily elements. This distinction can be understood from the explanation of the two kinds of wrong thoughts in the

<sup>65</sup> A. III. 285, V. 156; M. I. 323; S. III. 3.

<sup>66</sup> D. III. 225

<sup>67</sup> For example, in “*sabbe purentu saṅkappā*” (May all aspirations be fulfilled) (*Dhp* 127) and “*paduṭṭhamanasāṅkappo*” (defiled mental thought) (*M. I. 21*), ‘*saṅkappa*’ can be interpreted as ‘thought’, ‘aspiration’, or ‘intention’. Another example is in the *Apādāna Pāli* (i, p. 71), where there is a verse which reads: “*mama saṅkappamaññāya... mama dvāraṃ upāgami.*” Here a donor wishes to offer food to the Buddha and just makes a wish: “May the Great Sage come”. The Buddha knows his ‘*saṅkappa*’ and comes to the door. Here, it can be understood as both intention and thought without any change in meaning. See also D. III. 42.

<sup>68</sup> D. III. 180; It. 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Abhi.* II. 364.

<sup>70</sup> M. I. 287.

*Vibhaṅga* (p.86).<sup>71</sup> According to this *Abhidhamma* text, unlike the thoughts of ill will, which consist solely of a mental element, the ‘element of cruelty’ is explained as comprising both mental and behavioral aspects as follows:

Therein what is the element of cruelty (*vihiṃsā*)? The mentation, thinking, thought, fixation, focusing, application of the mind, wrong thought, associated with cruelty. This is called element of cruelty. Herein a certain one hurts (other) beings with the hand or with a clod or with a stick or with a sword or with a rope or with one thing or another; that which is similar, harassing, hurting, annoying, injuring, provoking, enraging, striking others. This is called element of cruelty.<sup>72</sup>

Hateful thoughts play an important role in the development of dispositions related to anger. For instance, if one engages in hateful thoughts excessively, one is likely to develop a hateful temperament. In simple terms, this means that a person can be easily provoked to anger. This is due to the tendency of human thought to repeat itself and become more firmly established through repetition. This point is highlighted in the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*.<sup>73</sup> The *Sutta* emphasizes a very important nature of thoughts: whatever one thinks frequently, one’s mind inclines toward it. In other words, thoughts are psychologically significant in the formation of temperament or mental inclination. For instance, whenever one is angry or engages in hateful thoughts, one consolidates the tendency to become angry again. Seen from this viewpoint, openly expressing anger increases the likelihood of being angry again.

On the other hand, by restraining anger, one prevents the consolidation of the tendency to anger. Furthermore, the repetition of hateful thoughts may be one of the causes of the formation of hateful temperament. In this regard, Ledi Sayadaw states that the repetition of thought can make the latent stage stronger.<sup>74</sup> He suggests that hateful thoughts or mental states have the potential to strengthen the latent tendency to anger.

<sup>71</sup> Here, they are explained as “elements” (*dhātu*). In the *Suttanta* also sometimes thoughts are explained as “elements” (A. III. 447).

<sup>72</sup> *Abhi.* II. 86: *Tattha katamā vihiṃsādhātu? Vihiṃsāpaṭisaṃyutto takko vitakko...pe... micchāsankappo – ayaṃ vuccati “vihiṃsādhātu”.* *Idhekacco paṇinā vā leḍḍunā vā daṇḍena vā satthena vā rajjuyā vā aññataraññatarena satte viheṭheti, yā evarūpā heṭhanā viheṭhanā hiṃsanā vihiṃsanā rosanā virosanā parūpaghāto – ayaṃ vuccati “vihiṃsādhātu.”* (Thiṭṭhila (2010), p. 111).

<sup>73</sup> M. I. 15.

<sup>74</sup> Ledi (2003), p. 342.

The active stage of anger can sometimes manifest as intentions to act. In the texts, the *Pāli* term most commonly used in relation to this is *ceteti*. For example, the intentions associated with a hateful mind are shown in passages like: “Because of hatred, a person who is angry intends (*ceteti*) to hurt oneself, hurt others, or hurt both.”<sup>75</sup> If the term *ceteti* is interpreted as ‘thinks,’ it can be understood that hatred gives rise to two kinds of wrong thoughts: the thought of cruelty (*byāpāda vitakka*) and the thought of violence (*vihiṃsā vitakka*). While the *Pāli* term *ceteti* primarily refers to intention, it can also be understood more generally as ‘thinks.’ Both interpretations are valid, as intention is an integral part of thought itself. According to *Abhidhamma*, intention is a universal mental state that arises with every moment of consciousness.

#### IV. MENTAL STATES ASSOCIATED WITH ANGER

According to the *Abhidhamma*, several unwholesome states of mind arise associated with anger. First, the hateful mind itself arises in two forms, differentiated by whether they arise spontaneously or not. One consideration in this regard is whether anger arises in response to external prompting.<sup>76</sup> The arising of anger with deliberate premonition is also called “prompted” (*sasaṅkhārika*). If anger arises due to internal causes, without being instigated by external agents or deliberate premonition, it is considered “unprompted” (*asaṅkhārika*).<sup>77</sup> This type of anger may also be referred to as “spontaneous” anger.

Second, anger can arise in various forms and associate with several other distinct states of mind. In explaining this, Venerable Janakābhivamsa (2014, p. 44) categorizes hatred (*dosa*) into two types: active and passive. Active forms of hatred include grudging, abusing, quarrelling, fighting, killing, and planning to kill others, among others. On the other hand, passive forms of hatred include sorrow, grief, lamentation, depression, fear, and worry. For Venerable Janakābhivamsa, active anger has both mental and behavioral components, while passive anger has only a mental component. This analysis is based on the *Abhidhamma* explanation that, in all these states of mind, the mental root of hatred (*dosa*) operates in some form. In other words, there is something one strongly dislikes or has aversion to. Notably, the inclusion of fear in the category of mental states related to anger is significant. In *Abhidhamma*, fear is explained as

<sup>75</sup> S. IV. 339; A. I. 157.

<sup>76</sup> *Abhi. I. 2: Domanassasahagataṃ paṭighasampayuttaṃ asaṅkhārikamekaṃ, sasaṅkhārikamekaṃ*. Also see CMOA (2016), p. 36.

<sup>77</sup> *Abhi. I. 299; Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 478, Abhi. I. 100 – 01.*



a state of mind connected to hatred, as there is no need to fear something one does not dislike or hate.

Among the unwholesome mental states associated with hatred, three are particularly noteworthy: envy (*issā*), stinginess (*macchhariya*), and remorse (*kukkucca*).<sup>78</sup> These states are sometimes grouped together as part of an ‘anger-class’ of mental states. What this implies is that when a person experiences envy, stinginess, or remorse, some form of hatred is also present. According to *Abhidhamma*, these three mental states are mutually exclusive, meaning they never arise together. For instance, if envy arises, the other two do not.<sup>79</sup> Anger, however, can arise independently of these mental states, and to varying degrees, it can arise with each of the three separately. From this analysis, it can be concluded that there are four possible permutations of consciousness pertaining to anger.

In general parlance, stinginess is often associated with greed (*lobha*). A similar suggestion can be found in the *Pāli* texts as well. For example, it is stated: “In a generation obsessed by the stain of stinginess, I dwell at home with my heart free from the stain of stinginess, freely generous and open-handed”.<sup>80</sup> According to commentary, stinginess appears to be linked not only to greed but also to hatred. It is said that the characteristic of stinginess is the inability to bear sharing things with others.<sup>81</sup> Here, “not to bear” suggests the presence of aversion, while “sharing” points to generosity, the opposite of greed.

The issue of placing *macchhariya* in the hatred class, however, is not addressed in the commentaries, nor is it found in the *Abhidhamma* works extant today. Instead, support is given to the inclusion of stinginess in the anger class. For example, it is stated: “It partakes in the characteristic of aversion and involves resistance to sharing one’s belongings with others”.<sup>82</sup> Explaining based on the roots of mind, Venerable Nārada, in the same vein, says that *macchhariya* cannot arise in consciousness rooted in attachment because there is an element of aversion in it, rather than greed: “*Macchhariya* is a kind of aversion to another’s vying with oneself”.<sup>83</sup> From the perspective of *Abhidhamma*, *macchhariya* is included in the anger class mainly because hatred is a co-nascent state of *macchhariya*. While stinginess may be caused by *lobha*, at the actual instance when

<sup>78</sup> *Abhi.* I. 10; CMOA (2016), p. 96.

<sup>79</sup> CMOA (2016), p. 96 – 9.

<sup>80</sup> A. II. 253.

<sup>81</sup> *Abhi.* I. 299; Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 478. See also Gorkom (2010), p. 174.

<sup>82</sup> CMOA (2016), p. 96.

<sup>83</sup> Nārada (1956), p. 147.

*macchhariya* arises, it is associated with hatred. In simple terms, one is uncharitable toward the recipient whom one dislikes.

According to *Suttanta*, greed (*lobha*) can also give rise to *issā* and *macchhariya*. For example, in the *Sakkapañha Sutta*, it is stated that *issā* and *macchhariya* are the main causes of conflict in the world. The root cause of *issā* and *macchhariya* is the propensity of human beings to be partial, prejudiced, and biased on various grounds. These prejudices are further conditioned by thoughts connected with craving (*taṇhā*), wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), and conceit (*māna*).<sup>84</sup> According to *Abhidhamma*, these three mental states arise with greed-rooted (*lobha-mūla*) consciousnesses.<sup>85</sup> Thus, it can be said that *issā* and *macchhariya* arise through the interplay of craving, hatred, wrong view, and conceit.

As already explained above, there is one more noteworthy mental state associated with anger that has implications for managing it: unpleasant feeling. First, a hateful mind is always associated with painful feeling (*dukkhā vedanā*). In the *Suttanta*, this is indicated in statements such as, “being obsessed by ill will, one lives painfully”.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, a hateful mind is often a reaction to painful feeling. In this way, the reaction to unpleasant feeling creates a vicious cycle, making it difficult to halt the proliferation of anger.

## V. BEHAVIORAL ANGER

When the active stage of defilements leads to actions of body or speech, these are said to be at the stage of transgression (*vītikkaṃa*).<sup>87</sup> Literally, the term *vītikkaṃa* means “going beyond” or “crossing a certain boundary”.<sup>88</sup> For instance, one violates the King’s order (*āṇaṃ vītikkaṃati*) (Mil, p. 227). When used in the context of moral practice, it refers to the transgression of moral precepts.<sup>89</sup> It is often used to describe the violation of the moral “boundary” that one has undertaken to observe.<sup>90</sup> To support this point, moral virtue itself is explained as having the sense of “non-transgression” (*avītikkaṃatṭhena*).<sup>91</sup> Thus, the term *vītikkaṃa* suggests that verbal or bodily actions caused by defilements

<sup>84</sup> M. II. 220; 31.

<sup>85</sup> CMOA (2016), p. 79.

<sup>86</sup> A. I. 202.

<sup>87</sup> Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> A. III. 227.

<sup>89</sup> M. II. 241; A. IV. 66; Paṭi. I. 43.

<sup>90</sup> D. II. 115.

<sup>91</sup> Paṭi. I. 225.

are unwholesome in nature and transgress some form of moral precept. From a psychological viewpoint, Padmasiri refers to this as a level of impulsive action.<sup>92</sup> In simple terms, from a Buddhist perspective, the transgressive stage of anger involves the violation of ethical norms.

The point that a hateful mind instigates a person to engage in various verbal and bodily actions, which are unwholesome in nature, is highlighted in many texts. For instance, it is said that hatred itself is an unwholesome state, and whatever actions one performs under the influence of hatred – whether by body, speech, or mind—are also unwholesome.<sup>93</sup> This point is elaborated more specifically in the *Kesamutti Sutta*: “When the mind of a person with a ‘hateful nature’ [hateful temperament] is overwhelmed and inundated by hate, [he] may kill beings, steal, and engage in adultery, lie, or even make others do these things - actions that cause harm and suffering for a long time.”<sup>94</sup>

According to Buddhist analysis, intentional verbal and bodily actions originate first in the mind. For example, the Buddha says in the *Nibbedhika Sutta*: “Monks, I call intention the *kamma*; for one intends and does action - by body, by speech, and by mind.”<sup>95</sup> Here, intention is shown as the cause of even mental actions. Furthermore, the primary motivating factors for unwholesome actions are greed, hatred, and delusion. Ethically, these are also called unwholesome roots, and they lead to unwholesome actions.<sup>96</sup> This means that actions of body or speech done under the influence of these three roots are unwholesome. Additionally, engaging in thoughts caused by these roots is also unwholesome.

According to *Abhidhamma*, delusion is a co-nascent state of anger. This means that when one is in the grip of anger, one’s reasoning and intelligence are impaired. This point is suggested in the *Suttanta* through passages such as, “When obsessed by hatred, one does not know what is in one’s welfare, others’ welfare, or both persons’ welfare.”<sup>97</sup> An angry person does not know what is beneficial; one who is obsessed by hatred is in blinding darkness.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, greed can also cause hatred to

<sup>92</sup> Silva (2014), p. 18.

<sup>93</sup> A. I. 201: *Yadapi, bhikkhave, doso tadapi akusalamūlaṃ; yadapi duṭṭho abhisāṅkharoti kāyena vācāya manasā tadapi akusalaṃ*. According to this Pali, hatred as a root seems to be explained as the cause of ill will, the mental action as it is mentioned in the texts.

<sup>94</sup> A. I. 190.

<sup>95</sup> A. III. 415.

<sup>96</sup> A. I. 201.

<sup>97</sup> A. I. 158.

<sup>98</sup> *It.* 84.

arise when the object of greed is either unobtained or destroyed.

The point that anger can cause mental action indicates that if anger is not restrained, it leads to the proliferation of hateful thoughts, which can potentially result in unwholesome actions of speech and body. In this sense, transgressive anger can be called “behavioral anger” or the “action stage of anger.” As noted above, the term “action” also refers to mental actions in the form of thoughts and intentions. In relation to the doctrine of *kamma*, actions are classified into three categories: mental, bodily, and verbal. From this viewpoint, hateful thoughts are mental actions, while behavioral anger refers to actions of speech and body. From the perspective of the three levels of anger, mental action belongs to the cogitative stage, while bodily and verbal actions belong to the transgressive stage.

One noteworthy reason behind a person’s inability to restrain unwholesome actions of speech and body is the weakness of the mental ability to abstain from such actions. According to *Abhidhamma*, the ability to refrain from verbal and bodily actions is an inherent human capacity. Three states of mind prevent transgression of moral precepts through speech and body; these are called “abstinences” (*virati*).<sup>99</sup> The inability to restrain the proliferation of hateful thoughts and abstain from overt actions caused by anger is due to the weakness of these abstinences. Abstinence itself is threefold: occasional abstinence (*sampatta*), moral abstinence (*samādāna*), and Noble abstinence (*samuccheda*).<sup>100</sup> One may occasionally abstain from expressing anger due to considerations such as one’s social position; one may abstain because one has taken moral precepts; or one may abstain because the disposition to aversion has been uprooted by the Noble Path.

If the latent tendency of anger has not been abandoned, cogitative anger arises whenever conditions are favorable. If hateful thoughts are not restrained, one will then engage in actions of speech and mind (Nett-a., p.249). This mechanism is clearly explained in the *Sanidāna Sutta*, which states that the element of ill will causes the perception of ill will.<sup>101</sup> The perception of ill will leads to hateful thoughts, which in turn cause hateful desire, restlessness, and quests. Ultimately, these mental states result in wrong actions of body, speech, and mind.

## VI. WORKINGS OF ANGER AT THREE STAGES

The *Mahāniddesa* (p.215) and its commentary (*Nidd I-a.ii*, p. 321

<sup>99</sup> *Vism.* II. 92; *D. I.* 304; CMOA (2016), p. 88; Rewata-dhamma (2004), p. 19.

<sup>100</sup> *Abhi.* I. 103.

<sup>101</sup> *S. II.* 151.

- 322) succinctly explain the relationship between the three stages of anger. Although the concept of three stages is not explicitly used, the progression of anger from a mere disturbance of the mind to extreme physical violence is well illustrated. Initially, anger is purely a mental event; it creates a disturbance in the mind but does not manifest in facial expressions. This stands in contrast to the Western notion that emotions are inherently physical and can be studied solely in terms of physical events.<sup>102</sup> This explanation not only demonstrates how anger can begin as a purely mental event but also how it later manifests in speech and bodily behavior.

*Mahāniddeśa* and its commentary explain that anger may initially cause physical changes, such as facial distortions, but without affecting the vocal cords. This means that while the mind may be disturbed, the intention to speak or the physical readiness to speak has not yet appeared. In the next stage, anger begins to affect the vocal cords, but harsh speech is not yet emitted. This indicates that one can still restrain oneself from speaking harshly. Sometimes, harsh words are spoken, but there is no desire to harm others physically. At this point, anger has manifested in verbal behavior, yet one is still able to contain it. In the following stage, anger may lead a person to pick up a weapon, though they may not actually use it. In other cases, a person may raise a weapon but refrain from striking. Sometimes, anger may cause someone to strike with a stick or sword, but without the intent to kill. At its most extreme, anger can lead a person to kill others or commit suicide. These stages of anger illustrate not only how latent anger can first manifest as a mental state and then later in behavior, but also how this process can be halted at any point.

The nature of the three levels of anger, as explained above, is clearly illustrated in the story of Vedehikā and her servant in the *Kakacūpama Sutta*.<sup>103</sup> Vedehikā, a householder known for her amiable and gentle nature, had a female servant named Kālī, who was obedient and skilled in her work. One day, Kālī decided to test whether her mistress' reputation for kindness was genuine. She purposely woke up late, and when Vedehikā discovered this, she became angry and scolded her. This represents the mental and verbal manifestation of anger. When Kālī performed her duties well, Vedehikā showed no signs of anger. However, at the slightest shortcoming, her anger surfaced. On the second occasion, when Kālī woke up late again, she was harshly scolded. On the third occasion, Kālī slept in much later

<sup>102</sup> See Premasiri, "emotion" in EOB.

<sup>103</sup> M. I. 125.

than before, and this time Vedehikā physically beat her. This demonstrates the manifestation of physical violence fueled by anger.

Kāli observed firsthand that her mistress' anger only surfaced when she disobeyed or failed to meet expectations. The Buddha points out that in the same way, a monk may appear gentle if no one provokes him. It is only when someone utters unpleasant speech or provokes him that his true nature can be tested. In other words, the latent potential for anger becomes evident only when a person is provoked, and the intensity of anger reveals itself in both mind and behavior.

## VII. DEALING WITH THREE LEVELS OF ANGER

The stratification of anger into three stages is significant in that it provides a crucial strategy regarding the preventive and curative methods of dispelling anger. It means that in dealing with anger, the antidotes and remedies should be sought at three levels. This was also perhaps one of the reasons in commentarial texts for stratifying defilements into three stages. For instance, in the *Visuddhimagga*,<sup>104</sup> Ācariya Buddhaghosa suggests this by saying that the latent stage should be dealt with by applying wisdom (*paññā*); the thought stage by applying concentration (*samādhi*), and the action stage by undertaking moral precepts (*sīla*).<sup>105</sup> In the context of the present study too, the practice of virtue, concentration, and wisdom can be applied to manage behavioral anger, cognitive anger, and latent anger respectively. Since virtue, concentration, and wisdom form three trainings (*sikkhā*) in the doctrine of the Noble Eightfold Path, it can be said that the practices alluded by the Noble Eightfold Path can be utilized in dispelling different levels of anger. There are also, however, methods which are helpful in dispelling anger, but not explicitly suggested by the three trainings.

The stratification of anger into three stages - latent, cogitative, and transgressive - holds great significance as it provides a clear framework for both preventing and curing anger. By understanding anger in these stages, one can apply antidotes and remedies at each level to manage it effectively. This stratification is likely rooted in commentarial texts as a means of addressing defilements in stages. In the *Visuddhimagga*, Ācariya Buddhaghosa suggests a method for dealing with different stages of defilements: the latent stage should be addressed through wisdom (*paññā*), the thought stage through concentration (*samādhi*), and the

<sup>104</sup> *Vism.* I. 5. B.

<sup>105</sup> Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 9.



action stage through the observance of moral precepts (*sīla*).<sup>106</sup>

In the present context, the practices of virtue, concentration, and wisdom align well with the management of the three levels of anger. Specifically, virtue can be used to manage behavioral anger (transgressive stage), concentration can be applied to cognitive anger (thought stage), and wisdom is crucial for addressing latent anger. These practices form the Three Trainings (*sikkhā*) within the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path and can thus be utilized to dispel anger at each of its stages. Furthermore, there are other methods to address anger that may not explicitly fall under the three trainings but still play an important role in anger management. These methods can complement the Eightfold Path's teachings and offer additional tools for cultivating patience, mindfulness, and compassion.

The most effective strategy for preventing behavioral manifestation of anger is to practice wholesome verbal and bodily conduct. This is emphasized in the commentaries, which state, "One restrains anger by restraining bodily and verbal misconduct by practicing morality."<sup>107</sup> The importance of kind and harmless speech is underscored in Buddhist practice, both for monastics and lay practitioners. For example, when a monk intends to rebuke another monk, he must first establish five considerations in his mind: he speaks at the appropriate time, speaks truthfully, speaks kindly, speaks in a way that is beneficial, and speaks with amity rather than with hatred.<sup>108</sup> This approach ensures that the monk does not disturb the one being addressed.<sup>109</sup>

Ācariya Buddhaghosa highlights the role of proper speech in dispelling anger, noting that cultivating kind and amiable speech can be particularly effective in managing both thought and latent stages of anger.<sup>110</sup> By engaging in wholesome and compassionate speech, one not only prevents the outward expression of anger but also reduces the internal conditions that give rise to it, thereby addressing anger at its deeper mental roots.

Verbal anger can be abandoned through the cultivation of right speech, which is one of the key components of the Noble Eightfold Path. Right speech involves abstaining from four types of wrong speech:

<sup>106</sup> Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 9.

<sup>107</sup> *Sn* 1. 9.

<sup>108</sup> *D.* III. 236; *M.* I. 126.

<sup>109</sup> *A.* III. 196.

<sup>110</sup> *D.* III. 779.

telling lies, harsh speech, malicious speech, and vain talk.<sup>111</sup> These guidelines form the moral framework related to speech in Buddhist practice. By avoiding harsh and malicious speech, one directly addresses anger at the verbal level. Moreover, lies and vain speech may arise from anger or hatred towards someone or something, further emphasizing the connection between speech and anger.

Similarly, physical actions that harm others are the bodily manifestations of anger. In the practice of the “nine precepts” (*navaṅga-uposatha*), there is a focus on preventing the expression of anger even at the mental level. The ninth precept, which is cultivating amity, is added to the eight basic precepts.<sup>112</sup> Monastic codes also contain specific precepts aimed at curbing actions born of anger. For example, monks are instructed not to raise a hand to strike another monk,<sup>113</sup> thereby preventing anger from turning into physical aggression.

Furthermore, among the ten unwholesome courses of action,<sup>114</sup> actions such as killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, telling lies, uttering malicious speech, harsh speech, and vain talk are categorized as behavioral misconduct. The first three fall under misconduct of the body, while the latter four are categorized as misconduct of speech. Anger, whether directly or indirectly, can lead to any of these unwholesome actions.<sup>115</sup> From this perspective, one of the main goals of ethical practice is to prevent the manifestation of anger in both speech and bodily actions.

The cogitative level of anger, which involves hateful thoughts, can be addressed in various ways. The most significant method is to cultivate thoughts that are the direct opposites of anger. According to the teachings on right thought, this strategy involves fostering “thoughts of amity” (*abyāpāda vitakka*) and “thoughts of harmlessness” (*avihiṃsā vitakka*). In the context of the Noble Eightfold Path, these two thoughts are often collectively referred to as *saṅkappa*, with the specific terms *abyāpāda-saṅkappa* and *avihiṃsā-saṅkappa* denoting non-hatred and non-cruelty, respectively.

Literally, the term *abyāpāda* can be translated as “non-hatred,” “amity,” or “loving-kindness.” Meanwhile, *avihiṃsā* is typically translated

<sup>111</sup> D. II. 312.

<sup>112</sup> A. IV. 388.

<sup>113</sup> Vin. IV. 147.

<sup>114</sup> CMOA (2016), p. 207.

<sup>115</sup> Abhi. I. 102; CMOA (2016), p. 208.

as “harmlessness,” opposing cruelty or harm.<sup>116</sup> The negative prefix *na* in *Pāli* also indicates an opposition to something, so *avihiṃsā* can be understood as “non-harming thoughts,” or simply the opposite of destructive thoughts. In essence, both *abyāpāda* and *avihiṃsā* can be seen as equating to amity (loving-kindness) and compassion, respectively.

The important point in the context of managing anger is that these two thoughts counteract the two main forms of hateful thinking - thoughts of ill will and thoughts of cruelty. In the practice of the *brahmavihāra* (sublime abodes), cultivating these thoughts is integral to developing the virtues of amity and compassion, which serve as antidotes to anger and hatred. By actively engaging in these positive thoughts, one can prevent the rise of anger at the cognitive stage.

As explained above, from a psychological perspective, *byāpāda vitakka* refers to a weaker form of hateful thoughts compared to *vihiṃsā vitakka*. When angry thoughts are not controlled, they give rise to destructive thoughts (*vihiṃsā vitakka*). It is this kind of thought that manifests as aggressive verbal or bodily actions. When destructive thoughts appear, one wants to harm others or oneself. Thus, the preventive strategy in curbing aggressive behavior is to remove the hateful thoughts before they develop into destructive thoughts. The two kinds of benevolent thoughts also help in preventing anger. In this regard, the cultivation of mindfulness of thoughts is very useful.

As explained above, from a psychological perspective, *byāpāda vitakka* refers to a milder form of hateful thoughts compared to *vihiṃsā vitakka*. When angry thoughts are left unchecked, they can evolve into more destructive thoughts (*vihiṃsā vitakka*). These destructive thoughts are the ones that typically manifest in aggressive verbal or bodily actions. When such thoughts arise, the intention is to harm others or oneself, signaling the development of fully-fledged anger.

The key preventive strategy, then, is to address these thoughts before they escalate into harmful, destructive ones. By intervening at the level of milder hateful thoughts, one can prevent them from evolving into more intense and destructive manifestations of anger. Additionally, the cultivation of benevolent thoughts, like those of amity and compassion (*abyāpāda* and *avihiṃsā*), plays a crucial role in preventing the development of anger. These positive thoughts counteract and reduce the influence of ill will and cruelty.

---

<sup>116</sup> Nārada (1956), p. 245.

In this process, mindfulness of thoughts becomes especially valuable. By being mindful, one can become aware of the rise of hateful thoughts and intervene before they have a chance to grow into more destructive or aggressive forms of anger. Mindfulness helps in recognizing and halting these mental patterns early, thus preventing the harmful outcomes that might otherwise follow.

The Buddha's emphasis on using wholesome thoughts to counter unwholesome thoughts is a central strategy in the cultivation of mental discipline and the cessation of negative emotions such as anger. This approach is mentioned in various places throughout the scriptures. For example, it is stated that in someone who has developed right thoughts, wrong thoughts become weakened and less influential.<sup>117</sup> This highlights the transformative power of cultivating wholesome, virtuous thoughts in the face of negative mental states.

The *Dhātu Sutta* further elaborates this idea by describing three kinds of right thoughts that serve to counter three kinds of wrong thoughts.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* points out that all thoughts can be divided into two categories: wholesome and unwholesome and encourages the cultivation of wholesome thoughts to eliminate unwholesome ones.<sup>119</sup> This division offers a clear framework for understanding how mental states can either support or obstruct one's path to enlightenment.

A more specific application of this principle can be found in the *Vitakka Sutta*, where the Buddha recommends developing thoughts of amity (*abyāpāda*) to overcome thoughts of ill will, and thoughts of compassion (*karuṇā*) to overcome thoughts of cruelty.<sup>120</sup> These specific antidotes to negative thoughts are crucial for cultivating a mind free from harmful emotions. Furthermore, the *Peṭakopadesa* (Peṭ., p. 160) reinforces that thoughts of amity work directly as antidotes to thoughts of ill will, showing how the cultivation of positive mental states can lead to the reduction or cessation of anger.

In the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*, the Buddha also points out a very significant characteristic of the mind: thoughts tend to repeat and create a mental bent.<sup>121</sup> If one engages in a certain kind of thought, one

---

<sup>117</sup> M. III. 76; A. V. 215.

<sup>118</sup> A. III. 447.

<sup>119</sup> M. I. 114.

<sup>120</sup> A. III. 446.

<sup>121</sup> M. I. 162 – 163.

creates a mental inclination associated with that thought. The relevant passage from the *Sutta* is as follows: “Whatever a monk thinks frequently and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind; if he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of ill will, he abandons the thought of amity and generates much ill will; his mind bends toward thoughts of ill will.”<sup>122</sup>

This passage not only warns against the formation of a mental bent toward ill will but also points out the remedy. If one engages in thoughts of amity, one creates the mental bent of amity. Furthermore, by doing so, the thoughts of ill will are abandoned. On the other hand, if one does not restrain oneself and frequently engages in thoughts of ill will, one abandons thoughts of amity. This means that by developing thoughts of amity, one can remove thoughts of ill will, and by cultivating thoughts of compassion, one can remove thoughts of cruelty.

In the texts, the mind is often classified based on the presence of wholesome or unwholesome roots. This classification of roots also seems useful in understanding the antidotes to unwholesome roots. From this viewpoint, Jayasuriya suggests that by knowing to which class a thought belongs, one can address its root.<sup>123</sup> The antidote to greed is non-greed (*alobha*), to anger is non-anger (*adosa*), and to delusion is non-delusion (*amoha*). Here, non-hatred can refer to both the absence of hatred and its opposite states, such as amity and compassion. From this perspective, the method outlined in the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* can be understood as a way of weakening unwholesome roots by strengthening wholesome ones.

One of the paradigms of right thoughts that help dispel cogitative anger is the application of wise reflection (*yoniso-manasikāra*). The scope of wise reflection is broad. In simple terms, within the context of this study, it refers to the exercise of attention or modes of reflection that assist in preventing or dispelling anger. The reflections encompassed by the broad definition of “wise reflection” include practices such as reflecting on the ownership of *kamma*, considering the harm of anger, contemplating the welfare generated by thoughts of amity and compassion, and so on.

About right thought, the role of right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) is also significant. The *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* states that knowing wrong

<sup>122</sup> *Yaññadeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhu bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, tathā tathā nati hoti cetaso. Byāpādavittakkaṃ ce, bhikkhave, bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, pahāsi abyāpādavittakkaṃ, byāpādavittakkaṃ bahulamakāsi, tassa taṃ byāpādavittakkāya cittaṃ namati.*

<sup>123</sup> Jayasuriya (2016), p. 100.

thought as wrong thought and right thought as right thought constitutes right view.<sup>124</sup> It is also mentioned that right thought should be supported by right effort, right mindfulness, and right view. In this regard, right mindfulness plays a key role in abandoning wrong thoughts and cultivating right ones. Furthermore, right effort itself refers to the effort made to abandon wrong thoughts.<sup>125</sup> Thus, all the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are integral.

Most importantly, the cultivation of mindfulness helps in curbing both behavioral and cognitive anger. It is important not only as a preventive but also as a curative method. Among the mindfulness practices, contemplation of the mind (*cittānupassanā*) and contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) are particularly significant.<sup>126</sup> In the contemplation of the mind, the key point is recognizing the presence of anger. In other words, when anger arises in the mind, one should be aware that it is present. Similarly, contemplation of feelings becomes crucial because painful feelings often trigger anger. If one can be mindful of painful feelings, it is possible to prevent aversion.

Cultivating right concentration (*samādhi*) also appears to be a possible method of dispelling anger. One of the primary benefits of cultivating right concentration is the suppression of the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*). In the *Āṅguttaranikāya*, it is said that to dispel hatred, one must cultivate the absorption stages of concentration.<sup>127</sup> In Buddhist meditation, two approaches are shown to develop concentration. In tranquility meditation (*samatha-bhāvanā*), the concentration levels of access (*upacāra*) and absorption concentration (*appanā*) are capable of suppressing hindrance.<sup>128</sup> The momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), attained through insight meditation, also suppresses hindrances.<sup>129</sup> This momentary concentration is not disturbed by hindrances and keeps the mind stable, much like absorption (*appito viya*).<sup>130</sup> There is no significant difference in concentration and stability

<sup>124</sup> M. III. 72.

<sup>125</sup> M. III. 73.

<sup>126</sup> D. II. 236 - 237.

<sup>127</sup> A. III. 557.

<sup>128</sup> Gunaratana (1980), p. 81.

<sup>129</sup> Mahāsi (2008), p. 86; Gunaratana (2009), p. 152: "Samathayānikassa hi upacārapanāppabhedam samādhim itarassa khaṇikasamādhim, ubhayesampi vimokkhamukhattayaṃ vinā na kadāci pi lokuttarādhigamo sambhavati." See also Mahāsi Sayadaw, 2008, p.86.

<sup>130</sup> Vism.mṭi, p.131 B: Sopi hi ārammaṇe nirantaram ekākāreṇa pavattamāno paṭipakkhena anabhibhūto appito viya cittaṃ niccalaṃ ṭhapeti.



between absorption concentration and momentary concentration.<sup>131</sup> Since anger is one of the hindrances, the cultivation of concentration serves as an effective method for dealing with anger.

One of the noteworthy psychological effects of attaining a deeper level of concentration is that the mind becomes joyful.<sup>132</sup> Since the joy and happiness born of concentration are opposed to unpleasant feelings, they can be an effective way to deal with anger. When a person is happy, they do not become angry easily. Thus, as anger is a response to unpleasant feelings, joy and happiness become crucial tools. According to commentary, the five hindrances are countered by the five *jhāna* factors. In this analysis, each of the five *jhāna* factors is explained as suppressing one of the hindrances, with the hindrance of anger being opposed by joy (*pīti*). “Joy (*pīti*) is the opposite of ill will” (*pīti byāpādassa paṭipakkho*).<sup>133</sup> From this perspective, it may also be possible to say that joy and happiness derived from other wholesome activities can similarly mitigate anger.

Joy and happiness may also arise when one perceives or obtains pleasurable five cords of sense objects. However, this kind of happiness does not seem to help in dispelling anger. The joy and happiness derived from sensual pleasures condition further craving for them, and when they are not obtained, perceived to be unobtainable, or recollected as unobtained, aversion and painful feelings arise. According to the *Kiṭṭāgiri Sutta*, only the pleasant feelings that lead to the increase of wholesome states and the decrease of unwholesome states are helpful.<sup>134</sup> Feelings that cause wholesome states to decline and unwholesome states to increase are not helpful.

As mentioned in the *Visuddhimagga*, the method that most directly affects the latent level of anger is the insight into the true nature of formations. The insight related to the comprehension of the characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and the absence of self appears to help in several ways. First, at a deeper level, not understanding the impermanent nature of things is itself a cause of anger. In the *Nakulapitu Sutta*, a significant relationship between the notion of self and emotional distress is highlighted.<sup>135</sup> It is said that the change and alteration of feeling do

<sup>131</sup> Mahāsi (1993), pp.102, 145

<sup>132</sup> D. I. 37.

<sup>133</sup> *Vism.* I. 137.

<sup>134</sup> M. I. 475.

<sup>135</sup> S. III. 3.

not elicit emotional distress if one does not identify with the feeling as ‘self’ or as one’s possession. The states of emotional distress, such as sorrow, lamentation, suffering, displeasure, and grief, which arise from experiencing painful feelings, increase one’s tendency toward aversion: “When one is touched by a painful feeling, one sorrows, grieves, and laments, weeping and beating the breast, losing self-control (*sammohaṃ āpajjati*), then the tendency to aversion becomes dormant.”<sup>136</sup>

The cultivation of higher dwellings (*brahma-vihāra*) is another practice that can be used to abandon anger. For instance, this point is highlighted in the *Paṭhama-āghātavinaya Sutta* and the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*.<sup>137</sup> These practices also have the potential to affect anger at the level of latency. The cultivation of higher dwellings is also significant in the restraint of behavioral anger. This point can be inferred from the *Milindapañha* (Mil, p. 394),<sup>138</sup> where the practice of amity is presented as a method to prevent anger. In this text, Venerable Nāgasena compares amity to a medicine, a kind of vaccine, to be “applied to the mind” to prevent the arising of anger. He gives the example of a mongoose going out to catch a snake. Before going out, it covers its body with an antidote to protect it from the poison it may encounter. This suggests that the practice of amity prevents the arising of anger.

Although cognitive anger is presented above as causing behavioral anger, according to Buddhist analysis, all three levels of anger are closely interrelated. Intentional actions of speech and body are caused by the mind. By engaging in actions driven by anger, one not only reinforces and strengthens the psychological disposition toward aversion but also accentuates the frequency with which thought processes related to anger arise in the mind. For example, by becoming constantly angry or expressing angry behavior, one reinforces the latent disposition of anger and creates an environment for the frequent arising of hateful thoughts. This relationship between thought and behavior is illustrated by the example of washing two hands: “Wisdom purifies virtue, and virtue purifies wisdom.”<sup>139</sup>

The causal relationship between three levels of defilements has been succinctly stated by Premasiri thus: The base of unwholesome emotional and motivational traits become strengthened by the constant repetition of patterns of behaviour which accompany their expression. On the one

<sup>136</sup> D. III. 285.

<sup>137</sup> A. III. 185; M. I. 424; M. III. 140.

<sup>138</sup> Davids (1894), p. 329.

<sup>139</sup> D. I. 124.

hand, a behavioral change at the level of overt expression of a person's emotional nature becomes necessary in order to weaken or eliminate the unwholesome emotions. On the other hand, as long as a person's motivational and emotional constitution is unwholesome, his overt behavior responses also tend to be unwholesome.

In this passage, Premasiri highlights the role played by overt verbal and bodily behavior in the enhancement of one's tendencies towards certain emotional and motivational traits. Based upon this observation, it can be said that one may either enhance or eliminate the mental tendency to anger by either engaging or abstaining from certain behavior patterns. This means that actions play a very important role in the consolidation of tendencies and thought processes. Furthermore, although the tendency to aversion is latent in all ordinary human beings, it is through the thought and behavior patterns that it gains strength. This is also perhaps the mechanism through which hateful temperament develops in a person.

### VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper examined anger through the framework of three levels of defilements: latent (*anusaya*), activated (*pariyuṭṭhāna*), and transgressive (*vītikkaṃa*). Latent anger refers to the inherent human tendency to become angry, which is often triggered by painful feelings or unpleasant objects associated with such feelings. This latent tendency is object-specific, meaning it persists toward certain individuals or objects and resurfaces when these are encountered or recalled. If unchecked, latent anger can escalate into hateful thoughts, intentions, and aggressive verbal or physical behavior.

The three levels of anger are interconnected, with each stage influencing the others. The persistence of latent anger increases the likelihood of its activation, while indulging in hateful thoughts or behaviors reinforces the latent tendency. To counteract this cycle, cultivating wholesome mental states such as kindness, compassion, and mindfulness is essential. Practices like mindfulness, concentration, and joy are particularly effective in creating an amiable mindset and reducing anger.

The stratification of anger into latent, activated, and transgressive stages provides a clear framework for understanding its mechanics and developing strategies to address it. Latent anger represents the potential for anger to arise, akin to the sound produced by a lute under favorable conditions. From a psychological perspective, this latent tendency is an inherent aspect of human nature, and its presence indicates that anger has not been fully uprooted. The activated stage involves anger manifesting

as malevolent thoughts, intentions, or a hostile state of mind, while the transgressive stage refers to anger expressed through harmful speech or actions that breach ethical precepts.

Painful feelings and perceptions of undesirable objects are the primary triggers of anger. Painful feelings, in particular, provoke an impulsive rejection, leading to anger. Similarly, objects associated with pain - whether through personal experience or social conditioning - can activate anger. However, subjective factors such as mood, perception, and judgment play a significant role in determining whether anger arises. For instance, a person in a pleasant state of mind may not react angrily to situations that would otherwise provoke them.

Several factors contribute to the failure to prevent anger from escalating. A lack of mindfulness, especially regarding feelings and intentions, is a key factor. Without mindfulness, one cannot recognize the onset of anger or restrain its expression. Ethical principles and moral precepts are also crucial, as they provide a framework for restraining harmful speech and actions. These practices are closely linked to the cultivation of mindfulness and sublime states, which together strengthen one's ability to manage anger.

From a Buddhist perspective, addressing anger requires strategies that target all three levels. The practice of sublime dwellings (*brahmavihāras*), such as loving-kindness and compassion, is particularly effective, as it counteracts anger at every stage. Serenity meditation and higher concentration practices also help by generating positive mental states like joy, which serve as antidotes to anger. Mindfulness plays a preventive role by enabling awareness of painful feelings and unpleasant objects before they trigger anger. By cultivating mindfulness, one can recognize and dispel anger as soon as it arises, preventing it from escalating.

### Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i>
A-a	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya- aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abhi	<i>Abhidhamma-piṭaka</i>
Abhi.i	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>
Abhi.ii	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
Abhi-s	<i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha</i> (Burmese edition from CSCD)
Abhi-a.i	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Aṭṭhasālinī</i> )
Abhi-a.ii	<i>Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā</i> ( <i>Sammohavinodanī</i> )
Abhi-a.iii	<i>Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abhi-mṭ	<i>Abhidhamma-mūlaṭīkā</i> (Burmese edition from CSCD)

<i>Kacc.</i>	<i>Kaccāyana Byākaraṇa</i>
<i>It</i>	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
<i>It-a</i>	<i>Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
<i>D-a</i>	<i>Dīghanikāya- aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsinī)</i>
<i>D-ṭ</i>	<i>Dīghanikāya- ṭīkā (Līnatthapakāsinī)</i>
<i>D-abhnt</i>	<i>Dīghanikāya-abhinavaṭīkā (Burmese edition from CSCD)</i>
<i>Dhp-a</i>	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i>
<i>Nidd I</i>	<i>Mahāniddesa</i>
<i>Nidd-a I</i>	<i>Mahāniddesa-aṭṭhakathā</i>
<i>Nett-a</i>	<i>Nettipakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā</i>
<i>Paṭi</i>	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
<i>Paṭi-a</i>	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga- aṭṭhakathā (Saddhammapakāsinī)</i>
<i>Peṭ</i>	<i>Peṭakopadesa</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
<i>M-a</i>	<i>Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdanī)</i>
<i>Mogg</i>	<i>Moggallāna Byākaraṇa</i>
<i>M-ṭ</i>	<i>Majjhimanikāya- ṭīkā (Līnatthapakāsinī)</i>
<i>Mil</i>	<i>Milindapañha</i>
<i>Vin</i>	<i>Vinayapiṭaka</i>
<i>Vin.ii</i>	<i>Pācittiya Pāḷi</i>
<i>Vin.iv</i>	<i>Cūlavagga Pāḷi</i>
<i>Vism</i>	<i>Visuddhimagga (Burmese edition of CSCD)</i>
<i>Vism-mhṭ</i>	<i>Visuddhimagga-mahāṭīkā (Burmese edition of CSCD)</i>
<i>S</i>	<i>Saṃyuttanikāya</i>
<i>Sn-a</i>	<i>Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā</i>
<b>CMOA</b>	<b>Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma</b>
<b>PD</b>	<b>Paramatthadīpanī by Ledi Sayādaw (Burmese edition of CSCD)</b>
<b>PED</b>	<b>PTS Pāli-English Dictionary</b>
<b>POP</b>	<b>Path of Purification (Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇāmoli)</b>

## REFERENCES

(References of Pāli texts and exegetical literature are to Pāli Text Society edition of CSCD, Vipassanā Research Institute, unless mentioned otherwise)

### Pāli Texts

*Aṅuttaranikāya Pāli*

*Apadāna Pāli*

*Itivuttaka Pāli*

*Kathāvatthu Pāli*

*Cūlavagga Pāli (Vinaya Piṭaka)*

*Dhammasaṅgaṇī Pāli*

*Dīghanikāya Pāli*

*Pācittiya Pāli (Vinaya Piṭaka)*

*Paṭisambhidāmagga Pāli*

*Peṭakopadesa Pāli*

*Majjhimanikāya Pāli*

*Mahāniddeśa Pāli*

*Milindapañha Pāli*

*Yamaka Pāli*

*Vibhaṅga Pāli*

*Saṃyuttanikāya Pāli*

### Pāli Commentaries and Sub-commentaries

Ānanda Thera. *Vibhaṅga-mūlaṭīkā*

Anonymous Thera. *Apadāna-aṭṭhakathā (Visuddhajānavilāsini)*

Buddhaghosa Thera. *Aṅuttaranikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Manorathapūraṇī)*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-aṭṭhakathā (Aṭṭhasālinī)*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsini)*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Pañcapakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdanī)*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā (Sammohavinodanī)*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā (Samantapāsādikā)*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Visuddhimagga-aṭṭhakathā*

\_\_\_\_\_. *Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā (Paramatthajotikā II)*

Dhammapāla Thera. *Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā (Paramatthadīpanī II)*



- \_\_\_\_\_. *Dīghanikāya-ṭikā (Līnatthapakāsini II)*
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Majjhimanikāya-ṭikā (Līnatthapakāsini II)*
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Visuddhimagga-mahāṭikā (Paramatthamañjūsā)*
- Mahānāma Thera. *Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā (Saddhammapa-kāsini)*
- Venerable Ñāṇabhivamsa, Ā. *Dīghanikāya-abhinavaṭikā*
- Upasena Thera. *Mahānidessa-aṭṭhakathā*.
- Translations and Secondary Sources**
- Ācariya Anuruddha. (1910) *Compendium of Philosophy*. Mrs. Rhys Davids (ed.). London: Pāli Text Society.
- Ashin Janakabhivamsa (2002) *Sangaha Bhasatika*. Mandalay: New Burma Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2014) *Abhidhamma in Daily Life*. Yangon: New Burma Press.
- Bhikkhu Analayo (2018) The Underlying Tendencies. *Insight Journal*. 4421–30.
- Bhikkhu Bodhi. (ed.) (2016) *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. Fourth. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Tr. (2000) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Kindle. USA: Wisdom Publications.
- Buddhaghosa Thera. (1999) *The Path of Purification*. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Davids, C.A.F. R. Tr. (1922) *The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Saṃyutta Nikāya)*. 5 vols. London: Pāli Text Society.
- Davids, T.W.R. Tr. (1894) *The Questions of King Milinda*. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Davids, T.W.R.Tr. (1910) *Dialogues of the Buddha (Translated from the Pāli of the Dīghanikāya)*. 3 vols. London: Oxford University Press.
- Gorkom, N. V. (2010) *Cetasika*. London: Zolag.
- Gunaratana, Henepola. (1980) *A Critical Analysis of the Jhānas in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation*. PDF. Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2009) *The Path of Serenity and Insight*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Jayasuriya, W. F. (2016) *Psychology and Philosophy of Buddhism*. Online. Washington: Pariyatti Publishing. [online]. Available from: [https://store.pariyatti.org/The-Psychology-Philosophy-of-Buddhism-PDF-eBook\\_p\\_4950.html](https://store.pariyatti.org/The-Psychology-Philosophy-of-Buddhism-PDF-eBook_p_4950.html).
- Karunadasa, Y. (2018) *Early Buddhist Teachings*. Ebook. USA: Wisdom Publications.
- Karunaratne, U. (2003) *Kilesa*. Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Vol 6.

- Colombo: Government of Ceylon.
- Ledi Sayadaw. (2003) *Paramatthadīpanī Saṅgahamahāṭīkā*. CSCD 2024. Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Mahākaccāyana (n.d.) *Kaccāyanapakaraṇa*. CSCD 2024. Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Mahāsi Sayadaw. (1993) *Dhammasacca Taya Daw*. Rangoon: Buddhasasananuggaha Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2008) *Vipassanā Shunyi (The Method of Vipassanā Practice)*. 2 vols. Yangon: Buddha Sāsanauggaha Samiti.
- Moggallāna (n.d.) *Moggallāna vyākaraṇa*. CSCD. Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Mon, M. T. (2002) *Buddha Abhidhamma*. PDF. Penang: Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.
- Nārada, V. (1956) *A Manual of Abhidhamma*. PDF. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society.
- Nyanaponika Thera. (1998) *Abhidhamma Studies*. PDF. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2007) *Guide Through The Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1962) *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Premasiri, P. D. (2000) Emotion. *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol 5. Colombo: Government of Ceylon.
- Sayadaw Silānanda. (2012) *Handbook of Abhidhamma Studies*. Vol. 3. Malaysia: Selangor Buddhist Vipassana Meditation Society.
- Silva, P. de (2014) *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology and Counselling*. London: Palgrave.
- Thiṭṭhila, A. Tr. (2010) *The Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga)*. Bristol: Pāli Text Society.
- Venerable Revata-dhamma. (2004) *Process of Consciousness and Matter*. California: Triple Gem Publications. [online]. Available from: [http://host.pariyatti.org/treasures/Process\\_of\\_Consciousness\\_and\\_Matter.pdf](http://host.pariyatti.org/treasures/Process_of_Consciousness_and_Matter.pdf).
- Walshe, M. Tr. (1996) *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Kindle. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

# LOVE CONQUERS THE WORLD, NOT ARMS

Dr. Labh Niharika\*

## Abstract:

This paper explores the Buddhist concept of *mettā* (loving-kindness) as a transformative force for personal development and global peace. Moving beyond conditional affection based on reciprocation, *mettā* is examined as an unconditional, boundless mental state — one of the *Brahmavihāras* — that fosters harmony within individuals and among communities. Drawing from the teachings of the Buddha, classical scriptures such as the *Dhammapada*, and cultural reflections like those of Kabirdas and Cāṇakya, the study emphasizes that love is not a transactional feeling but a spiritual discipline rooted in empathy, ego-surrender, and goodwill. The paper also critiques the limitations of arms and aggression, suggesting that genuine peace arises not from dominance but from the cultivation of selfless love. Despite challenges in a modern world rife with mistrust and violence, the practice of *mettā* remains a timeless remedy for conflict and suffering. Ultimately, love is portrayed not only as a moral virtue but as a powerful tool for sustainable peace, bridging the personal, social, and political spheres.

**Keyword:** *loving-kindness, mettā, Buddhism, brahmavihāra, peace, non-violence, compassion, ego-surrender, social harmony, global ethics.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper aims at understanding the concept of love, friendliness, or goodwill (Pali-*Mettā*, Skt. *Maitrī*) and its various dimensions, as well as its significance in the personal and social life of a person as preached by the Buddha.

In the gross sense, love is taken as a physical relationship between a boyfriend and a girlfriend, or as an emotional relationship existing between two or more family members like brother-sister, parents and kids, grandfather and grandkids, etc. However, when the circle of love gets widened, its physical aspect may get subsided and emotional part becomes more prominent.

---

\* Senior Academic Fellow, Indian Council of Historical Research, Bhopal, MP, Bharat.

A sense of lust, attachment, and expectation from the partner or the responding person(s), however, may naturally exist with the initiator. As a result, this sort of love may not be lasting, obviously because it is conditional and depends on the attitude, emotion, and reciprocation of the second party. The Buddha has cautioned against such a loving attitude or relationship. He repeatedly says in *Dhammapada* (*Piyavaggo*) :

*“Piyato jāyate soko, piyato jāyate bhayaṃ/*

*Piyato vippamuttassa, natthi soko kuto bhayaṃ//”<sup>1</sup>*

In other verses of the same chapter of *Dhammapada* (*Piyavaggo*), the Buddha repeats the same concept of lustful love and affection, which ultimately results in sorrow.<sup>2</sup>

While preaching the sermon (first turning of Dhamma-wheel) at Sarnath, the Buddha revealed that desire, passion, lust, or attachment is the root cause of suffering, which is manifested in different forms, stages, and dimensions.<sup>3</sup>

Love at the surface level begins with the expectation of return or reciprocation, which is quite natural also. A person who thinks about love and acts upon that normally expects the same in return. Such acts of love are commonly seen in day-to-day life in the family and other groups of people. This is indeed indicative of a kind of ‘relationship’ or ‘friendship’. Friendship always depends and functions based on mutual faith, respect, and confidence.

A person desirous of love, affection, or kindness cannot get freedom from lust or expectation. However, it is not less important that he should begin cultivating and developing such friendly feelings and exhibit them through such actions. His physical actions or behaviour with others should be helpful. He should be kind and caring for his brothers, sisters, parents, teachers, masters, servants, colleagues in the office, and other workplaces.<sup>4</sup> This may help in creating a congenial atmosphere in the conjugal life, family, society and even beyond.

The foundation of the UN lies in the very concept of mutual love, trust, respect, and confidence among the nations. Pañcaśīla, or the modern term ‘Panchasheel’ (The five principles of Peaceful co-existence), is a set of principles that defined the friendly relationship between Bharat and China. The principles had been agreed upon by the two countries in 1954.<sup>5</sup> These principles included mutual respect, non-aggression, non-interference in the internal affairs of each other, equality, and mutual benefit. These principles

<sup>1</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse No. 212.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* verse Nos. 213 – 16.

<sup>3</sup> *“Idaṃ vuccatī, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ, seyyathidaṃ-kāmatanñhā, bhavatanñhā vibhavatanñhā.” Mahāvaggapāli, Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap, Nalanda, p.19.*

<sup>4</sup> *Dīghanikāyapāli (Sigālovādasutta)*, 1958, 2016 (reprint), Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap (ed.) Nalanda.

<sup>5</sup> Trumbull, Robert (1979-02-18). “Panchasheel is Revived, But ...”, *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331. Retrieved 2024-07-05.

prepared the base for the United Nations as well. Although breaches of them have also been witnessed among nations, ultimately involved and affected parties sit at the table of negotiation, and peace is finally restored to ease the tension and normalize the situation.

So far as *Mettā* (love, loving kindness, good-will) is concerned, it is somehow different from *mitratā* (friendship) as we have seen earlier.

The way to the destination of lasting peace, whether at a limited level or even at the global level, passes through the way of love. Love is the strongest power and always advocates non-hatred. It can conquer all. No hurdle or difficulty cannot ultimately be overcome by love.<sup>6</sup>

It is said that love conquers all. But is it so easy? Can it be started at once like a vehicle? No. Instead, love is an emotion, a feeling for others' well-being. So the practitioner should first of all prepare such an emotion in his mind and heart. Because of having an unnecessary ego and pre-conceived notions, we do not yield. So, for generating feelings of love, generosity, benevolence, and goodwill, a person is suggested to forego ego and yield before the might of love. It helps in melting his false ego and motivates him to proceed on the path of love. Submission to love removes hatred from the heart and smoothens the way to harmony in the public life and purity of mind within.

In recent times, we have observed various conflicts in the family and society and wars at the international level. As a result, an atmosphere of hatred, violence, and fear of insecurity has developed not only among the warring countries, but even in the other parts of globe. War or warlike situation affects the politics and economy of other countries as well.

Saint Kabirdas has, therefore, aptly said that love is not planted and grown in the kitchen garden, nor is it sold in the market. It is instead available free of cost for kings as well as for ordinary people. Whosoever wishes love has liberty to take it away.<sup>7</sup>

Kabirdas further says that a person does not become wise or scholarly simply by reading texts. Instead, he becomes wise in the real sense only if he inculcates love within his heart and exhibits the same with others through his speech and actions.<sup>8</sup>

Love, as discussed earlier, carries the seed of expectations of return, involves lust and attachment, and in a nutshell is based on reciprocation or two way traffic notion. It is placed in the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path as well. When a person goes to the refuge of the Triple Gem, he vows to follow the ten precepts/ commandments (in case of a homeless recluse) or the five precepts/ commandments (in case of a householder follower, i.e., *upāsaka/upāsikā*). The first one, '*pāṇātipātāveramaṇī*', teaches one not to commit violence or hurt anybody. Second, '*adinnādānā veramaṇī*' teaches abstinence

<sup>6</sup> B. Labh, *Paññā in Early Buddhism* (1991), Delhi, Eastern Book Linkers, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Kabirdas, *Amritwani*, <https://Kabir-k-dohe.blogspot.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

from unjustifiably taking something from others, stealing, robbing, snatching, rooking, etc. Third, '*kāmesumicchārā/ abrahmacariyā veramaṇī*' teaches not to get indulged into a sexual relationship and remain satisfied and confined with one's spouse in the case of a householder and total celibacy in the case of a homeless recluse. Fourth, '*micchāvācā veramaṇī*' teaches abstinence from wrong speech like lying, harsh speech, slandering, and frivolous speech; instead, it teaches how to speak truth, sweet and soft, praise of others and meaningful talk. Fifth, '*Surāmerayyamajjappamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī*' teaches to keep away from consuming intoxicants. The rest of the five commandments meant for recluses too, teach morality and the path of inner and outer peace.

If we look at the global situation, many countries are seen to be engaged in fierce fighting, the sale of lethal weapons, bombs, missiles, etc. In such wars, one party wins, and another gets defeated. But what is the outcome? The Buddha reveals that victory generates enmity, and the defeated one undergoes suffering and humiliation. On the contrary, if one overcomes the problem of victory and defeat, he indeed enjoys peace —

*"Jayaṃ veraṃ pasavati, dukkhaṃ seti parājito/  
Upasanto sukhaṃ seti, hitvā jayaparājayaṃ//"*<sup>9</sup>

However, the cultivation of selfless or unconditional love is not as easy as we normally understand.

This is the reason the Buddha has differentiated *mettā/ maitrī* (love or loving kindness) from *mitratā* (friendship). Friendship hints at a relation based on reciprocation, whereas friendliness (*mettā*) is a selfless feeling or emotion that does not care for any return. It is unconditional and unbounded, which does not differentiate between friend and foe, favourable and unfavourable. It thinks and acts only for giving and not for taking back. This is the reason *mettā* has been described as a mental condition, which is attained in the higher realm (*Brahmavihāra*).

As it has been discussed earlier, pure and higher states of *mettā* cannot easily be developed or attained. Nevertheless, a sincere practitioner should not get disheartened or disappointed if someone does not reciprocate his goodwill in equal intensity. He should keep his continuity of showing love and good-will to one and all. Over time, his sincerity will start yielding desirable fruits, and he will start feeling inner happiness.<sup>10</sup>

This marks the beginning of *Mettā* – the first stage of *Brahmavihāra*. The Buddha advises his disciples to inculcate within themselves such a selfless feeling of goodwill. He expects from a practitioner of *mettā* to remain firm and dedicated like a mother to her only son, and does not hesitate even to get into troublesome situation for the safety of the latter —

<sup>9</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse No. 201.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Thanissaro Bhikkhu. '*Mettā means Goodwill*', Access to Insight (BLBS edition), 24 November 2013. [http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/metta\\_means\\_goodwill.html](http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/metta_means_goodwill.html).



*“Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ, āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe/  
Evampi sabbabhūtesu mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ//  
Mettaṇca sabbalokasmiṃ, mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ//”*<sup>11</sup>

*Mettā* (Skt. *Maitrī*), *Karuṇā*, *Muditā*, and *Upekkhā* are the four constituents of *Brahmavihāra* — a sublime state of living. *Brahmavihāra* is quite different, distinguished and sublime in comparison to ordinary living, in the sense that whereas all the four constituents are limited and confined to expectations, reciprocation and return; in case of *Brahmavihāra*, the four are free and above such desires, expectations, fruits, favourable outcome etc.; and remain pure, selfless, action for the sake of action only. They proceed with the notions of ‘go on’, ‘keep it up’, and ‘never say die’.

*Ācārya Buddhaghosa* has defined *Mettā* (love) as ‘*Mejjatī’ti mettā; sinehatī’ti attho*’.<sup>12</sup> *Mettā* is an emotion that smoothenes the roughness of the heart and paves a way further to move on with the feeling of goodness to all. Characteristically, *mettā* is a wish for others’ well-being (*hitākārappavattilakkhaṇā mettā*): its essence is the deed for others’ favour (*hitūpasamhārasā*).<sup>13</sup>

Love (*Mettā*), being a superior or sublime state of living (*Brahmavihāra*), has some prerequisites, like an unconditional commitment of goodwill for one and all. It suggests that a true practitioner of friendliness sleeps easily, works up easily, and dreams no evil incidents. He loves to and is loved by human beings and other beings as well. His mind gets concentrated easily. He remains active for others in every condition, whether sleeping, rising, sitting, walking, running, or standing till he is awake. He never performs any action for which others could blame or abuse him.

The practitioner of *Mettā* continuously thinks or acts for the well-being of others, whether they are moving or unmoving, dynamic or static, big or small, middle-sized, small or subtle; he thinks and acts good and good only for them.<sup>14</sup>

Universal love crosses over the limits of selfish feeling and instead embraces all. If it is taken at national level, it may spread the message of social and national harmony and solidarity in the country. Further if taken with utmost care to global level, first of all it spreads, the notion of the whole world as one family. Bharat has a firm belief that the entire globe is our own family. The wickedness of mind is gone, and a sense of universal love develops. *Ācārya Cāṇakya* has expressed that ‘this is mine’, ‘that is yours’, etc. is the mentality of a short-sighted, mean person, whereas a true humanist and noble person takes the entire world as his own family —

*“Ayaṃ nijaḥ paro veti, gaṇanā laghucetasāṃ/*

<sup>11</sup> *Suttanipāṭapāli (Mettasutta)*, Bhikkhu Dharmarakshita, Delhi, Motilal Banarasidass, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Aṭṭhasālinī* by Buddhaghosa, 1989, Ram Shankar Tripathi (Ed.), Varanasi, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, p. 304.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Suttanipāṭapāli*, op.cit.

*Udāracaritānāṃ tu, Vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam//*<sup>15</sup>

Application and difficulties, and suggestions

Love (*Mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) are the first two *Brahmavihāras* very closely and intimately inter-related. Both are to be conceived, thought, and applied towards others. In other words, they are outward. Love in general condition and compassion in the case of someone undergoing suffering or trouble, is usually applicable and visible. Both *Brahmavihāras* know no discrimination and exhibit to all equally, like the sun and the moon show their light equally to all.

There are certain difficulties and obstacles also in the application of *mettā*, as in the modern times, when disbelief, distrust, selfish motives, etc. are functional strongly as well as rampantly, and people even with best and purest intentions are seen with doubt. Generally, people look at the philanthropist or practitioner of love/good will and empathy with some ulterior selfish motives. It may hurt the sentiments of the practitioner and he may get disappointed.

However, as *mettā* and *karuṇā* are not an ordinary state of living, rather a sublime state, the practitioner should be firmly committed to the pious vow he has taken. He should endure such blame and sustain his practice —

*“Selo yathā ekaghamo, vātena na samīrati/*

*Evam nindāpasamsāsu, na samañjati paṇḍitā//*<sup>16</sup>

The noble fruits of love and empathy may be delayed but will not go to waste. To convince minds of different types, sometimes even negative, egoistic, erratic, conflicting, and quarrelsome is not so easy as theorists think. However, love and goodwill are the ultimate solutions to bring peace and harmony. Arms can silence the sound of protest, difference, and dissatisfaction for some time, but the fire of hatred and revenge inside the ashes may continue. That is why the message of love has been conveyed by the saints and seers as the ultimate means to resolve conflict. It is a power that goes beyond arms.<sup>17</sup>

*‘Sabbe sattā bhavantu Sukhitattā.’*

\*\*\*

<sup>15</sup> *Mahopaniṣad*, chapter 4, verse 71.

<sup>16</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* verse 5.

## REFERENCES

- Aṭṭhasālinī*, Ram Shankar Tripathi, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Varanasi, 1981
- B. Labh, *Paññā in Early Buddhism*, Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi, 1991.
- Common Buddhist Text, Guidance and Insight from the Buddha, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2017.
- Dhammapada*, Narada Thera (Tr.), Mahabodhi Book Agency, Kolkata, 2015
- Dīghanikāyapāli*, Jagdish Kashyap (Ed.), Nalanda, 1961
- Kabir Granthavali, Shyamsundar Das, Indian Press Ltd. Prayag, 2015
- Mahāvaggapāli*, Jagdish Kashyap (Ed.) Nalanda, 1961
- Milindapañho*, R. D. Wadekar (ed.), University of Bombay, Mumbai, 1972.
- R. K. Mookerji, Ancient Indian Education (Brahmanical and Buddhist), Motilal Banarasi Dass Publishers Pvt.Ltd, Delhi, 2016.
- Suttanipāta*, Bhikkhu Bodhi.
- Vinayapīṭakapāli*, Jagdish Kashyap (ed.), Nalanda, 1961.



# A SYNERGISTIC MODEL FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND HEALING IN BUDDHIST CONTEMPLATIVE CARE AND CHAPLAINCY

Ven. Tan Paññādīpa\*

**Abstract:**

Buddhist chaplaincy is a relatively recent profession that started in the West and has become increasingly popular among Asian Buddhists. This professional career provides counseling and spiritual and contemplative care, using Buddhist teachings as the guiding principle. A Buddhist chaplain is a socially engaged Buddhist involved in healing people from various psychological crises, especially in managing sicknesses and death. Therefore, at the emergence of psychological crises, the presence of a professionally-trained Buddhist chaplain becomes particularly warranted. In this paper, I discuss how Buddhist chaplains can apply their Dharma knowledge and skills to succeed in their healing roles. The proposed working model features four synergistic skills: theoretical *Dharma*, meditation contemplation, communication skills, and personal qualities that sit at the center stage in the training of Buddhist contemplative care and chaplaincy. These four skills in practice work collaboratively and in concert whereby development of one skill can synergistically aid in developing the others, and vice versa. The mutually supportive skill sets constitute the essential training a skillful Buddhist chaplain should ideally receive. By mastering these skills, I believe that a trained Buddhist chaplain is at their full capacity to help others ease through difficult times.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist chaplaincy, counseling, contemplative care, compassion, mindfulness meditation.*

---

\* Shan State Buddhist University, Phaya Phyu Qrt., 06011 Taunggyi, Shan State, Myanmar.

## I. PREAMBLE AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

### 1.1. Championing Buddhism as guardian of global mental health

For over three decades, the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors study (GBD) has identified mental disorders as one of the leading causes of disease burden globally, without evidence showing signs of reduction or stagnation since 1990.<sup>1</sup>

A coordinated implementation of effective prevention and treatment programs involving collaboration between governments and global health communities is especially warranted to curb this worldwide public health challenge. In addressing the treatment gap between the number of people with mental disorders and the number receiving treatments, the WHO World Mental Health Survey (2017) found that it was individual education levels, rather than the personal economic (income) factor, that had a stronger association with an increased likelihood for seeking treatment.<sup>2</sup> To target the dwindling global mental health, we should focus on educational interventions, effectively delivering current knowledge of mental disorders and state-of-the-art, evidence-based treatment options in preventative and treatment programs.

Meanwhile, the recent surge in the prevalence of mental health disorders may causally be attributable to the parallel decline in religious belief and religiosity. A meta-analysis of 147 intercontinental studies involving 99,000 participants reports a significant inverse relationship between religiosity and depressive symptoms.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, religious practices may bestow protection against mild to moderate forms of depression<sup>4</sup> and, in certain circumstances, mitigate anxiety episodes.<sup>5</sup> Another systematic review study further concludes that religious involvement is positively correlated with reduced substance abuse, suicide, dementia, and stress-related disorders.<sup>6</sup> Hence, there is growing scientific evidence to date to suggest that engaging in religious activities (e.g., meditation and prayers) is beneficial in preserving mental health.

Among religious activities ascribed to allaying mental suffering, Buddhism, with its assortment of psychologically uplifting teachings and meditation practices, appears to gain the most worldwide recognition. Of these, mindfulness (*Pāli*, *sati*), with its various modes of application

---

<sup>1</sup> GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators (2022): 137. GBD is the most comprehensive and influential study of disease burden in the world today. In this 2019 study, it collected data of 204 countries and territories encompassing 12 mental disorders: depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, autism spectrum disorders, conduct disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, eating disorders, idiopathic developmental intellectual disability, and a residual category of other mental disorders.

<sup>2</sup> Evans-Lacko et al. (2018): 1560.

<sup>3</sup> Smith et al. (2003): 614.

<sup>4</sup> Strawbridge et al. (2001): 68 – 70; Koenig et al. (2012): 145 – 47.

<sup>5</sup> Koenig et al. (2004): 554.

<sup>6</sup> Bonelli and Koenig, (2013): 657.



rooted in ancient Buddhist texts such as the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta*,<sup>7</sup> stands out as the most referenced psychological remedy. Germinating from this practical Buddhist concept, therapeutic applications of mindfulness via highly adaptable modules, most notably the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program and Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), have increasingly become a therapist-choice treatment modality in psychotherapy and a wide range of clinical and secular settings.<sup>8</sup> The popularity and widespread reception of these mindfulness-based programs have been mainly fostered by media, bestseller books, and influential therapists, in addition to positive findings from accumulating clinical studies. In a systematic review of cumulative clinical studies in 2021, Zhang and coworkers show that mindfulness-based interventions may advance a plethora of biopsychosocial advantages encompassing depression, anxiety, insomnia, addiction of various kinds, stress, psychosis, pain, weight management, hypertension, cancer-related symptoms, and prosocial behaviors.<sup>9</sup> We expect that in time to come, the integration and adoption of Buddhist concepts and meditation techniques into various secular settings to grow as we continue to uncover and examine the therapeutic value of Buddhist teachings.

Nevertheless, the secularism of the above Buddhism-inspired regimens has raised concern among many Buddhist experts.<sup>10</sup> The acts of compartmentalizing and segregating a supposedly integral Buddhist practice, mindfulness in this case, from its traditional spiritual context may undesirably discount the full benefits the comprehensive Buddhist practice has promised. In Buddhist traditions, practitioners always practice mindfulness alongside foundations of ethics, correct understanding and application of Buddhist teachings, and many other supportive skillful factors.<sup>11</sup> The omission of such mutual collaboration may render mindfulness interventions' effectiveness relatively modest, unsustainable, or even associated with adverse consequences.<sup>12</sup> Considering these potential caveats, there have been efforts to incorporate comprehensive Buddhist elements into clinical psychology and counseling. This move led to emerging Buddhist psychology, counseling, and

---

<sup>7</sup> Bhikkhu Sujato, *DN 22 The longest discourse of mindfulness meditation (Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta)*, accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at <https://suttacentral.net/dn22/en/sujato>

<sup>8</sup> Kabat-Zinn, Jon (2013): 1 – 9. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Revised and updated edition. Bantam Books; and Segal, Zindel V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2002): 146. *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression: A new approach to preventing relapse*. Guilford Press.

<sup>9</sup> Zhang et al. (2021): 41.

<sup>10</sup> Lee et al. (2017): 113 – 114; Farb (2014): 1062.

<sup>11</sup> In the *Mahācattārisaka-sutta* (MN 117) explains the foundational, leading role of right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) should usher in the successive development of the Noble Eightfold Path factors of ethics, concentration and wisdom that collectively gears toward spiritual awakening. See: Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Great Forty*, accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/mn117/en/bodhi>

<sup>12</sup> Farb (2014): 1066 – 1067.

contemplative science fields. Along with this development came the advent of Buddhist chaplaincy.

## 1.2. Emerging roles of Buddhist chaplaincy and contemplative care

Originating in the medieval Christian church as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century C. E., a chaplain (Latin *cappellani*) was a king-appointed priest or clerical minister to serve mainly the monarch on both ecclesiastical and secular matters (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). In modern times, a chaplain is a professional clergy member appointed by religious or corporate bodies mainly as a counsellor at cemeteries, prisons, hospitals, hospices, schools, universities, embassies, legations, or armed forces to provide religious guidance, counseling, and pastoral care to those in need. The presence of a chaplain is beneficial to one easing through significant crises in life, particularly in dealing with major sicknesses and inevitable death. Traditionally, a chaplain plays a pivotal role in providing end-of-life religious services, including much-needed emotional support, to terminally ill patients and criminals headed for a death sentence within Christian communities.

Inspired by this millennia-old beneficent work, Buddhist chaplaincy is a relatively recent profession still in its formative stage. In recent decades, this people-serving career path has grown in the West with increasing demands from the steadfast growth of new Buddhist converts. The intent of a Buddhist chaplain echoes the compassionate-in-action, suffering-relieving spirits of engaged Buddhism spearheaded by influential Buddhist leaders such as the late Thich Nhat Hanh and Venerable Xing-Yun, whose charity works continue impacting the world. As a professional career, monastic or lay Buddhists can now aspire to a career in Buddhist chaplaincy. Numerous higher institutions, including the University of Toronto and the University of the West in North America, have launched postgraduate programs in Buddhist chaplaincy and pastoral care.<sup>13</sup> Despite its growing presence in the West, Buddhist chaplaincy remains largely unheard of as a spiritual care profession in traditional Theravāda Buddhist nations in Southeast Asia. This disparity may be due to the availability of a sizeable population of monastic members, of which a significant number comprise those most educated and respected. Even though not specially trained as spiritual counselors, they would have long served similar roles as a Buddhist chaplain in the West. However, there is a proposal that urges professional Buddhist chaplains to be trained in Theravada countries as well.<sup>14</sup>

In East Asian nations with a majority of Mahayana Buddhists and relatively fewer monastic members, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, the needs for Buddhist chaplains and counselors are also increasingly felt.<sup>15</sup> To cater to this emerging trend, a one-year Master's program in

---

<sup>13</sup> See: Master of Pastoral Studies in Buddhism: <https://utbccs.wordpress.com/mps-buddhism/> and Buddhist chaplaincy graduate programs: <https://www.uwest.edu/buddhist-chaplaincy-graduate-program/>

<sup>14</sup> Munasinghe, H. L. M. (2023): 124.

<sup>15</sup> Lee and Oh (2019): 132.

Buddhist Counseling and a more career-oriented Postgraduate Diploma in the Professional Practice of Buddhist Counseling have lately been offered at the Centre of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hong Kong.<sup>16</sup> It is likely that the demand for professional Buddhist chaplains to rise as the world speeds towards the artificial intelligence era, where people will heavily seek highly specialized and personalized spiritual care beyond what traditional Buddhist institutes can provide.

A Buddhist chaplain shares many roles and functions with their Christian counterparts. However, there are fundamental differences in their theoretical premises and ways of discharging spiritual and pastoral services. A fundamental difference is that the Buddhist chaplain emphasizes self-reliance, awareness, mindfulness, and mental cultivation in delivering spiritual care.<sup>17</sup> This approach is somewhat different from its Christian counterparts, making the Buddhist chaplaincy more like an art of contemplative care. Giles and Millers (2013), in one of the pioneering works, define contemplative care as:

Practitioners provide contemplative care by offering spiritual, emotional, and pastoral support, informed by their personal, consistent contemplative or meditation practice.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Buddhist chaplaincy guides its principles based on core Buddhist values, particularly compassion and wisdom.<sup>19</sup> The combined maxim that weighs in equally both affective and intellectual aspects is quite a contrast to the predominantly affective trios – faith, hope, and love – central to the spiritual care of Christianity.<sup>20</sup> Here, rather than hankering exclusive hope on an external salvific agent for relief, the Buddhist chaplain encourages sourcing inwardly for internal strength in managing unanticipated vicissitudes in life.

A Buddhist chaplain's career is a direct pathway of applying Buddhist teachings to relieving human suffering. In this paper, I propose a working model for Buddhist contemplative care and chaplaincy and highlight the essential skills for which we should train a Buddhist chaplain. This paper will delineate synergistic yet practical strategies as to how ancient Buddhist wisdom could be instrumental in assisting us to cope with anxiety, fear, and depression upon occurrences of life adversity.

## **II. BUDDHIST CHAPLAINCY IN ALLEVIATING PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS**

According to the fundamental Buddhist philosophy, the most pertinent

---

<sup>16</sup> See Master of Buddhist Counselling at HKU: <https://www.buddhism.hku.hk/ap/mbc/admission/>; Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice of Buddhist Counselling: <https://www.buddhism.hku.hk/ap/pgdbc/>

<sup>17</sup> Giles, C. A. and Miller, W.B. (2012): XVII - XXI.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid: XVII

<sup>19</sup> Yamaoka (2013).

<sup>20</sup> Christman & Muller (2017): E1 – E7.

problem facing all sentient beings without exception is the unsatisfactory nature (*dukkha*) underlying this body and mind. All bodily and mental experiences inherently involve *dukkha*, characterized by oppression by successive transient phenomena. Myriad causes and conditions perpetually fuel these manifestations, mostly against our will and beyond our control. Such uncontrollable characteristics exemplify the key message of Buddhism concerning all phenomena: the doctrine of non-self or egolessness (*anattā*).

Out of ignorance (*avijjā*) of not recognizing this selfless reality with correct insight (*yathābhūtañāṇa*), we instead habitually tend to attach to this evanescent body and mind obsessively, identifying either or as a collective whole entity, as I, mine, or my “Self.” This personality view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*) keeps nourishing our subconscious craving (*taṇhā*) and attachment (*upādāna*) that constantly seek insatiable delight in virtually everything, animate or inanimate, that comes in contact with our six-sense experiences. At the same time, the personality view also gives rise to the unexamined perception of the dualism of subject and object, leading to discriminatory conceptions of individualism and otherness, separating us from seeing us as being a part of the mutually dependent whole. Consequently, distorted hallucinations (*vipallāsa*) accompanied by conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) surface, leading us to regard ourselves and others as substantive, “self-existing,” and unchanging, everlasting entities. All these corrupt views (*micchadiṭṭhi*) will prompt us to experience a psychological crisis when undesirable alterations strike upon the above long-held notions. Given the unpredictability and impermanency of all forms we experience, encountering various psychological crises in life is unexceptionally a universal human destiny.

Psychological crisis or emotional distress, if left unattended, can lead to both physical and psychological disorders that further disrupt personal, family, and social well-being.<sup>21</sup> It is observable that psychological crisis is one of the most recognized precursors of various social issues and biological dysfunctions.<sup>22</sup> The Buddha Dharma precisely combats these psychological crises through its teachings. Hence, teaching is a remedy for the above maladies, as it addresses the root causes of psychological crises, i.e., greed, aversion, and delusion. For this, Buddhism offers an attested path of over 2500 years, namely the Noble Eightfold Path. This ancient path not only promises effective practical means to overcome psychological crises but also, if undertaken to perfection, can uproot the *sine qua non* of all psychological crises, culminating in attaining the highest spiritual freedom.

The Buddha himself would have sowed the seeds of the spirits of Buddhist chaplaincy. Starting from the end of the first rain retreat after he founded the monastic Saṅgha, he had dispatched sixty newly enlightened monk disciples to walk alone and carry out the mission of spreading his teachings to the world,

<sup>21</sup> Hobfoll (2004): 1 – 15.

<sup>22</sup> Greenberg, Carl, and Summers (2002): 508.

out of compassion for the happiness and welfare of all beings.<sup>23</sup>

I am free from all snares, both human and divine. You, too, are free from all human and divine snares. Go wandering, monks, for the benefit and happiness of humanity, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and humans. You should each go a different way!

Such a compassionate act could have become the precursor for popularizing the Bodhisattva's path in Mahayana Buddhism, which places a great emphasis on uplifting the suffering of all beings.<sup>24</sup> The keen enthusiasm to place other beings before oneself aligns well with the Mahayanist vows of cultivating great compassion (*karunā*) and wisdom (*paññā*), which are considered the pair of wings on the path to Buddhahood.<sup>25</sup> Although compassion is not as emphasized in Theravada Buddhism, any effort to bring relief and welfare to suffering beings is still highly admired and praised. In a discourse in the *Anguttara-nikāya*, the Buddha refers explicitly to the most praiseworthy humans as those who can bring actual benefit to both themselves and others.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, a professionally trained Buddhist chaplain is one who skillfully applies Buddhist teachings to solving psychological and spiritual issues in various contexts. With that said, the legitimate role of a Buddhist chaplain in alleviating psychological crises is beyond question. I envisage that Buddhist chaplaincy will become an endeavor of great prospect for socially engaged Buddhists who vow to reduce human suffering.

### 2.1. A synergistic model of Buddhist chaplaincy for crisis management

A well-structured, regulated curriculum encapsulating essential training modules for Buddhist chaplaincy is still lacking within and across different Buddhist denominations. This curriculum mainly draws insights from core Buddhist teachings across various traditions. The trusted interpersonal bond anticipated between a Buddhist chaplain and their clients (patients) means that being cognizant of the latter's specific racial, social, and cultural conditioning is essential. Incorporating counseling with meaningful, therapeutic religious liturgies into spiritual and pastoral care is also necessary. Hence, Buddhist Chaplaincy training strategies should consider the peculiar cultural contexts and spiritual elements existing in different regions and among different Buddhist traditions. Despite this diversity, there are yet essential training and shared principles in Buddhist chaplaincy to which most, if not all, major Buddhist traditions apply.

<sup>23</sup> An excerpt of the Vinaya-pīṭaka Mahavagga 8 *Māra-kathā* (The account of the Lord of Death) by Bhikkhu Brahmali, accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/pli-tv-kd1/en/brahmali/>

<sup>24</sup> Bodhi (2013): 3.

<sup>25</sup> Lee and Oh (2019): 132 – 135.

<sup>26</sup> Bhikkhu Sujato, AN 4.95 A Firebrand discourse (*Chavālātasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/an4.95/en/sujato>



Many of the general training schemes of Buddhist chaplaincy could have sought and benefited from the existing sources of their Christian precedents. Dr. David G. Benner, a prominent Christian pastoral and spiritual care expert based in the USA, has spent over two decades formulating training elements that should be acquired and delivered by a pastoral caregiver. Mainly drawing from his vibrant professional experience as a chaplain, therapist, and academic, he has authored more than thirty books on various subjects in Christian spiritual care.<sup>27</sup> He has thus propounded several spiritual care elements essential in Christian chaplaincy and pastoral care. His works bridge psychology, spirituality, and theology, offering a holistic approach to understanding and nurturing a healthy human soul through the lens of Christianity. Among those elements I find to be equally valuable for informing Buddhist spiritual care are:

1. A healthy philosophy of life<sup>28</sup>
2. A set of values for ethical choices<sup>29</sup>
3. Experience of self-transcendence<sup>30</sup>
4. Inspire a love of life<sup>31</sup>
5. Trust and confidence<sup>32</sup>
6. Hope and acceptance<sup>33</sup>
7. Forbearance and forgiving<sup>34</sup>

In a nutshell, Benner's elements of spiritual care regard fundamental spiritual and theological philosophy as the primary source of inner strength, allowing individuals to garner solace and positive emotions upon encountering hardships in life. In this top-down model, spiritual faith for Christ forms the fountainhead from which supportive elements necessary for consolation and healing spring. Using a similar approach but more schematically, I have created a working model depicting key skills and training to orient Buddhist spiritual and contemplative care towards managing psychological crises.

Referring to the schematic representation as in **Figure 1**, the spiritual and contemplative care provided by a Buddhist chaplain forms the base and support system for individual clients (i.e., patients or victims of a crisis) suffering from a psychological crisis, e.g., terminal illness. This support system offers spiritual, psychological, emotional, and psychosocial care tailored to individual clients' unique needs. Besides, by direct or indirect side interventions, contemplative care may also provide additional, often *ad hoc*, care for the client's relatives

---

<sup>27</sup> Various authors, Wikipedia on David G. Benner. Accessed on ;Jan 12, 2025]; available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_G.\\_Benner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_G._Benner)

<sup>28</sup> Benner (1998): 21 – 50.

<sup>29</sup> Benner (2004): 11 – 30.

<sup>30</sup> Benner (2012): 1 – 18.

<sup>31</sup> Benner (2015a): 19 – 98.

<sup>32</sup> Benner (2011): 65 – 96.

<sup>33</sup> Benner (2015b): 17 – 33.

<sup>34</sup> Benner and Harvey (1996): 6 – 54.



and friends who may similarly be affected by the crisis. It aims to aid the client and/ or their loved ones in achieving personal equilibrium and well-being by leveraging the psychological burden of the crisis.

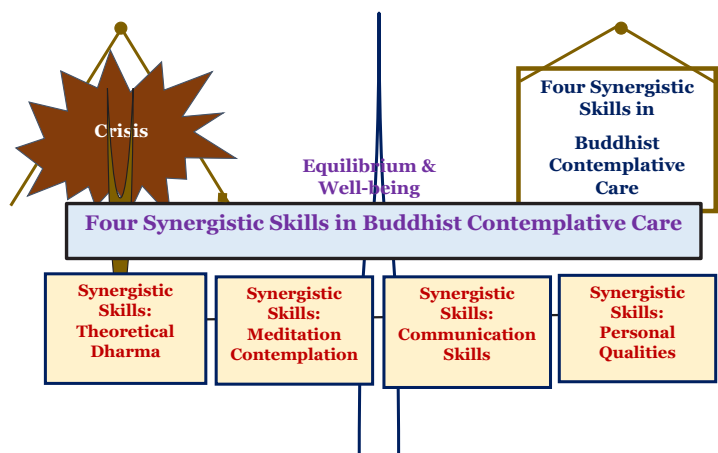


Figure 1: Synergistic Model in Psychological Crisis Management and Healing in Buddhist Contemplative Care and Chaplaincy

Meanwhile, to be a successful Buddhist chaplain for the above tasks, there are four essential but synergistic skills one needs to acquire and master. We call these skills “synergistic” because each set works in concert by synergism. In other words, developing one set of skills promotes the development of others and vice versa. We liken these synergistic skills to an ever-growing store of personal resources that comes from continuous self-investment in personal and professional development, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, socio-emotional, and behavioral aspects.

In the above model, there are four main themes of synergistic skills. First is theoretical knowledge of the Buddha Dharma, which provides the foundational and referential support for the remaining categories. Second is mental training on mindfulness supplemented with other beneficial meditative contemplation techniques that put the theoretical Dharma one has learned into practice. The outcome of mental training would further enhance a Buddhist chaplain’s ability to develop and integrate the other two essential soft-skill strategies: desirable personal qualities and interpersonal communication skills.

I need to emphasize again that the above four synergistic skills never work in isolation. When developed in a balanced way, they will serve the best personal resources available to Buddhist chaplains to accomplish their role as a contemplative and spiritual care provider. In the following sections, I will discuss these four synergistic strategies and make references, where necessary, to the current clinical Buddhist chaplaincy practices in a few hospitals and hospice centers in Hong Kong.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Much of the ideas that led to the creation of the current Buddhist contemplative care

## 2.2. Synergistic skills: Theoretical *dharma*

The theoretical premise of Buddhist counseling and spiritual care lies centrally in the teachings of the Buddha, his direct disciples, and the lineage of Buddhist masters of various Buddhist traditions. Grasping the core Buddhist teachings well, in theory, is thus the first and foremost prerequisite to ensure that the contents of spiritual care align with the essence of Buddhist teachings. With foundational knowledge, a Buddhist chaplain can skillfully steer towards their goals by incorporating interdisciplinary approaches into their work. The Buddhist chaplaincy training modules will include relevant science subjects such as introductory clinical psychology practices, basic counseling theory and methods, and palliative and hospice care ethics.

Generally, all Buddhist traditions center their most fundamental teaching on the Four Noble (Ennobling) Truths, addressing our most pressing existential problems. They are the ubiquitous unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), the cause of this unsatisfactoriness, its removal, and the path leading to its removal. Recognizing the pervasiveness and preponderance of unsatisfactoriness is the first inquiry that impels us to seek and understand its original cause. The search brings us face to face with the most profound teachings of the Buddha: The doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) or, in the broader perspective lobbied by *Mahayana* Buddhism, the doctrine of inter-dependent conditionality that connects us all.

By comprehending this doctrine deeply, one starts to realize the impermanent nature of all phenomena is as such simply because various impermanent causes condition them. In turn, another prior set of impermanent causes conditions these causes. The tracing of successively preceding causes could go on *ad infinitum*. Such a chained conditioning-and-conditioned process is ever-changing, devoid of an independent participating actor. All phenomena are thus marked by devoid of a central controller or the emptiness of a lasting and substantial “self-nature” in the *Mahayana* doctrine. Therefore, *dukkha*, with its most conspicuous representations as sickness and death separation from the beloved, is just a very natural process of life that no one can escape.

Embracing the impermanency of life has thus become the most important “lesson” a Buddhist chaplain should convey to his/ her clients, especially those undergoing terminal illnesses. The counseling goal is to learn to develop positive acceptance (patience and equanimity). The Buddhist teachings on the laws of *karma*, where life goes on a cyclic trip of birth (*samsara*) and death whilst no number of good deeds (including wholesome mental states) would go unnoticed, will help. To remain positive and calm through the passage of dying, simple-to-follow mindfulness and/ or compassion meditation techniques may be instructed to the dying patients.<sup>36</sup> Patients with a calm state of mind will recognize and distinguish the most precious things and be given

---

model come from a theory-and-practice course project on Buddhist counseling and pastoral care I undertook at the University of Hong Kong.

<sup>36</sup> Paññādīpa (2018): 32 – 34.

priority in this critical stage of life. From this, they will learn to forgive, release, and accept the inevitability of death and to inculcate compassion towards themselves and others.

Knowing the truths of impermanency, conditionality, and karma in their own right is not a mere “passive acceptance” of one’s fate. The patients should not give up on their hope of locating supportive causes and conditions that facilitate healing. It includes continuing to seek proper and advanced treatment options available within their capacity upon weighing the associated financial and physical costs. The common misconception that the law of karma is fatalistic does not comply with the actual Buddhist teaching. The workings of karma are never rigid and linear; the ripening of karmic fruits is sensitive to modifications by present karma (actions) and changes in conditions. Not all sicknesses and miseries directly result from one’s *karma*.<sup>37</sup>

In a nutshell, the workings of *karma* that drive the wheel of *samsāra* are rooted in the laws of dependent origination fueled mainly by ignorance and craving. The dominancy of karmic force propels all sentient beings to be reborn among the five or six realms of existence according to the ripening of karma at the time of death (*Theravāda* teachings) or during the intermediate between-life state (*antarabhāva*) (*Mahāyāna* teachings). The general principle is that wholesome karma (seed) begets good rebirth (fruit) in the happy realms, whereas unwholesome karma begets unfortunate rebirth. There is consensus among all Buddhist traditions that a good passing (death) is critical for a good rebirth. Hence, maintaining a wholesome mental state during the dying phase is paramount for one’s ultimate welfare in the next existence. Here, it shows how noble and significant the role of Buddhist chaplains was. They are the ones who earnestly assist the dying to transition successfully to a better rebirth and afterlife.

Meanwhile, to free ourselves from the entrapment of ignorance and craving, we need to cultivate the liberating wisdom of seeing the true nature of *dukkha*. The Noble Eightfold Path succinctly molds this wisdom, comprising three integrative, mutually supportive Buddhist practices: morality, concentration, and wisdom. Note that concentration and wisdom can only arise from mind development, which I will explore in the next subsection of meditation contemplation.

Among diverse Mahāyāna Buddhist practices in East Asia, there are numerous practices and skillful means for Buddhists to choose from in their long journey on the *Bodhisattva* Path. A commitment to walk this difficult path, which dedicates oneself to attaining the perfectly self-enlightened Buddhahood (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*), will surely make a Buddhist chaplain greatly appreciate their profession. Buddhist chaplaincy is a perfect career choice conducive to cultivating the six perfections (*pāramitā*) essential for accomplishing *Bodhicitta*. It is a sublime mind endowed with perfect

<sup>37</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, SN 36.21 Sivaka (*Sivakasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn36.21/en/bodhi>

wisdom and compassion, poised to the perfect state of the Buddha.

Another hugely popular form of Mahayana Buddhist practice today in East Asia is the devotional practice towards the Buddha *Amitabha*. This Buddha has manifested the Western Pureland (*Sukhāvatī*) and vowed to allow beings with faith in him to be reborn there and continue their practice to perfection. Reciting the name of the Buddha *Amitabha* alongside the acquisition of required merits has become the most attractive practice for many East Asian Buddhists. Chanting of the *Amitabha sūtra*, coupled with the repetitive recitation of the *Amitabha* Buddha's name, is also a common liturgical and prescriptive meditative practice necessary to be mastered by a Buddhist chaplain who works with East Asian Buddhists. The chanting often intensifies and can continue ceaselessly during the patient's critical dying period, ideally lasting at least 6 hours after death. Another equally potent afterlife destination, though not as popular, is the vow to be reborn at the *Tushita* Heaven, where the next Buddha on earth, *Maitreya*, resides.

Most East Asian Buddhists are also exceptionally devoted to and fond of those supremely compassionate and powerful *Mahāpurusa Bodhisattvas*, such as *Avalokitesvara* and *Kṣitigarbha*. Many believe these great guardians of Buddhism have extraordinary power to rescue beings in danger and guide them through difficulties on their holy path. Reciting their names and mantras and sūtras associated with them is thus well-received and welcomed by most Eastern Mahayana Buddhists today. Mahayana recitation practices are particularly popular with dying patients and at funerals because many believe that chanting can positively affect the departed "spirit" stuck in the intermediate state, helping it achieve a smooth transition for a better rebirth.

### 2.3. Synergistic skills: Meditation and contemplation

Meditation brings the intellectual learning of Buddha *Dharma* to fulfillment, i.e., to become the direct benefactor of *Dharma*. Daily meditation practice is considered the primary support for the chaplaincy work as it brings a much-needed clarity of mind, gentleness of heart, and a listening ear to any intense environment. Buddhist spiritual care is about helping people access the stillness, clarity, and love in their hearts.<sup>38</sup> Of course, it would need years, if not decades, to reach proficiency in our meditation, allowing changes in our mind to manifest in our behavior and appearance, which people around us would notice. Cultivating a composed and tranquil mind, accentuated with mindfulness and wisdom, allows us to control our negative emotions driven by underlying defilements. With heightened mindfulness, our mind can stay aloof amidst all the ups and downs, thick and thin, in life. Moreover, we would be more resistant and less reactive towards changes in our physical body, including sickness and death. It is where the analogy of being shot by two darts comes to our appreciation: the initial shot of physical pain is inevitable, whereas the following second shot of emotional pain, as a result of identifying and clinging to the body or pain as belonging to "I," "mine," or my "self," is

<sup>38</sup> Giles and Miller, 2012: II.

optional.<sup>39</sup> Concurrent with this notion, there have been numerous scientific studies indicating how meditation may effectively reduce pain signals and pain perception through novel neurophysiological pathways.<sup>40</sup>

Mindfulness meditation and contemplation so far remain the most popular forms of Buddhist meditation nowadays, and its practice may involve all postures and circumstances of our daily activities, not restricted to a passive sitting posture. Lately, psychotherapists and counselors in search of non-pharmacological treatment options have formulated a variety of psychotherapeutic regimens based on mindfulness in managing mental stress, pain, and different affective mood disorders. In worldwide scientific research, mindfulness-based interventions have received considerable recognition, with encouraging results and underlying mechanisms being continually unraveled.<sup>41</sup>

Although specific mindfulness practice presentations can vary from instructor to instructor, the basic instructions are the same. That is, to maintain an open-monitoring awareness of bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, intentions, and/ or emotions in every present moment. Cultivating awareness with a curious, accepting, non-judgmental, and non-engaging attitude helps us observe the phenomena arising in our body and mind without the filter of a stereotypical, prejudiced mind. This practice curbs habitual autopilot reactions to bodily and mental phenomena, often resulting in unnecessary emotional pain. Notably, Thich Nhat Hanh's non-sectarian mindfulness practices offer a wide range of skillful means to connect with our inner peace and joy in every moment.<sup>42</sup> All Buddhist chaplains should regularly practice mindfulness meditation, which can be done anywhere and anytime with noticeable benefits.

Moreover, as a professional provider of contemplative care, a Buddhist chaplain should aim to become an adept practitioner of mindful care for oneself as well as for their clients. Mindful care stresses the importance of establishing mindfulness within oneself as a means of self-guarding and self-protection. Such a seemingly self-focused training is indeed not selfish at all. By such an initial act, the subsequent protection extended to surrounding people can take effect through its natural course.<sup>43</sup> In other words, it is through equipping sufficient strength of self-mindfulness that propels us the capacity to help others to develop the same quality of mindfulness. In this way, a healthy balance of bilateral healing is accomplished, first by the Buddhist chaplain and later channeling out to others, as the Buddha utters in the *Sedaka-sutta*<sup>44</sup>:

And how is it, bhikkhus, that by protecting oneself, one protects others?

<sup>39</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi. SN 36.6 The Dart (*Salla-sutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn36.6/en/bodhi>

<sup>40</sup> Panyadipa (Tan KP) (2019): 1 – 34.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (2014): 9 – 20; Paññāpā (2019): 416.

<sup>43</sup> Lee (2024): 52 - 53.

<sup>44</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, SN 47.19 Sedaka (*Sedakasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn47.19/en/bodhi>



By the pursuit, development, and cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness. It is in such a way that by protecting oneself, one protects others.

Practitioners refer to *Dhyāna* in Sanskrit or *Jhāna* in Pāli as a deep meditative state akin to achieving intense mental concentration (*samādhi*). In some meditation lineages, it is an integrated concentration and insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. In brief, meditation begins with developing mental stillness and concentration by focusing on an object that could be our breathing, a visualized image, a mantra, a recollection of Buddha's qualities, or a recitation of the Buddha's name. Practice brings the mind to one-pointedness and calm, effectively suspending the five hindrances (sensual desire, aversion, restlessness, sloth and torpor, and doubt).

A tranquil mind free from hindrances is malleable, bright, steadfast, appropriate to work, and attained to imperturbable. It then investigates bodily and mental phenomena with penetrative clarity, following their true nature. It brings in the insight contemplation where direct seeing of the empirical reality enables us to understand its dependently arisen, impermanent, unsatisfactory, non-self, and empty nature. Such a deep insight into reality is how the liberating wisdom sprouts, whereby a direct glimpse of concept-less reality, as it truly is, can ignite our inner awakening engine. This advanced meditation technique is time-honored and suitable for a Buddhist chaplain who wishes to develop deep tranquility and insight in his Dharma practice.

Loving-kindness and compassion meditation are potent tools to infuse our mind with a wealth of positive energy, in addition to being a remedy against anger, frustration, and violence. As an essential virtue and mental quality, particularly in the Bodhisattva's path, compassion provides us the fountain source to carry out the impossible task of relieving the pains and suffering of all beings. In ancient Buddhist texts, loving-kindness and compassion meditation belong to the group of Divine Abiding (*Brahmavihāra*), which gives rise to a boundless mind conducive to awakening. The mind that dwelled in loving-kindness invokes joy and pleasant feelings in surrounding people, a much-desired element that makes a successful Buddhist chaplain. Moreover, with regular practice, a Buddhist chaplain would be able to maintain a continuous stream of love and enthusiasm to uplift the suffering of all beings that come to him. Even frequent blessings to every being we meet daily to be free from suffering would be beneficial. It is said to be the daily practice of the renowned Catholic sage, Mother Teresa, which qualifies her as a role model for those on the Bodhisattva's path.<sup>45</sup>

Meditation and contemplation training are critical in Buddhist spiritual and contemplative care. It helps Buddhist chaplains develop inner qualities and strengths to succeed in serving people and develop transferrable skills that their clients can nurture to uplift their mental and physical suffering. Meditating helps us comprehend the truths of impermanency and dukkha, allowing us

<sup>45</sup> Tsomo (2013): 96.



to appreciate the art of letting go. According to Buddhist wisdom, loosening our attachment to our body and mind grants us significant spiritual benefits, as this practice builds a sustained, wholesome mental state. A wholesome mind endowed with mindfulness and seven awakening factors is known to have healing effects on diseases.<sup>46</sup> Such ancient records align well with today's medical discoveries in which meditation appears to positively affect a vast array of psychological and physical ailments.<sup>47</sup>

#### 2.4. Synergistic skills: Personal qualities

Desirable, supportive personal qualities are those soft skills that make a Buddhist chaplain a suitable spiritual caregiver and a people person who is sensitive to the needs of others. Among those qualities extremely valuable to possess include, but not limited to, being highly ethical (virtuous), mindful, a good listener, empathetic, patient, tolerant, forgiving, friendly and amicable, loving and harmlessness, conscientious, just and non-judgmental, accommodating and accepting, emotionally stable, tactful, grounded, grounded, contended, good self-control, self-respectful, industrious and zealous, humorous, genuine, non-acquisitive, and an upholder of high integrity and professionalism. Although some of these qualities might have existed as inborn personal traits, they are also learned skills that can be acquired and further cultivated through possessing a habit of constant self-examination and self-reflection.

Noteworthy, furthering these qualities in Buddhist contemplative care can be enhanced by effective training in theoretical Dharma and meditation. For example, the establishment of mindfulness in mindful care (see 2.3 meditation and contemplation) requires one to simultaneously cultivate patience (*khanti*), harmlessness/ non-violence (*avihiṃsā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and sympathy and understanding (*anuddayā*) as in an instruction given by the Buddha to Sedaka<sup>48</sup>:

And how is it, bhikkhus, that by protecting one protects oneself? By patience, harmlessness, loving-kindness, and sympathy. It is in such a way that by protecting others, one protects oneself.

In addition, a determined effort to continue developing and safeguarding ethical virtues will keep us on track with continuing self-improvement. However, the learning journey of any soft skill is never a smooth sail – we may sometimes fall short of what we hoped for and anticipated. For whatever wrongs or unskillful actions we may have committed, we shall sincerely ask for forgiveness from the people we hurt and capable of forgiving ourselves and forgoing our shortcomings. In Mahayana Buddhist practice, verbalizing our

<sup>46</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, SN 46.16 Ill(1)(*Paṭhamagilānasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2015], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn46.14/en/bodhi>

<sup>47</sup> Panyadipa (Tan KP)(2019): 1 – 34.

<sup>48</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, SN 47.19 Sedaka (*Sedakasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn47.19/en/bodhi>

unskillful acts and determination to retrain from repeating them in the future before the Buddha or Bodhisattva statues in a repentance chanting rite is often conducted. The power of repentance reckoned by Mahayana Buddhism is that it not only empowers one to overcome present regrets and future obstacles but also gives us hope to undo things and start anew.

Of all personal qualities, patience (*khanti*), empathy, and compassion appear to stand out as the most precious ones all Buddhist chaplains shall work to embody. To develop these qualities, *khanti* or *kṣānti* in Sanskrit represents the prerequisite factor that brings into fruition most of the other qualities. With this quality of *khanti*, one develops enduring patience, acceptance, and forgiveness;<sup>49</sup> these qualities, in turn, grow simultaneously with compassion and empathy. Empathy and compassion enable us to contemplate others' feelings as our own, facilitating connection on an equal footing when discharging our spiritual care. Along with it, this connection fosters the qualities of being non-judgmental and perspective-taking. Empathy is genuine, free from condescending and concealed superiority that always comes with mere 'sympathy.'

### 2.5. Synergistic skills: Inter-personal communication skills

Effective interpersonal communication is undoubtedly essential for a Buddhist chaplain to acquire. After all, it is how a Buddhist chaplain enters the crisis zone of his clients and makes a positive impact. These skills involve thoughtfully choosing words, expressions, and non-verbal gestures, considering the client's context and social conditioning. Effective communication builds bridges between people and can be a significant solution to most of the crises we experience.<sup>50</sup> It is also a valuable set of soft skills that corresponds with the above three skill sets. For example, when dealing with terminal illness and death, Dharma teachings from a Buddhist chaplain may help patients steer right to a wholesome, positive frame of mind. Encouraging patients to recollect and rejoice in their past wholesome deeds and to reassert their faith in the Triple Gem can achieve this. Also, it would be beneficial if the chaplain could guide patients into appropriate meditative contemplation that suits their unique conditions and temperaments. Hopefully, with the help of Dharma and meditation, dying patients would pass on with less emotional pain and, from the Buddhist perspective, be assured of a fortunate rebirth. Note that all the above instructions would not be possible without the Buddhist chaplain equipped with practical communication skills.

Non-verbal communication skills mainly reflect the personal qualities of a Buddhist chaplain. A good personality with overflowing inner qualities will certainly shine, influence people, and help one communicate effectively. Even the presence of love and compassion alone may be enough to bring trust, calm, and joy to dying patients. Furthermore, the peaceful passing of the patient will help to comfort his loved ones, easing their passage of grief and bereavement.

<sup>49</sup> Lee (2004): 54.

<sup>50</sup> Speck and Herbert (2017): 324.

### III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The work of a Buddhist chaplain is an integral part of utilizing an interdisciplinary approach that pivots Buddhist teachings as the guiding principle. This profession has no fixed standard operating protocol but an amendable, constantly improving guideline catering to people's needs. And it is contingent on changing social and cultural milieus. This socially engaging work concerns people and sees everyone as a unique and spiritual unit yet inseparable from the rest. It sees the values of ancient wisdom left by the Buddha and his many great lineages of disciples and how this great inheritance may be applied to benefit people today.

In this paper, I propose that acquiring four synergistic skills can accomplish Buddhist chaplaincy's spiritual and contemplative care. They are theoretical Dharma learning, cultivation of a calm, beautiful, and wisdom-infused mind through meditation and contemplation, development of essential personal qualities, and refinement of interpersonal communication skills. These four skills work collaboratively to support one another, and they are to be continually perfected by a Buddhist chaplain along the career path.

#### Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>

\*\*\*

### REFERENCES

#### Primary sources

All Pali Buddhist texts referenced are retrieved from the Sutta Central's webpage (2025): <https://suttacentral.net/>

#### Secondary sources

- Benner, David G. 2015a. *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality (The Spiritual Journey)*. Madison: IVP Academic.
- . 2015b. *Desiring God's Will: Aligning Our Hearts with the Heart of God (The Spiritual Journey)*. Madison: IVP Academic.
- . 2012. *Spirituality and the Awakening Self: The Sacred Journey of Transformation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- . 2011. *Soulful Spirituality: Becoming Fully Alive and Deeply Human*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- . 2004. *Spiritual Direction and Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices*. Madison: IVP Academic.
- . 2003. *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-term Structured Model*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- . 1998. *Care for Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Benner, David G., and Robert W. Harvey. 1996. *Understanding and Facilitating Forgiveness (Strategic Pastoral Counseling Resources)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu. 2013. "Arahants, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas." In *The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of Mahayana*, edited by Bhikkhu Nyanatusita, 1–30. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bonelli, Raphael M., and Harold G. Koenig. 2013. "Mental Disorders, Religion, and Spirituality 1990 to 2010: A Systematic Evidence-Based Review." *Journal of Religion and Health* 52: 657–673. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-013-9691-4>.
- Christman, Susan K., and Joseph R. Mueller. 2017. "Understanding Spiritual Care: The Faith-Hope-Love Model of Spiritual Wellness." *Journal of Christian Nursing* 34 (1): E1–E7. <https://doi.org/10.1097/CNJ.0000000000000355>.
- Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2013. "Chaplain." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/chaplain>.
- Evans-Lacko, Sara, Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola, Ali Al-Hamzawi, Jordi Alonso, Cristina Benjet, Ronny Bruffaerts, et al. 2018. "Socio-Economic Variations in the Mental Health Treatment Gap for People with Anxiety, Mood, and Substance Use Disorders: Results from the WHO World Mental Health (WMH) Surveys." *Psychological Medicine* 48 (9): 1560–1571. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291717003336>.
- Farb, Norman A. S. 2014. "From Retreat Center to Clinic to Boardroom? Perils and Promises of the Modern Mindfulness Movement." *Religions* 5: 1062–1086.
- GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators. 2022. "Global, Regional, and National Burden of 12 Mental Disorders in 204 Countries and Territories, 1990–2019: A Systematic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019." *The Lancet Psychiatry* 9 (2): 137–150. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(21\)00395-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00395-3).
- Giles, Cheryl A., and Willa B. Miller. 2012. *The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Greenberg, Neil, James A. Carr, and Cliff H. Summers. 2002. "Causes and Consequences of Stress." *Integrative and Comparative Biology* 42 (3): 508–516. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icb/42.3.508>.
- Hobfoll, Stevan E. 2004. *Stress, Culture, and Community: The Psychology and Philosophy of Stress*. New York: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. 2013. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Revised and updated edition. New York: Bantam Books.

- Koenig, Harold G., Dana E. King, and Verna B. Carson. 2012. *Handbook of Religion and Health*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Koenig, Harold G., Linda K. George, and Paul Titus. 2004. "Religion, Spirituality, and Health in Medically Ill Hospitalized Older Patients." *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 52 (4): 554–562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-5415.2004.52161.x>.
- Lee, K. C. G., A. Oh, Q. Zhao, F. Y. Wu, S. Chen, T. Diaz, and C. K. Ong. 2017. "Buddhist Counseling: Implications for Mental Health Professionals." *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 4 (2): 113–122. <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000131>.
- Lee, K. C., and A. Oh. 2019. "Introduction to Compassionate View Intervention: A Buddhist Counseling Technique Based on Mahayana Buddhist Teachings." *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 21 (2): 132–151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2018.1561310>.
- Lim, K.L. (ed). 2024. "Mindful Care for Oneself and Others." *Voice of Buddhism Vol. 63* (Sept. 2024): 52–57.
- Munasinghe, H. L. M. 2023. "Why Buddhist Chaplains Matter for Sri Lankan Universities: Exploring Their Role in Student Well-being and Spiritual Support." In *Global Spread of Buddhism with Special Reference to Sri Lanka*, 124–136.
- Paññāḍīpa, V. P. 2018. "In the Seen There Is Only Mere Seen: An Analysis of the Meditation Instructions in Mālūṅkyaputta Sutta." *Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC)* 4 (1): 26–36.
- . 2019. "Living Buddha, Living Christ." *The Journal of International Association of Buddhist Universities (JIABU)*: 416–416.
- Panyadipa (Tan KP). 2019. "Rediscovering the Buddha's Wisdom in Scientific Age: Buddhist Meditation and Research on Psychosomatic Health and Longevity." *The Tianzhu Global Network for Buddhist and East Asian Culture Conference, Buddhism and Technology: History Background and Contemporary Challenge*, Sept. 20–22, Vancouver, BC, Canada. Pp. 1– 34.
- Segal, Z. V., J. M. G. Williams, and J. D. Teasdale. 2002. *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Smith, T. B., M. E. McCullough, and J. Poll. 2003. "Religiousness and Depression: Evidence for a Main Effect and the Moderating Influence of Stressful Life Events." *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (4): 614–636. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.4.614>
- Speck, P., & Herbert, C. 2017. Communication issues in pastoral care and chaplaincy. *Oxford textbook of communication in oncology and palliative care*, 324– 327.
- Strawbridge, W. J., S. J. Shema, R. D. Cohen, and G. A. Kaplan. 2001. "Religious Attendance Increases Survival by Improving and Maintaining Good Health Behaviors, Mental Health, and Social Relationships."

*Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 23 (1): 68–74. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15324796ABM2301\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15324796ABM2301_10).

Thich Nhat Hanh. 2014. *No Mud, No Lotus*. California: Parallax Press.

Tsomo, K. L. 2012. “Mother Teresa and The Bodhisattva Ideal.” *Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1 (1): 96–105.

Yamaoka, S. 2013. “Spirituality and Spiritual Care: A Buddhist Perspective.” *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 1.

Zhang, D., E. K. Lee, E. C. Mak, C. Y. Ho, and S. Y. Wong. 2021. “Mindfulness-Based Interventions: An Overall Review.” *British Medical Bulletin* 138 (1): 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bmb/ldab008>.



# LIBERATION BY ‘SUBLIME DWELLING’ (*BRAHMAVIHĀRA*): THE WAY TO INNER AND EXTERNAL PEACE

Bhikkhuni Dr. Thich Dieu Hieu<sup>\*</sup>

**Abstract:**

In 1963, as a student in Sarnath, a sacred Buddhist site, I witnessed the growing unrest in Vietnam, where Buddhist monks resorted to self-immolation in protest against the oppressive policies of Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem. Despite Vietnam being a Buddhist-majority nation, Diem, a Catholic leader aligned with Western anti-Communist powers, actively suppressed Buddhists, banning religious flags, restricting temple construction, and censoring Buddhist literature. The crisis reached its peak when Buddhists were prohibited from displaying their flags during Vesak, leading to violent confrontations. In India, 1956 marked the grand 2500th anniversary of Buddhism under Prime Minister Nehru’s leadership. Nehru, deeply inspired by Buddhist philosophy, initiated major infrastructural developments at Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar, and Sarnath. The Buddha Jayanti Celebration Committee, chaired by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, invited Tibetan leaders as chief guests. Another landmark event that year was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s mass conversion to Buddhism in Nagpur, where he and 360,000 followers embraced the faith at Diksha Bhumi. This historic event laid the foundation for the New Buddhist Movement in India. Tragically, Ambedkar passed away soon after, leaving behind a legacy of Buddhist resurgence. In this paper, I present my reflections on both these historical moments – the Buddhist crisis in Vietnam and the resurgence of Buddhism in India – based on personal observations, news reports, and scholarly interpretations.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, liberation, inner peace, external peace.*

\*\*\*

---

<sup>\*</sup> Vietnam Buddhist University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Liberation (*vimutti*), a core Buddhist concept, encompasses various stages and forms of freedom from mental impurities. *Nibbāna*, the ultimate goal for Buddhists, is often described as ‘ultimate peace’ (*accanta-santi*) and represents liberation from mental defilements.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, ‘peace’ is deeply linked to the absence of afflictions like greed, hatred, and delusion. The related term, ‘*nibbuti*,’ which also means ‘peace,’ similarly reflects a mind that is free of unwholesome states.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, ‘peace’ arises when mental afflictions are absent. When they emerge, the mind becomes disturbed and agitated.

Buddhism offers systematic methods to overcome defilements, which can be regarded as paths to achieving inner peace. For example, the path to attaining *Nibbāna* consists of the means to abandon mental afflictions. Among these practices, Sublime Dwelling (*brahmavihāra*) holds a prominent place. Sublime Dwelling consists of four states of mind: loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), unselfish delight (*muditā*), and neutrality (*upekkhā*). Developing these states aims to purify the mind by eliminating mental defilements rooted in hatred (*dosa*). The practice involving the development of these four states is aimed at purifying the mind by eliminating states rooted in hatred (*dosa*). Developing these states causes the mind to become peaceful by preventing or abandoning hatred and similar negative states.

This paper examines how Sublime Dwelling fosters inner peace by abandoning states of mind that are rooted in hatred. It also attempts to show how cultivating this practice extends to external peace, a natural outcome of inner peace. At an individual level, external peace is largely dependent upon one’s actions and behavior, which reflect one’s mental state. When negative states such as hatred persist in the mind, the mind loses inner peace. An individual who is not peaceful internally cannot foster peace externally. Therefore, the path to external peace begins with the cultivation of inner peace.

Drawing from Pali textual sources, this paper explores Buddhist practices that foster internal and external peace through Sublime Dwelling. For instance, morality (*sīla*), a key practice that is rooted in Sublime Dwelling, promotes inner peace by making oneself free from faulty actions. It also promotes external peace by engaging in actions that are grounded in Sublime Dwelling. The practice of Sublime Dwelling helps build a foundation for harmonious relationships and societal well-being. This study attempts to show that by cultivating Sublime Dwelling, individuals achieve inner peace and contribute to the peace of society and the world.

## II. SUBLIME DWELLING (BRAHMAVIHĀRA)

The practices taught by the Buddha in the Pali texts can be generally

<sup>1</sup> Buddhaghosa Thera, *Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā* (*Paramatthajotikā*), vol. 1, p. 338; Buddhaghosa Thera, *The Suttanipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha’s Discourses Together with Its Commentaries*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 2017), p. 815.

<sup>2</sup> *Khuddakapāṭha Pāli*, p. 4.

classified as either morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), or wisdom (*paññā*). These three are often described as forms of training (*sikkhā*), a brief form of the Noble Eightfold Path. In their highest sense, these three training forms a path to *Nibbāna*, the ultimate goal aspired by Buddhists. With relation to this, the practice of Sublime Dwelling holds a distinctive role because it is related to the three trainings. It is directly related to morality and concentration and also supports wisdom.

The moral virtues recommended for Buddhists to follow, including monastics, are fundamentally rooted in Sublime Dwelling. In the Noble Eightfold Path, the Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*), Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*), and Right Livelihood (*sammāājīva*) are based on Sublime Dwelling.<sup>3</sup> This is because major moral precepts and training rules involve avoiding harm to others – the core attitude of Sublime Dwelling. In many cases, texts explain Sublime Dwelling as the practice of morality. Furthermore, Sublime Dwelling aids in abandoning hindrances by directly opposing ill will (*byāpāda*),<sup>4</sup> which is essential to attaining concentration. By undertaking Sublime Dwelling as a meditation practice, one can even attain deeper levels of concentration called 'absorption' (*jhāna*).<sup>5</sup>

The practice of Sublime Dwelling forms a vital part of the path to liberation. In the teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the path to liberation, it is represented by Right Thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*). Among the three types of thoughts represented by 'Right Thought,' the 'thought of non-ill will' (*abyāpāda-vitakka*) and 'thought of non-cruelty' (*avihiṃsā-vitakka*) are mental aspects of Sublime Dwelling.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that in the classification of trainings, Right Thought belongs to the wisdom group (*paññā-sikkhā*). This highlights that Sublime Dwelling is integral to all three trainings. Moreover, it is also included in the ten perfections that an individual aspiring to become a *Buddha* has to fulfill.<sup>7</sup>

In literature about Sublime Dwelling, the term '*brahma*' is interpreted in two ways: as associated with *Brahmā* divinity or as denoting 'excellent' or 'best.' For example, Rhys Davids links '*brahma*' to 'divine.'<sup>8</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu suggests that Sublime Dwelling represents the sublime attitudes of "beings who live in the higher heavenly worlds."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*

<sup>3</sup> Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Colombo: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2006), pp.46 - 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, *Majjhimanikāya*, vol.1, p.424; *Nīvaraṇappahānavagga*, *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, vol.1, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Buddhaghosa Thera, *The Path of Purification*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Fifth (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999), p. 305.

<sup>6</sup> Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha's Ancient Path*, 2nd ed. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1979), p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 320.

<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Sakya; or Buddhist Origins* (London: Broadway House, 1931), p. 218.

<sup>9</sup> Bhikkhu Thanissaro, *Sublime Attitudes* (California: Metta Forest Monastery, 2014), p. 4.

states, “They are the mental dwellings of the Brahmā divinities in the Brahma-world.”<sup>10</sup> By contrast, some scholars favor a simple interpretation. For example, Mahāsi Sayadaw describes ‘*brahmavihāra*’ solely as ‘noble,’ which is used as a synonym of ‘excellent.’<sup>11</sup> Venerable Nārada also explains *Brahma* similarly as ‘sublime.’<sup>12</sup> They avoid any reference to *Brahmā* divinity.

The commentaries of Pali texts support both interpretations. For example, in the *Visuddhimagga*, Venerable Buddhaghosa describes ‘*brahma*’ as meaning ‘best’ and ‘immaculate.’ He says, “Those who practice *brahmavihāra* live on an equal footing with *Brahmā* gods.”<sup>13</sup> He further clarifies that it is in the sense of ‘faultlessness’ that the word ‘excellent’ is used. The minds of *Brahmā* deities are pure because they have abandoned mental hindrances. In this way, ‘best’ or ‘excellent’ reflects a state of purity. The interpretation of the commentary suggests that by practicing the Sublime Dwelling, one’s mind becomes excellent, which resembles the mind of *Brahmā* divinity. Drawing on this, Venerable Nyanaponika<sup>14</sup> assigns two meanings to *brahma*: divine and excellent.

The ‘excellent’ or ‘best’ meaning of ‘*brahma*’ is elaborated in various ways within the sub-commentaries. Venerable Dhammapāla, the author of the sub-commentary on the *Visuddhimagga* commentary, interprets it in two ways. His first explanation aligns with the interpretation of ‘excellent’ given by Venerable Buddhaghosa. Second, he interprets ‘excellent’ as ‘excellent beings’ by relating the Sublime Dwelling to the practice to *Bodhisatta*, the beings who practice the perfections to become a fully Enlightened Buddha.<sup>15</sup> Simply put, he views Sublime Dwelling as a key *Bodhisatta* practice. This interpretation is highlighted by Venerable Sumaṅgala in *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinīṭikā*. He notes that ‘highest’ has two meanings: they are ‘highest forms of dwellings’ and ‘dwellings of the highest beings.’<sup>16</sup>

The term ‘*vihāra*’ appears in the Pali texts with several meanings. Two are noteworthy here. First, it denotes a ‘dwelling place’ for monks, such as a monastery. For example, in the sentence “*Bhagavā vihāre viharati*” (the Blessed

[https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/TheSublimeAttitudes\\_181215.pdf](https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/TheSublimeAttitudes_181215.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed., *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Fourth (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2016), p. 336.

<sup>11</sup> Mahāsi Sayadaw, *Brahmavihāra Dhamma*, 4th ed. (Yangon: Buddhasasananuggaha Press, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Venerable Nārada Mahāthera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, 5th ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1979), p. 404.

<sup>13</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 314.

<sup>14</sup> Nyanaponika Thera, *The Four Sublime States* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008), p. 4. [https://bps.lk/olib/wh/wh006\\_Nyanaponika\\_The-Four-Sublime-States.pdf](https://bps.lk/olib/wh/wh006_Nyanaponika_The-Four-Sublime-States.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Dhammapāla Thera, *Visuddhimaggamahāṭīkā*, vol.1, p. 384.

<sup>16</sup> Bhaddanta Anuruddha and Bhaddanta Sumaṅgalasāmi, *Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma and Exposition of the Topics of Abhidhamma*, trans. R.P. Wijeratne and Rupert Gethin (London: Pali Text Society, 2002), p. 331.

One lives in monastery).<sup>17</sup> The second usage is in the context of meditation practice, where '*vihāra*' signifies 'prolonged attention to certain objects of meditation' or 'sustaining a certain state in the mind.' In this sense, the term is often employed for attainments (*samāpatti*) such as 'absorption' (*jhāna*) and 'fruition' (*phala*).<sup>18</sup> In the context of '*Brahmavihāra*,' the term '*vihāra*' aligns more with the second meaning. The rendering 'dwelling' is adopted in this paper to reflect this meaning.

### III. SUBLIME STATES OF MIND

There are four states of mind that are collectively called *brahmavihāra*. They are '*mettā*' (loving-kindness), '*karuṇā*' (compassion), '*muditā*' (unselfish delight), and '*upekkhā*' (neutrality). In many instances in the texts, only one or more of the four is used to represent all the four. Comparatively, the texts explain loving-kindness more than the other three.<sup>19</sup> The four states are also called 'illimitable states' (*appamaññā*) because they have to be radiated towards all beings without making any discrimination or boundary.<sup>20</sup> The rendering 'immeasurable state' is also used instead of 'illimitable state'.<sup>21</sup> Pali texts tell that they are to be radiated 'without boundary' (*appamāṇa*).<sup>22</sup> The usage of '*appamaññā*' for the four states is based on this.

From the *Abhidhamma* perspective, 'loving-kindness' represents a mode of 'non-hatred' (*adosa*), while 'neutrality' is a mode of 'mental equipoise' (*tatramajjhataṭṭā*). These two are mental states (*cetasika*) that can manifest in various forms and are present in all wholesome consciousnesses. However, they do not always appear as 'loving-kindness' and 'neutrality', respectively. By contrast, the other two states – 'compassion' and 'unselfish delight' – correspond to distinct mental states.<sup>23</sup>

The term *mettā* is commonly translated as 'loving-kindness'.<sup>24</sup> Other renderings are 'friendliness'<sup>25</sup> and 'amity'.<sup>26</sup> Commentaries explain its literal meaning in two ways. First, *mettā* fosters a 'bond'. Second, it reflects the attitude that a friend holds.<sup>27</sup> Based on these interpretations, 'loving-kindness' aligns

<sup>17</sup> *Udāna Pāḷi*, p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> Buddhaghosa Thera, *Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā* (*Papañcasūdanī*), vol.5, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> For example, *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya*, vol.2, p.80; *Saigīti Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya*, vol.3, p. 245.

<sup>20</sup> *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 336; *Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma and Exposition of the Topics of Abhidhamma*, p. 331.

<sup>21</sup> *Sakya*; or *Buddhist Origins*, p. 216.

<sup>22</sup> For example, *Dīghanikāya*, vol. 1, p. 234.

<sup>23</sup> *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, pp.89-90.

<sup>24</sup> Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *The Path of Discrimination* (*Paṭisambhidāmagga*) (London: Pali Text Society, 1982), p. 317; *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 336.

<sup>25</sup> *Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma and Exposition of the Topics of Abhidhamma*, p. 331.

<sup>26</sup> *Sakya*; or *Buddhist Origins*, p. 216.

<sup>27</sup> Buddhaghosa Thera, *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā* (*Aṭṭhasālinī*), p.192: *Mijjatitī mettā, siniyhatitī attho. Mitte bhavā, mittassa vā eṣā pavattitipi mettā*; Dhammapāla Thera, *Itivuttaka*



with the first meaning, and ‘friendliness’ or ‘amity’ fits the second. Here, ‘bond’ has a specific meaning, distinct from everyday usage. Venerable Buddhaghosa explains it as ‘wishing welfare’ (*hita-ajjhāsayatā*).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, a ‘friend’ (*mitta*) shares this ‘bond.’ The qualities of a good friend are mentioned in the texts in many places. For example, a friend protects from falling into misfortune.<sup>29</sup> Thus, loving-kindness denotes the attitude one friend extends toward another.

The second sublime state is called *karuṇā*, which is translated mostly as ‘compassion.’ Early translations render it as ‘pity.’<sup>30</sup> However, *karuṇā* and pity differ subtly. *Karuṇā* is essentially the capacity to be moved by others’ suffering. It is also associated with the desire to alleviate suffering. On the other hand, ‘pity’ denotes sorrow or sadness for others’ suffering or misfortune of others.<sup>31</sup> It is not necessarily associated with the desire to alleviate suffering. Thus, the term ‘compassion’ is more fitting in the context of Sublime Dwelling.

Commentaries explain *karuṇā* literally in three ways. First, it is the mental state that stirs the heart upon witnessing others’ suffering. Second, it drives a person to alleviate that suffering. Third, it radiates towards suffering beings.<sup>32</sup> The characteristics of *karuṇā* are often explained about *mettā*. While *mettā* wishes to bring welfare and happiness to others, *karuṇā* wishes to remove non-welfare and suffering.<sup>33</sup>

The third sublime state, *muditā*, is often rendered as ‘sympathetic joy’<sup>34</sup> or ‘appreciative joy.’<sup>35</sup> Both expressions refer to the capacity to rejoice in others’ happiness, success, or good fortune. The translation ‘gladness,’ which is the general meaning of ‘*muditā*,’ is used in some translations such as *Path of Purification*.<sup>36</sup> In the context of *brahmavihāra*, it denotes the gladness that arises from rejoicing in others’ welfare and happiness. This attitude is notably

*Aṭṭhakathā* (Paramatthadīpanī II), p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Khuddakapāṭha Pāli*, p. 248.

<sup>29</sup> *Khuddakapāṭha Pāli*, p. 248.

<sup>30</sup> Anuruddha Thera, *Compendium of Philosophy*, ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, trans. Shwe Zan Aung (London: Pali Text Society, 1910), p. 204; *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā*, p.192; Pe Maung Tin, *The Expositor* (*Aṭṭhasālinī*), ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids, vol. 2 (London: The Pali Text Society, 1976), p. 258.

<sup>31</sup> “Pity | Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.Com,” accessed February 26, 2025, [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/pity\\_1?q=pity](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/pity_1?q=pity).

<sup>32</sup> *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā*, p. 192; *The Expositor* (*Aṭṭhasālinī*), p. 258.

<sup>33</sup> *Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 128.

<sup>34</sup> Sarah Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts From the Pāli Canon*, PDF (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.163; *Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma and Exposition of the Topics of Abhidhamma*, p.331.

<sup>35</sup> Arahant Upatissa, *The Path of Freedom* (*Vimuttimagga*), trans. N. R. M. Ehara, Thera Soma, and Thera Kheminda (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995), p. 192.

<sup>36</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 311.



different from 'sympathy'.<sup>37</sup> 'Sympathy' does not fit the meaning of '*muditā*' because sympathy is a response to another person's pain, sorrow, or distress.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, *muditā* celebrates others' well-being. Instead of being jealous or arousing aversion, *muditā* enables one to share in others' happiness.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, unselfish delight rejoices without seeking to deprive others of their well-being and success.<sup>40</sup> Based upon this meaning given in commentary, it is rendered here as 'unselfish delight.' As the term 'joy' is often used for '*pīti*',<sup>41</sup> it is more appropriate to use 'gladness' or 'delight.'

The term *upekkhā* that is used for the fourth Sublime Dwelling encompasses many dimensions. Fundamentally, it is a neutral stance one adopts towards a person who is neither liked nor disliked.<sup>42</sup> Commentaries typically describe it as perceiving beings with equipoise, without engaging oneself in thoughts of loving-kindness or compassion.<sup>43</sup> Such an explanation is given in conjunction with the doctrine of *kamma*, that beings are the owner of their *kamma*. *Upekkhā* also helps us see equality in beings and avoid partiality or prejudice.<sup>44</sup> This attitude is emphasized in the *Vimuttimaggā* by saying that when parents have equanimity, they are "neither too attentive nor yet inattentive towards any of their children but regard them equally and maintain an even mind towards them."<sup>45</sup>

The four sublime states are closely interconnected. Each of the sublime states is capable of influencing the others. For example, loving-kindness can influence compassion and vice versa. If loving-kindness is prominent, compassion follows it. Similarly, if compassion is prominent, loving-kindness follows it. The mental state of 'non-greed' (*alobha*), which counters 'greed' (*lobha*), also shares such a relationship with Sublime Dwelling.<sup>46</sup> Thus, when one of the sublime qualities is developed, the others are also strengthened. This also frees the mind of greed.

Their relationship is illustrated through their presence among parents towards their child. When the child is in the womb, parents exhibit loving-kindness, hoping, "When will we see the child, healthy and able-bodied?"

<sup>37</sup> Paravahera Vajirañāṇa Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation: In Theory and Practice*, Second (Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1975), p. 272.

<sup>38</sup> "Sympathy | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.Com," accessed February 26, 2025, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/sympathy?q=sympathy>.

<sup>39</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 312.

<sup>40</sup> *Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 128.

<sup>41</sup> H. Gunaratana, "A Critical Analysis of the Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation" (Washington, The American University, 1980), p. 129.

<sup>42</sup> *Vibhaṅga Pāli*, p. 88: *Ekaṃ puggalaṃ neva manāpaṃ na amanāpaṃ disvā upekkhako assa, evameva sabbe satte upekkhāya pharati.*

<sup>43</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 344; *Visuddhimaggamahāṭīkā*, vol.1, p. 384.

<sup>44</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 344; *Visuddhimaggamahāṭīkā*, vol.1, p. 384.

<sup>45</sup> *The Path of Freedom*, p. 193.

<sup>46</sup> *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 2, p. 93.

When the child is crying and distressed, they feel compassion upon hearing the child's cry. Parents experience unselfish delight when they see the child walk and play freely. When the child marries and sustains his or her own life, the parents maintain neutrality.<sup>47</sup> The example given in the *Vimuttimaggā* is similar except for the neutrality, as noted earlier.<sup>48</sup> The Buddha himself also illustrated the nature of loving-kindness by comparing it with the attitude of a mother towards her only child.<sup>49</sup>

Among the four sublime states, loving-kindness plays a foundational role. Compassion and others arise depending upon loving-kindness. For example, when one has loving-kindness, one is moved by others' suffering. Compassion, unselfish delight, and neutrality arise easily in a person who has developed loving-kindness.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps for this reason, Pali texts often present the teachings of Sublime Dwelling using only it. For example, *Mettā Sutta*,<sup>51</sup> *Mettāsahagata Sutta*,<sup>52</sup> *Mettābhāvanā Sutta*,<sup>53</sup> and so on. In some cases, only the benefits of loving-kindness are shown. For instance, loving-kindness is singled out as a state that leads to growth (*aparihāniyā*).<sup>54</sup> However, in such cases, it should be understood that other sublime states also accrue such benefits. In this paper, therefore, discourses mentioning only loving-kindness are considered as instances of Sublime Dwelling.

#### IV. LIBERATION OF MIND (*CETOVIMUTTI*)

The expression 'liberation of mind' (*cetovimutti*) appears commonly in Pali texts in two contexts. First, it denotes 'liberation of mind' through complete freedom from defilements. It is synonymous with the attainment of *Nibbāna*. In this sense, it is frequently termed 'unshakeable liberation of mind' (*akuppā cetovimutti*).<sup>55</sup> Commentaries identify it as the Fruition of Arhantship (*arahatta-phala*).<sup>56</sup> Second, it is used to describe the effect of the Sublime Dwelling. This can be seen in phrases like 'liberation of mind by loving-kindness' (*mettā cetovimutti*)<sup>57</sup> and similar expressions for each sublime state. In such contexts, the phrase 'immeasurable liberation of mind' (*appamāṇā cetovimutti*)<sup>58</sup> is also used. As explained earlier, this expression is used because the four Sublime Dwellings have to be radiated boundlessly.

<sup>47</sup> *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 2, p. 157.

<sup>48</sup> *Path of Freedom*, pp. 181, 191 - 193.

<sup>49</sup> *Khuddakapāṭha Pāḷi*, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 91.

<sup>51</sup> *Samyuttanikāya*, vol. 5, p. 131; *Anguttaranikāya*, vol. 4, p. 150; *Anguttaranikāya*, vol. 5, p. 342; *Khuddakapāṭha Pāḷi*, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Samyuttanikāya*, vol. 5, p. 115.

<sup>53</sup> *Itivuttaka Pāḷi*, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Dīghanikāya*, vol. 2, pp. 80 - 81.

<sup>55</sup> *Dasuttara Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya*, vol. 3, p. 273.

<sup>56</sup> *Buddhaghosa Thera, Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsini)*, vol. 3, p. 1057.

<sup>57</sup> *Saṅgīti Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya*, vol. 3, p. 248.

<sup>58</sup> *Mahāvedalla Sutta*, *Majjhimanikāya*, vol. 1, p. 297.

The commentaries outline five forms of liberation: 'liberation through suppression' (*vikkhambhanavimutti*), 'liberation by opposing factor' (*tadaṅgavimutti*), 'liberation through eradication' (*samucchedavimutti*), 'liberation through tranquilization' (*paṭippassaddhivimutti*), and 'liberation through escape' (*nissaraṇavimutti*).<sup>59</sup> Among these, the liberation attained through Sublime Dwelling is mainly the 'liberation through suppression' as absorption-level concentration can be achieved by cultivating four sublime states. Commentaries explain the five types of 'liberation' also as five kinds of 'abandonment' (*pahāna*).<sup>60</sup> Essentially, it highlights different forms of abandoning mental afflictions.

The first type of liberation denotes a temporary form of liberation achieved by suppressing mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) by the power of deep concentration (*samādhi*), such as the meditative absorptions (*jhāna*). In this type of liberation, hindrances are temporarily subdued. The neighborhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*), which is in proximity to absorptions, also suppresses hindrances.<sup>61</sup> Texts like *Visuddhimagga* state that one can attain all fine-material absorptions through Sublime Dwelling.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the 'liberation through suppression' can be achieved through this practice.

According to commentaries, in texts that use only the term *mettā*, both the neighborhood and absorption are implied. However, when it is paired with 'liberation of mind,' it refers only to the loving-kindness that has reached absorption.<sup>63</sup> Sublime Dwelling may be aroused just as a wholesome state of mind or as a 'meritorious' act of mind.<sup>64</sup> Texts say that the development of *mettā* is a much higher form of merit among those that are in the mundane level.<sup>65</sup> When it is developed systematically as a meditation practice, it can lead to neighborhood concentration and absorption.

The second type of liberation refers to liberation from hindrances and unwholesome states by developing their opposing wholesome factors. One achieves this liberation by counteracting specific defilements. In the commentaries, it is mainly explained about abandoning doubt, wrong views, and ignorance. This is mainly achieved through insight (*vipassanā*) or by applying opposing wholesome mental factors.<sup>66</sup> As the sublime states oppose

<sup>59</sup> *Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 2, p. 426.

<sup>60</sup> *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā* (*Aṭṭhasālinī*), p. 351.

<sup>61</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 131.

<sup>62</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 113.

<sup>63</sup> Buddhaghosa Thera, *Samyuttanikāya Aṭṭhakathā* (*Sāratthapakāsinī*), vol.3, p. 105; Buddhaghosa Thera, *Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā* (*Sammohavinodanī*), vol. 1, p. 75.

<sup>64</sup> *Brahmavihāra Dhamma*, pp.11 - 12.

<sup>65</sup> *Okkhā Sutta*, *Samyuttanikāya*, vol. 2, p. 264; *Velāma Sutta*, *Aṅguttaranikāya*, vol. 4, pp. 392 - 395.

<sup>66</sup> *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā*, p. 352; *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 39; Mahānāma Thera, *Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā* (*Saddhammapakāsinī*), vol. 1, p. 122.

negative mental qualities like hatred and aversion,<sup>67</sup> Sublime Dwelling is also related to liberation by the opposing factor.

The third type of liberation is a permanent liberation achieved by eradicating defilements through the noble Path (*magga*).<sup>68</sup> Unlike the previous two types of liberation, this liberation ensures that the hindrances and unwholesome states that have been abandoned never arise again. At the highest level, this is the liberation of an Arahant, one who has eliminated all defilements and escaped the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). Sublime Dwelling cannot achieve this liberation directly. However, it supports 'liberation through eradication' in two ways. First, the concentration attained through Sublime Dwelling provides a foundation for practicing insight. Second, its cultivation aids insight by keeping ill will and similar negative states at bay. Liberation through eradication can be attained through the practice of insight, but Sublime Dwelling is a serenity meditation.

The remaining two types of liberation are related to 'liberation through eradication.' Liberation through tranquilization is the result of attaining the Path. It refers to the calming or pacification of the defilements at the stage of Fruition (*phala*). In the process of enlightenment, it comes immediately after the Path. The final type of liberation refers to 'escaping' from the defilements and the cycle of rebirth through the realization of *Nibbāna*. This represents the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path, where one transcends all forms of suffering and attains complete freedom from rebirth.<sup>69</sup>

The 'liberation' associated with Sublime Dwelling is primarily liberation from ill will (*byāpāda*).<sup>70</sup> The practice of Sublime Dwelling suppresses mental states rooted in hatred and does not allow them to appear in the mind. To emphasize this effect of Sublime Dwelling, the *Saṅgīti Sutta* states that ill will cannot seize the mind of one who has developed Sublime Dwelling.<sup>71</sup> This practice not only prevents the arising of ill will but also abandons it if present.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, as absorption can be attained through Sublime Dwelling, it can also suppress other hindrances.

## V. BRAHMAVIHĀRA AND INNER PEACE

The four sublime states represented by Sublime Dwelling help in fostering inner peace in two ways. As noted earlier, they first help eliminate negative states of mind such as ill will. A common context in which Pali texts teach Sublime Dwelling is the abandonment of such states. For example, in the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, the Buddha instructs that loving-kindness should be

<sup>67</sup> *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, *Majjhimanikāya*, vol. 1, p. 424.

<sup>68</sup> *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 39; *Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 123; *Visud-dhimagga*, vol. 2, p. 337.

<sup>69</sup> *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 39.

<sup>70</sup> *Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 75.

<sup>71</sup> *Saṅgīti Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya*, vol. 3, pp. 248 - 249.

<sup>72</sup> *Nīvaṇappahānavagga*, *Aṅguttaranikāya*, vol. 1, p. 4.

developed to abandon ill will, compassion should be developed to eliminate thoughts of violence, unselfish delight should be developed to abandon displeasure, and neutrality should be developed to eliminate aversion.<sup>73</sup> The sublime states directly counteract the four unwholesome states. In the *Saṅgīti Sutta*, neutrality is shown as a way to abandon craving.<sup>74</sup> Thus, Sublime Dwelling directly opposes two of the five hindrances as counteracting states.

Secondly, hindrances and other unwholesome states are abandoned when one attains absorption concentration.<sup>75</sup> As noted earlier, this, too, can be achieved through Sublime Dwelling. In serenity meditation, the elimination of hindrances signifies 'serenity' (*samatha*),<sup>76</sup> a calm effectuated by deeper concentration.<sup>77</sup> It can also be interpreted as 'peace.' Technically, it is termed 'serenity of mind' (*cittasamatha*).<sup>78</sup> In everyday terms, it can be called 'peaceful mind.'

The inner peace achieved by Sublime Dwelling is also evident in the benefits of cultivating it. The *Mettā Sutta*<sup>79</sup> outlines eleven benefits of developing loving-kindness, including sleeping well, awakening calmly, attaining concentration easily, and serene appearance, among others. In such instances, the term '*sukha*,' which is typically translated as 'happiness,' is better rendered as 'peace' or 'ease.' This reflects a mind unburdened by defilement. Indeed, only a mind freed from ill will through the radiation of boundless Sublime Dwelling can induce such a tranquil state.

## VI. EXTENDING PEACE AND HARMONY THROUGH BRAHMAVIHĀRA

The inner peace cultivated by Sublime Dwelling naturally extends to promote external peace and happiness. This role is emphasized across numerous Pali discourses. For example, in the *Kosambiya Sutta*, the Buddha includes loving-kindness among states that foster cohesion, cordiality, love, and respect, and leads to harmony, concord, and unity.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the *Mettā Sutta* highlights how Sublime Dwelling fosters mutual goodwill. It first generates internal peace by cultivating goodwill toward all beings. As a result of radiating sublime states, others also generate goodwill towards oneself in return.

The *Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta*<sup>81</sup> further illustrates how the practice of loving-

<sup>73</sup> Majjhimanikāya, vol.1, p.424; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995), pp. 530 - 531.

<sup>74</sup> *Dīghanikāya*, vol. 3, p. 249.

<sup>75</sup> *Dīghanikāya*, vol. 3, p. 94.

<sup>76</sup> *Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 315.

<sup>77</sup> *Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 3, p. 983.

<sup>78</sup> *Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 2, p. 522.

<sup>79</sup> *Mettā Sutta, Aṅguttaranikāya*, vol. 4, p. 150.

<sup>80</sup> Majjhimanikāya, vol 1, p. 322: *Piyakaraṇā garukaraṇā saṅgahāya avivādāya sāmaggīyā ekibhāvāya saṃvattanti*; *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 420.

<sup>81</sup> Majjhimanikāya, vol. 1, p. 206: *Samaggā sammodamānā avivadamānā khīrodakibhūtā*



kindness helps a community live peacefully. In this *Sutta*, the Buddha asks a group of three monks if they were living in concord, without disputing. The monks affirm that they do. They attribute it to three strategies: bodily restraint, the complete practice of loving-kindness, and mutual deference. These three factors enable them to dwell together harmoniously without quarreling. According to this *Sutta*, a key aspect of loving-kindness's role in harmony is its expression through bodily and verbal conduct, not merely as a mental state. The *Sutta* also emphasizes practicing loving-kindness consistently, "both in front and behind," meaning without duplicity.

Preventing anger within oneself and avoiding provoking others a critical steps in fostering peace. In this regard, tolerance (*khanti*) or forbearance (*Timika*) plays a significant role. The Buddha emphasizes this quality of mind on various occasions about harmonious co-existence among beings. For example, he states that "tolerance and forbearance are highest religious practices."<sup>82</sup> Without developing tolerance, one cannot obtain external peace and harmony. To emphasize this point, the Buddha asserts in the *Sedaka Sutta* that "one protects others by developing tolerance."<sup>83</sup> Here, 'protection' is used to refer to fostering a harmonious relationship. In the lack of tolerance, one is easily irritated and allows anger to arise in the mind. Consequently, one's mind is not peaceful. Commentaries explain that it is a manifestation of 'non-hatred' (*adosa*).<sup>84</sup> As noted earlier, loving-kindness is also a manifestation of non-hatred. Thus, in the ultimate sense, 'tolerance' is related to Sublime Dwelling.

In the Pali texts, Sublime Dwelling primarily denotes sublime mental states. For example, expressions such as '*mettācitta*' (mind with loving-kindness) and '*mettā cetovimutti*' (liberation of mind through loving-kindness) a commonly used. As noted earlier, Pali texts frequently present it also as encompassing physical and verbal dimensions. This is said about actions that are done in association with Sublime Dwelling. For example, verbal loving-kindness refers to speaking kindly and gently. Similarly, bodily compassion refers to abstaining from actions that hurt others physically. The practice of Sublime Dwelling through speech and bodily action is particularly important in the practice of morality. The precepts included in the morality training mainly involve abstaining from harming others. For this reason, Venerable Buddhaghosa explains that *brahma* means excellent because *brahmavihāra* represents excellent attitudes held towards beings.<sup>85</sup> When actions are done

---

*aññamaññaṃ piyacakkhūhi sampassantā viharatha; Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 301 - 302.

<sup>82</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse 184.

<sup>83</sup> *Sedaka Sutta, Saṃyuttanikāya*, vol. 5, p. 169; Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, vol. 2 (USA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 1648.

<sup>84</sup> *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā*, vol. 1, p. 111; *Visuddhimaggamahāṭikā*, vol.1, p.350. Mahāsi Sayadaw, pp. 8 - 9.

<sup>85</sup> *Path of Purification*, p. 314.



based on such attitudes, they do not hurt others. This consequently leads to peaceful co-existence with other beings.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This paper presented 'peace' as a state achieved through the absence of mental defilements such as greed, hatred, and delusion. It attempted to present how the Sublime Dwelling plays an important role in attaining this peace by mainly eliminating hatred. As the primary sources of conflict and discord are states rooted in hatred, it is essential to abandon them for peace. Buddhism teaches various approaches to abandon hatred. However, the most recurring method in the Pali texts is Sublime Dwelling. Each of the sublime states works like an antidote to specific unwholesome tendencies. Hatred is abandoned by loving-kindness, violence is abandoned by compassion, jealousy is abandoned by unselfish delight, and aversion is abandoned by neutrality. Sublime Dwelling opposes these states by preventing their emergence and abandoning them if present.

As a serenity meditation, Sublime Dwelling helps to foster inner peace by developing deeper levels of concentration and by countering hindrances of mind. By developing the sublime states systematically, one can attain the stage of neighborhood concentration and complete absorption. The attainment of absorption marks suppression of hindrances, arising of joy, and tranquility. Such a state of absorption is inherently peaceful and is described as 'serenity of mind. Although this type of liberation is temporary, it indeed aids in the permanent removal of defilements.

Another context in which Sublime Dwelling is presented in the text is for fostering harmony and goodwill. It has two aspects. First, Sublime Dwelling helps a person to be benevolent and engage in kind verbal and bodily action. As verbal and bodily actions are generated by the mind, acting with Sublime dwelling makes the actions benevolent. For example, if one speaks or does something with Sublime Dwelling in the mind, one creates a harmonious atmosphere.

Second, discourses like the *Kosambiya Sutta* and *Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta* highlight the need to practice Sublime Dwelling in bodily and verbal conduct. As a result of such complete practice of Sublime Dwelling, one lives in concord and unity, dissolving conflict and fostering goodwill in society. Here, tolerance, a protective quality closely related to Sublime Dwelling, plays a vital role. The four sublime states, paired with the practice of tolerance, lead to peace within and contribute to external peace in society and beyond.

## REFERENCES

- Āṅguttaranikāya*, vol. 1. 1989. Edited by Richard Morris. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London: Pali Text Society.
- Āṅguttaranikāya*, vol. 4, 5. 1979. Edited by E. Hardy. London: Pali Text Society.
- Anuruddha Thera. 1910. *Compendium of Philosophy*. Edited by Mrs. Rhys Davids. Translated by Shwe Zan Aung. London: Pali Text Society.
- Arahant Upatissa. 1995. *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimagga)*. Translated by N. R. M. Ehara, Thera Soma, and Thera Kheminda. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bhadanta Anuruddha, and Bhadanta Sumaṅgalasāmi. 2002. *Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma and Exposition of the Topics of Abhidhamma*. Translated by R. P. Wijeratne and Rupert Gethin. London: Pali Text Society.
- Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed. 2016. *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. 4th ed. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed. 2012. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Āṅguttaranikāya*. Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications.
- Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. 2017. *The Suttanipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses Together with Its Commentaries*. Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications.
- Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, vol. 2. Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications.
- Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, trans. 1982. *The Path of Discrimination (Paṭisambhidāmagga)*. London: Pali Text Society.
- Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, trans. 1999. *The Path of Purification*. 5th ed. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. 1995. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bhikkhu Ṭhanissaro. 2014. *Sublime Attitudes*. California: Metta Forest Monastery. [https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/TheSublimeAttitudes\\_181215.pdf](https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/TheSublimeAttitudes_181215.pdf).
- Buddhaghosa Thera. *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā (Aṭṭhasālinī)*. 1897. Edited by Edward Muller. London: Pali Text Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera. *Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsini)*, vol. 1. 1929. Edited by T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter. London: Pali Text Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera. *Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsini)*. vol. 2. 1931. Edited by W. Stede. London: Pali Text Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera. *Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsini)*. vol. 3. 1932. Edited by W. Stede. London: Pali Text Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera, *Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdanī)*, vol. 1. 1922, 1983 Edited by J. H. Woods and D. Kosambi. London: Pali Text Society.

- Buddhaghosa Thera, *Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdanī)*, vol. 2. 1928, 1979, 2016 Edited by J. H. Woods and D. Kosambi. London: Pali Text Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera, *Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdanī)*, vol. 3, 4. 1977. Edited by I. B. Horne. London: Pali Texts Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera. *Samyuttanikāya Aṭṭhakathā (Sāratthapakāsinī)*, vol. 3. 1937, 1977. Edited by F. L. Woodward. London: Pali Text Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera. *Suttanipāṭa Aṭṭhakathā (Paramatthajotikā)*, vol. 1. 1916. Edited by Helmer Smith. London: Pali Text Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera. *Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā (Sammohavinodanī)*, vol. 1. 1980. Edited by A. P. Buddhaddatta Thero. London: Pali Text Society.
- Buddhaghosa Thera. *Visuddhimagga*, vol. 1, 2. 2024. CSCD 4.1. Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Davids, Mrs. Rhys. 1931. *Sakya; or Buddhist Origins*. London: Broadway House.
- Dhammapāla Thera. *Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā (Paramatthadīpanī II)*. 2024. CSCD 4.1. Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Dhammapada Pāli*. 2024. CSCD 4.1. Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Dhammapāla Thera. *Visuddhimaggamahāṭīkā*, vol.1, 2. 2024. CSCD 4.1. Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Dīghanikāya*, vol. 1. 1890. Edited by T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter. London: Pali Text Society.
- Dīghanikāya*, vol. 2. 1995. Edited by T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter. London: Pali Text Society.
- Dīghanikāya*, vol. 3. 1992. Edited by J. Estlin Carpenter. London: Pali Text Society.
- Gunaratana, H. 1980. "A Critical Analysis of the Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation." PhD diss., The American University, Washington.
- Itivuttaka Pāli*. 1975. Edited by Ernst Windisch. London: Pali Text Society.
- Khuddakapāṭha Pāli*. 1978. Edited by Helmer Smith and Mabel Hunt. London: Pali Text Society.
- Mahānāma Thera. *Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā (Saddhammapakāsinī)*, vol. 1. 2024. CSCD 4.1. Igatpuri: Vipassanā Research Institute.
- Mahāsi Sayadaw. 1985. *Brahmavihāra Dhamma*. 4th ed. Yangon: Buddhadasananuggaha Press.
- Majjhimanikāya*, vol. 1. 1993. Edited by V. Trenckner. London: Pali Text Society.
- Nyanaponika Thera. 2008. *The Four Sublime States*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. [https://bps.lk/olib/wh/wh006\\_Nyanaponika\\_The-Four-Sublime-States.pdf](https://bps.lk/olib/wh/wh006_Nyanaponika_The-Four-Sublime-States.pdf).
- Pe Maung Tin. 1976. *The Expositor (Aṭṭhasālinī)*. Edited by Mrs. Rhys Davids. Vol. 2. London: Pali Text Society.
- Piyadassi Thera. 1979. *The Buddha's Ancient Path*. 2nd ed. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

- Samyuttanikāya*, vol. 1. 1998. Edited by G. A. Somaratne. London: Pali Text Society.
- Samyuttanikāya*, vol. 2. 1888. Edited by L. Feer. London: Pali Text Society.
- Samyuttanikāya*, vol. 5. 1898. Edited by L. Feer. London: Pali Text Society.
- Shaw, Sarah. 2006. *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts From the Pāli Canon*. PDF. New York: Routledge.
- Udāna Pāli*. 1885. Edited by Paul Steinthal. London: Pali Text Society.
- Vajirañāṇa, Venerable. *Buddhist Meditation: In Theory and Practice*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Venerable Nārada Mahāthera. 1979. *A Manual of Abhidhamma*. 5th ed. Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society.
- Vibhaṅga Pāli*. 1904. Edited by C. A. F. Rhys Davids. London: Pali Text Society.
- Walpola Rahula. 2006. *What the Buddha Taught*. Colombo: Buddhist Cultural Centre.
- “Pity | Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary.” Accessed February 26, 2025. [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/pity\\_1?q=pity](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/pity_1?q=pity).
- “Sympathy | Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary.” Accessed February 26, 2025. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/sympathy?q=sympathy>.

### **Pāli - English Glossary**

- Accanta-santi*: Ultimate peace; refers to the complete tranquility of *Nibbāna*.
- Adosa*: Non-hatred; a wholesome mental factor linked to *mettā* and tolerance.
- Akuppā cetovimutti*: Unshakable liberation of mind; the permanent freedom of an Arahant.
- Alobha*: Non-greed; a wholesome mental state that counters greed (*lobha*).
- Appamāṇa*: Without boundary; boundless, describing the limitless radiation of sublime states.
- Appamaññā*: Immeasurable states; another term for the four sublime states due to their boundless nature.
- Arahatta-phala*: Fruition of Arahantship; the result of the Arahant’s path, ultimate liberation.
- Avihiṃsā-vitakka*: Thought of non-cruelty; a component of Right Thought linked to *brahmavihāra*.
- Avyāpāda-vitakka*: Thought of non-ill will; a component of Right Thought linked to *brahmavihāra*.
- Brahma*: Excellent, best; etymological root of *brahmavihāra*, also related to *Brahmā* divinity.
- Brahmacariyā*: Sublime practice; encompassing mental, verbal, and physical ethical conduct.
- Brahmavihāra*: Sublime Dwelling; the four sublime states (*mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, *upekkhā*).
- Byāpāda*: Ill will; a hindrance and negative state countered by *mettā*.

- Cetasika*: Mental factor; a constituent of consciousness, e.g., *adosa*, *alobha*.
- Cetovimutti*: Liberation of mind; freedom from defilements, temporary or permanent.
- Cittasamatha*: Serenity of mind; mental calm from concentration, equated with peace.
- Dosa*: Hatred; a root defilement opposed by *brahmavihāra*.
- Jhāna*: Meditative absorption; deep concentration states.
- Kamma*: Action; deeds owned by beings.
- Karuṇā*: Compassion; second sublime state, counters violent thought and action.
- Khanti*: Tolerance, forbearance; linked to *adosa* and *mettā* for external peace.
- Lobha*: Greed; a root defilement countered by *alobha*.
- Magga*: Path; the Noble Path leading to the eradication of defilements.
- Mettā*: Loving-kindness; first sublime state, counters ill will.
- Mitta*: Friend; basis of *mettā*'s attitude of goodwill.
- Muditā*: Unselfish delight; third sublime state, counters jealousy and displeasure.
- Nibbāna*: Nibbana; ultimate liberation and peace, freedom from defilements.
- Nibbuti*: Peace; synonymous with cessation of unwholesome states.
- Nissaraṇavimutti*: Liberation through escape; freedom from *saṃsāra* via *Nibbāna*.
- Nīvaraṇa*: Hindrances; five mental obstacles.
- Pahāna*: Abandonment; five types paralleling liberation.
- Paññā*: Wisdom; one of three training.
- Paṭippassaddhivimutti*: Liberation through tranquilization; calming defilements at Fruition.
- Phala*: Fruition; arises after Path in the process of enlightenment.
- Pīti*: Joy; contrasted with *muditā*'s gladness.
- Samādhi*: Concentration; mental focus, including proximate and absorption levels.
- Samatha*: Serenity; calm from concentration, equated with peace.
- Sammā-saṅkappa*: Right Thought; includes non-ill will and non-cruelty.
- Samṣāra*: Cycle of rebirth; transcended in liberation through escape.
- Samucchedavimutti*: Liberation through eradication; permanent freedom via the Path.
- Sikkhā*: Training; three types (*sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*) encompassing the Path.
- Sīla*: Morality; one of the three training.
- Sukha*: Happiness, ease; interpreted as peace in *brahmavihāra* contexts.
- Tadaṅgavimutti*: Liberation by opposing factor; counters defilements with wholesome states.
- Taṇhā*: Craving; a root defilement, linked to neutrality's opposition.
- Tatramajjhataṭṭā*: Mental equipoise; *Abhidhamma* term for *upekkhā*'s neutrality.

*Upacāra-samādhī*: Proximate concentration; stage nearing absorption.

*Upekkhā*: Neutrality; fourth sublime state, counters aversion.

*Vihāra*: Dwelling; meditative state or abode.

*Vikkhambhanavimutti*: Liberation through suppression; temporary freedom via concentration.

*Vimutti*: Liberation; freedom from defilements.



# THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS: PATHWAY TO INNER GROWTH AND RENEWAL

Dr. Jyoti Gaur\*

## Abstract:

Forgiveness is a profound process that paves the way for personal growth, emotional healing, and inner transformation. While religions may differ in their doctrines, the core human values they promote are strikingly similar. Forgiveness, with its psychological, emotional, and sometimes spiritual aspects, empowers individuals to let go of anger, overcome personal challenges, and cultivate inner peace. This paper delves into the dynamics and advantages of forgiveness, focusing on its positive effects on physical, emotional, and mental well-being. It also examines forgiveness within interpersonal relationships and communities, emphasizing its role in fostering empathy, resilience, and collective harmony. Techniques such as cognitive reframing, self-compassion, mindfulness, and therapeutic approaches are explored as effective strategies to nurture a forgiving mindset. By presenting these perspectives, the study highlights forgiveness as a transformative force that can reshape life experiences and promote emotional well-being.

**Keywords:** *Forgiveness, Inner growth, Emotional healing, Personal renewal, Mental well-being, Psychological resilience, Emotional intelligence, Self-compassion, Interpersonal relationships, Spiritual growth, Conflict resolution, Mindfulness, Letting go, Healing trauma, Personal transformation.*

---

\* Professor, Suresh Gyan Vihar University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is a multifaceted concept extensively explored across disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, and theology, with definitions that often encompass emotional, cognitive, and relational aspects. According to Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000),<sup>1</sup> forgiveness involves letting go of resentment and judgment toward those who have caused harm, while cultivating emotions like compassion, generosity, and even love. Far from being a single act, forgiveness is an intentional and transformative process that promotes emotional healing, enabling individuals to restore inner peace and achieve personal growth.

## II. ARE THERE DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL APPROACHES TO FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a universal concept, yet its meaning and importance differ across cultural contexts. In Western societies, forgiveness is frequently regarded as a personal decision closely associated with emotional relief, self-enhancement, and individual well-being, fostering emotional health and personal development. On the other hand, in many Eastern cultures shaped by philosophies such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, forgiveness is often perceived as a collective practice integral to maintaining social harmony and fulfilling moral obligations. For instance, in Buddhism, forgiveness is considered essential for alleviating suffering and progressing toward enlightenment.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1. The Art of Letting Go Through Mindfulness and Compassion

The teachings of the Buddha consistently highlight the importance of forgiveness and its profound significance. A striking example is the relationship between the Buddha and his cousin, Devadatta, who, driven by jealousy, sought to harm and even kill the Buddha. Despite these acts of malice, the Buddha chose compassion and forgiveness over retaliation, famously stating, “Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” In Buddhism, forgiveness is deeply intertwined with compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*), promoting the release of anger and resentment to achieve inner peace and enlightenment.

Buddhist traditions often include forgiveness rituals aimed at restoring harmony and strengthening interpersonal bonds, reflecting

<sup>1</sup> Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000): 277 – 285.

<sup>2</sup> Lin YY, Swanson, D. P., Rogge RD. (2021): 12.

the interconnected nature of all beings.<sup>3</sup> Central to this philosophy is the cultivation of *metta*, or loving-kindness, which encourages individuals to extend compassion to themselves and others. Buddhist practices of forgiveness frequently incorporate meditation techniques designed to foster empathy and understanding. For example, Loving-Kindness Meditation involves wishing for the well-being of all beings, including those who have caused harm, reinforcing the transformative power of forgiveness.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2. Christianity: Embracing Grace and Redemption

In Christianity, forgiveness is a cornerstone of faith, deeply embedded in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Central to Christian theology is the concept of grace – unearned favor granted by God to humanity. This grace serves as a model for Christians to forgive others, reflecting God’s boundless love and mercy.

One of the most powerful illustrations of forgiveness in the Bible is the Parable of the Prodigal Son, found in the Gospel of Luke. In this story, a younger son wastes his inheritance on indulgent living but, driven by hardship, returns to his father in repentance. The father, seeing him from afar, runs to embrace him and celebrates his return without reproach, exemplifying unconditional love and the joy of reconciliation. Similarly, during his crucifixion, Jesus demonstrated ultimate forgiveness by praying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” embodying the selfless love central to Christian doctrine.

Forgiveness in Christianity is both a moral imperative and a spiritual pathway. It is enshrined in the Lord’s Prayer, which emphasizes reciprocal forgiveness as vital for spiritual growth and communal harmony: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” This underscores the idea that forgiveness is essential not only for personal salvation but also for nurturing relationships and building cohesive communities.

Christian worship often incorporates forgiveness through prayers, rituals, and sacraments. Practices like confession and reconciliation services encourage believers to release grievances and seek unity with others, promoting personal healing and collective restoration.<sup>5</sup> These traditions reinforce the transformative power of forgiveness as an

---

<sup>3</sup> Kornfield, J. (1993): 83 - 86.

<sup>4</sup> Germer, C. K. (2005): 14.

<sup>5</sup> Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L. (2005): 1112 – 1123; and, Hoffman, M. (2007): 213 – 22.

expression of divine love and a means to strengthen interpersonal and communal bonds.

### 2.3. Hinduism: Cultivating Ahimsa and Inner Peace

Hinduism emphasizes forgiveness as an integral part of spiritual growth and social harmony, deeply rooted in the principles of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Karma* (the law of cause and effect). Forgiveness is seen as both a personal virtue and a societal necessity, promoting reconciliation and unity.

The *Bhagavad Gita* offers profound insights into forgiveness through the story of Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava. Following the devastating Kurukshetra War, Yudhishtira is consumed by guilt over the immense loss of life, including that of his family and revered teachers. Guided by Lord Krishna, he learns that forgiveness is not a sign of weakness but a vital component of *Dharma* (righteousness). Krishna advises Yudhishtira to rule with compassion, forgive those who have erred, and prioritize the welfare of his kingdom. This journey teaches that forgiveness is essential for overcoming suffering and fostering a harmonious society, illustrating the moral and spiritual strength that forgiveness embodies. The *Bhagavad Gita* highlights forgiveness as a key virtue, stating, "Forgiveness is the noblest quality of a man; it is the greatest virtue".<sup>6</sup>

Hindu practices further reinforce the significance of forgiveness. Rituals like *Prayaschitta* (atonement) and *Kshama* (forgiveness) are central to restoring harmony and mending relationships. Acts of reconciliation during festivals, such as Diwali, encourage individuals to let go of grievances and rebuild connections with family and friends, fostering communal togetherness. Ceremonies like *Pradakshina*, where devotees circumambulate sacred objects or deities while seeking forgiveness for their transgressions, exemplify the role of forgiveness in spiritual practices.

Hindu scriptures, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, underscore forgiveness as a pathway to inner peace and societal cohesion, advocating for it as a means to transcend anger and conflict, thereby nurturing understanding and unity.<sup>7</sup> Through its teachings and practices, Hinduism presents forgiveness as a powerful tool for personal transformation and the creation of a harmonious world.

---

<sup>6</sup>Radhakrishnan, S. (1999): 8 - 12.

<sup>7</sup> Rao, M. S. (2013): 55.

## 2.4. Jainism: Spiritual growth and liberation

In Jainism, forgiveness is a fundamental principle intricately linked to *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Aparigraha* (non-attachment). It is regarded as a vital practice for spiritual growth, purification of the soul, and the prevention of negative karma accumulation. Forgiveness is not only a personal virtue but also a means of fostering harmony within oneself and the community. Jains express this value through the phrase *Micchāmi Dukkaḍaṃ*, meaning, “If I have caused you to harm, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word, or action, I seek forgiveness.”

A poignant example of Jain forgiveness is the story of Acharya Harikesha, who embodied patience and compassion when confronted by Prince Kuniya. The prince attacked and insulted Harikesha, yet the Acharya remained calm and refrained from retaliation, adhering to Jain principles of non-violence and empathy. Instead, Harikesha prayed for Kuniya’s well-being and gently advised him on the destructive nature of anger. This act of profound forgiveness moved the prince, leading him to repent and seek forgiveness. The story illustrates the Jain belief that true strength lies in forgiveness, which nurtures inner peace and inspires compassion in others.

Jains emphasize forgiveness as a communal and personal practice, particularly during the *Paryushana* festival and *Samvatsari Pratikraman*. These occasions are dedicated to self-reflection, seeking forgiveness, and granting it to others, fostering spiritual renewal. During this period, Jains actively engage in rituals and prayers, asking for forgiveness from those they may have harmed and forgiving those who have wronged them. This collective practice strengthens unity and compassion within the Jain community, highlighting forgiveness as both a moral duty and a path to liberation (*moksha*).<sup>8</sup>

Through its stories, rituals, and teachings, Jainism underscores forgiveness as an essential virtue, promoting spiritual purification and harmonious coexistence. It demonstrates how forgiveness, rooted in non-violence and detachment, can lead to inner tranquility and inspire positive transformation in others.

## 2.5. Islam: Seeking Allah’s Mercy and Practicing Reconciliation

In Islam, forgiveness is one of the central attributes of Allah (God) and a profound moral virtue encouraged among believers. The *Qur’an*

---

<sup>8</sup> Jain, Viney. (2014): 238.

and *Hadiths* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) provide extensive guidance on the importance and practice of forgiveness. A key verse in the *Qur'an* states, "And let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like for Allah to forgive you?" (*Qur'an* 24:22). This verse highlights the reciprocal nature of forgiveness, urging believers to forgive others as an act of emulating Allah's boundless mercy.

Forgiveness in Islam is seen as both a divine attribute and a pathway to spiritual purification. Through the regular practice of *Salah* (prayer), Muslims are encouraged to reflect on their actions, seek forgiveness for their sins, and extend forgiveness to those who have wronged them. Communal prayers often include appeals for Allah's mercy and encourage believers to reconcile with one another, fostering harmony within families and communities.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most significant occasions for forgiveness in Islam is *Eid al-Fitr*, the celebration that marks the conclusion of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting and spiritual reflection. This festive period is often characterized by acts of forgiveness and reconciliation, as families and communities come together to renew bonds and resolve conflicts.

Islamic teachings emphasize that forgiveness is not a sign of weakness but a manifestation of strength and mercy. By forgiving others, believers reflect the divine qualities of Allah, who is frequently referred to as *Al-Ghaffar* (The Forgiving) and *Al-Rahim* (The Merciful), encouraging a culture of compassion and mutual respect. Through its practices, rituals, and teachings, Islam underscores forgiveness as a means of personal growth, spiritual elevation, and communal harmony.

## 2.6. Judaism: Balancing Justice and Mercy

Judaism emphasizes a balanced approach to forgiveness, integrating the principles of justice and mercy. Central to this practice is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, regarded as the holiest day for seeking forgiveness from both God and others. This day provides an opportunity for introspection, repentance, and renewal, underscoring the importance of repairing relationships and fostering communal harmony.

The process of forgiveness in Judaism is deeply rooted in *Teshuvah*, a structured approach to repentance. *Teshuvah* involves several key steps: acknowledging one's wrongdoing, expressing sincere remorse, seeking forgiveness from those harmed, and making restitution where possible.

---

<sup>9</sup> Fisher, S. (2006): 175 – 192.



This process culminates in a commitment to avoid repeating the offense, demonstrating genuine transformation and a desire to rebuild trust.

## 2.7. Sikhism: Emphasizing Forgiveness and Equality

Sikhism emphasizes forgiveness as a pathway to inner peace, spiritual growth, and social harmony, deeply rooted in its core values of equality, justice, and compassion. Central to Sikh teachings is the practice of *Naam Jaap* (repeating God's name), which helps individuals maintain focus, cultivate humility, and develop a forgiving heart. By constantly connecting with the divine through *Naam Jaap*, Sikhs are encouraged to rise above anger and resentment, embodying forgiveness in their daily lives.

Community involvement plays a significant role in fostering forgiveness within Sikhism. The principles of *Sangat* (holy congregation) and *Pangat* (equality through communal meals) emphasize mutual respect, support, and egalitarianism. These practices encourage Sikhs to seek reconciliation, forgive others, and strengthen bonds within the community.

Forgiveness in Sikhism is also seen not as a weakness but as a strength, aligning with the broader goal of maintaining harmony and upholding justice. By embodying forgiveness, Sikhs strive to live in accordance with divine will, contributing to both personal and collective spiritual well-being.

## III. INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY

Indigenous cultures often emphasize collective approaches to forgiveness, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals within their communities. In many Indigenous spiritual traditions, forgiveness is seen as crucial for healing communal wounds and restoring harmony.

For instance, in certain Native American cultures, forgiveness practices are integrated into ceremonial rituals that promote collective healing, such as the *Sweat Lodge Ceremony*. These ceremonies often involve storytelling, prayer, and deep reflection, allowing individuals to express grievances, seek reconciliation, and work toward emotional healing. Through these practices, the community comes together to address conflicts, mend relationships, and reinforce social cohesion.<sup>10</sup>

The communal aspect of forgiveness in Indigenous traditions underscores its importance not only for individual well-being but also for maintaining balance and harmony within the group. As these diverse spiritual and

---

<sup>10</sup> Glover, J. (2014): 27 – 45.

religious traditions illustrate, forgiveness is not merely a personal choice but a profound spiritual practice that fosters transformation at both the individual and collective levels. Ultimately, forgiveness plays a foundational role in ethical behavior, emotional healing, and the restoration of social harmony across various cultural contexts.

### 3.1. Forgiveness Demystified: Exploring Common Misconceptions

Still, forgiveness is often confused with concepts like reconciliation, condoning, and forgetting, each with unique meanings and relational implications. Understanding these differences clarifies forgiveness's role as an internal process distinct from these other approaches.

**3.1.1. Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation** - Forgiveness involves the internal release of negative emotions toward an offender, whereas reconciliation is a relational process focused on rebuilding trust and requires active participation from both parties.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that forgiveness can occur without reconciliation, allowing an individual to find inner peace without re-establishing a relationship with the offender. In contrast, reconciliation requires the willingness of both individuals to restore trust and repair their bond.<sup>12</sup> While forgiveness can create a foundation for reconciliation, it does not necessitate it.<sup>13</sup>

**3.1.2. Forgiveness vs. Condoning** - Forgiveness is often confused with condoning, which involves excusing or accepting wrongdoing. However, unlike condoning, forgiveness acknowledges the harm caused while choosing to release resentment. Forgiveness recognizes the impact of the offense without justifying or accepting it, allowing for the emotional release of negativity without diminishing the wrongdoing.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, condoning downplays the severity of the offense and can undermine accountability. Forgiveness, on the other hand, empowers individuals by providing them with the agency to control their emotional response, independent of the offense's justification.<sup>15</sup>

**3.1.3. Forgiveness vs. Forgetting** - Forgetting involves erasing or disregarding the offense, whereas forgiveness requires consciously remembering the wrongdoing but choosing to change one's emotional

---

<sup>11</sup> Worthington, E. L., Jr., Mazzeo, S. E., & Canter, D. E. (2005): 235 – 257.

<sup>12</sup> North, J. (1998): 15 – 34). University of Wisconsin Press; and, McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. A. (1997): 985 – 1001.

<sup>13</sup> Exline, J. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000): 409 – 429.

<sup>14</sup> Fincham, F. D. (2000): 36 – 43.

<sup>15</sup> Rye, M. S., et al. (2001): 451 – 469.

response to it. Forgiveness allows individuals to integrate the experience without allowing it to negatively shape their self-identity, facilitating healing without resorting to denial or repression.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, forgetting can leave unresolved emotions that may continue to affect emotional well-being over time.<sup>17</sup>

These differences highlight forgiveness as an internal process that empowers individuals to manage their emotional reactions, ultimately promoting resilience and emotional well-being.

### **3.2. When Forgiveness Feels Impossible: Psychological and Social Obstacles**

Forgiveness is often challenging due to a variety of psychological, emotional, and social factors that complicate the process. Few of these are evident in the current literature, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

**3.2.1. Emotional Pain and Psychological Scars:** Forgiveness can be especially challenging when emotional wounds are profound. The pain of betrayal or hurt often persists, leading to repetitive mental replays of the past injury<sup>18</sup> explain that negative emotions can become ingrained over time, creating habitual patterns that make it difficult to release these feelings and move forward.

**3.2.2. Justice and Fairness:** Many individuals struggle with forgiveness because it can feel like a betrayal of their sense of justice, especially when the wrongdoing remains unresolved or unacknowledged. Exline et al. (2003)<sup>19</sup> found that people who prioritize fairness or retribution may view forgiveness as excusing or minimizing the offender's actions. This perception of injustice can create a significant emotional barrier, making forgiveness feel morally wrong or undeserved.

**3.2.3. Fear of Vulnerability and Future Harm:** Many people hesitate to forgive because they fear it might leave them vulnerable to further harm. Forgiveness involves letting go of anger and resentment, which can feel like relinquishing protective emotional boundaries.

---

<sup>16</sup> Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996): 155 – 170.

<sup>17</sup> Exline, J. J., et al. (2003): 6 – 12.

<sup>18</sup> Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996): 155 – 170; and, Lichtenfeld S, Maier MA, Buechner VL, Fernández Capo M.(2019): 1425.

<sup>19</sup> .Exline, J. J., Baumeister, R. F., Bushman, B. J., Campbell, W. K., & Finkel, E. J. (2003): 658 – 666.

Research by Karremans and Van Lange (2008)<sup>20</sup> suggests that individuals may be reluctant to forgive because they worry it will make them appear weak or exposed to exploitation. This fear of being taken advantage of often prevents people from embracing forgiveness, as they may see it as a loss of control or a potential invitation for further hurt.

**3.2.4. Ego and Pride:** Forgiveness can be challenging when pride or ego are involved, as it may feel like a personal loss or a blow to one's self-esteem. Baumeister et al. (1998)<sup>21</sup> explain that individuals may resist forgiveness because they perceive it as a form of surrender, potentially diminishing their sense of self-worth. In situations where pride is tied to the conflict, forgiving the offender may feel like an admission of weakness or an acknowledgment that they were wronged. This internal struggle between maintaining self-respect and letting go of negative emotions can create a significant barrier to the forgiveness process.

**3.2.5. Attachment to Anger:** For some individuals, anger serves as an empowering emotion, especially in the aftermath of repeated harm or betrayal. Enright et al. (1998)<sup>22</sup> found that anger can provide a sense of control over the situation, giving individuals a way to protect themselves from further hurt. This emotional response can act as a defense mechanism, allowing individuals to feel empowered in the face of injustice. However, forgiveness requires letting go of that anger and control, which can feel uncomfortable or even risky. Surrendering anger in favor of healing may feel like relinquishing the power that anger once provided, making forgiveness a daunting step for those who rely on their anger as a form of emotional protection.

**3.2.6. Difficulty with Empathy:** Forgiveness becomes significantly easier when individuals are able to understand the perspective of the person who has wronged them. Empathy (the ability to recognize and share the feelings of others) helps to soften the emotional barriers built from past harm. When empathy is present, people are more likely to move past their own pain and see the situation from the other person's viewpoint, which makes forgiveness more accessible.<sup>23</sup> However, when empathy is lacking, forgiveness can be much more challenging. Without the ability to appreciate the offender's intentions or circumstances, individuals may become stuck in their own pain, which only deepens

<sup>20</sup> Karremans, J. C., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2008): 1 – 12.

<sup>21</sup> Baumeister, R. F., Exline, J. J., & Sommer, K. L. (1998): 31 – 35.

<sup>22</sup> Enright, R. D., Freedman, S. R., & Rique, J. (1998): 46 – 60.

<sup>23</sup> McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. A. (1997): 985 – 1001.

the emotional divide. The absence of empathy can lead to a defensive mindset, where individuals remain emotionally distant and less likely to seek reconciliation. In this state, forgiveness may seem like an unfair concession or an emotional vulnerability, making it difficult to heal or rebuild relationships. Therefore, fostering empathy is critical in overcoming the challenges of forgiveness. It allows individuals to transcend personal hurt and see the situation in a broader, more compassionate light, which paves the way for reconciliation and emotional healing.

**3.2.7. Fear of Losing Boundaries:** Forgiveness can be challenging when individuals fear it may compromise their personal boundaries, allowing the offender to repeat hurtful behavior. Hall and Fincham (2005)<sup>24</sup> note that forgiveness is often misunderstood as an invitation to be harmed again. In reality, forgiveness is an internal process of letting go of negative emotions, without condoning the behavior or permitting further harm. The difficulty in forgiving arises from emotional scars, cognitive biases, and social factors, making the process feel risky or counterproductive. Forgiveness does not mean losing boundaries; it involves finding peace while still maintaining self-protection.

### **3.3. The Psychology of Forgiveness: Personality Differences in Letting Go**

What They Are Not Letting Go Of:

**3.3.1. Ruminative and Grudge-Holding** - Individuals who struggle with forgiveness often hold onto past wrongs, replaying the hurt and keeping anger and pain alive in their minds. They may be prone to bitterness, vengefulness, and dwelling on negative experiences. Research by Niven et al. (2012)<sup>25</sup> shows that rumination, or the tendency to repeatedly think about past wrongs, can intensify negative emotions and hinder psychological well-being, making the process of forgiveness more difficult for such individuals.

**3.3.2. Low Emotional Resilience** - Individuals who have difficulty forgiving often find it challenging to move on from emotional wounds, as feelings of anger, hurt, and betrayal take over. These strong emotions can cloud their thinking and obstruct their healing journey. They often experience emotional vulnerability, struggle with managing stress, and

---

<sup>24</sup>Hall, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (2005): 459 – 466.

<sup>25</sup> Niven, K., Holman, D., & Stride, C. (2012): 2712 – 2726.

are highly sensitive to perceived offenses, all of which make it harder for them to release negative emotions and embrace forgiveness.

**3.3.3. Strong Sense of Justice and Retribution** - Individuals with a strong belief in fairness and a desire for justice may struggle with forgiveness, as they perceive it as condoning the wrongdoing or letting the offender avoid consequences. Their high need for fairness, desire for retribution, and strong moral compass make it difficult for them to reconcile the act of forgiveness with their sense of right and wrong.

**3.3.4. Ego-Centerism** - Individuals with a strong sense of pride may view forgiveness as a threat to their self-image. For them, letting go of anger or admitting vulnerability can feel like relinquishing control or losing power. Their ego-driven nature, defensiveness, self-righteousness, and pride make it difficult for them to embrace forgiveness, as it challenges their sense of superiority and personal strength.

**3.3.5. Insecure and Fearful of Vulnerability** - Individuals with deep insecurities often fear that forgiveness will leave them vulnerable to further harm or strip away their sense of protection. Struggling with trust, they may have difficulty believing in the goodwill of others. Their distrust, anxiety, insecurity, and fear of being hurt again create a barrier to forgiving, as they are wary of being taken advantage of or betrayed once more.

**3.3.6. Lack of Empathy** - Forgiving requires the ability to understand the offender's perspective, but people who lack empathy often struggle with this. They may find it difficult to put themselves in the other person's shoes and might view the offender as unforgivable. These individuals tend to have low empathy, an inability to consider others' feelings, and rigid thinking, which hinders their ability to forgive.

What They Are Letting Go Of:

**i. High Emotional Intelligence** - These individuals are skilled at processing and managing their emotions, which helps them move beyond negative feelings and forgive more easily. They can empathize with others' shortcomings and grasp the reasons behind harmful actions. They possess strong emotional awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and social skills.

**ii. Non-judgmental and Open-Minded** - Individuals who forgive easily are typically open-minded and refrain from making quick judgments. They recognize that everyone is fallible and are willing to give second chances. They possess a high level of acceptance, open-mindedness, and a non-judgmental attitude.



**iii. Compassionate and Kind** - Individuals with a strong sense of compassion are able to overlook wrongdoings and focus on the well-being of others. They often practice forgiveness to foster peace and harmony in their relationships. They are characterized by kindness, empathy, understanding, and a genuine concern for others' welfare.

**iv. Secure and Confident** - Individuals who forgive easily tend to have a strong sense of self-worth and are not easily affected by others' actions. They possess confidence in their ability to forgive while maintaining their integrity and self-respect. They are emotionally stable, self-assured, and secure in their values.

**v. Spiritual and Philosophical** - Individuals who adhere to spiritual or philosophical teachings often see forgiveness as a vital practice for personal growth and emotional tranquility. They emphasize releasing negative emotions to maintain inner peace and harmony. These individuals embrace spirituality, mindfulness, inner peace, and acceptance of human imperfection.

**vi. Resilient and Positive** - Individuals who find it easy to forgive often demonstrate resilience, recovering quickly from challenges without harboring lingering resentment. They prioritize the positive elements in their relationships and are open to moving past previous conflicts. These individuals possess emotional strength, a hopeful outlook, a present-focused mentality, and a future-oriented perspective.

**vii. Altruistic and Selfless** - People who forgive easily often have a deep sense of altruism, driven by a genuine desire to support others' growth and healing. They prioritize the well-being of others and choose to forgive as a means of releasing emotional burdens and fostering healing. Their actions are rooted in selflessness, compassion, and a focus on the collective good.

The ability to forgive is influenced by a variety of personality traits. "Let go of the past, let go of the future, let go of the present, and cross over to the other shore. With mind wholly liberated, you shall come no more to birth and death." Letting go of past grievances is essential for spiritual liberation and peace. Individuals who find it difficult to forgive often exhibit higher levels of pride, emotional sensitivity, and a strong sense of justice. In contrast, those who are more inclined to forgive typically possess emotional resilience, empathy, and a compassionate outlook. Recognizing these personality differences can help us understand both the obstacles and advantages of forgiveness, offering pathways to improved emotional well-being and better interpersonal relationships for everyone.

#### IV. DECODING FORGIVENESS: PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS AT PLAY

Forgiveness is a multifaceted psychological process that involves mental, emotional, and behavioral transformations. It requires shifting away from emotions like anger and resentment and moving toward a positive or neutral stance on past hurts. This transformation occurs through cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, empathy, and self-compassion. It includes the following mechanisms

**4.1. Cognitive Restructuring** - Cognitive restructuring is a therapeutic technique that involves reframing the offense to diminish negative emotions. It encourages individuals to view the situation more objectively, acknowledging the offender's human imperfections and limitations. This shift in perspective can reduce anger and resentment, leading to emotional relief. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) frequently incorporates cognitive restructuring to alleviate emotional distress and promote healthier emotional responses.<sup>26</sup>

**4.2. Emotional Regulation** - Emotional regulation is a critical skill for managing and responding to emotions in a constructive way, especially in the context of forgiveness. It involves choosing to release negative emotions like anger and resentment, which are often tied to an offense. By using emotional regulation, individuals can work through these challenging emotions, allowing space for compassion and understanding. This process helps people avoid reactions that might worsen the hurt. Techniques such as mindfulness and relaxation can aid in emotional regulation, enabling individuals to reflect on their emotions without becoming overwhelmed. Research indicates that emotional regulation is strongly linked to better mental health and plays a crucial role in forgiveness, helping to reduce stress and negative emotional responses.<sup>27</sup>

**4.3. Empathy Development** - Empathy is the ability to understand and connect with the offender's perspective, which helps reduce judgment and softens feelings of anger. By developing empathy, individuals can consider the motives or struggles of the person who caused harm, fostering a sense of compassion. Research has shown that empathy plays a key role in increasing the willingness to forgive by diminishing

---

<sup>26</sup> Hargrove, T. (2020): 123 – 135.

<sup>27</sup> Keng SL, Smoski MJ, Robins CJ. (2011) :1041 - 56.

negative emotions tied to the offense.<sup>28</sup> As a result, empathy exercises are often integrated into forgiveness training programs to encourage a more compassionate and understanding approach.

#### **4.4. Forgiving Yourself: How Self-Compassion Fuels Emotional Recovery**

Forgiveness often starts with self-compassion, which involves treating oneself with kindness, especially when dealing with feelings of guilt or shame. The story of Angulimala can prove the same.

Meera, a wise and compassionate woman from a peaceful village near the Ganges River, was well-known. However, her life was not always easy. She walked with a limp. When asked about it, she'd tell a narrative that inspired everyone who listened. Meera was a young, angry, and resentful woman years ago. She had suffered many losses, including the death of her father at a young age, recurring crop failures, and betrayal by her closest friend. One day, as she wandered through the forest, her thoughts were muddled by sorrow and frustration. She was so engrossed in her feelings that she didn't notice the thorny bush and a sharp thorn penetrated her foot, inflicting pain throughout her body. She yelled, sitting by the side of the path, blaming herself for not paying attention, and blaming life for its incessant harshness. At the same time, a learned monk passed by and heard her sobbing, he stopped. "Why do you sit here crying, child?" he inquired, sensing her agony. She pointed to the thorn and remarked, "This is just another example of how unjust my life is. Everything hurts, and nothing goes right." The monk thought quietly and smiled. "Tell me, what would you do if your best friend sat here with a thorn in their foot, weeping as you are now?" She paused and reflected for a time. "I would help her pull it out and soothe her pain." "And yet," the monk replied gently, "you let your pain fester. You sit here in rage instead of assisting yourself. Wouldn't you treat yourself with the same kindness and compassion, you would show to a friend?" The woman felt extremely moved by the monk's words. For the first time, she regarded her pain not as a punishment, but as a natural part of existence. She cleansed her wound and removed the thorn. Her bitterness began to soften as the pain subsided. The monk went on, "When life throws thorns in our path, we have two options: blame the world or care for our wounds with compassion." Only by caring for yourself will you be able to move forward without bitterness.

---

<sup>28</sup> Moudatsou M, Stavropoulou A, Philalithis A, Koukouli S. (2020): 26.

Self-forgiveness allows individuals to let go of these burdens, promoting personal growth and self-acceptance. Research by Neff (2003)<sup>29</sup> highlights that self-compassion improves emotional resilience, reduces negative self-judgment, and supports the ability to forgive others. By cultivating self-compassion, individuals are not only better able to forgive themselves but also others, contributing to improved well-being. Incorporating these practices into therapeutic settings can facilitate personal transformation and create a culture of compassion.

#### **4.5. Forgiveness as a Path to Spiritual Growth**

Forgiveness is a deeply transformative process, intertwining emotional healing with spiritual growth. Spiritually, forgiveness is integral to cultivating compassion and achieving inner peace, often regarded as a pathway to higher values and deeper beliefs<sup>30</sup>. It goes beyond being a mere emotional response; it is fundamentally connected to spiritual evolution and the pursuit of tranquility. By releasing anger, resentment, and hurt, individuals make room for healing, peace, and harmony in their lives. Forgiveness, across many spiritual traditions, is revered as a sacred practice that nourishes the soul, strengthens connections with others, and fosters a deeper bond with the divine or one's own inner self. It invites self-reflection, empathy, and a greater understanding of others, transforming negative emotions into a force for personal and communal well-being.

Approaching forgiveness as a spiritual practice not only benefits others but also offers personal liberation from emotional burdens, bringing about true peace and freedom. In various spiritual contexts, forgiveness holds great importance: in Buddhism, it is seen as a means to attain inner peace, while in Christianity and Islam, it is regarded as a divine act aligned with moral and spiritual integrity<sup>31</sup>. Ultimately, forgiveness promotes moral development, helping individuals move beyond personal grievances and toward greater compassion.

#### **4.6. Embracing Forgiveness: Its Role in a Fulfilling Life**

Forgiveness plays a vital role in promoting mental health and emotional well-being, acting as a powerful pathway to healing. By releasing negative emotions and lingering resentments, forgiveness helps cultivate inner peace, which in turn reduces stress, anxiety, and

---

<sup>29</sup> Neff, K. D. (2003): 85 – 101.

<sup>30</sup> Thoresen, C. E., et al. (2000): 529 – 558.

<sup>31</sup> Rye, M. S., et al. (2001): 451 – 469.

depression. Studies have shown that individuals who practice forgiveness tend to experience lower levels of psychological distress and higher levels of life satisfaction. This underscores forgiveness as an effective therapeutic tool for enhancing mental health and overall quality of life.<sup>32</sup>

#### **4.7. Physical Health Benefits of Forgiveness**

Forgiveness supports physical health by reducing anger and psychological stress, which can manifest physically. It also encourages positive emotions like empathy and compassion, which enhance health outcomes.

**4.7.1. Blood Pressure and Cardiovascular Health** - Stress and negative emotions are key contributors to high blood pressure, and research indicates that forgiveness can help alleviate these factors, leading to improved cardiovascular health. Worthington et al. (2005)<sup>33</sup> found that forgiveness interventions resulted in significant reductions in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Long-term studies suggest that individuals who regularly practice forgiveness are more likely to maintain healthier blood pressure levels, highlighting the cardiovascular benefits of forgiveness.<sup>34</sup>

**4.7.2. Heart Rate Variability and Emotional Regulation** - Heart rate variability (HRV), an indicator of the body's ability to manage stress, has been shown to improve with forgiveness, promoting better emotional regulation and resilience. Lemay et al. (2016)<sup>35</sup> discovered that individuals who practiced forgiveness had higher HRV, suggesting that forgiveness enhances emotional regulation and supports more balanced physiological responses to stress.

**4.7.3. Immune Function** - Forgiveness has significant benefits for immune health by reducing inflammation and promoting faster recovery from illness. The positive psychological states that come with forgiveness help lower stress-related inflammation, which in turn supports a stronger and more effective immune response.

**4.7.4. Reducing Inflammation** - Chronic inflammation is linked to a range of health issues, including cardiovascular and autoimmune diseases. Forgiveness has been shown to reduce inflammatory markers,

---

<sup>32</sup> Toussaint, L., Worthington, E. L., & Williams, D. R. (2001): 305 – 338.

<sup>33</sup> Worthington, E. L., et al. (2005): 658 – 669.

<sup>34</sup> Witvliet, C. V., et al. (2001): 191 – 217.

<sup>35</sup> Lemay, E. P., & Prentice, M. A. (2016): 150 – 159.

such as pro-inflammatory cytokines, in the body<sup>36</sup>. Studies also indicate that individuals who practice forgiveness exhibit lower levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a marker of inflammation, suggesting that forgiveness may help protect against inflammation-related health conditions.<sup>37</sup>

**4.7.5. Quicker Recovery from Illness** - Forgiveness plays a significant role in promoting faster recovery from illness by reducing stress and enhancing immune function. Research indicates that patients who practice forgiveness tend to recover more quickly and face fewer complications during their recovery process.<sup>38</sup> This suggests that the psychological benefits of forgiveness can support physical healing by improving immune system functioning and reducing stress-related barriers to recovery.

## **4.8. Mental Health Benefits of Forgiveness**

Forgiveness improves mental health, particularly by reducing anxiety and depression. Studies indicate that it lowers physiological stress markers, including cortisol, blood pressure, and heart rate.

**4.8.1. Cortisol and Stress Response** - Forgiveness has been shown to lower cortisol levels, a stress hormone linked to various health issues.<sup>39</sup> By releasing feelings of resentment and embracing forgiveness, individuals can reduce the negative impacts of chronic stress, promoting both physical and mental well-being. This reduction in stress hormones helps to lower the risk of stress-related health problems, contributing to better overall health.

**4.8.2. Anxiety and Depression** - Forgiveness plays a key role in emotional healing by alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression.<sup>40</sup> It interrupts the cycle of rumination, where individuals obsess over negative experiences, helping to reduce emotional distress.<sup>41</sup> This emotional release fosters a sense of relief and promotes overall mental well-being.

**4.8.3. Emotional Regulation and Positive Emotions** - Forgiveness promotes emotional regulation by encouraging the development of empathy, compassion, and gratitude. These positive feelings play a key role in enhancing mental well-being and building resilience. By fostering

---

<sup>36</sup> McCullough, M. E. (2001): 62 – 75.

<sup>37</sup> Tkach, P., et al. (2017): 121 – 134.

<sup>38</sup> Keng, S. L., Smoski, M. J., & Robins, C. J. (2011): 1041 – 1056.

<sup>39</sup> Lawler, J. M., & McCullough, M. E. (2005): 106 – 122.

<sup>40</sup> Harris, M. A., Thoresen, C. E., & Forgiveness, W. (2006): 1012 – 1035.

<sup>41</sup> Lynch, S. M., & Reed, M. (2005): 1019 – 1031.



empathy, compassion, and gratitude, forgiveness helps strengthen emotional health and coping abilities.<sup>42</sup>

**Forgiveness in Post-War Recovery-** Forgiveness is crucial in the process of post-conflict reconciliation, assisting both individuals and communities in healing from the trauma of war, violence, or systemic injustices. By addressing deep emotional scars, forgiveness allows people to move past past grievances, promoting societal healing, rebuilding trust, and fostering lasting harmony.

## **4.9. Other Benefits of Forgiveness**

**4.9.1. Forgiveness Leading to Peace** - Forgiveness plays a critical role in providing peace that mends the harm caused by criminal actions through inclusive processes that engage victims, offenders, and the community. The direct dialogues between victims and offenders allow victims to express the emotional impact of the crime, fostering forgiveness and promoting personal healing. “Forgiveness is the path that turns wounds into wisdom and enemies into friends.” Forgiveness, rooted in love, is the path to overcoming hatred and resentment. These conversations also encourage offenders to take responsibility for their actions and recognize their consequences.<sup>43</sup>

Restorative justice initiatives not only facilitate healing in individual relationships but also benefit the broader community by promoting forgiveness and accountability. This approach helps reduce recidivism, strengthens community bonds, and cultivates a sense of belonging. By embracing forgiveness, individuals and communities build stronger, healthier connections, fostering personal growth and collective resilience.

**4.9.2. Forgiveness: A Key to Unlocking Self-Transformation** - Forgiveness is often seen as an act of kindness toward others, but it also serves as a powerful catalyst for personal growth and self-improvement. The act of forgiving requires individuals to confront their emotions, reflect on their experiences, and make conscious choices about responding to past hurts. This introspective process often leads to profound insights and transformations. By letting go of resentment and negative emotions, individuals reclaim their emotional energy and redirect it toward positive growth. The main benefits of forgiveness for personal development include.

---

<sup>42</sup> Maltby, J., Day, L., & Macaskill, A. (2002): 151–160; and, Toussaint, L., Worthington, E. L., & Williams, D. R. (2001): 305 – 338.

<sup>43</sup> Yi Z, Wu D, Deng M. (2023): 747.

**i. Enhanced Self-Acceptance** - Forgiveness helps individuals accept both their own flaws and those of others. By understanding that everyone is prone to making mistakes, people nurture self-compassion, which in turn promotes greater self-acceptance. Neff's (2003)<sup>44</sup> research emphasized that self-compassion, which is closely linked to forgiveness, is associated with enhanced emotional well-being.

**ii. Greater Emotional Resilience** - Practicing forgiveness strengthens emotional resilience by providing individuals with better-coping mechanisms for dealing with adversity. Releasing grudges opens up mental space for positive experiences and personal growth. Research by Worthington et al. (2005)<sup>45</sup> found that individuals who embrace forgiveness tend to show greater resilience, helping them recover more effectively from life's difficulties. **"Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."** This emphasizes that harboring resentment harms the person holding it more than the one who caused the hurt.

**iii. Increased Life Satisfaction** - Several studies have established a connection between forgiveness and greater life satisfaction. Coyle and Enright (1997)<sup>46</sup> discovered that individuals who participated in forgiveness exercises experienced significant improvements in life satisfaction and happiness, compared to those who did not. Letting go of past grievances allows individuals to focus more on the present and future, leading to a more enriching and fulfilling life.

**iv. Promotion of Positive Mindsets** - Forgiveness fosters a positive mindset by helping individuals shift their focus from past negative experiences to the lessons learned and opportunities for growth. This cognitive reframing plays a vital role in personal development, as it enables people to view challenges as opportunities for learning. According to research by McCullough et al. (2004)<sup>47</sup>, individuals who practice forgiveness are more likely to develop an optimistic outlook, which contributes to improved overall well-being. **"In separateness lies the world's greatest misery; in forgiveness lies the world's true strength."** Forgiveness brings unity and healing, reducing suffering for oneself and others.

---

<sup>44</sup> Neff, K. D. (2003): 85 – 101.

<sup>45</sup> Worthington, E. L., et al. (2005): 658 – 669.

<sup>46</sup> Coyle, C. T., & Enright, R. D. (1997): 111 – 127.

<sup>47</sup> Worthington, Everett & Scherer, Michael. (2004): 385 – 405.

**v. Strengthening Identity and Values** - Forgiveness can serve as a catalyst for individuals to reflect on their core values and reassess their priorities, ultimately strengthening their sense of identity. Through this reflection, people often uncover new passions and interests that align with their deepest beliefs, fostering personal growth. Research has shown that those who practice forgiveness often develop a clearer sense of purpose and direction in life.<sup>48</sup>

The transformative effect of forgiveness on personal growth is well-documented. For instance, a longitudinal study by Wade and Worthington (2003)<sup>49</sup> revealed that participants who engaged in forgiveness exercises reported significant improvements in self-esteem, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction over time. Likewise, research by Coyle (2001) demonstrated that forgiveness training enhanced self-awareness and contributed to greater overall life satisfaction.

#### **4.10. Barriers to Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a complex process that can be obstructed by various personal, social, and psychological barriers. Understanding these obstacles is crucial for facilitating forgiveness and promoting emotional healing.

**4.10.1. Personal Barriers** - Personal barriers refer to internal challenges that individuals face when attempting to forgive. These may include Resentment and Anger. Intense feelings of resentment and anger toward someone who has caused harm can create a significant obstacle to forgiveness. These emotions are often held onto as a way of validating one's pain or maintaining a sense of control over the situation. "You will not be punished for your anger; you will be punished by your anger." This reminds us that anger creates suffering within us and can lead to harmful consequences. According to Enright et al. (1998),<sup>50</sup> unresolved anger acts as a major barrier to forgiveness, especially when individuals perceive their anger as a protective mechanism for emotional self-defense.

**4.10.2. Fear of Vulnerability** - Forgiveness can seem risky because it involves opening oneself up to potential future pain, making individuals hesitant to engage in the process. This fear of further harm can create reluctance to forgive. Worthington (2004)<sup>51</sup> highlights that the

<sup>48</sup> Luchies, Laura & Finkel, Eli & Fitzsimons, Gráinne. (2010):. 1251 - 80.

<sup>49</sup> Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L. (2003): 343 – 353.

<sup>50</sup> Enright, R. D., Freedman, S. R., & Rique, J. (1998): 61 – 87).

<sup>51</sup> Worthington, Everett & Scherer, Michael. (2004): 385 - 405.

vulnerability required in forgiveness can be difficult, particularly when individuals are uncertain about the offender's future actions or sincerity.

**4.10.3. Lack of Self-Compassion** - Individuals who struggle with self-criticism often find it challenging to forgive others. A lack of self-compassion can lead to feelings of unworthiness, making it difficult to believe they deserve forgiveness themselves. This creates a negative cycle. Neff's (2003)<sup>52</sup> research on self-compassion emphasizes that cultivating kindness toward oneself is vital for breaking this cycle, enabling individuals to extend forgiveness to others.

To heal, it's essential to acknowledge the emotions tied to hurt. Rather than suppressing or denying these feelings, individuals must allow themselves to fully experience and accept them as part of their healing journey. Journaling is one effective method for processing these emotions, offering a private space to reflect and express thoughts. Talking to a trusted friend or therapist can also provide support and a broader perspective. Research by Pennebaker and Beall (1986)<sup>53</sup> suggests that such expressive practices help process painful emotions, making it easier to move past them.

Developing self-compassion is another key step, as it helps individuals recognize their value and capacity for forgiveness. Neff (2003) highlights that exercises in self-compassion are effective in fostering inner kindness. By nurturing a compassionate mindset, individuals not only learn to forgive others but also extend forgiveness to themselves. This foundation of kindness promotes resilience, especially when confronting painful experiences, and encourages a forgiving attitude grounded in self-worth.

Another effective strategy for overcoming obstacles to forgiveness is reframing perspectives. Cognitive restructuring allows individuals to shift their focus from anger to understanding, promoting empathy. Instead of seeing the offender as an antagonist, reframing helps individuals view them as a fallible human being. McCullough et al. (1997)<sup>54</sup> found that when individuals approach others with empathy and understanding, forgiveness becomes more accessible and achievable.

**4.10.4. Social Barriers** - Social factors also impede the forgiveness process, including:

---

<sup>52</sup> Neff, K. D. (2003): 85 – 101.

<sup>53</sup> Pennebaker, J. W. (1997): 162 - 166.

<sup>54</sup> McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. A. (1997): 985 – 1001.

**i. Cultural Norms** - Certain cultures place a stronger emphasis on retribution than on forgiveness, fostering societal expectations to hold onto grievances and seek justice rather than reconciliation. This cultural norm can make forgiveness seem less viable or even undesirable. Hook et al. (2012)<sup>55</sup> underline the significant impact of cultural frameworks in shaping individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward forgiveness, showing how these values influence whether forgiveness is embraced or resisted.

**ii. Cultural Influences** - Cultural perspectives on forgiveness significantly influence a client's willingness to engage in forgiveness-based interventions. To provide effective support, therapists must take these cultural factors into account, tailoring their methods to align with the client's unique values and belief systems. This culturally sensitive approach ensures that interventions are meaningful and resonate deeply with the client's worldview.

**iii. Negative environment** - Family and friends who perpetuate a victim mindset may unintentionally hinder the forgiveness process by fostering anger and resentment. Fincham et al. (2006)<sup>56</sup> highlight that social circles emphasizing negativity can create barriers to forgiveness, as they may discourage letting go of grievances and promote holding onto past hurts.

**iv. Fear of Losing Identity** - For some individuals, holding onto grievances becomes intertwined with their sense of identity, making it challenging to let go. Releasing such hurts may feel like losing a core part of themselves. Lawler-Row and Piferi (2006)<sup>57</sup> note that attachment to these negative aspects of identity can impede the emotional release needed for forgiveness.

Creating a supportive social environment can significantly aid in the forgiveness process, especially when cultural or relational barriers exist. Being surrounded by people who encourage emotional healing and value forgiveness fosters a positive atmosphere that supports personal growth. Fincham et al. (2006)<sup>58</sup> suggest that supportive networks reinforce attitudes conducive to forgiveness, making it easier to adopt these practices.

---

<sup>55</sup> Hook, J. N., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Utsey, S. O., & Davis, D. E. (2012): 508 – 528.

<sup>56</sup> Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., & Davila, J. (2006): 611 – 622.

<sup>57</sup> Lawler-Row, K. A., & Piferi, R. L. (2006): 535 – 555.

<sup>58</sup> Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., & Davila, J. (2006): 611 – 622.

Challenging cultural norms that discourage forgiveness through education and open dialogue can also create meaningful change. Sharing knowledge about the psychological and emotional benefits of forgiveness helps reshape perceptions within social circles. Hook et al. (2012)<sup>59</sup> emphasize that these discussions can promote greater acceptance of forgiveness, encouraging individuals to reevaluate traditional views and embrace emotional resilience.

Identifying role models who exemplify forgiveness offers additional inspiration and guidance. Observing how others have navigated the path to forgiveness can motivate individuals to pursue similar healing in their own lives. McCullough (2001)<sup>60</sup> highlights the influence of such role models, demonstrating that their experiences can provide hope and practical examples for overcoming resentment.

#### **4.11. Psychological Barriers to Forgiveness**

Psychological factors often play a significant role in hindering forgiveness. These may include Cognitive Distortions. Negative thought patterns, including black-and-white thinking and catastrophizing, often distort perceptions and intensify feelings of hurt, making forgiveness more challenging. Worthington (2001) emphasizes that confronting and reframing these cognitive distortions is essential for cultivating forgiveness. By adopting a clearer and more balanced perspective, individuals can better understand the situation and move toward emotional resolution.

**4.11.1. Trauma and Unresolved Grief** - Experiencing significant trauma or unresolved grief can make the process of forgiveness more complex. According to Greenberg and Warwar (2006)<sup>61</sup>, such past traumas often lead to lingering emotional barriers, as individuals grapple with unresolved emotions that hinder their ability to forgive. Addressing these underlying issues is crucial for overcoming these obstacles and fostering emotional healing.

**4.11.2. Fear of Repeating Mistakes** - The fear of forgiveness leading to further harm or betrayal often causes hesitation. Wade and Worthington (2005)<sup>62</sup> suggest that addressing underlying anxieties about trust can help alleviate this concern, enabling individuals to approach forgiveness with greater confidence and emotional security.

---

<sup>59</sup> Hook, J. N., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Utsey, S. O., & Davis, D. E. (2012): 508 – 528.

<sup>60</sup> McCullough, M. E., and Worthington E. L. (1999): 1141 - 1164.

<sup>61</sup> Greenberg, L. S., & Warwar, S. H. (2006): 574 – 588.

<sup>62</sup> Worthington, E. L., et al. (2005): 658 – 669.



**4.11.3. Resistance to Forgiveness** - People may initially struggle with forgiveness due to unresolved feelings of anger or betrayal. Therapists need to approach these emotions with care and patience, giving clients the time and space to process their experiences at their own pace.

Overcoming barriers to forgiveness is a complex process that requires self-awareness, intentional effort, and external support. Viewing forgiveness as a gradual journey rather than an immediate goal empowers individuals to take manageable steps toward healing and reconciliation.

Therapeutic interventions can be particularly helpful for those encountering psychological obstacles to forgiveness. Trauma-informed therapies provide tools to address unresolved pain, challenge harmful thought patterns, and foster healthier emotional responses. Research by Wade and Worthington (2005) and Greenberg and Warwar (2006)<sup>63</sup> demonstrates the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) in guiding individuals through these challenges and creating pathways toward forgiveness.

Mindfulness practices also play a crucial role in breaking through psychological barriers. By promoting present-focused awareness, mindfulness helps individuals let go of entrenched negative emotions and thought patterns, creating mental clarity for forgiveness. Kabat-Zinn (2003)<sup>64</sup> underscores the benefits of mindfulness in reducing the emotional weight of past grievances, enabling individuals to move forward with greater ease.

A gradual approach to forgiveness, starting with smaller acts of self-forgiveness or addressing minor offenses, can make the process more manageable. Enright et al. (1998)<sup>65</sup> highlight that incremental steps allow individuals to confront their emotions in a less overwhelming way, building the confidence and emotional capacity to tackle deeper wounds over time.

#### **4.11.4. Breaking Barriers: Practical Techniques for Moving Forward**

Forgiveness techniques offer valuable strategies for managing the challenging emotions and situations associated with hurtful experiences.

---

<sup>63</sup> Greenberg, L. S., & Warwar, S. H. (2006): 574 – 588.

<sup>64</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003): 283 – 303.

<sup>65</sup> Enright, R. D., Gassin, E. A., & Wu, C. (1998): 155 – 171.

**i. Journaling:** Writing about one's feelings allows for deep self-reflection and the expression of pain and anger, providing a constructive outlet to process emotions and move toward forgiveness.

**ii. Mindfulness Practices:** Focusing on the present moment helps individuals detach from persistent negative thoughts and regulate emotions, creating space for calm and thoughtful reflections on the hurt.

**iii. Visualization:** Mentally rehearsing forgiveness—such as imagining conversations with the offender or visualizing the release of resentment—can make the concept of forgiving feel more tangible and attainable.

**iv. Seeking Support:** Talking with trusted friends, therapists, or support groups offers external validation and fresh perspectives, fostering a supportive environment conducive to healing and forgiveness.

**v. Setting Boundaries:** Establishing limits with the offender ensures protection from future harm, reinforcing that forgiveness does not equate to accepting harmful behavior.

**vi. Gradual Exposure:** Taking incremental steps, such as forgiving smaller offenses or practicing self-forgiveness, builds confidence and emotional resilience to address deeper wounds over time.

**vii. Acts of Kindness:** Demonstrating kindness – toward oneself or the offender – can nurture compassion and empathy, which are essential for achieving forgiveness.

**viii. Therapeutic Interventions:** Structured methods like trauma-focused therapy offer valuable tools for processing emotions, reframing negative thought patterns, and fostering forgiveness within a supportive, guided environment.

By integrating these techniques into their lives, individuals can effectively navigate the forgiveness journey, ultimately achieving emotional healing, personal growth, and enhanced well-being. To conclude, forgiveness is more than a virtue; it is a transformative journey toward inner growth and renewal. By choosing to forgive, we release the burdens of resentment and open our hearts to healing and compassion. This powerful act not only liberates us from past wounds but also fosters a deeper connection with ourselves and others, guiding us toward a more peaceful and fulfilling life. True renewal begins within, and forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door to lasting emotional freedom and personal growth.

## V. CONCLUSION

Forgiveness is a transforming process that promotes personal development, emotional healing, and psychological well-being. It is more than just forgiving others; it is an intentional decision to relinquish animosity, allowing people to break free from the cycle of negativity. Research has shown that forgiveness has a significant impact on mental health, relationships, and even physical well-being, suggesting that it is both a psychological and physiological imperative.

Individuals who embrace forgiveness develop empathy, resilience, and self-compassion, opening the way for greater personal strength and healthier social ties. Furthermore, forgiveness is profoundly embedded in a variety of cultural, intellectual, and spiritual traditions, demonstrating its global importance. While the journey to forgiveness might be difficult, it ultimately allows people to restore their tranquility and purpose.

Forgiveness acts as a link between past traumas and future growth. It is a road to inner regeneration that benefits not only the person but also society by fostering more compassion and harmony. As more people acknowledge and practice forgiveness, communities' collective emotional and psychological well-being can improve, resulting in a chain reaction of healing and transformation.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Baumeister, R. F., Exline, J. J., & Sommer, K. L. (1998). "The effects of pride on the self", *Psychological Science*, 9 (1).
- Coyle, C. T., and Enright, R. D. (1997) "Forgiveness: A study of the effects of forgiveness on life satisfaction and happiness", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 16 (2).
- Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P. (2000). *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice*. Guilford Press.
- Enright, R. D., Freedman, S. R., & Rique, J. (1998) "The psychology of forgiveness", *Handbook of Forgiveness*.
- Enright, R. D., Freedman, S. R., & Rique, J. (1998) "The psychology of forgiveness", In W. G. Austin & S. M. Williams (eds.), *The social*

*psychology of intergroup reconciliation*. Oxford University Press.

- Enright, R. D., Gassin, E. A., & Wu, C. (1998) "Explanatory style, forgiveness, and depression", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 17 (2).
- Exline, J. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000) "Long-term perspectives on forgiveness: Theory and practice", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19 (3).
- Exline, J. J., Baumeister, R. F., Bushman, B. J., Campbell, W. K., & Finkel, E. J. (2003) "Does forgiving mean forgetting?", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84 (5).
- Exline, J. J., et al. (2003) "Forgiveness and the health benefits of forgiving", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85 (1).
- Fincham, F. D. (2000) 'Forgiveness in marriage: A historical and contemporary perspective', *The Family Psychologist*, 15 (4).
- Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., & Davila, J. (2006) "Forgiveness in marriage: The role of interpersonal processes and individual characteristics", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205280919>
- Fisher, S. (2006) 'Forgiveness in Islam: The Qur'an, Hadith, and the Path of Mercy', in *Forgiveness: A philosophical exploration* (pp. 175–192). Cambridge University Press.
- Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996) 'Forgiveness as a psychological construct: Theoretical developments and empirical findings', in *Journal of Social Issues*, 52 (3).
- Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996) 'Forgiveness as an intervention goal with incest survivors', in *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64 (6).
- Germer, C. K. (2005) *The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*, New York: The Guilford Press.
- Glover, J. (2014) "Forgiveness: A communal approach in Indigenous spiritualities", in *Journal of Indigenous Spirituality*, 29 (1).
- Greenberg, L. S., & Warwar, S. H. (2006) "The role of forgiveness in emotional processing: Implications for psychotherapy", in *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62 (5). <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20253>
- Hall, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (2005) "Forgiveness and relationship quality: A meta-analytic review", in *Journal of Family Psychology*, 19 (3).
- Hargrove, T. (2020) "Cognitive-behavioral therapy and its role in forgiveness practices", in *Journal of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*, 13 (3).

- Harris, M. A., Thoresen, C. E., & Forgiveness, W. (2006) "Forgiveness, health, and well-being: A review of research" in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 25 (7).
- Hoffman, M. (2007) "Forgiveness in context: Forgiving others and forgiving yourself", in *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 35 (3).
- Hook, J. N., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Utsey, S. O., & Davis, D. E. (2012) "Cultural influences on forgiveness and its role in psychological well-being" in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 31 (5). <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2012.31.5.508>
- Jain, V. (2014) "*Uttam Kshama (Supreme Forgiveness): A Jain Concept and Practice for Spiritual Progress, Social Harmony and Peace*".
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003) "Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and the cultivation of emotional intelligence", in G. S. B. Germer, R. D. Siegel, & C. R. Fulton (eds.), *Mindfulness and psychotherapy*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Karremans, J. C., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2008) "Forgiveness and the need for revenge", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34 (1).
- Keng, S. L., Smoski, M. J., & Robins, C. J. (2011) "Effects of mindfulness on psychological health: A review of empirical studies", *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31 (6).
- Kornfield, J. (1993). *A path with heart: A guide through the perils and promises of spiritual life*. New York: Bantam.
- Lawler, J. M., & McCullough, M. E. (2005). The role of forgiveness in well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 9 (2).
- Lawler-Row, K. A., & Piferi, R. L. (2006) "Forgiveness and identity: The role of identity integration in the forgiveness process", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 25(6). <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2006.25.6.535>.
- Lemay, E. P., & Prentice, M. A. (2016) "Forgiveness and emotional regulation: How forgiveness promotes mental health and resilience", in *Journal of Behavioral Science*, 8(4).
- Lichtenfeld, S., Maier, M. A., Buechner, V. L., & Fernández Capo, M. (2019) "The influence of decisional and emotional forgiveness on attributions", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, pp. 1425. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01425>.
- Lin, Y. Y., Swanson, D. P., & Rogge, R. D. (2021) "The Three Teachings of East Asia (TTEA) Inventory: Developing and validating a measure of the interrelated ideologies of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism",

*Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, pp. 626122. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.626122>.

- Lynch, S. M., & Reed, M. (2005) "Rumination, forgiveness, and psychological health", in *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61 (7).
- Maltby, J., Day, L., & Macaskill, A. (2002) "Forgiveness and psychological well-being: A review of the literature", *Personality and Individual Differences*, 33 (2).
- McCullough, M. E. (2001) "Forgiveness and the healing process: A meta-analytic review", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 20(1), pp. 62–75. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.20.1.62.22297>
- McCullough, M. E., & Worthington, E. L. (1999) "Religion and the forgiving personality", in *Journal of Personality*, 76.
- McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. A. (1997) "Forgiveness, forbearance, and the pursuit of justice", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73 (4).
- Moudatsou, M., Stavropoulou, A., Philalithis, A., & Koukouli, S. (2020) "The role of empathy in health and social care professionals", *Healthcare (Basel)*, 8 (1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare8010026>.
- Neff, K. D. (2003) "Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself", *Self and Identity*, 2 (2).
- Niven, K., Holman, D., & Stride, C. (2012) "The role of forgiveness in enhancing the psychological well-being of employees" in *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42 (11).
- North, J. (1998) "The 'ideal' of forgiveness: A philosopher's exploration", in Enright, R. D. and North, J. (eds.), *Exploring forgiveness*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pennebaker, J. W. (1997) "Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process", *Psychological Science*, 8(3), pp. 162–166. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1997.tb00403.x>
- Radhakrishnan, S. (1999). *The Bhagavad Gita: A new commentary*. London: Penguin Books.
- Rao, M. S. (2013). *21 success sutras for leaders*.
- Rye, M. S., et al. (2001) "Forgiveness and its role in intimate relationships", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 20 (5).
- Rye, M. S., et al. (2001) "Forgiveness and spiritual growth", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 20 (3).
- Thoresen, C. E., et al. (2000) "Forgiveness and health: An updated



- review", in *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 23 (5).
- Tkach, P., et al. (2017) "Reducing inflammation through forgiveness", in *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 45 (2).
- Toussaint, L., Worthington, E. L., and Williams, D. R. (2001) "Forgiveness and health: An empirical review", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 25 (4).
- Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L. (2003) "Overcoming interpersonal offenses: Is forgiveness the only way to deal with unforgiveness?", in *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 81.
- Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L. (2005) 'Forgiveness and self-esteem: A meta-analytic review', in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88 (6).
- Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L. (2005) "Forgiveness and the psychological effects of trauma", in McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I. and Thoresen, C. E (eds). *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Witvliet, C. V., et al. (2001) "The psychophysiology of forgiveness", in *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 20 (2).
- Worthington, E. L. and Scherer, M. (2004) "Forgiveness and emotional regulation: Understanding the healing process", in. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 60 (1).
- Worthington, E. L., et al. (2005) "Forgiveness and health: A review of empirical studies", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31 (4).
- Worthington, E. L., Jr., Mazzeo, S. E., and Canter, D. E. (2005) "Forgiveness-promoting approach: Helping clients REACH forgiveness through using a longer model that teaches reconciliation", in Sperry, L. & Shafranske, E. P. (eds.) *Spiritually oriented psychotherapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10886-010>
- Worthington, E., & Scherer, M. (2004) "Forgiveness is an emotion-focused coping strategy that can reduce health risks and promote health resilience: Theory, review, and hypotheses", *Psychology & Health*, 19, pp. 385–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0887044042000196674>
- Yi, Z., Wu, D., & Deng, M. (2023) "Beliefs about the nature of forgiveness and avoidance of an offender among Chinese college students", *Behavioral Sciences (Basel)*, 13 (9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13090747>



# A BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OF FORGIVENESS

Prof. Dr. Abraham Vélez de Cea\*

## Abstract:

The paper attempts to clarify the concept of forgiveness from a Buddhist perspective that is compatible not only with Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions but also with contemporary research on the psychology of forgiveness. The first part analyzes diverse philosophical conceptions of forgiveness. The second part analyzes two recent articles about Buddhist forgiveness to illustrate the need to clarify the meaning and scope of this important concept within Buddhist traditions. The third part contends that the basic distinction within Buddhist forgiveness is not between conditional and unconditional forgiveness but rather between psychological and social forgiveness. The fourth part examines several patterns of Buddhist forgiveness and suggests that Buddhist forgiveness cannot be reduced to either forbearance or compassion. The fifth part explains the three main stages of psychological Buddhist forgiveness.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, forgiveness, philosophy.*

\*\*\*

## I. CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHIES OF FORGIVENESS

Contemporary discussions of forgiveness in moral and political philosophy began with the work of Hannah Arendt<sup>1</sup> and Vladimir Jankélévitch.<sup>2</sup> Both authors view forgiveness as presupposing a conditional relationship between an offender and a victim. In their account, forgiveness involves an interpersonal transaction that requires

---

\* Department of History, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Eastern Kentucky University.

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt (1958). *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press): 86.

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch (1967). *Le Pardon* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne): 101.

certain conditions to take place, especially confession, contrition and repairs. Both Arendt and Jankélévitch also agree in considering some actions like crimes against humanity unforgivable.

Jacques Derrida challenged both Arendt's and Jankélévitch's understanding of forgiveness,<sup>3</sup> and developed a political philosophy based on the concepts of unconditional forgiveness and universal hospitality. Derrida argues that forgiveness consists in forgiving the unforgivable. Derrida compares forgiveness to unconditional giving and suggests that it must overcome the limits of reciprocity and economic exchange because it is not something done to achieve a goal. True forgiveness arises only from what is considered unforgivable.

The most comprehensive philosophical analysis of forgiveness has been undertaken by Charles Griswold.<sup>4</sup> According to Griswold, forgiveness is a virtue that responds to wrongdoing and evil, which are aspects of our imperfection. Forgiving expresses our imperfection, our vulnerability, embodiment, finitude and emotional nature. For Griswold, there are six conditions required for forgiveness: (1) Taking responsibility for a past wrongdoing or acknowledging that someone was responsible for specific deeds. (2) Repudiating the wrongness of such deeds and the kind of person who performed them. (3) Experiencing and expressing regret at having caused injury to a particular person or wronged party. (4) Commitment, shown through deeds and words, to becoming a better person who does not inflict injury. Together the first four conditions constitute what Griswold calls the "contrition requisite", which involves not only taking responsibility but also emendation. The last two conditions for forgiveness are: (5) Sympathetic understanding of the injured person's perspective and of the damage done by the injury. This requires not only listening to the victim's account but also grasping what she or he may say with compassion. (6) Providing answers to the victim or a narrative explanation of the reasons that lead to do wrong, of how such wrongdoing does not express the totality of the person, and how the offender is becoming worthy of approbation.<sup>5</sup>

For Griswold, these six conditions represent what he calls "forgiveness at its best", "ideal forgiveness" or "paradigmatic forgiveness".

---

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida (2001). *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London and New York: Routledge): 45.

<sup>4</sup> Charles L. Griswold (2007). *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press): 46 – 8.

<sup>5</sup> Griswold (2007): 49 - 51.

That is, what forgiveness would have to be to be perfectly accomplished? Griswold accepts that forgiveness admits of degree or approximation in relation to ideal forgiveness. That is, there are non-paradigmatic or non-ideal forms of forgiveness that may satisfy less conditions but still can be considered imperfect instances of forgiveness. Griswold speaks about three “threshold” or “baseline” conditions for imperfect forgiveness: (1) Willingness of the victim to lower her pitch of resentment and to forswear revenge. (2) Willingness of the offender to take minimal steps to qualify for forgiveness, for instance, some degree of repentance. (3) The injury or deed is forgivable.<sup>6</sup> For Griswold, forgiveness is always conditional and the unilateral giving up of resentment does not count as forgiveness, even less as perfect forgiveness. For him, the view of forgiveness as a “gift” or “unconditional” is a mistaken theory. Griswold accepts that achieving a state of inner peace in response to wrongdoing and injury is necessary but not sufficient to speak about accomplished forgiveness.<sup>7</sup>

Another important philosophy of forgiveness has been developed by Martha Nussbaum.<sup>8</sup> Nussbaum offers a critique of classical or canonical Judeo-Christian forgiveness, which she calls “transactional forgiveness”. She describes it as a “typically dyadic procedure involving confrontation, confession, apology and “working through””<sup>9</sup> For Nussbaum, it plausible to think that transactional forgiveness is the most common form of forgiveness in the world today.

Nussbaum contends that the procedural aspects of this kind of forgiveness have their origins in and are organized by a Judeo-Christian worldview in which the primary moral relationship is between an “omniscient score-keeping God and erring mortals”.<sup>10</sup> God keeps records of all our errors, and “if there is enough weeping, imploring, and apologizing - typically involving considerable self-abasement - God may decide to waive the penalty for some or all transgressions and to restore the penitent person to heavenly blessings”.<sup>11</sup> This relationship between God and humans serves as model for human relationships, but the primary relationship remains that between God and humans. Thus, human forgiveness is modeled on the way God forgives us.

---

<sup>6</sup> Griswold (2007): 115.

<sup>7</sup> Griswold (2007): 117.

<sup>8</sup> Martha Nussbaum (2016). *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 98.

<sup>9</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 10.

<sup>10</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 11.

<sup>11</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 11.

For Nussbaum the process of transactional forgiveness is “a harsh inquisitorial process. It demands confession, weeping and wailing, a sense of one’s lowness and essential worthlessness. The penitent is tormented simply by penitence. The person who administers the process is controlling and relentless toward the penitent, an inquisitor of acts and desires...the process asks us to sit in judgment on one another, confessing and being confessed to”.<sup>12</sup> Nussbaum assessment of transactional forgiveness suggests that rather than being an antidote to anger it “looks like a continuation of anger’s payback wish by another name”.<sup>13</sup> In her critique of transactional forgiveness, Nussbaum goes as far as to express her agreement with Nietzsche’s view of some aspects of Judeo-Christian morality. For Nussbaum, Nietzsche is right in seeing transactional forgiveness as “a displaced vindictiveness and a concealed resentment”.<sup>14</sup> However, Nussbaum criticizes Nietzsche for failing to see the complexity of Jewish and Christian morality, which possess other alternative ways of thinking about forgiveness.

According to Nussbaum, Jewish and Christian traditions contain other ways of thinking about forgiveness besides transactional forgiveness. More specifically, Nussbaum analyzes two alternative conceptions of forgiveness “in which generosity, love, and even humor replace the grim drama of penance and exacted contrition”.<sup>15</sup> She calls these two other forms of forgiveness “unconditional forgiveness” and “unconditional love and generosity”, which for Nussbaum it is better not to call it forgiveness. Rather than forgiveness, it is an ethic of unconditional love that departs altogether from judgment, confession, contrition, and consequent waiving of anger.

For Nussbaum, “unconditional forgiveness” presupposes a response to prior anger and a subtle payback wish that needs to be waived. In contrast, “unconditional love and generosity” responds to wrongdoing with an attitude of unconditional love and generosity, “love is the first response, not a substitute for a prior pay back wish”.<sup>16</sup> Nussbaum discusses instances of unconditional forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud as well as in the Gospels. She contends that in the words and example of Jesus unconditional forgiveness is more prominent

---

<sup>12</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 73.

<sup>13</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 11.

<sup>14</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 12.

<sup>15</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 11.

<sup>16</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 78.



than transactional forgiveness.<sup>17</sup> The paradigmatic Christian examples of forgiveness as unconditional love and generosity, that is, forgiveness without previous judgment and anger, is the story of the prodigal son and the exhortation to love your enemies in the Sermon of the Mountain.

Overall, contemporary philosophies of forgiveness are based on the dichotomy victim-wrongdoer, and they are primarily focused on the question of whether the wrongdoer must do something to warrant or earn forgiveness. The fundamental distinction is between conditional and unconditional forgiveness. That is, between forgiveness with or without requirements such as remorse, repentance, apology and repairs.

Conditional forgiveness is also known as “transactional forgiveness”<sup>18</sup> and “moral justice forgiveness”.<sup>19</sup> Unconditional forgiveness is also known as “gifted forgiveness”. One important concern discussed by recent scholarship on the philosophy of forgiveness is the relationship between these two types of forgiveness. There have been attempts to integrate these two kinds of forgiveness into one explanatory order. Some scholars argue that conditional forgiveness has priority, and that unconditional forgiveness is derivative,<sup>20</sup> while others change the order and give priority to unconditional forgiveness over conditional forgiveness.<sup>21</sup>

## II. CONFLICTING VIEWS OF BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

Here I cannot analyze all the available scholarship on Buddhist forgiveness. I limit myself to discuss two recent articles on Buddhist forgiveness to illustrate the diversity of Buddhist views on forgiveness, and the need to clarify the nature of this important concept. First, I will discuss the work of the Taiwanese scholar Chien-Te Lin,<sup>22</sup> and afterwards the work of the Canadian scholar Donna Lynn Brown.<sup>23</sup>

Chien-Te Lin explains that forgiveness in Buddhism has moral and social dimensions as well as spiritual and transcendental aspects.

---

<sup>17</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 75.

<sup>18</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 80.

<sup>19</sup> Miranda Fricker (2019). “Forgiveness - An Ordered Pluralism”, in *Australian Philosophical Review*, vol.3. no.3, 241 - 260.

<sup>20</sup> Fricker (2019): 20.

<sup>21</sup> Lucy Allais (2019). “The Priority of Gifted Forgiveness: A Response to Fricker”, in *Australian Philosophical Review*, Vol.3. NO.3, 261 - 273.

<sup>22</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021). “With or Without Repentance: A Buddhist Take on Forgiveness”, in *Ethical Perspectives*, 28. no.3, 263 - 285.

<sup>23</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022). “Forgiveness American-Style: Origins and Status of Forgiveness in North American Buddhism”, in *Contemporary Buddhism*, vol. 23, nos.1 - 2, 18 - 66.

Chien-Te Lin contends that Buddhist forgiveness “is unconditional and repentance is not compulsory for a victim to forgive the wrongdoer”.<sup>24</sup> For Chien-Te Lin, forgiveness forms an integral part of the daily practice of both clergy and lay practitioners; forgiveness is also a vital Buddhist practice in both the bodhisattva and the arahant traditions “irrespective of whether or not there is repentance by the transgressor”.<sup>25</sup>

Chien-Te Lin affirms that forgiveness may not correspond precisely to the perfection of patience or forbearance (*Pāli khanti/Sanskrit kṣānti*), but he acknowledges that they are related. Both forbearance and forgiveness are a virtuous response to harm brought upon oneself by another’s misconduct. Chien-Te Lin claims that forgiveness is a quality inherent in forbearance and he defines forgiveness as “acknowledging the harm of others leniently without thoughts of further revenge”.<sup>26</sup>

Although Chien-Te Lin defines forgiveness as a quality inherent in forbearance, he also affirms that forgiveness is an act of compassion. In fact, he entitles a section of his article “Forgiveness as An Act of Compassion”<sup>27</sup>, and explains that “forgiveness is both an act of compassion toward another and a means to achieve self-transformation”.<sup>28</sup> In other section of his article, Chien-Te Lin clarifies that forgiveness is “a precursor to compassion”.<sup>29</sup>

Whether forgiveness is an act of compassion or a quality inherent in forbearance that serves as a precursor to compassion, what really matters is that forgiveness protect us from hatred and helps to develop spiritual qualities such as “tolerance, comity, forbearance, endurance, mercy, softness, kindness and magnanimity”.<sup>30</sup>

For Chien-Te Lin, forgiveness in Buddhism is primarily an internal exercise to train compassion and to become a better person. If forgiveness is an indispensable exercise to attain self-transformation and the betterment of persons, it should be unconditional. In Chien-Te Lin’s words “forgiveness is a crucial Buddhist spiritual practice, which does not presuppose repentance as a necessary prerequisite”.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 265.

<sup>25</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 272.

<sup>26</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 266.

<sup>27</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 269 - 270.

<sup>28</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 268.

<sup>29</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 271.

<sup>30</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 271.

<sup>31</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 268.

Chien-Te Lin illustrates the unconditional nature of Buddhist forgiveness with the examples of Āryadeva and the XIV Dalai Lama. Āryadeva forgave the person who killed him during his dying moments displaying deep compassion towards him and regardless of whether the attacker showed repentance. Similarly, the Dalai Lama forgives his transgressors out of a compassionate attitude towards them, and without necessarily requiring their apology and repentance. Chien-Te Lin also discusses the example of Bodhisattvas, who are “encouraged to cultivate a level of compassion which allows for unlimited and universal forgiveness, such that there is nobody and nothing that cannot be forgiven.”<sup>32</sup>

According to Chien-Te Lin, a Buddhist framework provides two compelling reasons to forgive unconditionally out of compassion: the fact that the deeds of those who harm us derive from a state of ignorance, and the fact that wrongdoers create negative karma that eventually will ripen in future suffering. The cause of any wrongful act is an ignorant state of mind. The root problem is not the transgressor but rather ignorance: “it is not the bite of a snake that kills us, but rather the poison; it is the presence of ignorance in the mind of the transgressor that is at fault, rather than the transgressor him or herself.”<sup>33</sup>

Chien-Te Lin discusses other reasons to cultivate forgiveness toward those who harm us such as the fact that they have been our relatives in past lives, and that they offer us the opportunity for spiritual growth. Rather than creating negative karma through retaliation and revenge out of resentment, anger or hostility, we should be grateful to those who hurt us for giving us an opportunity to practice forgiveness, thus contributing to our self-transformation and spiritual advance. Another reason is that unconditional forgiveness brings happiness and benefits the practitioner, whereas hostility and anger bring suffering.

Forgiving others is a powerful remedy against anger and hostility. Forgiveness can be considered from an egocentric point of view as a matter of self-interest because it contributes to both our physical and mental health. However, seen from an altruistic point of view, forgiveness is a liberating and powerful remedy that aids our spiritual growth and that is essential to the cultivation of compassion. In sum, Buddhist forgiveness is a vital spiritual practice “irrespective of whether there is repentance by the transgressor.”<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 269.

<sup>33</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 268.

<sup>34</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 272.

Chien-Te Lin explains that Buddhist forgiveness has four unique characteristics. First, Buddhist forgiveness is intention-based. What determines the karmic potential of the act of forgiving is the intention or volition of the forgiver. For Chien-Te Lin, this intentional nature of forgiveness underscores the fact that forgiveness does not depend on the offender's repentance: "Due to the importance of intention, forgiveness comes into existence, not from an objective recognition, but from subjective validation".<sup>35</sup>

The second characteristic of Buddhist forgiveness is its detached, selfless character. Chien-Te Lin relates this with the doctrine of non-self and emptiness: "during the act of forgiving, ultimately there is no agent who forgives, no one who is being forgiven and there is no wrongdoing to be forgiven".<sup>36</sup> This characteristic also signifies the absence of egoistic concerns and the moral equality of forgiver and forgiven, that is, the forgiver is not to be seen as superior to the forgiven and the forgiven is not to be seen as inferior.

The third characteristic of Buddhist forgiveness is that it is a competence that can be acquired gradually. Forgiveness may require time and practice to be fully achieved. Someone may choose to forgive unconditionally because that is what we ought to do, but that does not mean that we are able to do so immediately. In Chien-Te Lin's words, "forgiveness is not merely a conceptual understanding or idealistic imperative, but also a matter of pragmatic competence".<sup>37</sup> We all can increase our capacity to forgive and this may require mental training.

The fourth characteristic of Buddhist forgiveness is that it is an indication of prudence and strength. Forgiving someone unconditionally out of compassion does not mean that we condone or excuse their misconduct. Forgiveness does not preclude punishment. Punishing a wrongdoer is compatible with our willingness to forgive. The goal of punishment is not only justice but also the moral reform of the transgressor. Punishment must be given out of lovingkindness and a sense of concern for the wellbeing of the transgressor: "Rather than a form of retaliation, it [punishment] is a skillful form of rehabilitation".<sup>38</sup>

Chien-Te Lin draws on the Dalai Lama to distinguish between the agent and the act of wrongdoing: "When we forgive, we forgive the

---

<sup>35</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 276.

<sup>36</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 277.

<sup>37</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 277 - 278.

<sup>38</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 278.

agent but not the action”.<sup>39</sup> Forgiving someone does not entail passivity or weakness. Quite the contrary, forgiving is consistent with taking a strong stance and doing something to stop the misconduct of someone. Adopting countermeasures against wrongful deeds while forgiving the agent requires prudence and inner strength.

In conclusion, for Chien-Te Lin “forgiveness is unconditional in Buddhism”.<sup>40</sup> Whereas Buddhist forgiveness does not require repentance as a prerequisite, in “Western philosophy and mainstream monotheistic traditions, repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness – no apology means no forgiveness”<sup>41</sup>. Forgiveness benefits both oneself and others, the one who forgives and the person who is forgiven. Forgiveness is a vital spiritual practice that transforms the one who forgives. For Chien-Te Lin, what allows forgiveness is Buddhist wisdom and compassion,<sup>42</sup> and “apart from the mundane moral and social dimensions of forgiveness, the Buddhist practice of forgiveness has spiritual and transcendent aspects which enable unconditional forgiveness of wrongdoing in the absence of repentance”.<sup>43</sup>

The second scholar whose work on Buddhist forgiveness I analyze here is Donna Lynn Brown.<sup>44</sup> According to Donna Lynn Brown, “what is taught as forgiveness in older Buddhist contexts often differs from what is taught in North American Buddhism today”.<sup>45</sup> Since the 1980s, there is a new paradigm of forgiveness in Western culture: “victims let go of anger as a way to close wrongs. It is an attitude, not an action. It is not conditional, and does not lead to reconciliation. I call it ‘individual forgiveness’”.<sup>46</sup>

Besides “individual forgiveness”, there are two other paradigms of forgiveness, which Brown calls “relational forgiveness” and “gift forgiveness”. What unites relational and gift forgiveness is that both lead to reconciliation, that is, the aim of both is restoring relationships. Both relational and gift forgiveness are best described as actions. However,

---

<sup>39</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 279.

<sup>40</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 280.

<sup>41</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 279.

<sup>42</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 280.

<sup>43</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 281.

<sup>44</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022). “Forgiveness American-Style: Origins and Status of Forgiveness in North American Buddhism”, in *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol. 23, Nos.1 - 2, 18 - 66.

<sup>45</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 19.

<sup>46</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 39.

individual forgiveness is best described as an attitude unconnected to wrongdoer accountability or reconciliation. Individual forgiveness is “an attitude of letting go that offers mental peace but does not restore relationship”.<sup>47</sup>

Relational forgiveness requires conditions such as repentance and repairs, whereas gift forgiveness does not depend on any prerequisite. In this sense, relational and gift forgiveness correlate with conditional and unconditional forms of forgiveness. Brown draws on Martha Nussbaum to define individual forgiveness: “an attitude, unconditional, opposite to anger and vengefulness, embraced in solitude, and not restoring relationship.”<sup>48</sup> I label this way of forgiving ‘individual’ forgiveness”.<sup>49</sup>

According to Brown, the prevalent form of forgiveness in classical Buddhist texts as well as in premodern Asian practice is what she calls “relational forgiveness”, that is, forgiveness intended to restore a relationship through the fulfilment of certain conditions such as confession, apology and commitment to future restraint. Gift forgiveness or unconditional forgiveness to restore a relationship and achieve reconciliation “is not easily found in classical Buddhist texts, but probably occurs in everyday life”.<sup>50</sup>

Brown thesis is that the forgiveness taught in Buddhism in North America today is mainly individual,<sup>51</sup> and that it “did not come from Asia, but originated in North America”.<sup>52</sup> In other words, forgiveness as a peaceful attitude to let go of anger is a North American innovation that has passed largely unnoticed.<sup>53</sup> This new form of Buddhist forgiveness was developed primarily by five vipassana teachers: Stephen Levine, Joseph Goldstein, Anagārika Munindra, Jack Kornfield, and Sharon Salzberg.

Brown points out two foundations that contributed to contemporary understandings of individual forgiveness. The first foundation is that forgiveness was used as a translation for forbearance terms. These translations led to an understanding of forgiveness as equivalent to forbearance. In Brown’s words: “One foundation for individual forgiveness was the idea that ‘forgiveness’, rather than referring to the act of reconciling after wrongdoers repaired their wrongs, meant only

---

<sup>47</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 20.

<sup>48</sup> Nussbaum (2016): 72, 77 - 78.

<sup>49</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 21.

<sup>50</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 21.

<sup>51</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 21.

<sup>52</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 25.

<sup>53</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 30.



‘forbearance’.”<sup>54</sup> Brown discusses translations by Charles Wilkins, T. W. Rhys Davids, and Caroline Rhys Davids. Brown also discusses how Theosophists like Helena Blavatsky portrayed the Buddha as advocating unconditional forgiveness because karma enforces justice and any demand for accountability from wrongdoers would add unnecessary karmic punishment. For Brown, theosophical writers conflated forgiveness and forbearance in their descriptions of Buddhism, and they “spread the view that the Buddha taught forgiveness as unconditional, an attitude, and the same thing as forbearance.”<sup>55</sup>

The second foundation that contributed to the prevalence of individual forgiveness among North American Buddhists is the way Western followers interpreted the words and actions of their Asian teachers. Brown discusses four Asian teachers: Anagārika Dharmapāla, Satya Narayan Goenka, Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati, who was a Hindu teacher of Stephen Levine, and Neem Karoli Baba, who was the Hindu guru of Ram Dass.

Anagārika Munindra was a friend and student of Anagārika Dharmapāla, who was heavily influenced by Theosophical writers, and probably drew on their view of forgiveness as an attitude. Munindra was also a student of Goenka and he was influenced by Goenka’s conception of forgiveness. For Brown, Munindra “mixed relational and individual forgiveness.”<sup>56</sup>

Goenka shows a relational idea of forgiving that is conditional on requesting forgiveness from others after acknowledging possible wrongdoing through body, speech and mind (dedication-pardon). However, Brown suggests that such dedication-pardon recited at the end of Goenka’s meditation retreats has been interpreted as individual forgiveness.<sup>57</sup> More specifically, Munindra, Goldstein and Salzberg, who attended Goenka’s retreats in the early 1970s, interpreted Goenka’s dedication-pardon, which is a form of relational, conditional forgiveness, as a form of unconditional, individual forgiveness. Thus, Brown concludes that Goenka’s dedication-pardon “disseminated the idea that Buddhism teaches individual forgiveness.”<sup>58</sup>

Stephen Levine was a student of a Hindu teacher called Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati, who was also influenced by Theosophy and

<sup>54</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 25.

<sup>55</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 26.

<sup>56</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 33.

<sup>57</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 26.

<sup>58</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 27.

taught both relational and individual forgiveness. Whereas relational forgiveness was based on confession, remorse and restoring relationship, individual forgiveness was understood as a mere letting go of anger to resolve wrongs without holding wrongdoers accountable. For Brown, Stephen Levine taught forgiveness and self-forgiveness in the same individual way.

Neem Karoli Baba was the teacher of Ram Dass, who influenced the view of individual forgiveness taught by American vipassana teachers like Levine, Kornfield, Goldstein, and Salzberg. Ram Dass interpreted his teacher's view of acceptance or love as a form of individual forgiveness. For Ram Dass, an attitude of unconditional forgiveness forms a step toward "being love", which is the goal of spirituality. That is, unconditional love is founded on unconditional forgiveness. Forgiveness is the expression of a loving attitude or feeling that washes away the wrongdoing of both oneself and others; a peaceful attitude of letting go that heals and absolves all wrongs, hurts, irritants, guilt, and remorse. American vipassana teachers "adopted his [Ram Dass] definition of forgiveness - an attitude of non-anger, unconditional on repair, that dismisses wrongs, hurts and irritants as a step toward 'being love'".<sup>59</sup>

Brown assumes that "The idea that forgiveness precedes love comes from Ram Dass"<sup>60</sup> and concludes that "Evidence that forgiveness meditation came from Asia is lacking"<sup>61</sup>. Brown contends that neither the *mettā sutta* nor loving-kindness meditations contain words or concepts that can be translated as forgiveness. Likewise, mainstream Asian meditations of *mettā* meditations "produced prior to Western influence also do not mention forgiveness or forbearance".<sup>62</sup> From the absence of forgiveness meditation that precede lovingkindness meditation, and the absence of terms about forbearance and forgiveness in the *mettā sutta*, Brown concludes that the origins of individual forgiveness is found in American culture, not in traditional Asian Buddhism.

In her study of the origins of individual forgiveness, Brown not only credits Ram Dass but also A course in Miracles, bestselling New Age self-help author Dr. Gerald G. Jampolsky, and the evangelical pastor Lewis B. Smedes. By the 1990s, individual forgiveness was in, and instead of addressing interpersonal wrongs through conditional forms of relational

---

<sup>59</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 34.

<sup>60</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 34.

<sup>61</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 34.

<sup>62</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 35.

forgiveness by holding wrongdoers accountable, now forgiveness was practiced in solitude by letting go of anger, that presenting anger and forgiveness as a dichotomy. According to Brown, “the high profile of this new form of forgiveness, and its growing role in psychotherapy, contributed to its adoption by Buddhists”.<sup>63</sup>

According to Brown, the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn represents a transition that involves lovingkindness meditation with forgiveness borrowed from vipassana and a definition of forgiveness taken from non-Buddhist sources.<sup>64</sup> For Brown, “Kabat-Zinn defines forgiveness as resolving past wrongs by dropping anger, presents a dichotomy of forgiveness and anger, and makes the purpose of forgiving peace of mind, not ‘being love’ as Ram Dass and the *vipassāna* teachers had taught.”<sup>65</sup> This definition, dichotomy and aim were all drawn from Smedes’ and others’ self-help and psychological teachings”.<sup>66</sup>

In conclusion, Brown argues that individual forgiveness has “mainly non-Buddhist origins”,<sup>67</sup> “mainly North American origins”,<sup>68</sup> because it “was developed mainly by Ram Dass and Stephen Levine in the 1970s”. Another key claim of Brown’s article is that individual forgiveness does not emphasize moral agency, judgment of right and wrong, accountability, repair, and reconciliation.<sup>69</sup>

### III. THE BASIC DISTINCTION WITHIN BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

Given the existence of conflicting views of forgiveness among Western philosophers as well as among scholars who have researched Buddhist forgiveness, there is a need to clarify the meaning of this important concept. As Donna Lynn Brown says, contemporary scholarship “reveals contradictory ideas about what constitutes forgiveness in Buddhism”.<sup>70</sup> In what follows, I argue that forgiveness is not a Buddhist concept from a cosmological perspective but rather a concept that can be used from a psychological and social perspective. I suggest that the basic distinction within Buddhist forgiveness is not between conditional and unconditional forgiveness but rather between psychological and social

<sup>63</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 41.

<sup>64</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 41.

<sup>65</sup> Kabat-Zinn (1990) 127 - 8, 182 - 3.

<sup>66</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 41.

<sup>67</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 46.

<sup>68</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 47.

<sup>69</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 47.

<sup>70</sup> Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 48.

forgiveness. I also contend that from a Buddhist perspective these two basic kinds of forgiveness are intrinsically interrelated and oriented toward healing and peace both at the individual and the social level.

Buddhist forgiveness can be understood from a cosmological, social, and psychological perspective. Depending on what perspective we adopt, we can say different things about Buddhist forgiveness. From a cosmological standpoint, it is inaccurate and highly misleading to speak about Buddhist forgiveness. Forgiveness is not a Buddhist concept from a cosmological perspective. The Buddhist conception of karma cannot, and it should not be understood as having anything to do with forgiveness.

There is no forgiveness at the cosmic level of karma and its consequences. The Buddhist universe does not contain a creator God who may choose to intervene in the workings of karma to forgive wrongdoers, or to offer his only begotten son as a loving sacrifice to suffer and die for the sins of humankind. Likewise, liberation from karma is never a salvific gift or a grace received from a higher divine power. These theological ideas have nothing to do with Buddhist cosmology and the Buddhist conception of forgiveness.

Karma cannot be forgiven, and neither gods nor Buddhas or Bodhisattvas can intervene to eliminate the inexorable consequences of our actions. As Ken McLeod states “There is no grace in the operation of karma, just as there is no grace in the operation of gravity”.<sup>71</sup> Karma is a natural process that no supernatural agent can stop, suspend, or supervise at will. We can experience the results of our actions, we can mitigate the consequences of past evil deeds with new wholesome actions, and eventually we can even transcend good and bad karma. However, nobody can do anything to make karma disappear or absolve wrongdoers from the consequences of their actions. The Buddhist view of the universe is incompatible with the forgiveness of karma by any supernatural entity or divine reality.

The absence of a concept of forgiveness at the cosmological level, however, does not mean that there is no forgiveness in Buddhist traditions. As Bhikkhu Thanissaro affirms: “Forgiveness may not be able to undo old bad *karma*, but it can prevent new bad karma from being done”.<sup>72</sup> Although there is no Buddhist forgiveness at the cosmic level of karma, there is Buddhist forgiveness at the psychological and social levels.

<sup>71</sup> Ken McLeod (2017). “Forgiveness is not Buddhists”, in *Tricycle*, Winter, 120.

<sup>72</sup> Bhikkhu Thanissaro (2018). “All Winners, No Losers: The Buddha’s Teachings on Animosity & Forgiveness”. Originally published in *Tricycle*.

By forgiveness I mean an intentional response to someone who has committed a transgression or done something to harm us in some way. In other words, forgiveness is a response to those who harm us. As we will see, psychological Buddhist forgiveness is a gradual process that cannot be identified with patience, non-hostility, lovingkindness and compassion.

The most basic distinction within Buddhist forgiveness is between social and psychological forgiveness. Both types of forgiveness are responses to those who harm either us or the communities in which we live. Social forgiveness is intended to heal and restore relationships. The goal of social forgiveness is to reestablish harmonious interactions among individuals and to foster peaceful coexistence within communities. Ideally, social forgiveness seeks reconciliation and, if possible, a friendly relationship with all beings.

Social forgiveness usually requires conditions such as acknowledgement of a transgression, confession and commitment to avoid the same transgression in the future. In some cases, social forgiveness may also require repairs or amendments, such as rectification, restitution and some sort of retribution or punishment. Although social forgiveness is always conditional, psychological forgiveness may be either conditional or unconditional, depending on the spiritual development of the victim. The more loving and compassionate the practitioner is, the more likely she/he will offer forgiveness unconditionally, that is, regardless of the transgressor's repentance and reparations.

From a traditional Buddhist perspective, forgiveness at the social level is not limited to human interactions within lay and monastic communities. Traditional Buddhist cosmology includes diverse planes of rebirth besides the human realm. One can be reborn in any of those realms of existence and have interactions with beings living there. Likewise, humans can have interactions with beings from other realms of existence and such interactions may require forgiveness. Wherever there is harm and transgression, there is room for forgiveness. In other words, from a Buddhist perspective, social forgiveness is not limited to human interactions because humans can have interactions not only among themselves but also with other beings including deities (*devas*), titans (*asuras*), hungry ghosts (*petas*), and in Mahāyāna traditions, even with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Whereas social forgiveness is intended to heal and restore relationships to foster harmony and peace within communities, psychological

forgiveness is intended to heal and transform individuals. The goal of psychological forgiveness is to put aside negative, unwholesome emotions toward someone who has wronged us in some way, and to gradually replace such afflictive emotions by more positive and wholesome emotions such as forbearance, non-hostility, lovingkindness and compassion.

As we will see, the inner transformation enabled by forgiveness is a gradual process that may involve several stages, from restraining unwholesome attitudes and conduct through forbearance, to their progressive replacement by wholesome attitudes and conduct based on lovingkindness and compassion.

From a Buddhist perspective, psychological forgiveness is an indispensable part of the Buddhist path to transform and purify the mind. In this sense, psychological forgiveness can be considered a fundamental spiritual practice that enhances the cultivation of key Buddhist virtues such as forbearance, lovingkindness and compassion.

What I call “psychological” and “social” forgiveness can be compared to what is called “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” forgiveness in contemporary philosophy and psychology. Some Buddhists may find the terms “interpersonal” and “intrapersonal” more appropriate while others might find them problematic because they seem to presuppose the ultimate existence of persons, which is incompatible with the Buddhist doctrine of non-self. Personally, I think it is possible to speak about persons and responsible individuals at the conventional level, and as long as we do not posit a permanent and independent identity or self, the terms “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” are harmless and consistent with Buddhist traditions. However, to prevent possible misunderstandings and to avoid possible tensions with Buddhist traditions and the Buddhist doctrine of non-self, I prefer to use the terms “psychological” and “social” forgiveness instead of “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” forgiveness.

Other thinkers may prefer other terminologies like “inner” and “outer” forgiveness, or “spiritual” and “ethical” forgiveness, or “soteriological” and “sociopolitical” forgiveness. I really do not think terminology should be an issue because what really matters is the meaning of the terms and whether such terms help to clarify and better understand Buddhist forgiveness.

We need to clarify whether psychological and social forgiveness are interrelated in Buddhist traditions, whether one type of forgiveness has priority over the other, and whether Buddhist forgiveness admit degrees and variations. Psychological and social forgiveness are intrinsically



interrelated in Buddhist traditions because both are intended to foster healing and peace. Psychological forgiveness fosters inner healing and peace that is, within individuals or within their minds, whereas social forgiveness promotes external healing and peace, that is, healing relationships within families and communities, and peaceful coexistence between diverse groups of people.

Psychological and social forgiveness are also intrinsically interrelated in Buddhist traditions because they both contribute to the transformation of individuals and their communities in accordance with the Dharma, that is, they are both conducive to greater levels of healing and peace inside us and between us. Both psychological and social forgiveness mitigate individual and social suffering, eventually culminating in liberation, which is also described in terms of peace and health.

Exercising forgiveness at both the psychological and the social levels is required to live in accordance with the Buddha Dharma. For instance, the Buddha suggests that transgressions must be acknowledged as transgressions by the offenders, and that victims must rightfully forgive those confessed transgressions. In Bhikkhu Thanissaro's translation: "Monks, these two are fools. Which two? The one who doesn't see his transgression as a transgression, and the one who doesn't rightfully pardon another who has confessed his transgression. These two are fools. These two are wise people. Which two? The one who sees his transgression as a transgression, and the one who rightfully pardons another who has confessed his transgression. These two are wise people."<sup>73</sup> It is important to note that this text presupposes two distinct yet interrelated aspects of forgiveness. Seeing one's transgression as a transgression is an aspect of psychological forgiveness, and rightfully pardoning a confessed transgression is an aspect of social forgiveness. This means that Buddhist forgiveness is not merely an internal psychological process because the transgressor acknowledges and confesses his/her transgression to the victim. Likewise, Buddhist forgiveness is not merely an external social transaction because seeing the transgression as transgression and pardoning the transgression are internal psychological phenomena.

Although both psychological and social forgiveness are equally important and necessary to promote healing and peace within individuals and the communities in which they live, from a Buddhist perspective, psychological forgiveness has priority over social forgiveness. As the first verse of the *Dhammapada* states: "Mind precedes all things, mind is their

---

<sup>73</sup> A. I. 59.

chief, they are all mind-made, if someone speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him like the wheel follows the foot of the ox".<sup>74</sup>

Another reason for the priority of psychological forgiveness over social forgiveness is that Buddhist practices of social forgiveness are ultimately oriented toward the moral and spiritual transformation of individuals. That is, ceremonies to formally acknowledge, confess, and commit to exercising restraint in the future are not only social practices to promote communal harmony and peace, but also skillful instruments to foster the psychological transformation of both offenders and victims. In other words, the ultimate goal of social forgiveness is not restoring relationships and promoting communal harmony, but rather to eventually replace unwholesome attitudes and conduct dominated by anger and resentment by wholesome attitudes and conduct based on positive emotions and wisdom.

#### IV. PATTERNS OF BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

It is futile to try to find in classical Buddhist texts a comprehensive definition of forgiveness that resembles the definitions prevalent in contemporary philosophy and psychology of forgiveness. Likewise, it is naïve to think that we can find a Buddhist term common to all Buddhist traditions that can be translated as forgiveness in all cases and contexts. To identify functional equivalents of forgiveness across Buddhist traditions, we need a different approach.

What we find across different forms of Buddhism are stories illustrating Buddhist responses to people who harm or hurt others. For instance, the *Angulimāla Sutta* illustrates how different people respond to Angulimāla's past crimes.<sup>75</sup> These responses to Angulimāla's wrongdoing allow us to infer patterns that can be conventionally called expressions of Buddhist forgiveness. For instance, one response to Angulimāla's harmful deeds is the Buddha's unconditional forgiveness, who simply corrects Angulimāla's ways and accepts him as one of his disciples without requesting any reparation or amendments for his past crimes. Another response to Angulimāla's past wrongdoing is the conditional forgiveness of King Pasenadi, who first goes with his army where the Buddha resides to capture and put to death Angulimāla, but changes his mind and decides not to put him down after seeing he has become a venerable bhikkhu with outstanding moral behavior. Yet another response to Angulimāla's crimes is the lack of forgiveness shown by the

---

<sup>74</sup> *Dhp* 1.

<sup>75</sup> *M. II.* 97 - 105.

persons who hit and threw stones to him despite his amazing spiritual transformation. The *Angulimāla Sutta* is even useful to understand that from a Buddhist perspective, nobody can forgive bad karma, not even a Buddha, who explains that the assault suffered by Angulimāla is an inexorable consequence of his past deeds.

We also find across Buddhist traditions a multiplicity of practices to express repentance and acknowledge transgressions or the performance of unwholesome actions through body, speech or mind. These practices can also be considered expressions of Buddhist forgiveness. For instance, the Vinayas of all Buddhist schools contain special rituals performed every two weeks that involve confession of faults against the monastic code, as well as a commitment to future restraint. Similarly, many Buddhist practitioners, whether lay or monastic, perform every evening a ritual recitation that involves expressing repentance for unwholesome actions through body, speech or mind. For instance, members of the Chinese Buddhist organization called Dharma Realm Buddhist Association & The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, recite every evening the Eighty-Eight Buddhas Repentance Ceremony. In this ceremony one takes refuge in the three Jewels, invokes the eighty-eight Buddhas, and then the practitioner, whether lay or monastic, says: “May all the world Honored Ones, kindly be mindful of me, as I repent of the offenses I have committed in this life and former lives”. Similarly, the evening chanting of the Theravāda Oxford Buddhist Vihara, whose abbot is Bhikkhu Dhammasami includes a recitation in which after venerating each of the three Jewels, the practitioner, whether lay or monastic, bows and says: “Through body, speech, or mind, whatever unwholesome deeds I have done to the Buddha... Dhamma... Sangha, may the Buddha... Dhamma... Sangha accept my fault, so that in the future I may show restraint toward the Buddha... Dhamma... Sangha”.

Buddhist traditions are not monolithic. Although there is not a unique Buddhist term for forgiveness and there are several rituals related to the practice of forgiveness across Buddhist traditions, it seems possible to detect some common patterns that allow us to develop a unified philosophy of Buddhist forgiveness. One of those patterns is that terms that have been translated as forgiveness usually connote ideas that express “acceptance”, “forbearance” or “patience”. For instance, the Pāli term “*khama*” (Sanskrit *kṣama*) and terms derived from the verbal root “*kham*”, may signify forgiveness in some cases, but mostly in the sense of “enduring” “bearing”, and “tolerating”. The same could be said about the perfection of “*khanti*” (Sanskrit *kṣanti*), that is, such term might be

translated as forgiveness in some contexts, but it should not be equated with forgiveness because it has other meanings beside “forbearing” or “enduring” the harm inflicted by others.

Strictly speaking, it is not possible to conflate forgiveness and forbearance in Buddhism. Yet we could say that Buddhist terms signifying “forbearance” “tolerance” or “patience acceptance” may include in their semantic field some aspects of Buddhist forgiveness. Forgiveness is much more than a decision to restrain anger through forbearance (*khanti/ kṣanti*). Choosing not to respond with anger through body, speech and mind is an important aspect of Buddhist forgiveness included within the practice of forbearance, but we should not conflate forgiveness and forbearance.

As Chien-Te Lin suggests, forgiveness is “a quality inherent in forbearance”,<sup>76</sup> but forbearance does not encompass all aspects of Buddhist forgiveness. In fact, Chien-Te Lin himself, explains Buddhist forgiveness as “an act of compassion”.<sup>77</sup> Besides terms connoting forbearance, Buddhist traditions contain other terms that could also be translated as forgiveness in some contexts. These terms connote ideas related to love and compassion. For instance, the *Pāḷi* term “*avera*” (non-hostility, non-hate) is the response that the Buddha recommends to “*vera*” (hostility, hate) in the famous fifth verse of the *Dhammapada*. In Bhikkhu Buddhārakkhita’s translation: “Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased”. Obviously “*avera*” is not the same thing as forgiveness but expresses important aspects of Buddhist forgiveness. More specifically, “*avera*” relates to forgiveness in the sense of choosing not to pay hate and hostility with more hate and hostility.

This aspect of Buddhist forgiveness as “non-hate” and “non-hostility” seems irreducible to mere forbearance, which simply restrains anger and hate without necessarily implying their absence. That is, a mind that cultivates forbearance may presuppose the existence of restrained anger, hate, and hostility. Restrained anger, hate, and hostility through forbearance is not the same thing as non-hate and non-hostility.

The presence of “*avera*” expresses another aspect of Buddhist forgiveness, a deeper layer of meaning that connotes something more than just restraining anger and hate through forbearance. Here Buddhist forgiveness is no longer reducible to a quality inherent in forbearance. The presence of “*avera*” entails is a different kind of emotional response to those who harm us and this response is irreducible to restraining anger

<sup>76</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 263.

<sup>77</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 269.

through forbearance.

Forbearance entails a decision not to retaliate out of anger and this is achieved through restraint. One applies forbearance to restrain anger so that one does not engage in unwholesome actions against the other. *Avera* entails a decision not to retaliate, but this is not achieved through forbearance but rather through wisdom or realization of the Dharma. More specifically, “*avera*” seems to derive from a profound understanding of resentment and vengeance. This understanding is nicely expressed by verses 3-5 from *Dhammapada*. One realizes that those who harbor certain thoughts such as “he abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me” are never appeased, and those who do not harbor such thoughts find peace or are appeased. That is, one realizes that forgiveness leads to peace and resentment leads to not being at peace. This realization is deepened by verse 5, which relates to the specific means to attain such peace or appeasement. That is, one further realizes that in this world hate and hostility are never appeased through more hate and hostility, they are appeased only by “*avera*”, that is non-hostility or non-hate, the opposite of “*vera*”.<sup>78</sup>

Whether “*avera*” refers to the absence of hate and hostility, or to the presence of love is open to interpretation, as the multiple translations of the “*avera*” as “love” in verse 5 of *Dhammapada* demonstrate. In my view, the cessation of hostility and hate that “*avera*” signifies, does not amount to the automatic origination of goodwill, lovingkindness and compassion towards those who harm us. Rather, “*avera*” seems to mark an intermediate stage in the development of Buddhist forgiveness between forbearance and full-fledged love.

In my view, it is highly misleading to translate “*avera*” as “love” instead of “non-hate” or “non-hostility”. The point of the verse is not to teach that love is the means to end hatred and hostility, but rather that the vicious circle of violence and vengeance (returning hate with hate again and again), only perpetuates the conflict. The vicious cycle of hate and hostility stops when one of the parties in conflict decides to stop the hostilities and not to retaliate in kind, i.e., one chooses not to pay hate with hate anymore. Between “non-hate” in the sense of stopping the hostilities and deciding not to retaliate in kind, and “non-hate” in the sense of having a positive emotion of love toward those who hurt us, there is a long emotional distance. Not every time someone stops hating a person, love emerges immediately. The “non-hate” of verse 5

---

<sup>78</sup> *Dhp* 3 – 5.

from Dhammapada presupposes wisdom, not necessarily love.

Restraining hate and hostility with forbearance is the first step to get out of the vicious cycle of violence and vengeance. The next step is “*avera*” in the sense of non-hostility after having chosen to stop the hostilities and not to pay hate with more hate. This decision presupposes forbearance, but it does not derive from forbearance but rather from wisdom. By wisdom in this context I mean realizing that harboring certain thoughts of resentment does not lead to peace, and knowing that in this world hate is never appeased by more hate.

Forgiveness based on “*avera*” or non-hate constitutes an improvement over forgiveness based on forbearance, but it is not the highest expression of Buddhist forgiveness. Responding to those who harm us with “*avera*” it is not yet the same thing as responding with full-fledged love and compassion. The presence of “*avera*” may perhaps mark the beginnings of forgiveness rooted into love and compassion, but there is still room to cultivate a more loving and compassionate response to those who harm us.

## V. THE THREE STAGES OF BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

Buddhist forgiveness from a psychological point of view is a complex and gradual process that involves a variety of mental factors including forbearance, non-hostility, lovingkindness and compassion. There are three main stages in the psychological process of Buddhist forgiveness. The first stage of Buddhist forgiveness is marked by the prevalence of forbearance and the restraint of anger, so that we do not do or say anything against those who harm us. In this first stage of Buddhist forgiveness, the primary goal is to restrain anger so that we do not perform unwholesome deeds in retribution or as retaliation for the harm inflicted upon us. In this first stage we decide to let go of unwholesome actions rooted in anger and hate.

Buddhist texts from different traditions contain numerous examples of this expression of Buddhist forgiveness. A paradigmatic example of forgiveness understood as choosing to restrain anger and hate through forbearance is the *Khantivādin Jātaka*.<sup>79</sup> Here, the Bodhisattva was an ascetic preaching about forbearance. An intoxicated king assaults him and asks about the meaning of forbearance. The Bodhisattva replies that forbearance is not being angry when abused, defamed and beaten.

The second stage of Buddhist forgiveness is marked by the presence of non-hate or non-hostility (*avera*). Forbearance might still be required,

---

<sup>79</sup> Ja. 313.



but it is no longer the prevalent mental factor. Whereas in the first stage forbearance focusses on restraining anger and hate to prevent moral misconduct and the accumulation of negative karma, in the second stage non-hate focusses on counteracting resentment (he abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me) as well as thoughts of vengeance (wishing to pay back hate with hate).

Whereas in the first stage of Buddhist forgiveness, forbearance is accompanied by the realization of the dangers of anger and moral misconduct, in the second stage, non-hate or non-hostility are accompanied by the realization of the eternal Dharma: "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased". This realization of the eternal Dharma is preceded by awareness of the uselessness and harmful nature of resentment. Resentment does not heal our minds and hearts, and it does not contribute to the solution of any conflict. Quite the contrary, those who experience resentment are never at peace, and harboring thoughts such as "he abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me" only feed our wish to pay back hate with hate, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence and vengeance.

Whereas in the first stage of Buddhist forgiveness one decides to let go of moral misconduct rooted into anger, in the second stages one decides to let go of resentment and the wish to payback hate and hostility with more hate and hostility. In other words, in the first stage of Buddhist forgiveness one decides to let go of stronger manifestations of hate, whereas in the second stage one decides to let go of subtler expressions of hate. Both stages of Buddhist forgiveness serve to counteract unwholesome mental states and immoral actions, but they address distinct degrees and manifestations of hate.

The third stage of Buddhist forgiveness is marked by the increasing presence of lovingkindness and compassion, which gradually grows until the practice of forbearance becomes unnecessary. That is, once lovingkindness and compassion become prevalent in the mind, the need to cultivate forbearance in the sense of restraining anger and hate disappears. Practitioners are supposed to cultivate forbearance as well as lovingkindness and compassion at all stages of the process of Buddhist forgiveness. However, it is at this third stage that lovingkindness and compassion begin to take off and become truly abundant (*vipula*), exalted (*mahaggata*), immeasurable (*appamāṇa*), without hostility (*avera*) and without ill will (*abyābajjha*).

A paradigmatic example of this third stage of Buddhist forgiveness, that is, of a response to those who harm us with lovingkindness and

compassion, can be found in the *Kakacūpamasutta* (M. M. 21). There, the Buddha explains that when someone addresses us with harsh words, intending our harm, and with inner hate, we should train the mind to respond with lovingkindness and compassion. In Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation: "Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading that person with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; and starting with him, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind similar to a catskin bag, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.' That is how you should train, bhikkhus."<sup>80</sup>

After encouraging monks to train their minds so that they can respond to verbal abuse with lovingkindness and compassion, the Buddha uses the famous simile of the saw to underscore his point. The simile of the saw, however, goes even further to suggest that one should respond with love and compassion not only to those who harms us verbally but also physically. In Bhikkhu Bodhi's words: "even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching."<sup>81</sup> This response to those who physically harm us represents an ideal type of behavior, which requires a higher degree of forgiveness or forgiveness as an expression of love and compassion.

It should be noted that the simile of the saw states that those who fail to carry out the Buddha's teachings are those who give rise to a mind of hate, which only requires the first stage of forgiveness or forgiveness understood as restraining anger through forbearance. Yet the ideal type of Buddhist forgiveness is not to respond to those who harm us with forbearance, but rather with a mind imbued with lovingkindness and compassionate for their welfare.

Eventually, the gradual replacement of anger and hate by lovingkindness and compassion renders forgiveness redundant. Strictly speaking, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have nothing to forgive because their minds have reached the highest level of lovingkindness and compassion. For advanced Buddhist practitioners, there is no need to let go of anger and hate, no need to let go of resentment and vengeful feelings, and no need to train the mind further to respond to verbal and physical abuse with lovingkindness and compassion.

---

<sup>80</sup> M. I. 129.

<sup>81</sup> M. I. 129.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are living embodiments of lovingkindness and compassion without any need to forgive anybody or anything. No matter how bad someone treats a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, their response will always be an expression of immeasurable love and compassion. In this sense, it could be said that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are beyond forgiveness, not because they would not be willing to forgive someone who harm them, but rather because their first response is always unconditional love and compassion. However, to avoid possible misunderstandings I prefer to say that the forgiveness characteristic of exemplar Buddhist practitioners is always unconditional, absolute and universal. Like Chien-Te Lin, I view ideal types of Buddhist forgiveness as unconditional and without presupposing “repentance as a necessary prerequisite”<sup>82</sup>. However, I do not think it is correct to suggest that all forms of Buddhist forgiveness are unconditional.

Buddhist social forgiveness is usually conditional or dependent on the transgressor’s acknowledgment of a fault and commitment to future restraint. However, some practitioners may choose to forgive others who harm them without the repentance of the offender and without reparations. Likewise, psychological forgiveness is conditional whenever it is cultivated as spiritual practice by someone who has committed a fault or done something wrong. Without repentance and commitment to avoid the same transgression in the future, a practitioner cannot cultivate psychological forgiveness as a spiritual practice. Asking Buddhas to be witness or invoking the three Jewels while acknowledging one’s faults without repentance and commitment to future restraint does not make much sense from a Buddhist perspective.

From the perspective of the victim or the person who has been wronged by others, however, it is true that repentance of the offender is not a prerequisite to forgive. A Buddhist practitioner who has been harmed by others can and, from a Buddhist perspective, should emulate Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and choose to practice forgiveness unconditionally, that is, without requiring repentance and amendments from the transgressor. This spiritual practice of unconditional Buddhist forgiveness should be distinguished from what Donna Lynn Brown calls “individual forgiveness”. Unlike “individual forgiveness”, forgiveness as an unconditional spiritual practice presupposes clear ethical standards of right and wrong, as well as personal accountability.

The spiritual practice of psychological forgiveness, which offers

---

<sup>82</sup> Chien-Te Lin (2021): 268.

unconditional forgiveness, is compatible with social practices of forgiveness, which require conditions such as confession, commitment to future restraint, and even amendments are indispensable. There is no contradiction between forgiving everybody for everything at the psychological level, and requiring certain conditions to be forgiven at the social level.

In conclusion, the basic distinction within Buddhist forgiveness is not between conditional and unconditional forgiveness but rather between psychological and social forgiveness. Both psychological and social forgiveness can be either conditional or unconditional depending on the spiritual development of practitioners as well as the needs to reestablish healthy relationships and harmony within communities.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Allais, L. 2019. "The Priority of Gifted Forgiveness: A Response to Fricker", in *Australian Philosophical Review*, Vol.3. NO.3, 261 - 273.
- Arendt, H. 1958. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).
- Brown, D. L. 2022. "Forgiveness American-Style: Origins and Status of Forgiveness in North American Buddhism", in *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol. 23, Nos.1 - 2, 18 - 66.
- Derrida, J. 2001. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Dhammapada*, Ed. S.Sumangala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K.R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.
- Fricker, M. 2019. "Forgiveness – An Ordered Pluralism", in *Australian Philosophical Review*, Vol.3. No.3, 241 - 260.
- Griswold, C. L. 2007. *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- Jankélévitch, V. 1967. *Le Pardon* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne).
- Khuddakapāṭha*, Ed. Ven. Ñāṇamoli, *The Minor Readings and the Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, PTS, London, 2015.
- Lin, Chien-Te. 2021. "With or Without Repentance: A Buddhist Take on Forgiveness", in *Ethical Perspectives*, Vol.28, No.3, 263 - 285.
- Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed.V.Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London,

1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.

McLeod, K. 2017. "Forgiveness is not Buddhists", in *Tricycle*, Winter.

Nussbaum, M. 2016. *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Thanissaro, 2018. "All Winners, No Losers: The Buddha's Teachings on Animosity & Forgiveness". Originally published in *Tricycle*.





# “*AHIMŚĀ*”: A BUDDHIST RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)

Elias G. Konyana\*

## **Astracts:**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of interpersonal violence that women and girls suffer from men and boys, especially when they are dating. It is a salient form of gender-based violence, also known as domestic violence. IPV includes the physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse of one partner by the other. More often, IPV entails one partner exercising control over the other's behaviour, making life unpleasant for the victim partner. It is a foregone conclusion that IPV is the worst affront to social cohesion and peaceful male-female co-existence. However, over the years, I have observed that, while there has been research on reconciling survivors of other forms of interpersonal violence such as genocide, war and colonial exploitation, research on the possibility of reconciling perpetrators of intimate partner violence with survivors of the same violence is scant. Arguably, most research has been on the causes, effects and/ or impact of gender-based violence and domestic violence, as well as the preventive strategies that can be instituted to avoid and consequently end violence in relationships between men and women. Not much has been said about national peacebuilding through forgiveness, reconciliation, and compensation of victims of violent intimate relationships for the good of the greater society or community. Thus, the argument in this article is that the Buddhist principle of “*Ahiṃsā*” is the best alternative that

---

\* Associate Professor in Ethics: Department of Ethics, Philosophy, Religion and Theology, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe. Senior Research Associate: African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science (ACEPS), University of Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa.

Buddhism has offered to the world. I argue that “*Ahiṃsā*” can end any form of violence, including intimate partner violence, and bring social justice and reconciliation at intimate partner relational level. It can also guarantee family stability, community cohesion and national healing and peacebuilding throughout the world.

**Keywords:** *Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), “Ahiṃsā”, social justice, reconciliation, mindful healing.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The world is full of violence at all levels of human interaction, be it personal and interpersonal. In most communities, intimate partner violence (IPV) is generally misconstrued as a private matter unless and until one partner, usually the wife, goes out to seek intervention. Even then, she does so secretly by consulting her aunty or grandmother who, more often than not, discourage her from taking private matters into the public domain. IPV is the worst form of interpersonal violence for humanity.<sup>1</sup> This kind of violence makes women suffer physical, sexual and/ or emotional abuse, making IPV a salient killer of family peace and community harmony. More often, IPV entails one partner exercising control over the other’s behaviour, making life unpleasant for their partner. It is a foregone conclusion that IPV is the worst affront to social cohesion and peaceful male-female co-existence. However, existing research on violence has focused on reconciling perpetrators and survivors of other forms of violence such as genocide, war and colonial domination. Not much, if anything, has been done on the possibility of reconciling perpetrators of IPV with their victims. This article proceeds by discussing the possibility of forgetting abuse and forgiving perpetrators of IPV for purposes of achieving family peace and community harmony.

It should be noted that forgiveness is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been debated by philosophers, psychologists, and spiritual leaders for centuries. Buddhism has brought a fascinating approach to forgiveness. While forgiveness can be a challenging and often painful process, it is also a powerful tool for healing and reconciliation. In this article, I will explore the relationship between forgiveness, mindful healing, and reconciliation, and guide how to cultivate forgiveness in our lives.

---

<sup>1</sup> Intimate partner violence is regarded as an issue between those in love. Once the woman tells anyone about what pains her in the marriage such as violence, she is regarded as a failure and her case becomes village gossip material.

This paper is constructed from an argument anchored on three premises, that is, that forgetting is a psychological or spiritual process which takes time to happen, that forgiveness is a deliberate personal effort to erase all the bad memories about a painful past, and that forgiveness without the perpetrator openly admitting wronging the victim is provisional and fictitious. Thus, the paper claims that without personal commitment to restitution, survivors of IPV cannot forgo or forget the painful abusive experience and forgive the perpetrator. In the final analysis, the import of the argument is that without admission by perpetrators and restitution to reconcile with the victim, family, community and national peacebuilding remains a pipe dream.

## II. MOTIVATION

Writing this article was inspired by a case I witnessed in my community. A neighbour and his wife always fought and we never noticed until the fight went out of hand. For me, being way younger than the man involved in this case, it was uncultured to intervene between the couple. From an African cultural perspective, it is taboo for the young to advise the elders on anything, let alone on marital issues.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this paper was inspired by a real life scenario involving a couple known and very close to me. For ethical reasons, I refer to the couple as Mr. and Mrs. X or, simply the X's. The couple was always nice and welcoming everyone into their home. Neighbours hardly noticed anything unusual between them because neither of the couple would show that they were always arguing or fighting. On very few occasions, the couple would miss community gatherings, Church services, or being seen together in public. So, for years, nothing became evident until recently when the wife decided to break the silence and the circle of violence in her married life. One day, she reached out to me as a member of the Community Campaign against Violence (CCaV) team and asked me a pertinent question. The question was on whether it is possible to forgive an abusive intimate partner for what he has been doing to her and forget all about the painful experiences. This happened following a community outreach and awareness campaign against gender-based violence programme that we had carried out in the neighbourhood in respect of the 2022 United Nations' theme: "UNITE! Activism to end Violence against Women and Girls by 2030."<sup>3</sup> I listened to her account of the abuse she

---

<sup>2</sup> In an African communitarian set-up, there is no room for the young to advise the elders. Doing so is tantamount to breaking a sacred code of conduct.

<sup>3</sup> U.N. (n.d.). What we do: Ending violence against women. UN Women. Retrieved

was suffering from her husband. From her narrative, I noticed that she was acrimonious and needed help to make peace between her and her husband. She needed a victim-offender reconciliation dialogue with her husband to achieve interpersonal reunion and peace. This is the gap I identified which required urgent attention. Undoubtedly, IPV victims are demanding significant attention from their abusers to get the closure and peace of mind required for a continued and happy intimate relationship.

So, in response to the woman's question, I directed her to our counselling services as I investigated the possibility of post-abuse forgiveness and reconciliation among intimate couples in Zimbabwe. The assumption I made was that peaceful co-existence between intimate couples was a microscopic reflection of community harmony, which in turn became a recipe for national unity and peace. This incident opened a plethora of issues which I sought to investigate and expose through this article.

### **III. WHAT IS MINDFUL HEALING?**

Mindful healing is a holistic approach to wellness that combines the principles of mindfulness with the process of forgiveness. Mindfulness involves paying attention to the present moment, without judgment or attachment. When people practice mindfulness, they become more aware of their thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, allowing them to respond to challenging situations with greater clarity and compassion.

In the context of forgiveness, mindful healing involves cultivating awareness of people's emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations related to a painful experience. By acknowledging and accepting their feelings, rather than suppressing or denying them, they can begin to release the negative energy associated with the experience.

#### **3.1. A path to reconciliation**

Forgiveness and mindful healing are not only essential for personal healing but also for reconciliation. When people forgive, they create space for new relationships, new experiences, and new perspectives emerge. Forgiveness allows people to let go of the past and move forward, rather than remaining stuck in a cycle of resentment and anger.

#### **3.2. Intimate partner violence: Some definitions**

There is already a wide range of literature on what intimate partner violence is.<sup>4</sup> For purposes of putting the reader of this article into

---

December 10, 2024, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>.

<sup>4</sup> Several authors including Konyana, E. G. (2018) and Burrill, E. *et al*, (2010) published on

perspective, I reiterate that intimate partner violence is one of the many forms of domestic violence that disproportionately affect women and girls in intimate relationships more than men and boys. While domestic violence broadly refers to abuse of any family member such as elderly persons, parents, children or siblings, IPV refers to any abuse or aggressive behaviour that occurs in a romantic or intimate relationship. According to the World Health Organisation (2012) report, intimate partner violence is widespread as it occurs in all settings and among all social, economic, religious and cultural communities worldwide.<sup>5</sup> However, there are various definitions of IPV. For example, Mukamana et al. (2020:13) define IPV as "...any assaultive and coercive behaviour that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to a person in a relationship."<sup>6</sup> These definitions present IPV as a version of domestic violence as it directed to or occurs between people in an intimate relationship and invariably, all the definitions point to four types of IPV as identified by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2015:5), namely, physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression.<sup>7</sup> The idea is to come up with coherent and uniform conceptions of IPV to improve the collection and analysis of data and help to identify trends and make comparisons in different social settings.

### 3.3. Manifestations of forms of abuse in intimate relationships

Intimate partners are persons who live, or may have lived together, and share life and emotions. This comes from their love for each other, which, in the first place, is the reason for them to accept and share love, compassion, and resources. Their closeness implies that they become familiar with each other and strongly feel like being together forever. However, intimacy makes each of them susceptible to abuse by the other at some point in their love life. 'Abuse' may set in at any stage, taking various forms and shapes. For instance, it can come in as one partner,

---

domestic violence including IPV, covering a wide range of issues such as causes, interventions strategies and preventive mechanisms.

<sup>5</sup> WHO. (2012). *Intimate partner violence. World Health Organization (WHO)*. Retrieved January 13, 2024, from [https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.36\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>6</sup> Iman'ishimwe Mukamana, J., Machakanja, P., & Adjei, N. K. (2020). *Trends in prevalence and correlates of intimate partner violence against women in Zimbabwe, 2005-2015*. BMC International Health and Human Rights, 20, 2 - 5. 10.1186/s12914-019-0220-8.

<sup>7</sup> Saltzman, L. E., Fanslow, J., McMahon, P. M., & Shelley, G. A. (2002). *Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements [Report]*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

usually the man, supported by some African cultural beliefs and practices, realises that he has power to control his partner. Such power shows itself through control over resources and decisions on certain procedures and processes in the home. The man gradually emerges as the more powerful of the two and, at that point, the love relationship begins to take an 'abusive' trajectory. By 'abusive' I mean that the powerful partner begins to control the unsuspecting partner in very subtle ways, which include giving instructions, refusing to be questioned, irritability, and hiding their feelings. When this happens, especially between married couples who live under one roof, abuse can escalate and become nasty. The discomfort that the victim partner suffers gets to unbearable levels to the extent that the victim has no option but to react.

As indicated in the section above, IPV takes various forms. It can take the economic dimension where the woman would have to seek her husband's approval to buy groceries, including feminine hygiene products for her and her girls' use. In some instances where a married woman is gainfully employed, the abusive husband may conjure behaviour that seeks to get the woman unpopular at her workplace and get her dismissed.

In some instances, the perpetrator may stalk his wife, surprisingly showing up at places where his wife would have gone to. He may also call her on her mobile phone, asking about where she would have gone and what time she is likely to come back home.<sup>8</sup> Whenever this happens, then the intimate relationship becomes toxic and the most likely outcome is physical violence. This is what happened in my motivational case where the wife was beaten several times before she finally broke the silence. While she had kept silent for purposes of keeping peace, she was in fact at war within herself.

### 3.4. Restorative justice and reconciliation

According to Zehr (1995: 3 - 39), restorative justice, also known as victim-offender reconciliation, is an approach to justice whose objective is to repair the harm suffered by victims of abuse by providing an opportunity for those harmed and those responsible for the harm to meet, discuss and address their needs in the aftermath of a crime.<sup>9</sup> It is

---

<sup>8</sup> Chuma, M., & Chazovachii, B. (2012). Domestic violence act: Opportunities and challenges for women in rural areas: The case of ward 3, Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 3 (3. 4).

<sup>9</sup> Zehr, H. *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. Waterloo, Herald Press, (1995), p. 33 - 39.



a process that invites the victims of a crime, those that committed the crime, and the community to participate in a process of dealing with offenders and repairing the harm that the offenders caused.<sup>10</sup> In essence, restorative justice processes are three-way, and provide opportunities for the perpetrator to reflect on the harm they inflicted on their victims, take responsibility, show remorse and seek forgiveness from those that they offended. This is to say that, unlike viewing justice as punishing the offender, restorative justice looks at justice as repairing the damage caused by the criminal or offender.<sup>11</sup> Usually, the approach to restorative justice is open discourse, allowing the victim to pour out their grief and also permit a repentant offender to express regret in the presence of the offended and the arbitrator. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, restorative justice has a traditional background.<sup>12</sup> It has always been used by families and communities when they resort to the traditional court institutions such as the family court (*Dare remusha*), the Headman's Court (*Dare raSabhuku*) or the Chief's Court (*Dare raShe/Mambo*). However, a successful restorative justice process does not set the conciliation terms for the offender. It should be made possible at the offender's instigation and not by the victim or the arbitrator.

### 3.5. Is intimate partner violence forgivable? Some ancient contestations.

The issue of forgiving is closely linked to that of forgetting. One cannot forgive without having to forget whatever it was that went wrong. This concept was emphasised by Bhattacharya, H. (2009: 19) who claimed that, in the context of interpersonal violence, to forgive involves emotions to forget, to let go and tolerate pain or suffering to move on with life.<sup>13</sup> Conceived thus, forgiveness operates on the behest of the victim's preparedness to sustain an offence and excuse the offender at any cost. Nevertheless, the philosophy of forgiveness is a contested one and it dates back to the ancient Greek classical philosophers' time, Plato and Aristotle. For instance, in Plato's theory of justice, there is no

<sup>10</sup> Bonta, J., Wallace-Capretta, S., & Rooney, J. (1998). *Restorative Justice: An Evaluation of the Restorative Justice Project*. Ottawa: Solicitor General, Canada.

<sup>11</sup> Pointer, L., & Buchanan, C. D. (2021, August 5). What is "Restorative Justice" and How Does it Impact Individuals Involved in Crime? bja nttac. Retrieved February 23, 2025, from <https://bjatta.bja.ojp.gov/media/blog/what-restorative-justice-and-how-does-it-impact-individuals-involved-crime>.

<sup>12</sup> Bourdillon M. (1991). *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to their Religion*. Gweru: Mambo Press, p. 127.

<sup>13</sup> Bhattacharya, H. (2009). Introduction to gender violence and identity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(2), 267–275. SAGE Publications, p. 104.

room for exonerations. An offender is never to be forgiven or pardoned without serving their punishment or repaying for the damage they caused. This principle is well situated in Practical Philosophy and it requires that both the victim and offender expressively reciprocate and operate in morally appropriate ways. The appropriate thing to do or way out for the offender is to compensate the victim, who, in turn, should accept the atonement and forget the offense. In all practical realities, Plato holds that mere forgiveness is not a possibility.<sup>14</sup> For him, it is forgiveness rather than forgiveness, that rides on the victim's benevolent willingness to forget the painful past on the understanding that some people cannot help being bad or behave badly due to some forces they cannot overcome. This conception of forgivingness makes forgiveness a function of exaggerated human existence because it is impossible for the victim to completely forget the experiences of crime until they are atoned. Instead, Plato believed that only forgiveness or kindness can be extended to the offender by the victim after abuse without this amounting to forgiveness itself. The idea is that, since forgiveness entails that the victim ought to willingly forget what they suffered at the hands of the offender, it also implies that the offender ought to incentivise the victim to forget the pain they subjected them to. The incentive, which is a form of compensation, is meant to encourage the victim to deliberately forget the crime and the pain suffered.

Contrary to Plato's convictions on forgiveness, Aristotle believed that forgiveness is possible as it rests within the victim's capacity to do so. For Aristotle, forgiveness is a virtue, a sign of wisdom and personal growth of character.<sup>15</sup> It is a demonstration on the part of the victim or the offended that they are mature and understand that blaming offenders for wrongdoing is failing to understand them well. This is to suppose that intimate partners ought to appreciate each other and tolerate each other's weaknesses and shortcomings, including the disposition to be violent.

While Aristotle's conception is a good approach to saving an intimate partner relationship that would have become toxic through violence, the challenge comes when the perpetrator does not understand that they have a problem seated within their violent temperament. Tolerating abuse and staying with such a perpetrator may prove to be a very difficult and dangerous decision. A victim may desire to find happiness again

---

<sup>14</sup> Griswold, C. L. (2007). *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Griswold, C. L. (2007). *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 101.

after abuse, which may not come while they continue staying with the perpetrator. Ultimately, the victim may leave an abusive relationship when the pain of staying and tolerating intimate partner abuse is stronger than the pain of ending the abusive relationship. However, some victims may choose to stay with the abuser for various reasons<sup>16</sup> and desire reconciliation with their abusers because they believe that it is the perpetrator's responsibility to accept accountability and compensate the victim for the damage and pain suffered.

#### IV. BUDDHIST APPROACHES IN ADDRESSING IPV

In addressing intimate partner violence (IPV), Buddhism offers a threefold approach that emphasizes inner transformation, emotional resilience, and ethical living. These approaches are rooted in Buddhist philosophy and psychological well-being, providing survivors with tools for healing and empowerment.

##### 4.1. Mindfulness and meditation (*sati* and *samādhi*)

The cultivation of mindfulness and meditative practices serves as a foundational method for survivors of IPV to regain a sense of inner stability. Through practices such as *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing) and *vipassanā* (insight meditation), individuals develop heightened self-awareness, mental clarity, and emotional equilibrium. This enables them to process trauma with greater detachment, reducing overwhelming distress and fostering a sense of inner peace.

##### 4.2. Loving-kindness meditation (*mettā-bhāvanā*)

The practice of *mettā* (loving-kindness) meditation encourages individuals to generate unconditional goodwill and compassion (*karuṇā*), both towards themselves and others. For survivors of IPV, this meditation serves as a means of self-reconciliation, allowing them to cultivate self-compassion while gradually transforming resentment or emotional pain. Importantly, this practice does not necessitate reconciliation with the perpetrator; rather, it empowers survivors to heal by fostering an expansive and liberating sense of compassion.

##### 4.3. Forgiveness and letting go (*khanti* and *vossagga*)

Buddhist teachings advocate for the practice of forgiveness - not as an obligation to the perpetrator, but as a means of releasing oneself

<sup>16</sup> Konyana, E. G. (2018). Domestic violence legislation in Zimbabwe: probing into the security of women in rural communities. In M. C. Green, T. J. Gunn, & M. Hill (Eds.), *Religion, Law and Security in Africa* (pp. 336 - 338). African Sun Media. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv21ptz2w.26>.

from the burden of negative emotions. Forgiveness in Buddhism is not about condoning harm but rather about achieving emotional liberation (*vimutti*). By letting go of resentment and anger, survivors free themselves from cyclical suffering (*dukkha*) and create space for their own psychological and spiritual well-being.

At the heart of this approach lies the ethical principle of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), one of the most fundamental tenets of Buddhist morality. *Ahiṃsā* is grounded in the understanding that all sentient beings possess an inherent right to live free from harm, fear, and suffering. It calls for the cultivation of deep empathy, compassion, and kindness (*mettā-karuṇā*) toward all living beings. In the context of IPV, the principle of *ahiṃsā* reinforces the necessity of rejecting all forms of violence - physical, emotional, and psychological - while advocating for justice, healing, and the restoration of dignity for survivors. By embodying *ahiṃsā*, individuals and societies move toward a path of peace, ethical integrity, and genuine transformation.

#### 4.4. Practicing *ahiṃsā* for world peace

To achieve peace in the world, the renowned Buddhist Hanh says that:

“To prevent war, to prevent the next crisis, we must start right now. When a war or crisis has begun, it is already too late. If we and our children practice *ahiṃsā* in our daily lives, if we learn to plant seeds of peace and reconciliation in our hearts and minds, we will begin to establish real peace and, in that way, we may be able to prevent the next war.”<sup>17</sup>

Within the Buddhist tradition, the practice of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) is regarded as a fundamental ethical precept that fosters harmony, compassion, and the alleviation of suffering. Rooted in the understanding of interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and karmic consequences, *ahiṃsā* extends beyond the mere avoidance of physical harm to encompass speech, thought, and social conduct. Its application can contribute to a more peaceful world in several significant ways:

**4.4.1. Refraining from harming or killing (*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*):** Buddhists uphold the principle of non-harm by consciously avoiding any action that causes suffering, injury, or death to living beings. This commitment extends not only to human interactions but also to the

---

<sup>17</sup> Sieber, A. (2015). Hanh's Concept of Being Peace: The Order of Interbeing. *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, 5(1), 1-8. 10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v05i01/51097.

treatment of animals and the natural environment, reflecting the broader ethical responsibility toward all sentient beings.

**4.4.2. Cultivating compassion and empathy (*mettā-karuṇā-bhāvanā*):** The practice of *ahimśā* is deeply intertwined with the development of *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). By fostering an attitude of understanding and concern for the well-being of others, Buddhists strive to reduce hostility and promote a culture of mutual care and respect.

**4.4.3. Speaking with kindness and truthfulness (*sammā-vācā*):** Ethical speech is a critical aspect of *ahimśā*, as words possess the power to heal or to harm. Practitioners of Buddhism are encouraged to engage in *sacca-vācā* (truthful speech) and *piya-vācā* (kind and pleasant speech), avoiding harsh, deceitful, or divisive language that could lead to suffering or discord.

**4.4.4. Engaging in non-violent conflict resolution (*avirodha-dhamma*):** In alignment with Buddhist teachings on harmony and right action (*sammā-kammanta*), non-violent approaches to conflict resolution are essential. Rather than resorting to aggression or coercion, Buddhists advocate for dialogue, patience, and reconciliation, fostering peaceful coexistence within families, communities, and societies.

Through the practice of *ahimśā*, Buddhists contribute to the cultivation of a world where violence, exploitation, and suffering are minimized. By integrating this principle into daily life, individuals and societies can foster ethical integrity, deepen their spiritual practice, and create a foundation for lasting peace and harmony.

#### 4.5. The benefits of *ahimśā*

Practicing *Ahimśā* brings numerous benefits, including:

- i. Cultivating compassion and empathy: *Ahimśā* helps develop a sense of connection and understanding with others.
- ii. Reducing suffering: By avoiding harm and promoting kindness, *Ahimśā* contributes to reducing suffering in the world.
- iii. Promoting peace and harmony: *Ahimśā* fosters a sense of peace and harmony within individuals and communities.
- iv. Supporting spiritual growth: Practicing *Ahimśā* is considered essential for spiritual growth and development in Buddhism.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) stands as a profound relational crisis due to the immense harm and destruction it inflicts upon individuals and

families. The enduring psychological, emotional, and physical scars left by IPV often render the path to healing arduous, with victims struggling to move beyond the profound trauma they have endured. In this context, the discourse surrounding forgiveness, particularly its role in fostering reconciliation and social harmony, becomes critically significant. The absence of external pressure to forgive, alongside a nuanced understanding of the consequences of interpersonal forgiveness, is essential in the broader framework of family, community, and national peace-building efforts. While forgiveness remains a deeply contested concept, its underlying purpose is to facilitate the restoration of peace and mutual understanding between conflicting parties. However, forgiveness can only yield positive outcomes for the survivor if the perpetrator demonstrates genuine remorse, takes full accountability for their actions, and actively engages in a process of transformation.

Reconciliation in the aftermath of intimate partner abuse is contingent upon the abuser's willingness to acknowledge their culpability, accept responsibility for the suffering they have inflicted, and take meaningful steps toward amends. Mere verbal assurances of change are insufficient; rather, reconciliation necessitates tangible, sustained behavioral transformations. The process must be accompanied by concrete actions - such as reparative gestures, engagement in therapy, or participation in rehabilitative programs - that substantiate the sincerity of the abuser's commitment to change. Without such evidence, reconciliation remains superficial, offering little assurance to the survivor that genuine reform has taken place. The burden of proof, therefore, lies with the perpetrator, whose actions must align with their words to rebuild trust and foster a sense of security for the survivor.

In a broader ethical and philosophical context, the Buddhist principle of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) offers a profound framework for addressing intimate partner violence and fostering healing. Rooted in the fundamental precept of refraining from causing harm (*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*), *ahiṃsā* encourages individuals to cultivate compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and ethical responsibility in their interactions with others. By internalizing and embodying *ahiṃsā*, practitioners strive to minimize suffering, nurture harmonious relationships, and advance spiritual growth. Within the discourse on IPV, this principle underscores the importance of a transformative justice approach—one that does not simply demand forgiveness from the survivor but instead prioritizes accountability, healing, and the genuine reformation of harmful behaviors. Thus, in alignment with Buddhist



ethics, true reconciliation must be predicated upon a commitment to non-harm, mutual respect, and the active pursuit of justice and healing for all those affected.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Bhattacharya, H. (2009). Introduction to Gender, Violence, and Identity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(2), 267–275. 10.1177/1077800408326843
- Bonta, J., Capretta, S. W., & Rooney, J. (1998, October). *Restorative Justice: An Evaluation of the Restorative Resolutions Project* [Report]. Solicitor General Canada.
- Bourdillon, M. F. C. (1976). *The Shona peoples: an ethnography of the contemporary Shona, with special reference to their religion*. Mambo Press.
- Burrill, E. S., Roberts, R. L., & Thornberry, E. (Eds.). (2010). *Domestic Violence and the Law in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*. Ohio University Press.
- Chuma, M., & Chazovachii, B. (2012). Domestic violence act: Opportunities and challenges for women in rural areas: The case of ward 3, Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 3(3.4).
- Griswold, C. L. (2007). *Forgiveness: a philosophical exploration*. Cambridge University Press.
- Iman'ishimwe Mukamana, J., Machakanja, P., & Adjei, N. K. (2020). Trends in prevalence and correlates of intimate partner violence against women in Zimbabwe, 2005-2015. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 20, 2-5. 10.1186/s12914-019-0220-8
- Konyana, E. G. (2018). Domestic violence legislation in Zimbabwe: probing into the security of women in rural communities. In M. C. Green, T. J. Gunn, & M. Hill (Eds.), *Religion, Law and Security in Africa* (pp. 336 - 338). African Sun Media. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv21ptz2w.26>
- Pointer, L., & Buchanan, C. D. (2021, August 5). *What is "Restorative Justice" and How Does it Impact Individuals Involved in Crime?* bja nttac. Retrieved February 23, 2025, from <https://bjatta.bja.ojp.gov/media/blog/what-restorative-justice-and-how-does-it-impact-individuals-involved-crime>

- Saltzman, L. E., Fanslow, J., McMahon, P. M., & Shelley, G. A. (2002). *Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements* [Report]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.
- Sieber, A. (2015). Hanh's Concept of Being Peace: The Order of Interbeing. *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, 5(1), 1 - 8. 10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v05i01/51097
- Thich Nhat Hanh. (1999). Ahimsā: The Path of Harmlessness. In D. W. Chappell & J. Halifax (Eds.), *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*. Wisdom Publications.
- U. N. (n.d.). *What we do: Ending violence against women*. UN Women. Retrieved December 10, 2024, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>
- WHO. (2012). *Intimate partner violence*. World Health Organization (WHO). Retrieved January 13, 2024, from [https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.36\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf?sequence=1)
- Zehr, H. (1990). *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. Herald Press.

# SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: THE BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Most Ven. Prof. KL. Dhammajoti\*

## **Abstract:**

This essay explores the intricate relationship between spiritual practice and social engagement from a Buddhist perspective, challenging prevalent misconceptions about the nature of “Engaged Buddhism.” It asserts that the Buddha’s teachings emphasize the sharing of spiritual wisdom – the Dhamma – over material charity, positing that the act of teaching is the highest form of compassionate action. By reframing social engagement as a spiritual practice, the text highlights the distinction between mere charitable acts and the transformative potential of Dhamma sharing, which fosters spiritual awakening in both the giver and receiver. The essay further examines the integration of self-cultivation with compassionate action, emphasizing that genuine social engagement stems from awareness of interdependence rather than self-sacrifice. Through the analysis of key texts, the work illustrates the progressive path of spiritual transformation that arises from practices such as listening, teaching, and reciting the Dhamma. It argues for the unity of worldly engagement and spiritual transcendence, advocating for a middle path that harmonizes immediate relief of suffering with the pursuit of ultimate liberation. Ultimately, the essay underscores the significance of spiritually meaningful social engagement, presenting it as a vital aspect of authentic Buddhist practice that cultivates mutual benefit and contributes to the realization of *Nibbāna*.

**Keywords:** *Engaged Buddhism, spiritual transformation, compassionate action, dhamma sharing, interdependence.*

---

\* Most Ven. Prof. K. L. Dhammajoti-Chairman of Buddha Dharma Centre of Hong Kong.

## I. INTRODUCTION: BEYOND CONVENTIONAL “ENGAGED BUDDHISM”

This paper explores the transformative potential of socially engaged Buddhist practice by reinterpreting canonical sources from the *Pāli*, *Sanskrit*, and *Chinese* Buddhist traditions. Challenging the modern reduction of “Engaged Buddhism” to socio-political activism or charitable works, it argues for a model of social engagement grounded in spiritual insight, mindfulness, and the cultivation of wisdom. Drawing on teachings such as the *Vimuttāyatana Sutta*, *Saṅgītiparyāya*, and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, the study demonstrates that actions like listening to, teaching, and reciting the Dhamma are not mere ritual duties but profound bases for liberation when performed with appropriate mental qualities. These practices lead to a progressive inner transformation – joy, tranquility, and ultimately *Nibbāna* – benefiting both self and others. The integration of self-cultivation (*svārtha*) and compassionate action (*parārtha*) is emphasized as a non-dual path, where spiritual transcendence and worldly engagement are harmonized. This approach reframes Buddhist social action not as self-sacrifice but as mutual benefaction rooted in the realization of *anattā* and *śūnyatā*. The study concludes that socially engaged Buddhism becomes spiritually significant only when it serves as a vehicle for both alleviating suffering and realizing liberation.

The relationship between spiritual practice and social engagement in Buddhism is often misunderstood. While many modern Buddhist apologetics cite the Buddha’s exhortation to the first sixty arahant bhikkhus as evidence for social work being central to Buddhism, a closer examination reveals a more nuanced teaching:

“Wander, O monks, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world. For the welfare and happiness of gods and men, let not two of you go on the same path. Teach [them] the Dhamma.” (*caratha bhikkhave cārikaṃ bahujana-hitāya bahujana-sukhāya lokānukampāya | atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam mā ekena dve agamittha | desetha bhikkhave dhammaṃ*)<sup>1</sup>

This passage, properly contextualized, shows that the Buddha was primarily instructing spiritually accomplished teachers (arahants) to spread the Dhamma. The emphasis was not on material charity but on sharing spiritual wisdom – the highest form of giving, as the Buddha himself declared: “The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts.”

## II. REFRAMING “SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT” AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

### 2.1. Spiritual benefits over material giving

The Buddha’s approach to social engagement differs fundamentally from modern conceptions of social work. While building hospitals and engaging in charitable activities have their place, the Buddha emphasized teaching Dhamma as the supreme form of compassionate action. This distinction is

<sup>1</sup> Vin. i, 21; DN ii, 48.

crucial for understanding spiritually significant Buddhist social engagement.

Teaching Dhamma isn't merely transferring information or even imparting knowledge but creating conditions for the spiritual awakening of others as much as oneself. This, on the one hand, represents a profound form of compassion that addresses suffering at its root causes rather than merely alleviating symptoms, and, on the other, directly experiencing the profound inspiration capable of transforming oneself in the process.

## 2.2. Transforming “Religious duties” into liberation practices

What might appear as routine religious obligations can become powerful vehicles for spiritual transformation when approached with proper mental qualities. As stated in the *Vimuttāyata-sutta*:<sup>2</sup>

“These five, O Bhikkhus, are the liberation bases wherein – when a Bhikkhu is abiding heedful (*appamatta*), zealous (*ātāpin*) and resolutely committed (*pahitatta*) – his not yet liberated thought is liberated, and his not yet fully destroyed outflows (*āsava*) come to full destruction, and he comes to attain the not yet attained supreme Spiritual Security (*yogakkhema* = *nibbāna*)...”

The text identifies several activities that can become “bases of liberation” when practiced with proper mindfulness and commitment:

1. Listening to the Dhamma
2. Teaching the Dhamma to others
3. Reciting the Dhamma

These practices, often reduced to mere religious duties or obligations, can lead to full enlightenment when approached with the right mental cultivation.

## III. THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

### 3.1. The progressive path of inspiration to liberation

When engaged in these practices with proper aspiration, intention, and sincerity, one undergoes a progressive spiritual transformation. The Pāli and Saṅgītiparyāya texts clearly describe this TRANSFORMATION process as a progressive experience of increasingly profound joy – the deepest joy/happiness being that of *Nibbāna*/ *Nirvāṇa*:

### 3.2. When listening to the Dhamma (Base I)

“A teacher or a spiritual practitioner in the position of a teacher (*garuṭṭhānīyo sabrahmacāri*) teaches the *Dhamma* to a Bhikkhu. That Bhikkhu, O Bhikkhus, comes to directly discern (*paṭisaṃvedī hoti*) the *dhamma* and meaning (*attha*) with regard to that *Dhamma* in the very same manner the teacher or the fellow spiritual practitioner teaches that *Dhamma* to him. To him who is directly discerning the meaning and the *Dhamma*, joyousness arises. To him who is joyful, rapture arises. For him, with a rapturous mind, the body becomes tranquil. With a tranquilized body, he feels happiness. Being happy his thought

<sup>2</sup> AN iii, 21.

is equipoised (*samādhiyati*)..."<sup>3</sup>

The complete progression from the *Saṅgītiparyāya*: Direct discernment → joyousness → rapture → bodily tranquillity → happiness → mental equipoise → knowledge-vision of things as they truly are (如實知見) → discontent/ disenchantment (*nirvid*) → detachment (*virāga*) → liberation.

### 3.3. When teaching the Dhamma (Base II)

"Neither a teacher nor a fellow spiritual practitioner teaches the *Dhamma* to a *Bhikkhu*. But he teaches the *Dhamma* to others in detail as it has been heard and mastered. O *Bhikkhus*, in the very manner he is teaching the *Dhamma* to others in detail as it has been heard and mastered, in that very same manner he comes to directly discern the *dhamma* and meaning with regard to that *Dhamma*... joyousness arises... rapture arises... feels happiness... his thought is equipoised."<sup>4</sup>

Remarkably, this passage reveals that not only the listener but the teacher himself is transformed through the act of teaching. This beautifully illustrates the spiritual "mutual benefaction" that occurs in spiritually significant *Dhamma* sharing. The following are two clear examples:

- Young Nāgasena *bhikkhu* attained spiritual insight and became transformed in the very process of preaching the *Dhamma* to a sincere old devotee (in the *Milindapañha*)
- Similarly, Upagupta acquired spiritual attainment while preaching to the courtesan Vāsavadattā (in the *Aśokāvadāna*)

### 3.4. When reciting the Dhamma (Base III - *Saṅgītiparyāya* version):

"No teacher teaches... But he/ she recites loudly the *Dharma* as has been heard and mastered (隨曾所聞究竟法要所有義趣)... In the manner that he recites..., in that very same manner he/ she comes to directly discern the *dharma* and the meaning... then generates joyousness;... rapture;... body becomes tranquil;... experiences happiness;... thought is equipoised;... knowledge-vision of things truly as they are;... discontent; detachment;... liberation.... *Nirvāṇa*."<sup>5</sup>

### 3.5. The integration of self-cultivation and compassionate action

The Buddhist approach transcends the false dichotomy between self-development and service to others. As Erich Fromm noted:

"The [false] assumption... is: Selfishness is identical with self-love. To love others is a virtue; to love oneself is a sin. Furthermore, love for others and love

<sup>3</sup> AN iii, 21. See also Pāli versions in DN, *Saṅgīti-sutta*; DN, *Dasottara-sutta*, and other versions in the Sanskrit and Chinese texts quoted in K.L Dhammajoti, "The Five bases of Liberation: Transformation through creative listening", in: *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies*, Sri Lanka, Vol XX, 139 – 173.

<sup>4</sup> AN iii, 21 – 22.

<sup>5</sup> For this and other quotations from the Chinese version of the *Sarvāstivāda Saṅgītiparyāya*, see T26, no.1536, 424a4 – 425c12.



for oneself are mutually exclusive... Selfishness is not identical to self-love but its very opposite. Selfishness is one kind of greediness.... Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction.”<sup>6</sup>

From a Buddhist perspective, spiritually significant social engagement flows naturally from the insight of *anattā/nairātmya* (not-self/no-selfness). This means that Buddhist social engagement should not be mischaracterized as “self-sacrifice” but rather as a practice recognizing the interdependence of all beings.

For social engagement to be spiritually significant (or authentic), it must be cultivated with awareness of mutual benefaction – the accomplishment of self-benefaction (*svārtha* 自利) through that of others (*parārtha* 利他) and conversely.

## V. THE DIALECTIC OF ENGAGEMENT AND TRANSCENDENCE

### The unity of worldly engagement and spiritual transcendence

“Being in the world” (入世) must also have a “world-transcendence” (出世) dimension. This principle distinguishes spiritually significant Buddhist social engagement from mere worldly activism. The Chinese Buddhist tradition articulates this as the harmony between “benefiting self and others” (自利利他). We need to recognize that not all personality types are to be socially engaged or at all phases of their spiritual striving. But given the appropriate personality type who is so motivated and inspired, social engagement should – ideally or as much as possible – be practiced with the mindfulness of what the *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures express as “*anupalambha-yoga*” (無所得方便). We might translate this important phrase as “the method of non-apperception,” i.e., not conceptualizing any ontologically real occurrences. We could perhaps also call this the method of deconstructing the conception of the metaphysical reals. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā* underscores the spiritual significance of such a manner of social engagement (the example of charity) as follows:

“If a Bodhisattva, Mahāsattva, practises *dāna-pāramitā* by the method of *anupalambha* – fully discerning (了達) that all givers, recipients and gifts are non-occurrences (*an-upa-√labh*; 不可得 ‘cannot be got at’) – such *upāya-kausālya* can fulfill the *pāramitās* of *śīla*, *kṣānti*, *vīrya*, *dhyāna* and *prajñā*.”<sup>7</sup>

The *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā* (金剛經) states succinctly and profoundly:

“The Bodhisattva, the Great Being, should thus produce a thought that is non-fixated (*apraṭiṣṭhita*) – in such a manner that the thought is produced

<sup>6</sup>Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom* (1994 Reprint), 114f.

<sup>7</sup>《大般若波羅蜜多經》T05, no. 220, p. 14c17–21: 若菩薩摩訶薩以無所得而為方便, 修行布施波羅蜜多 – 了達一切施者、受者及所施物皆不可得 – 如是布施方便善巧, 能滿布施、淨戒、安忍、精進、靜慮、般若波羅蜜多。Also cf: T5, 737c11–14.

without being fixated anywhere. (Chinese: 應無所住而生其心)<sup>8</sup>

This unity of engagement and transcendence operates on multiple levels:

- **In action:** Outward charitable activities become vehicles for inward cultivation
- **In motivation:** Compassion for suffering beings becomes inseparable from insight into emptiness
- **In understanding:** The conventional truth of helping others and the ultimate truth of no-self are realized as complementary, not contradictory
- **In goal:** Relief of immediate suffering becomes unified with liberation from all suffering

The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* exemplifies this approach through the bodhisattva, who engages with the defiled world yet remains undefiled, like a lotus growing from mud yet remaining unstained. The bodhisattva's engagement is more effective precisely because it is grounded in transcendent wisdom.

Viewed from one perspective, the Bodhisattva is “self-sacrificing” (altruistic); viewed from another, he is actually practising for his own spiritual perfection. As Samantabhadra Bodhisattva eloquently expressed: 「因於眾生而起大悲。因於大悲生菩提心。因菩提心成等正覺。」<sup>9</sup>

“Because sentient beings exist, [the Bodhisattva] generates great compassion. Because there is great compassion, he generates the *bodhi-citta*. Because of the *bodhicitta*, he attains Perfect Full Enlightenment (*samyak-sambodhi*).”

This profound statement encapsulates the Buddhist perspective on spiritual transformation through social engagement. The very existence of suffering beings provides the opportunity for compassionate action, which in turn becomes the vehicle for one's own enlightenment.

## VI. CONCLUSION: SPIRITUALLY SIGNIFICANT BUDDHIST SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

For practicing Buddhists, mere “engaged Buddhism” focused solely on social welfare remains insufficient. Spiritually significant practice requires the integration of compassionate action with spiritual insight and mindfulness. When properly understood, social engagement becomes not a distraction from spiritual practice but its very fulfillment – a manifestation of the Buddhist ideal that unifies self-benefaction and other-benefaction – the two are not mutually exclusive but mutually fulfilling.

The Buddhist approach thus offers a unique vision for social engagement – one that addresses both immediate suffering and its ultimate causes. Such

<sup>8</sup> bodhisattvena mahāsattvenaivam apratiṣṭhitam cittam utpādayitavyam yan na kvacitpratiṣṭhitam cittam upādayitavyam ...

<sup>9</sup> 《大方廣佛華嚴經》〈入不思議解脫境界·普賢行願品〉, 846a13-15.

engagement transforms not only society but also the practitioner, creating a virtuous cycle of mutual benefit. The highest form of this engagement remains, as the Buddha taught, the sharing of Dhamma – which liberates both giver and receiver, culminating in the supreme happiness of Nibbāna.

As we navigate contemporary social challenges, this ancient wisdom reminds us that true social transformation must be rooted in spiritual transformation. In this way, Buddhist social engagement becomes neither worldly activism divorced from spiritual insight nor spiritual bypass that ignores worldly suffering, but rather a middle path that integrates and transcends both extremes.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Āṅguttara Nikāya*. (1900–1920). *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (Vol. 3, 21). Pāli Text Society.
- Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. (n.d.). *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, Chapter: Entry into the Inconceivable Liberation Realm – Vows of Samantabhadra (T10, No. 293, p. 846a13–15). *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*.
- Dasottara-sutta*. (n.d.). In *Dīgha Nikāya* (Vol. 3). Pāli Text Society.
- Dīgha Nikāya*. (1890–1910). *Dīgha Nikāya* (Vol. 2, 48). Pāli Text Society.
- Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. (n.d.). *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (T05, No. 220, p. 14c17–21; cf. 737c11–14). *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*.
- Sanḅgīti-sutta*. (n.d.). In *Dīgha Nikāya* (Vol. 3). Pāli Text Society.
- Sarvāstivāda Saṅgītiparyāya*. (n.d.). *Sarvāstivāda Saṅgītiparyāya* (T26, No. 1536, 424a4–425c12). *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*.
- Vinaya Piṭaka*. (1885–1910). *Vinaya Piṭaka* (Vol. 1, p. 21). Pāli Text Society.

### Secondary sources

- Dhammajoti, K. L. (n.d.). The five bases of liberation: Transformation through creative listening. *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies (Sri Lanka)*, 20, 139–173.
- Fromm, E. (1994). *Escape from freedom* (Reprint ed.). Holt Paperbacks.
- Gunaratana, H. (2011). *Mindfulness in plain English* (2nd ed.). Wisdom Publications.
- Nyanatiloka Thera. (1993). *Buddhist dictionary: Manual of Buddhist terms and doctrines*. Buddhist Publication Society.
- Santikaro, B. (2022). Listening to and teaching the Dhamma. *The Buddhist Teacher*, 12(3), 45–67.



# THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE VIETNAMESE BHIKKHUNI SANGHA TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY

Bhikkhuni Dr. Lieu Phap<sup>\*</sup>

## Abstract:

This paper highlights the impactful role of the Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha in promoting sustainable development across Vietnam. It outlines the historical and contemporary significance of Vietnamese nuns in education, healthcare, social welfare, environmental advocacy, and Dhamma propagation. Through community-based charity work, including care for orphans, the elderly, and marginalized populations, the Bhikkhuni Sangha embodies Buddhist compassion and social responsibility. Their free clinics and disaster relief initiatives demonstrate active engagement in public health and emergency response. Additionally, the nuns contribute to spiritual education through public Dhamma talks, university teaching, summer camps, and conferences. By integrating traditional Buddhist teachings with modern societal needs, the Bhikkhuni Sangha fosters ethical living, social harmony, and inclusive spiritual development. Their participation in academic, environmental, and humanitarian fields illustrates the vital role of women in Vietnamese Buddhism, paving a sustainable path for national progress and global compassion.

**Keywords:** *Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha, sustainable development, buddhist charity, Dhamma education, social welfare, women in Buddhism, spiritual leadership.*

\*\*\*

---

<sup>\*</sup> Deputy Head, Department of Dharma English, Vietnam Buddhist University. Abbess of Vien Khong Nunnery.

## I. OVERVIEW OF VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM AND VIETNAMESE BHIKKHUNI SANGHA

### 1.1. Overview of Vietnamese Buddhism

Buddhism may have first come to Vietnam as early as the 3rd or 2nd century BCE from the Indian subcontinent or China in the 1st or 2nd century CE.<sup>1</sup> In any case, at the end of the second century CE, Vietnam had grown into a significant regional Mahayana Buddhist center, called Luy Lâu in the current Bắc Ninh Province, upper northeast of the present-day capital city of Hanoi. Luy Lâu was the capital of the Han district of Jiaozhi and was a well-known destination visited by numerous Indian Buddhist missionary monks on the way to China. Several Mahāyāna sutras and the Āgamas were translated into Classical Chinese there, including the Sutra of Forty-two Chapters and the Ānāpānasati Sūtra.

In the next eighteen centuries, Vietnam and China shared many common features of cultural, philosophical, and religious heritage as a result of geographical proximity and Vietnam being annexed twice by China. Vietnamese Buddhism is thus related to Chinese Buddhism in general and, to some extent, reflects the formation of Chinese Buddhism after the Song dynasty.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in 875, Cham King Indravarman II, who was a devout Zen Buddhist, established Mahayana Buddhism as Champa's state religion. His dynasty continued to rule Champa until the late 10th century.<sup>3</sup>

During the Đinh dynasty (968–980), Mahayana Buddhism was recognized as an official religion (971), showing the high esteem of the Buddhist faith held by the Vietnamese rulers, including some impacts from the Vajrayana section.<sup>4</sup>

The Early Lê dynasty (980–1009) likewise bestowed the same acknowledgment to the Buddhist Sangha. The development of Buddhism during this time is credited to the recruitment of erudite monks to the court, as the newly independent state needed an ideological basis on which to build a country. Consequently, this role was ceded to Confucianism.<sup>5</sup>

Vietnamese Buddhism reached its peak during the Lý dynasty (1009–1225), starting with the founder, Lý Thái Tổ, who was brought up in a pagoda.<sup>6</sup> All of the kings during the Lý dynasty professed and authorized Buddhism as the state religion. This continued with the Trần dynasty (1225–1400), but Buddhism had to share the stage with the emerging growth of Confucianism.

<sup>1</sup> Nguyen, C. T. (1997). *Zen in medieval Vietnam: A study of the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* (p. 9). University of Hawaii Press.

<sup>2</sup> Prebish, C., & Tanaka, K. (1998). *The faces of Buddhism in America* (p. 134).

<sup>3</sup> Hall, D. G. E. (1981). *History of South East Asia* (pp. 201–202). Macmillan Education, Limited.

<sup>4</sup> Nguyen, T. T. (2008). *The history of Buddhism in Vietnam* (p. 77).

<sup>5</sup> Nguyen, T. T. (2008). *The history of Buddhism in Vietnam* (p. 75).

<sup>6</sup> Nguyen, T. T. (2008). *The history of Buddhism in Vietnam* (p. 89).



By the 15th century, Buddhism fell out of favor with the court during the Later Lê dynasty, even though it was still popular with the masses. Some officials attacked it as heretical and wasteful.<sup>7</sup> It was only after the 19th century that Buddhism recovered some height under the Nguyễn dynasty, which granted royal support.<sup>8</sup>

A Buddhist revival movement emerged in the 1920s to reform and reinforce institutional Buddhism, which had lost ground to the spread of Christianity and the growth of other religions under French rule. The movement continued into the 1950s.<sup>9</sup>

Today, Buddhists are found throughout Vietnam, from North to South. Buddhism is the single largest organized religion in Vietnam, with somewhere between 12.2% and 16.4% of the population identifying themselves as Buddhist.<sup>10</sup> The number is higher than reported, as many declared themselves as atheists but still participated in Buddhist activities.

Buddhism is associated with the long and deep history of Vietnam. Buddhist festivals are officially promoted by the Government, whereby Vietnam hosted UN Vesak Day four times, in 2008, 2014, 2019, and 2025.

## 1.2. Overview of the Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha

At present, there are three Sects in Vietnamese Buddhism, namely Mahayana, Theravada, and Mendicants. All the three Sects have their own Bhikkhuni community in their respective tradition, but all are united in the National Bhikkhuni Sangha.

Even though there are some extremists who, due to a lack of knowledge and understanding, exalt their school and disparage the others, most well-informed Buddhists know the history and value of each school. At the Buddhist universities, where monks and nuns of all the three schools are trained, students are instructed in both canonical and non-canonical subjects, including the doctrines of the two main Buddhist schools: Theravāda and Mahāyāna. For Buddhist ceremonies, such as those held on Buddha Jayanti Day, Buddhists of all three schools gather together and pray for the peace and prosperity of the country. This is also because the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha has established an action program for national cooperation and harmony among all Buddhist schools. They have founded a system of monastic education and have been promoting friendship among the world's Buddhist organizations to help create peace on earth.

<sup>7</sup> Tran, N. T., & Reid, A. (2006). *Việt Nam: Borderless histories* (p. 67).

<sup>8</sup> The Vietnam Review. (1997). *Volume 3*.

<sup>9</sup> DeVido, E. A. (2007). Buddhism for this world: The Buddhist revival in Vietnam, 1920 to 1951, and its legacy. In P. Taylor (Ed.), *Modernity and re-enchantment: Religion in post-revolutionary Vietnam* (p. 251). Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

<sup>10</sup> Home Office. (2014, December). *Country information and guidance – Vietnam: Religious minority groups*.

All the three Sects in Vietnam have their own Bhikkhuni community in their respective tradition, but all are united in the National Bhikkhuni Sangha. At the beginning of the 21st century, the number of nuns in Vietnam continued to grow to tens of thousands of people, accounting for 54% of the total number of more than 50,000 monks and nuns in the country. The cultural standard of nuns has improved greatly as compared to earlier times when nuns only did domestic work within the pagodas. According to the Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang, the Supreme Patriarch of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, the number of Vietnamese nuns was not only larger than that of monks, but many of them were highly educated and increasingly active in various fields.

Although there are some differences in theory and practice between these three schools, they co-exist harmoniously in the same country. Together, they guide the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. Each school tries to preserve its traditions while respecting the contributions of the other schools. Vietnamese Buddhists are free to choose the school that is most suited to their particular temperament and change from one school to another as they like. If they wish, they can even learn from and support all three schools at one time.

In recent years, nunneries have appeared in great numbers, and the number of nuns has increased dramatically. In Vietnam today, the number of nuns is estimated to be two times the number of monks. Nuns can be seen everywhere. Whenever the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha opens Buddhist schools and universities, the student nuns are always the overwhelming majority. The cultural standard of nuns has improved greatly as compared to earlier times when nuns only did domestic work within the pagodas. These days, many nuns are interested in registering for courses at secular universities in Vietnam as well as in foreign countries such as India, China, Australia, and France. Most nuns pursue studies or charity activities, such as helping lepers, old people, the handicapped, and poor people in distant or isolated areas. These activities are manifestations of the benevolent and compassionate spirit of the bodhisattva practice.

## **II. CONTRIBUTION OF VIETNAMESE BHIKKHUNI SANGHA FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY**

The Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha has made invaluable contributions to the sustainable development of Vietnam, intertwining spiritual practices with social and environmental responsibility. The Bhikkhuni Sangha has played a key role in fostering social welfare, providing support to marginalized communities, particularly women and children, by organizing educational programs, healthcare initiatives, and poverty alleviation projects. The Sangha also advocates for ethical business practices, community-building, and peaceful conflict resolution, contributing to the overall social cohesion of the country.

### **2.1. Charity activities**

Vietnamese nuns have long been engaged in various charity activities, often driven by deep compassion, religious commitment, and a desire to serve others. Their charity work is primarily linked to Buddhist monastic traditions but also extends into other aspects of Vietnamese society.

The dedicated spirit of the nuns is deeply imbued with noble deeds: taking care of abandoned children, orphans, children with disabilities, or families with no means of nurturing. Many temples have become family homes for orphans and disadvantaged people and become classrooms to teach literacy and benevolence to disadvantaged and disabled children.

### 2.1.1. Old-Aged Home

Old-aged homes run by Vietnamese Buddhist nuns play a significant role in supporting elderly individuals who may be without family care or resources. These homes provide not only physical care but also emotional and spiritual support, in line with Buddhist principles of compassion and respect for all beings, particularly the elderly.

The primary mission of old-aged homes run by Vietnamese Buddhist nuns is to offer a safe, peaceful, and loving environment for elderly individuals. In Vietnam, where family care is highly valued, there are still instances where the elderly are neglected, abandoned, or do not have adequate family support. In these cases, Buddhist nuns create a nurturing space where seniors can live with dignity, receive proper care, and experience a sense of belonging.

Buddhist teachings emphasize compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*), which are foundational in the care provided in these homes. The elderly are seen as deserving of respect and care in their later years, aligning with the Buddhist belief in the importance of reverence for life and the cycle of aging.

In addition to physical care such as food, shelter, and medical attention, these homes often provide spiritual support through Buddhist practices. Nuns offer regular meditation sessions, chanting, and dharma talks (Buddhist teachings) to help the elderly find peace and comfort in their spiritual life.

Many elderly people find solace in the Buddhist teachings on impermanence and mindfulness, which can be particularly helpful as they face the challenges of aging. Nuns often engage in one-on-one conversations with residents, offering counseling and guidance to help them cope with any fears or anxieties related to aging, death, or loneliness.

The elderly in these homes are cared for with attention to their physical health, particularly those who may be frail, disabled, or chronically ill. The nuns and volunteers often help with daily activities such as feeding, bathing, and dressing. Depending on the resources available, there may also be trained medical professionals to offer regular health check-ups or address specific medical needs.

Besides physical care, the residents are encouraged to participate in light physical activities, such as walking or simple exercises, to maintain their mobility and well-being. In many cases, these homes provide communal activities, such as group meals, handicraft sessions, or social events, to help the elderly stay engaged and connected.

Old-aged Buddhist homes typically aim to create a familial atmosphere where the elderly residents feel loved and cared for rather than isolated or

abandoned. The nuns often form close relationships with the residents, providing them with a sense of stability and comfort. For many, this environment is akin to an extended family, where mutual respect and kindness are emphasized.

While these homes provide a sanctuary for the elderly, the nuns also encourage the residents to maintain relationships with their families, if possible. The homes may welcome family visits and encourage regular communication to help maintain the family bond.

Some notable examples are the Bao Quang Pagoda in Da Nang and Lam Quang Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City, where Buddhist nuns provide shelter and care to elderly people, including those who have no family or whose families are unable to care for them. In these kinds of establishments, the elderly not only receive daily care but are also invited to participate in the spiritual and communal life of the monastery.

### 2.1.2. Orphanages

Orphanages run by Vietnamese Buddhist nuns play a vital role in the care and nurturing of children who have been abandoned, orphaned, or left in difficult circumstances. These orphanages not only provide shelter, food, and education but also offer a supportive and compassionate environment where the children receive emotional, spiritual, and moral guidance.

The primary mission of orphanages run by Buddhist nuns is to provide a safe, nurturing, and loving environment for children in need. The nuns often see their work as a form of spiritual practice, embodying the principle of serving others selflessly.

In Vietnam, where many families face economic hardship or social challenges, orphaned or abandoned children may have few options. Buddhist nuns step in to provide these children with a secure and supportive home, allowing them to grow up with care and opportunity.

The nuns running these orphanages focus on meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the children. This comprehensive approach ensures that the children receive more than just the basics- they are raised in an environment that fosters love, respect, and dignity.

**Physical Care:** The children are provided with a safe, clean, and stable home environment. This includes access to healthy meals, shelter, clothing, and basic hygiene.

**Medical Care:** Nuns ensure the children receive regular health check-ups and care for any illnesses or medical conditions. In some cases, these orphanages may work with doctors and medical volunteers to provide necessary treatments.

**Education:** Nuns often run or collaborate with schools to provide education for the children. They may have on-site teachers or organize after-school tutoring. Education is seen as a key means of empowering children to build a better future.

**Emotional and Psychological Support:** Many children in orphanages have experienced trauma, such as the loss of parents or abandonment. The nuns provide psychological and emotional support, creating a nurturing and safe space where children can heal and feel loved. The nuns themselves often act as maternal figures, offering comfort and care.

Since these orphanages are run by Buddhist nuns, spiritual guidance is an integral part of the children's upbringing. The children are taught Buddhist principles such as mindfulness, compassion, and gratitude, which help them build resilience and inner strength.

**Buddhist Practices:** Children may learn basic Buddhist practices like meditation, chanting, and mindfulness exercises. These activities are designed to help children develop a sense of inner peace, emotional balance, and empathy for others.

**Moral Education:** In addition to academic education, the nuns emphasize ethical teachings based on Buddhist values. This includes fostering qualities like honesty, respect, humility, and kindness.

**Rituals and Celebrations:** Orphanages may also involve the children in religious rituals, festivals, and celebrations, helping them connect with the Buddhist community and tradition.

The orphanages strive to create a warm, family-like atmosphere where children feel a sense of belonging. The nuns work hard to establish a communal environment in which children are encouraged to support each other, form friendships, and work together.

The children often refer to the nuns as “mother” or “aunt,” indicating the close and caring relationship that develops between them. The nuns take on a motherly role, providing both guidance and affection. This environment fosters a sense of security and stability for children who may have faced abandonment or loss.

Specializing in raising orphans, founded by some nuns, Dieu Giac Orphanage is located on the campus of Dieu Giac Pagoda, Ho Chi Minh City, and currently caring for more than 100 orphaned children. It was established in 1989 by Ven. Bhikkhuni Nhu Tri who directly takes care of the children... To raise funds for the Orphanage, the temple has a vegetarian restaurant and a shop selling handicrafts made by the children.

Luc Hoa Orphanage in Lam Dong Province has about 50 orphans, large and small, who are cared for and protected by nuns and a few male and female laypeople. Living here is possible thanks to the donations and sponsorships of happy benefactors, which have helped some of the children grow up and have the conditions to go to school. Some have graduated from university and got a job.

### 2.1.3. Free Clinics

Free clinics run by Vietnamese Buddhist nuns are important charitable initiatives that provide essential medical care, especially for people who are underserved or living in poverty. These clinics reflect the Buddhist principles



of compassion, mindfulness, and service to others, offering health care as part of the nuns' broader commitment to alleviating suffering. These clinics are often located in rural areas or urban slums where access to medical services may be limited.

The mission of these free clinics is to provide accessible and affordable healthcare to people in need, regardless of their background or financial situation. The clinics emphasize holistic care, addressing not only physical ailments but also emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being. In line with Buddhist teachings, the focus is on healing the body, mind, and spirit, as all three are seen as interconnected.

Free clinics run by Vietnamese Buddhist nuns typically offer a range of health services, especially in underserved or rural areas. The services vary, depending on the resources available, but they generally include:

**Basic Health Care:** Nuns, often with the help of volunteer doctors and medical professionals, offer general health check-ups, diagnosis, and treatment for common illnesses such as colds, infections, and chronic conditions.

**Traditional and Alternative Medicine:** Many of these clinics incorporate traditional Vietnamese or Buddhist medicine, such as herbal treatments, acupuncture, or other holistic approaches. This allows patients to access remedies they might not find in conventional hospitals.

**Preventive Care and Health Education:** Nuns running these clinics focus not only on treating illnesses but also on preventing them. Health education, including hygiene, nutrition, and lifestyle advice, is often provided to help people avoid common health problems.

**Mental Health Support:** In addition to physical health, many Buddhist nuns also offer emotional and psychological support. Mental health is increasingly recognized as an important aspect of overall well-being, and some Buddhist clinics offer counseling or meditation sessions to help people manage stress, anxiety, or grief.

**Maternal and Child Health:** Some clinics focus on the needs of mothers and children, providing pre-natal care, post-natal care, and regular check-ups for infants and young children. This care is especially important in rural areas where access to maternal health services can be scarce.

**Emergency Care:** In some cases, nuns organize emergency care for victims of accidents or natural disasters. They provide first aid and may coordinate with larger medical facilities for more complex treatments.

One of the unique aspects of these clinics is the emphasis on spiritual and emotional care, which is integral to the Buddhist approach to healing. Nuns often offer patients a space for emotional release and mental healing, incorporating Buddhist teachings into the process.

**Meditation and Mindfulness:** Some clinics offer meditation sessions as a way to help patients deal with stress, anxiety, or chronic pain. Meditation is used to help individuals connect to their inner peace, improve their mental health, and recover faster.



**Buddhist Teachings:** The nuns may give short talks on the Buddha's teachings, focusing on impermanence, mindfulness, compassion, and other Buddhist values. This spiritual guidance helps patients reflect on their lives and find solace in difficult times.

**Dharma Counseling:** Nuns may offer counseling based on Buddhist philosophy to help individuals understand and accept the nature of suffering. This can provide emotional comfort and mental clarity, particularly for those dealing with personal struggles or health issues.

Many Free Clinics (Tue Tinh Duong) provide free medical examination and treatment for the people using traditional medicine and modern medicine established by nuns. For example, the traditional medicine clinic at Phuoc An Pagoda (Can Tho Province) of Ven. Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Tu Tam, the charity clinic of Ha Tien Pagoda (Vinh Phuc Province) by Ven. Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Dieu Nhan, and the Charity general clinic Long Buu (Binh Duong Province) of Ven. Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Lien Thanh has provided free medical examination and treatment for tens of thousands of patients with difficult circumstances throughout the provinces and cities across the country.

#### 2.1.4. Community relief

Vietnamese Buddhist nuns have been deeply involved in various community relief efforts, both within Vietnam and internationally. Their initiatives encompass disaster response, pandemic aid, and ongoing support for vulnerable populations.

**Disaster Relief Efforts:** Buddhist monks, nuns, and their followers have a longstanding tradition of contributing to Vietnam's disaster relief operations. They have provided essential aid such as food, clothing, and medical supplies to communities affected by natural calamities, showcasing their commitment to humanitarian assistance.

Vietnamese Buddhist nuns are actively participating in social charity work such as visiting and giving gifts to poor and needy people, helping people in natural disaster areas, distributing meals and gifts to patients at the hospital, giving gifts to orphans, building houses of love, etc. The Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha have mobilized monks and nuns and lay Buddhists who generously contributed money, goods, and items to help people to overcome difficulties and soon stabilize their lives. This activity has attracted thousands of monks and nuns in general and the nuns in particular towards the poor and disadvantaged people, accompanying and supporting them in difficult times.

**Pandemic Support:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnamese Buddhist nuns extended their support to affected communities both domestically and internationally. For instance, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) offered medical supplies worth VND1.8 billion (approximately US\$78,320) to assist the Indian government and its people in combating COVID-19.

In South Korea, a Vietnamese Buddhist nun was honored for her contributions in supporting pandemic-hit individuals. She dedicated her time

in Vietnam to assist with the fight against COVID-19 by donating face masks, hand sanitizers, and medical supplies.

**Support for Migrant Communities:** In Japan, Vietnamese Buddhist nun Thich Tam Tri established the Tochigi Daion-ji temple to aid Vietnamese workers facing hardships during the pandemic. The temple has served as a sanctuary, offering shelter and support to those in need.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, nuns take off their robes and coats to rush to the frontlines against epidemics at field hospitals to take care of patients in nursing homes and quietly donate their blood to save the lives of many patients. In Ho Chi Minh City, many nuns volunteer to serve at the COVID-19 Intensive Care Hospital.

These examples highlight the proactive role of Vietnamese Buddhist nuns in delivering compassionate aid and support to communities in need, reflecting their dedication to humanitarian service and the alleviation of suffering.

## **2.2. Dhamma propagation**

Vietnamese nuns have actively participated in the preaching work, is a member of the Central Committee for Dissemination of the Dhamma, regularly giving lectures, teaching meditation practice, conducting Basic and Advanced Buddhism classes, organizing summer retreats, retreats for youth and children, retreats for the blind, retreats for the sick, the disabled ... With their tirelessly effort in spreading the Dharma to the community, the nun teachers have been loved and studied by the majority of Buddhists and young people.

In the context of the development of information technology, modern communication, and social networks, the nuns quickly learn, absorb, and change the forms of teaching to be suitable and accessible to Buddhists. The content spread to sentient beings is not only encapsulated in the issues of the scriptures, but is also combined with issues in the family, social life, living environment, and issues in life that are of great interest to the world. ... with diverse and flexible forms of activities and exchanges to attract the participation of devotees and people. The activities that the nuns are carrying out are the inheritance of history, and at the same time meet the requirements of the modern context, embodying the incarnation spirit of Buddhism.

### **2.2.1. Giving Dhamma talks to the devotees and public**

The nuns have guided Buddhists to live contentedly and responsibly to themselves, to their families, to the social community, to behave with each other in the spirit of loving-kindness - compassion - joy - equanimity, to fulfill the Buddhists' duties to the Dhamma and civic duty to the country. Buddhism has circulated in the life of the Vietnamese people for hundreds of years, and the nuns in history have spread the Dharma with flexible, simple, and close methods, helping Buddhist teachings to be deeply imprinted in the life and thought of Vietnamese people.

Today, Buddhist followers belong to many different backgrounds, occupations, and circumstances in society, so the orientation, guidance, and practice need to be used skillfully and appropriately. Many nuns have boldly

preached about some behaviors that are not by the teachings of Buddhism, such as offering stars for relief, praying for fortune and prosperity, and burning votive paper, without understanding the teachings and meaning of Buddhism.

Not only preaching the Dharma, the nuns' activities also integrate content to help believers perceive social phenomena, relationships, and changes in a correct and objective way so that believers understand and consider the observance of the law as a standard of social morality, the responsibility of each individual.

With prestige and morality, the nuns have actively gathered and attracted followers, especially female followers. Although there are currently no statistics on the exact number of female followers, in fact observed at temples, the percentage of women going to worship facilities always accounts for a high percentage. With gender roles and characteristics, nuns have many advantages in gathering and attracting followers to participate in Buddhist and world affairs activities. The nuns have organized activities to attract people in groups with great success.

#### **2.2.2. Teaching and studying at Universities and colleges**

Currently, the number of nuns in Vietnam is larger than that of monks, in which many have graduated with master's and doctorate degrees, many have attended training in foreign countries, have extensive knowledge, and are fluent in foreign languages, knowledgeable about the Dhamma, many of them teach at Buddhist colleges and universities, making an important contribution to the development of the Dharma. The program "raising funds for education for young nuns" was organized by the National Bhikkhuni Sangha to help nuns study and serve education in poor areas. Hard. This is a step forward in the program of training dedicated nuns to volunteer preaching in remote areas, which is still somehow abandoned,

#### **2.2.3. Organizing summer camps for youth and children in provinces and cities.**

"Summer camp" is a successful program by the Vietnamese monks and nuns that educates school students with Buddhist moral stories and discussion, Buddhist teachings such as doctrines of cause and effect, with individual and social skills, and takes them to visit centers of love and meet less fortunate children to teach them how to nurture and share love. The parents noticed that after returning from studying at the temple, the children reduced their addiction to games, loved books, and knew how to take care of themselves and of others... When their children make progress, parents will voluntarily follow their children to the temple.

#### **2.2.4. Organizing conferences and seminars**

Interested in research activities, nuns cooperate with universities, organizations and experts to organize conferences and seminars such as: International Sakyadhita Conference of Buddhist Nuns (2009), National Scientific Conference "Vietnamese Buddhist nuns - Tradition and modernity" (2016), Scientific Conference "Legacy of Master Nhu Thanh - Inheritance and

development of Vietnamese nuns” (2019), actively participated in drafting content, contributing ideas in seminars of local units, of Vietnam Fatherland Front and Vietnam Women’s Union.

Organizing retreats for young female intellectuals combined with workshops to discuss issues related to young female intellectuals and life.

A one-day retreat called Returning Home (Trở Về Nhà) was born to help women know how to return to their minds and bodies and apply meditation in life. Because women are always pressured between family and society, easily stressed, lose emotional balance, and experience the breakdown of marriage, breaking the family structure, and having less time to educate children, which will lead to many negative consequences for themselves, their families, and the wider society. The workshops on practical issues such as “How to balance work and life”, “Finding calm and peace in your own home”, “How to maintain your merit and property”, etc. have attracted the young female intellectuals to discussion and learning from the nuns and from one another.

#### **2.2.5. Giving psychological counseling to those who have needs**

This activity requires the nuns to have profound knowledge in both Dhamma and psychology, skills, patience, and dedication to bring the light of the religion into life to enlighten lay Buddhists and guide them to live in the spirit of the Eightfold Path. Therefore, spiritual teachers need to develop their knowledge, grasp the progress of the times, understand the thoughts and feelings of the people who come to the temple, and help them overcome difficulties and conflicts in their lives.

Initially, many people went to the temple because of the stalemate, unable to find a way out in how to resolve conflicts in family and society. But after coming to the counseling room and being guided by us, they gradually learn how to transform suffering and pain into peace and joy. After that, many intellectuals came back to support the temple in our activities.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Nowadays, many Vietnamese nuns have become great teachers who deliver the Dhamma to young nuns as well as laypeople, thereby becoming highly respected and extremely influential. There have been many nuns undertaking many important Buddhist works and duties, contributing enthusiastically to the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha.

Although their traditions are different, all the Mahayana, Theravada, and Mendicant nuns practice the Dhamma and perfect the function of the Buddha’s daughters, propagating the Buddha’s teachings in order to bring calmness and welfare to Vietnamese society. Together with the monks, Vietnamese nuns have made significant contributions to the harmony and well-being of the Vietnam society, as well as to the development of Vietnamese Buddhism in the modern time.

By integrating Buddhist teachings with contemporary challenges, the

Bhikkhuni Sangha continues to inspire a more harmonious, equitable, and sustainable path for Vietnam's future. Their work underscores the important role of religious communities in addressing both spiritual and practical concerns, paving the way for a balanced approach to development that honors both people and the planet.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCE

- Buddhist Studies Vietnam: Current and Future Directions. (2016, February 26). *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*.
- Hall, D. G. E. (1981). *History of Southeast Asia* (pp. 201–202). Macmillan Education, Limited.
- Home Office. (2014). *Country information and guidance — Vietnam: Religious minority groups* (December).
- Nguyen, C. T. (1997). *Zen in Medieval Vietnam: A Study of the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* (p. 9). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Nguyen, T. T. (2008). *The history of Buddhism in Vietnam* (pp. 75, 77, 89).
- Prebish, C., & Tanaka, K. (1998). *The faces of Buddhism in America* (p. 134).
- The Vietnam Review. (1997). *Volume 3*.
- Tran, N. T., & Reid, A. (2006). *Việt Nam: Borderless histories* (p. 67).





# BUDDHIST REFLECTION ON FORGIVENESS AND ITS RELEVANCE TO PATIENCE AND LOVING-KINDNESS

Dr. Wimal Hewamanage\*

## **Abstract:**

This paper explores the Buddhist perspective on forgiveness and its connection to patience and loving-kindness. Forgiveness, a universally valued concept, is examined in the context of major world religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, as well as within the Buddhist monastic code (Vinaya-piṭaka). While theistic religions associate forgiveness with divine grace, Buddhism emphasizes personal effort, patience, and loving-kindness as key components of the forgiveness process. The research focuses on methods outlined in the Sutta-piṭaka and Visuddhimagga, such as self-reflection, recollection of others' behaviors, understanding karma and rebirth, contemplation of the elements, and giving gifts. Additionally, the study highlights the Buddha's own experiences with patience and tolerance in both his present and past lives. The findings reveal that Buddhist forgiveness is deeply intertwined with patience and loving-kindness, which serve as essential tools for eradicating anger and cultivating compassion. The discussion also underscores that certain forgiveness practices extend beyond religious boundaries, offering a universal ethical approach applicable to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, forgiveness, patience, loving-kindness, Sutta-piṭaka, Vinaya-piṭaka, karma, rebirth, mindfulness, compassion.*

---

\* Professor in Buddhist Studies, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is a concept that received great attention during the last few centuries all over the world. Religions were the key players on the subject of forgiveness and forbearance regardless of theistic and atheistic bifurcation of religious traditions. Buddhism, an ancient Indian religion, successfully spread all over Asia with necessary changes considering their existing cultural traditions. Nonetheless, its modern sub-traditions namely Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, forgiveness is a foremost concept discussed as a part and partial of the *khanti* in Pali (*kṣānti* in Sanskrit). *Khanti* is directly appreciated as an essential part of the path of the nirvana and identified under the perception in Mahayana and Theravada traditions. There is nothing better than patience. The Dictionary of the Pali Text Society, *Khanti* translates into English as patience, forbearance, and forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> *Titikkhā*, *khamā*, *khamanatā*, *khamanasīla*, *sahati*, *marisati* etc. are used for forgiveness and forgive in Pali. The problem should be raised as to why the Buddhist notion of forgiveness is highly associated with patience and loving-kindness. Further, what are the methods used to develop forgiveness with patience and loving-kindness, and how do patience and loving-kindness support the development of forgiveness? This paper attempts to discuss methods of forgiveness preached by the Buddha through loving-kindness in the Sutta-pataka and explanations given in the *Brahmavihāra-niddesa* of the *Visuddhimagga*, under loving-kindness meditation. The diversified methods for forgiveness and their significance show that they apply to a Buddhist, a non-Buddhist, or a person who does not follow any religion. The research paper uses qualitative methodology and textual analysis. The paper runs with subtitles; self-centered method, recollection of others' behaviors, *kamma*, *saṃsāra*, elements and gifts, recollection of the Buddha's present and past lives, the connection of forgiveness to patience, and loving-kindness. The beginning of the discussion has given an overview of other religious standpoints and the forgiveness in the Vinaya-piṭaka to clarify the field's background.

## II. OVERVIEW OF OTHER RELIGIOUS STANDPOINTS

Research on forgiveness in the West focuses on four main areas: psychology, philosophy, religion, and – perhaps surprisingly – politics.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Davids, T.W. Rhys & Stede, William (1994), *Pali - English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter, A. (2007), *Forgiveness: Hindu and Western Perspectives*. *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 20 (2007). p. 35.

The concept of forgiveness was highly strange in the Greek and Roman cultures that dominated the West before the arrival of Christianity, and it was not regarded as a virtue. Assertion of Hannah Arendt that Jesus brought forgiveness to the West has been contested by Charles Griswold, who notes that ancient philosophers appeared to have had a notion similar to our forgiveness (*sungnomê*).<sup>3</sup> Forgiveness is emphasized as a core component of the Christian faith for promoting reconciliation, compassion, and the ability of God's grace to transform the transformative power of God's grace in both the Old and New Testaments. God is shown to be kind and forgiving, and followers are encouraged to ask for and give unconditional forgiveness to others. "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14 - 15). Jesus instructs Peter to forgive his "sinning brother" seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21 - 22). In brief, the first of the two main tenets of Christian forgiveness is that one should forgive one's neighbor for transgressions in the hopes of receiving one's sins from God. The second is that Christ's crucifixion provides universal, everlasting forgiveness to those who believe in his divinity.<sup>4</sup> Christian teachings on turning the other cheek and the mercy of Allah in Islam are widely recognized.

In Islam, patience and forgiveness are two sides of a coin. Forgiveness should be practiced in our own lives if we are to genuinely understand the incredible power of the mercy of Allah, All-Forgiving. In terms of the Islamic faith, forgiveness is the least. Some Islamic folk stories highlight the limitless forgiveness of Allah towards followers. The end of Allah's forgiveness marks the end of the seeking forgiveness by followers. "O My servants who have wronged themselves! Do not despair of the Mercy of God; verily, Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And turn in repentance (and in obedience with true faith) to your Lord and submit to Him ..." (Al-Quran, Zumar, 53 - 54).

In Hindu Dharma, forgiveness is regarded as one of the six cardinal virtues; the rest are Truth, kindness, non-violence, purity, and austerity. The term *kṣamā* is given in the Bhagavadgītā (16.3)<sup>5</sup>, and it is mentioned

<sup>3</sup> Couenhoven, J. (2010), *Forgiveness and Restoration: A Theological Exploration*. *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 90, no. 2 (April 2010). pp. 148 - 170.

<sup>4</sup> Hunter, A. (2007), *Forgiveness: Hindu and Western Perspectives*. *Journal of Hindu - Christian Studies* 20 (2007). p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* (ed.) (2022), Narasingha, B.G. Swami. Gauranga Vani Publishers. <https://www.rupanugabhajanashram.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Bhagavad-gita-Swami->

alongside other divine qualities (*daiviṃ sampadam*), such as fearlessness, pure-heartedness, charity, self-control, austerity, sincerity, non-violence, truthfulness, freedom from anger, renunciation, serenity, compassion for all creatures, absence of avarice, gentleness, modesty, steadiness, patience, cleanliness, freedom from envy all of which a spiritually minded person should strive for. When someone is unable to forgive, they carry memories of unpleasant emotions like anger and unresolved feelings that impact their present and future. Forgiveness is portrayed through Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and fortune, and her husband Vishnu, sustainer of the universe as feminine and masculine forms respectively. However, Lakshmi offers forgiveness unconditionally, even if the wrongdoer does not repent, Vishnu only offers forgiveness when the wrongdoer repents. The Hindu festival of Holi, a well-known celebration of color, love, and spring, is customary to celebrate forgiveness, make new friends, and help fix damaged relationships on this day. While the Abrahamic religions believe in the one-power of Jesus or Allah, Hinduism believes that the grace of Brahma can be revealed instantly or through a variety of deities. Further, it believes that self-cultivation and practice will support the purge of defilements like anger. The relationship between God and people is one of Forgiver and forgiven in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. People believe that humans are perceived as transgressors who require divine forgiveness, and that God can provide it.<sup>6</sup> The concept of forgiveness in the said religions has a serious connection with divine forgiveness. Most think about the impact of religion on forgiveness in three ways: through religious activity, religious affiliation and teachings, and imitation of God.<sup>7</sup> These brief remarks show that all the world's religious traditions have paid sufficient attention to forgiveness and its related concepts.

### III. FORGIVENESS IN THE VINAYA-PIṬAKA

The *Vinaya* methods are not discussed in this research paper, but a brief introduction is given. For resolving the four types of disputes (*vivādādhikaraṇa*), accusations (*anuvādādhikaraṇa*), offenses (*āpattādhikaraṇa*), and duties (*kiccādhikaraṇa*), the seven rules are suggested. (i) Settling issues by discussion (*sammukhāvīnaya*), (ii)

---

BG-Narasingha.pdf

<sup>6</sup> McCullough, M. E. & Worthington, E. L. Jr. (1999), *Religion and Forgiving Personality. Journal of Personality*. 2 (1) pp. 1141 - 1164. Laura J. Lutjen, Nava R. Siltan and Kevin J. Flannelly (2012), *Religion, Forgiveness, Hostility and Health: A Structural Equation Analysis. Journal of Religion and Health*, June 2012, Vol. 51, No. 2 (June 2012), p. 469).

<sup>7</sup> Escher (2013): 100.

Settling issues by taking into account the recognition of a monk (*sativinaya*), (iii) Settling issues by taking into account the insanity of a monk (*amūḷhavinaya*), (iv) Settling issues by an acknowledgment (*paṭiññā*), (v) Settling issues by a majority decision (*yebhuyyasikā*), (vi) Settling issues by judgment of the ill will of a monk (*tassapāpiyyasikā*), (vii) Settling issues by covering the act with grass (*tiṇavatthāraka*).<sup>8</sup> The Buddhist monastic discipline provides ways to punishment and forgiveness for grave or light offences under seven categories; *Pārājikā*, *Saṅghādisesa*, *Thullaccaya*, *Pācittiya*, *Pāṭidesanīya*, *Dukkaṭa*, *Dubbhāsita*. The first two categories are great offenses (*garukāpatti*) but the *Pārājikā*s are irremediable (*atekiccha*) and *Saṅghādisesa*s are remediable (*satekicca*) and forgive through the penalties such as *parivāsa*, *mānatta*, *abbhāhana*, etc.<sup>9</sup> These incidents clearly show the punishment and forgiveness procedures for fellow members of the Sangha who have gotten into trouble other than *Pārājikā* offenses.

The *Sutta-piṭaka* discourses should receive attention in light of these observations about other world religions and Buddhist monastic disciplinary codes. Review the danger in hate and the advantage of patience and loving-kindness are the bases of forgiveness. Consideration of the damage that anger does to oneself, remembrance of the virtue of the enemy, review of the self and others as owners of their action (*kammasakata*), dealing with the round of rebirths, review of the resolution into elements, and try the giving gifts, review the special qualities of the Buddha's former conducts, are useful methods that mentioned in the *Visuddhimagga* to develop the loving-kindness.<sup>10</sup> In this connection, attention is paid to recognize the significance of these teachings to tolerate various negative mental pressures that are brought by the enemy and encourage us to practice tolerance as a form of forgiveness. Modern researchers, Worthington (2005)<sup>11</sup> and McCullough et al (2000),<sup>12</sup> and others paid attention to this positive and negative bifurcation. If we quickly look at the key points listed above,

<sup>8</sup> Dhirasekera, J. (2007), *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Center. p. 231.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* pp. 205 – 223.

<sup>10</sup> *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London, The Pali Text Society. pp. 295 - 314; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification Visuddhimagga*. Sri Lanka, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society. pp. 291 - 307

<sup>11</sup> Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2005), *Handbook of forgiveness*. New York: Brunner-Routledge Press.

<sup>12</sup> McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., & Thoresen, C. E. (2000), *Forgiveness: Theory, research and practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.

we will see that they emphasize the importance of being patient towards wrongdoers as a way to forgive them and control anger and other hateful mental factors. Forgiveness itself is entirely or partially characterized by patience, lack of intolerance, and lack of ferocity. Systematically, the cultivation of kind, constructive thoughts and the control and elimination of hateful, negative thoughts are the basis of forgiveness in both *Vinaya* and *Sutta*.

#### IV. SELF-CENTERED METHOD

The person most dear to them is themselves.<sup>13</sup> The Buddhist notion of priority and importance says that the benefit of all should be important, but the priority should be given to one's moral well-being.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, he can be guided toward good by demonstrating how the outcome of an action is detrimental to him. Awareness of anger's negative effects on oneself helps one become more patient and compassionate. The enemy is pleased with seven harms that he wants to cause to his opponent. May he be ugly because an enemy does not delight in an enemy's beauty, may he sleep badly because an enemy doesn't like when an enemy sleeps at ease, may he not succeed because an enemy doesn't like in the success of an enemy, may he not wealthy because an enemy doesn't like wealth of an enemy, may he not famous because an enemy doesn't like fame of an enemy, may he have no friends because an enemy doesn't like an enemy having friends, may he be reborn in the plane of misery because an enemy doesn't like an enemy's going to a good destination. When the angry person is overcome and oppressed by anger, there is no use of the good bath, and other beautifying, he is still ugly. In the same manner, a comfortable couch for good sleep is unusable, whatever is received to succeed is unusable since he thinks harmful as beneficial, beneficial as harmful. His righteous wealth is appropriated by kings for the royal treasury, he loses whatever his fame, friends, and relatives avoid him from afar, and finally, after death, he is reborn in the plane of misery.<sup>15</sup> The angry person is overcome and oppressed by anger, he

<sup>13</sup> *Saṃyuttanikāya* I (ed.) (1989), Feer, L. M., London: Pali Text Society. p.75; *Udāna* (1982) Steinthal, P. London, Pali text Society. p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Āṅguttaranikāya* II (ed.) (1958), Morris, R. London: Pali Text Society. p.95; Karunadasa Y. (2013) *Early Buddhist Teachings The Middle Position in Theory and Practice*, Hong Kong: Center For Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong. p. 91; Karunadasa, Y. (2019), *The Buddhist Moral Life: Some Further Reflections. Pasatthavibhāvinī Emeritus Professor Sumanapala Galmangoda Felicitation Volume. Edited by Makuruppe Dhammananda et al.* Dalugama, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya. pp. 5 - 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Āṅguttaranikāya* II (ed.) (1958), Morris, R. London: Pali Text Society. pp. 94 - 98;



continuously engages in misconduct by body, speech, and mind. Hence, here, it is explained how the hateful evil that one seeks out against one's opponents is turned against oneself. The Kodhana-sutta expresses that an angry person kills his mother, who gave life, nurtured, showed this world, and also, he kills his father, kills Brahmins, and worldlings. Not only that, some kill themselves with a sword, swallow poison, hang with a rope, or jump into mountain gorges.<sup>16</sup> The sutta guides as: Thus, death's snare hidden in the heart; has taken the form of anger. One should cut it off with self-control, wisdom, energy, and the right view: *Itāyaṃ kodharūpena – maccupāso guhāsayo/ Taṃ damena samucchinde – paññā viriyena diṭṭhiyā*.<sup>17</sup>

To overcome the said anger, patience and loving-kindness are equally useful techniques. Being ugly, not getting good sleep, loss of success, confiscation of wealth, loss of fame, loss of friends, and misery in the afterlife are highly linked to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Hence, by giving priority to our benefits, it will be possible to forgive enemies while overcoming anger mind and cultivating loving-kindness.

The *Visuddhimagga* has given a further explanation of the significance of the disadvantage of anger (*āghāta*) by focusing on self-harm. The meditator should advise himself as follows;

Suppose an enemy has hurt you, you know in what his domain,  
Why try yourself as well to hurt, your mind? – That is not his domain.  
Another does ignoble deeds, so you are angry – How is this?  
Do you then want to copy too, the sort of acts that he commits?  
Suppose another, to annoy, provokes you with some odious act,  
Why suffer anger to spring up, and do as he would have you do?  
If you get angry, then maybe you make him suffer, maybe not;  
Though with the hurt that anger brings, you certainly are punished  
now.

If the hurt is done to you by a foe, because of anger on your part,  
Then put your anger down, for why should you be harassed  
groundlessly?<sup>18</sup>

Bodhi Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha a new Translation of the Aṅguttaranikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. pp.1066 - 1067.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 1958, p. 98; 2012, p. 1069.

<sup>18</sup> *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London: The Pali Text Society, pp. 300, 301; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification*. Kandy:

The person gets angry with physical harm from the enemy, which is beyond your control. But your mind is under your control. Why are you going to allow your enemy to control your mind? Your enemy has done an ignoble act against you that is harmful to you. As a person who considers the enemy's act as ignoble, why are you going to perform the same? The enemy has done the wrong to provoke you. If you react with anger, you make a success your enemy's willingness. Your enemy may or may not become depressed as a result of your rage. However, you are already being oppressed by your anger. The enemy hates you, which is why they harass you. Therefore, the same hatred can be eliminated without considering it as a reaction. Handling that resentment is a pointless endeavor. Further, the text has advised us to think of anger as the destroyer of the base of the ethical life, angry beings enter into the evil path, and no reason for the meditator to follow them, since the aggregates are instant unpleasant things that occur through them are also instant. Self-centered strategy is useful to comprehend the necessity of forgiveness and it is beyond the limit of Buddhists or any other religious faith.

## V. RECOLLECTION OF OTHERS' BEHAVIORS

Recollection of the behaviors of others is another useful method to develop forgiveness, patience, and loving-kindness through the eradication of anger. Based on others' conduct – be it mental, verbal, or physical – that causes him to forget his negative actions. We are also guided by this pattern to see the others' qualities as favorably as possible. Five types of persons are identified in Akkodhana-sutta; (i) impure in bodily behavior but pure in verbal behavior, (ii) impure in verbal behavior but pure in bodily behavior, (iii) impure in bodily and verbal behavior, but periodically experience mental clarity and calm, (iv) impure in bodily and verbal behavior, and not periodically experience mental clarity and calm, and (v) pure in bodily and verbal behavior, and periodically experience mental clarity and calm.<sup>19</sup>

Given five similes in the Sutta are useful to further elucidate the meaning. The first person is similar to a rag-robed monk who sees a rag thrown away in the road and presses it down with his left foot, spreads it out with his right, tears off the sound part, and takes it away with him. The second comes along, burning with heat, covered with sweat, exhausted, trembling, and thirsty, sees a pool covered with algae and

---

Buddhist Publication Society. pp. 295, 296.

<sup>19</sup> Bodhi Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha a new Translation of the Aṅguttaranikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. pp.774 - 776.

water plants, jumps into the pool, sweeps away the algae and water plants with both hands, drinks from his cupped hands, and leaves it. The third comes along as mentioned in the second, sees water in a little puddle in a cow's footprint, gets down on all fours, without being disturbed by hand or cup slurps up it like a cow. The fourth, who is very ill and in pain, is traveling down a forest road unable to get food, medicine, suitable assistance, or anyone to take him to the village. What if someone else saw him and showed him sympathy, pity, and compassion to keep him from going to ruin? The fifth who tried by traveling along sees a pool that is sweet, cool, and limpid, with gently sloping banks, shaded, and baths, drinks, and rest in the shade of trees. Except for the fourth person, the minimum good qualities exist with others to control anger and to develop loving-kindness and patience. The fourth scenario, which is the worst among them, practitioners should consider humanity rather than the qualities of the other person.<sup>20</sup>

Buddhaghosa Thera has also expressed about five kinds of persons focusing on their bodily, verbal, and mental behaviors. (i) The individual who can control his physical behavior but not his verbal or mental behavior performs rites and rituals well. (ii) The individual whose verbal behavior is under his control with sweet, kind words but whose physical and mental behavior is not. (iii) The individual whose mental behavior is controlled but not his physical or verbal behavior, he proves through worshiping at shrines. (iv) The individual who lacks control over any one of these three components has nothing for recollection. In this situation, we should cultivate compassion that even though he is currently living in the human world, he will eventually end up in either one of the eight great hells or in the sixteen prominent hells. (v) The individual is in full control of all three and we can remember any of the three in that person because it is easy to nurture loving-kindness toward someone like that.<sup>21</sup> Recollection of others' good qualities supports us to develop loving-kindness through bodily, verbal, and mental actions, and the same manner bearing their misconducts is patience and forgiveness. Akkodhana-sutta paid more attention to physical and verbal qualities while Visuddhimagga paid more attention to physical, verbal, and mental. This method proposes to positively see whatever qualities of enemies rather than look at the bottle with half of the water as half empty.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* pp. 774 - 776.

<sup>21</sup> *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London, The Pali Text Society, pp. 299, 300; Nānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. pp. 294, 295.

## VI. KAMMA, SAṂSĀRA, ELEMENTS AND GIFTS

Focusing on basic teachings like owners of deeds (*kammassakatā*), the cycle of birth and death, resolution into elements (*dhātuvinibbhoga*), and giving of a gift are also methods of forgiveness and patience through loving-kindness. According to Buddhism, you will inherit everything you do because you are the owner and heir of your actions, and your actions are your parents, your kin, and your refuge.<sup>22</sup> Anger doesn't cooperate to achieve full enlightenment, undeclared enlightenment, or the disciple's grade. Also, it doesn't support any positions of Brahma, Sakka, universal king, regional king, etc. The action that results in a fall from the dispensation and endless agony in hell is anger. An angry man is like someone who wants to strike someone and picks up a burning ember or excreta in his hand, burning himself or making himself odorous in the process. After recollection of the harmfulness of one's anger, it should be turned towards others in the same manner. He also receives the same result with the anger and he merely covers himself with dust, like a man who wants to hurl it at someone against the wind. Hence, this method highlights the concept of Buddhist *kamma* to overcome anger while pointing out its uselessness, and harmfulness for one's own and others' career. A portion of this approach is possible to incorporate into the previously mentioned self-centered method. Beings are creatures that go through an endless cycle of rebirth. Therefore, taking into account kinship among beings should help people get rid of their anger and cultivate patience, forgiveness, and loving-kindness. Finding a person who has not previously been your mother, father, brother, sister, son, or daughter is difficult, according to the Buddha.<sup>23</sup> *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* is very popular in this teaching in Mahayana Buddhism.

Another technique is the resolution of elements. Though there is no ultimate meaning other than the combination of four great elements, five aggregates, twelve faculties, eighteen elements, etc., beings are recognized as the conventional truth. They are impermanent, suffering, no-self. Then, what is the meaning of anger? Are you angry with body hairs or head hairs, nails, the element of water, the element of fire, the element of air, the twelve bases, the eighteen elements, or the five aggregates? Then, anger has no place like a mustard seed on the tip of an awl or a painting in the air. Another helpful strategy is to give a gift. Practice can either be offered to the other person by himself or accepted by the other person by

<sup>22</sup> *Āṅguttaranikāya* III (ed.) (1958), Hardy, E. London: Pali Text Society. p. 186.

<sup>23</sup> *Saṃyuttanikāya* II (ed.) (1992), Feer, Leon M. London: Pali Text Society. pp. 188 - 190.

himself. However, one should only provide for the other if their means of subsistence are not pure and their necessities are inappropriate. There, an alms-food eater was pardoned by the senior monk after he had forced him to leave his lodging three times. Thera, who eats alms, brought a bowl to the elderly monk and explained that her mother, a lay devotee, had made it.<sup>24</sup> Giving gifts is more common among the *kamma*, *samsāra*, elements (*dhātu*), and gift-giving techniques for anyone who can practice them without any restrictions based on their religion. Buddhist teachings on samsara and elements make it difficult for someone who believes in the existence of an eternal soul within samsara or in this very life to change their mind about enemies. The relationship between cause and effect (dependent origination) is the Buddhist concept of the *kamma* and its outcomes. As a result, even though our adversaries are not permanent, we still have the opportunity to affect them to view us differently if the right cause and conditions are put in place.

## VII. RECOLLECTION OF THE BUDDHA'S PRESENT AND PAST LIVES

Recollection of the Buddha's present and past lives is another important method that would be more useful for the followers. The Buddha's hardships in this life and his previous births demonstrate how he tolerates them all. It has to be noted that most of the stories and incidents prove patience is a mere reaction against hatred. The facts make it clear that patience is forgiveness itself. Once Brahmin Akkosa Bharadvaja heard Brahmin Bharadvaja entered the Order and got angry, and then abused and criticized the Buddha. You will receive your food and snacks back if a relative visits your home and refutes your offer, said the Buddha. Similarly, you are abusing us who do not abuse, you are angry with us who do not get angry, you are quarreling with us who do not quarrel, so you must return them. Further, the Buddha expressed that one quarrels back when quarreled with, one trails back when trailed, and one abuses back when abused. This is referred to as reciprocal association and exchange, but there is no such engagement.<sup>25</sup>

King Suppabuddha, the father-in-law of the Buddha, was not happy regarding the renunciation of Siddhattha while leaving his daughter

<sup>24</sup> *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London, The Pali Text Society. p. 306; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification Visuddhimagga*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. p. 302.

<sup>25</sup> *Samyuttanikāya I* (ed.) (1991), Feer, L. M., London, Pali Text Society. p.161; Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2000) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha A New Translation of Samyuttanikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publication. pp. 255 - 257.



Yasodhara alone. Once he met the Buddha and seriously scolded him. The Buddha was patient and the king left after scolding the Buddha till his anger subsided.<sup>26</sup> Brahmin Aggika-Bhāradvāja who was preparing an offering to the great Brahma, addressed the Buddha as a shaveling (*muṇḍaka*), wretched monk (*samaṇaka*), and outcast (*vasalaka*) when the Buddha visited his home. The sight of a monk was considered unlucky by the Brahmin. Tolerating his harsh words, the Buddha expresses his views about the outcast and the conditions that make an outcast.<sup>27</sup> Five hundred young monks from the Sāriputta and Moggallāna's disciples once came to see the Buddha when he was residing in the city of Cātumā. The Buddha asked them to leave the monastery after hearing their loud noise. They then departed from the monastery. After that, the Sākyans from Catuma City and Sahampati Brahma came to see Buddha and asked him to sympathize with the young monks. The Buddha eventually pardoned them and taught the Dhamma.<sup>28</sup>

During the time of the Buddha, internal means from his disciples and external means from other religious groups calumnies (*abbhācikkhana/abbhākkhāna*), and rumors (*janavāda*) occurred. Monks like Sati, Aritṭha, and Bhikkhunī Mettiyā are examples of the former. Sundari, Cīncamānavikā, etc. are the latter.<sup>29</sup> Two external calumnies and rumors; murder and rape from other religious groups are very popular. Sundari, a female wanderer ascetic, and Cīncamānavikā, a beautiful ascetic disciple, were used for them. Without being aware of their secret strategy, Sundari frequently traveled to Jetavana Monastery under the direction of heretics. After the people came to know about this, they killed her and hid her in Jetavanarama to trap the Buddha and his disciples.<sup>30</sup> Cīncamānavikā entered the Jetavana monastery in the evening and left the next morning, making it seem like she spent the night with the Buddha. She gradually disclosed that she was pregnant, then went to the monastery and accused

<sup>26</sup> *The Commentary on the Dhammapada III* (ed.) (1970), Norman, H.C. London: Pali Text Society. pp. 44 - 47.

<sup>27</sup> *Suttanipāta* (ed.) (1997), Andersen, D. & Smith, H. Oxford: The Pali Text Society. pp. 20 - 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Majjhimanikāya I* (1979), Trenckner, V. London: Pali text Society. pp. 456 - 462.

<sup>29</sup> Hewamanage, W. (2017), *Calumnies and Rumours: Religious Perspective and Modern Implication. The Paper Collection of International Conference on the Frontier Topics in Pseudo Religion Studies*. Wuhan: Wuhan University. pp. 56 - 64.

<sup>30</sup> *The Commentary on the Dhammapada III* (ed.) (1970), Norman, H.C. London: Pali Text Society. p.473; *Jātaka together with its Commentary II* (ed.) (2003), Fausboll, V. London: Pali Text Society. pp. 415, 416.



the Buddha of being the cause of her pregnancy while he was preaching.<sup>31</sup> The Buddha tolerated and forgave all kinds of calumnies and rumors and sometimes he took time to answer them.

Buddhaghosa Thera highlights only the recollection of the former conduct of the Buddha through nine examples through the Jataka stories; Silava, Khantivādī, Culladhammapāla, Chaddanta, Mahākapi (not mention the name of the Jātaka), Bhūridatta, Campeyya, Saṅkhapāla, and Mātuposaka.<sup>32</sup> The Ascetic Khantivādī story shows the Bodhisattva's patience and loving-kindness even though he was cut his body parts by the executioner with the order of King Kalābu. Kalābu went to hell due to the same sin, there was no punishment given by the Bodhisattva, but he wished the king and executioner happiness and long life. Mahāsilava Jātaka presents the story of the patience of King Silava and regaining power with the power of loving-kindness and the support received from demons. Finally, Silava forgave his enemy king. As a white elephant in the Chaddanta-jātaka, the Bodhisattva endured the hunter's suffering without any ill-will and hatred. Strong and endowed with psychic powers, Saṅkhapāla, the serpent king, bore the agony of the wounds.<sup>33</sup>

First of all, Buddhists find greater value in these life stories and events because they have a unique connection to their belief in the Buddha and his past lives. The circumstances are comparable to those found in other religious traditions concerning God, gods, or a representative of him. Four religious factors – prayer, religious attendance, faith (depth of belief in God), and interpretation – were found to be positively correlated with (a) attitudes toward forgiveness, (b) self-report of past forgiving behavior, and (c) self-assessment of the tendency to forgive in the future by Fox and Thomas. The most accurate predictor of forgiveness among the four variables was faith, which was followed by prayer.<sup>34</sup> The second is that the message can be effectively used to foster forgiveness

<sup>31</sup> *Jātaka together with its Commentary* Part IV (1963), Fausboll, London: Pali Text Society. p. 187; *The Commentary on the Dhammapada* III (ed.) (1970), Norman, H.C. London: Pali Text Society. 177 - 182.

<sup>32</sup> *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London, The Pali Text Society. pp. 302 - 305; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification*. Sri, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. pp. 297 - 300.

<sup>33</sup> *Jātaka together with its Commentary* I (1962), Fausboll, London, Pali Text Society. 39 - 43, 261 - 268; Part V (1963) 37 - 57, 161 - 177; Ariyadhamma, T. (1966), "Khanti" *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* VI. Edited by W. G. Weeraratne. Colombo: Sri Lanka Government Press. pp. 202 - 204.

<sup>34</sup> Laura J. Lutjen, Nava R. Silton and Kevin J. Flannelly (2012), *Religion, Forgiveness, Hostility and Health: A Structural Equation Analysis*. *Journal of Religion and Health*, June 2012, Vol. 51, No. 2 (June 2012), p. 469.

with patience and loving-kindness if one sees it through its narrative. Here, it's crucial to highlight how fairy tales and folklore both advise and transform society.

### VIII. CONNECTION OF FORGIVENESS TO PATIENCE, AND LOVING-KINDNESS

In a general sense, forgiveness represents physical and verbal direct involvement among haters and hated persons in public. A hated person forgives or tolerates the hater's performed misconduct via verbal and physical behaviors, and the hater promises not to repeat. The *Sutta* and *Vinaya-piṭakas* present diversified methods for forgiveness. According to the *Sutta-piṭaka* discourses, forgiveness is the use of tolerance to subdue hateful emotions. Nonetheless, in the *Sutta-piṭaka*, priority was not given to punishments against the wrongdoers. It is evident in *Vinaya-piṭaka* that the convicts are forgiven following a corporate punishment of some length for transgressions of the monks and nuns. Further, the *Sutta-piṭaka* discussions mostly focus on intra-personal forgiveness while the *Vinaya-piṭaka* focuses on interpersonal forgiveness. In applied Buddhism, just after the common prayer, devotees request forgiveness from the Buddha, for their misconducts which occurred by body, speech, and mind. However, the Buddha's involvement cannot be seen as a way to forgive with divine power like theistic religions that are mentioned above. It is only a self-determination to reduce or stop misconduct. Even today, young monks request forgiveness for their shortcomings from their teachers after evening daily worship in the monastery education system.

Some defilements must be abandoned by seeing (*dassanā*), restraining (*saṃvarā*), using (*paṭisevanā*), enduring (*adivāsanā*), avoiding (*parivajjanā*), removing (*vinodanā*), and by developing (*bhāvanā*). Enduring is the third of the seven types of abandoning defilements that the Buddha expresses in this discussion. Here, a mendicant who wisely tolerates cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, and reptiles. He tolerates ill-spoken and unwelcome words and physical sensations that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, displeasing, and menacing to life. If he does not tolerate the fermentations, vexation, or fever, defilements would arise but defilements do not arise for him when he tolerates them.<sup>35</sup> To destroy the taints, suitable methods should be followed, according to the type of defilements. The process of enduring is self-centered even

<sup>35</sup> Nāṇamoli, Bhikkhu & Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2009), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha a Translation of the Majjhimanikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. pp. 91 - 95.

though the disturbances reach from outside, and some of them are made by nature and manmade. Aññakoṇḍañña, the first among humans to realize the Dhamma, recounts his struggles and accomplishments along the road to arahantship in *Theragāthā*. When he lived in the great forest, being touched by mosquitoes and gadflies, he tolerated mindfully like a warrior elephant in a battle.<sup>36</sup> Though mosquitoes and gadflies were a trouble for him as a forest monk, he endured without harming them. In this case, refraining from killing or harming them with anger represents his patience, loving-kindness, as well as forgiveness. It's interesting to note that Buddhists extend their forgiveness practice beyond humans because they practice loving-kindness for all living things.

The discussion shows that consideration of the damage that anger does to oneself, remembrance of the virtue of the enemy, review of the self and others as owners of their action, dealing with the round of rebirths, review of the resolution into elements, and try the giving gifts, review the special qualities of the Buddha's present and past conducts are prominent methods depicted in the Sutta-piṭaka. Buddhism has given enough strategies for the person who wishes to follow the path with the faith of the triple gem or without any faith as a devotee of Buddhism or as another religious follower. As mentioned above, the story of Aññakoṇḍañña Thera, Sabbāsaṃvāsa-sutta expressions enduring (*adhivāsanā*), Khantivādi-jātaka, Akkosa-bhāradvāja's incident confirm that patience itself is forgiveness. Whichever methods you prefer are possible to use, but eradicating anger, a certain way of performing hatred, and cultivating loving-kindness should be its foundation. The terms used in Pali language; *kodha*, *āghāta*, *kopa*, *rosa*, *dosa*, *amarisa* for anger and *kuddha*, *kupita*, *duṭṭha*, *rūḍha*, *anattamana* for anger<sup>37</sup> also emphasizes the connection. The beginning of the loving-kindness meditation (*mettā-bhāvanā*) of the Brahmavihāra-niddesa expresses the danger of anger and the benefit of patience, is a good example to see the interconnection of these three facts.

Friends, when a man hates, is a prey to hate and his mind is obsessed by hate, he kills living things, and ..." (A I 216 – this is not available in the present *Aṅguttaranikāya*). And the advantage of patience should be understood according to such *suttas* as these: "No higher rule, the Buddhas say, than patience, And no Nibbāna

<sup>36</sup> *Thera and Therīgāthā*, (ed.) (1966), Norman, K. R. & Altdorf, L. London: The Pali Text Society. p. 69.

<sup>37</sup> Piyatissa, W. (1949), *The English Pali Dictionary*. Colombo: Apothecaries. p. 19.

higher than forbearance” (*D* II 49; *Dhp* 184); “Patience in force, in strong array: him I call a brahman” (*Dhp* 399); “No greater thing exists than patience” (*S* I 222).<sup>38</sup>

In Buddhism, mentality (*nāma*) and corporeality (*rūpa*) are the basic constituents of human beings, articulated through five aggregates, six elements, twelve faculties, eighteen elements, etc. The key point of explanation is to emphasize the uselessness of reading conventional truth as the ultimate truth and the interconnection between mentality and materiality through the theory of dependent co-origination. Patience and forgiveness are positive actions against negative thoughts that center upon hatred. As previously stated, the appropriate set of mental and physical phenomena always gives rise to physical and mental factors. Abhidhamma has stated that all mental factors, both wholesome and unwholesome, share seven universals (*sabba-citta-sādhāraṇa*). After that, there are six occasions (*pakinnaka*) that can occasionally be associated with both wholesome and unwholesome mental factors.<sup>39</sup> The idea here is that thoughts don’t just come to mind; they also need other supportive elements. Forgiveness and patience are healthy behaviors that can be expressed verbally, physically, and mentally with the help of other encouraging elements. Develop positive thoughts like compassion and love, which are always the antithesis of negative ones like anger and hatred, to develop and sustain both patience and forgiveness. According to contemporary research, there is broad agreement that forgiveness is different from and should not be confused with several other ideas, including forgetting, reconciling, excusing, condoning, justifying, and pardoning.<sup>40</sup>

## IX. CONCLUSION

This paper is dedicated to the Buddhist perspective on forgiveness and its relevance to patience and loving-kindness, centering the *Sutta-piṭaka*. Other religious ideas and the *Vinaya-piṭaka* point of view on forgiveness are introduced on the outset. Overview of other religious standpoints on forgiveness proves that it is an appreciated common practice in Hindu, Christian, Islamic traditions. They highlighted the

<sup>38</sup> Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2011), *The Path of Purification*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. p. 291.

<sup>39</sup> Bodhi Bhikkhu (2007) *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. pp.77 - 83.

<sup>40</sup> Kathleen A. Lawler-Row, Cynthia A. Scott, Rachel L. Raines, Meirav. Edlis Matityahou & Erin W. Moore (2007), *The Varieties of Forgiveness Experience: Working toward a Comprehensive Definition of Forgiveness*. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Jun., 2007, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Jun., 2007), pp. 233 - 248.

forgiveness and its relevance to the God or gods. Buddhist disciplinary codes provide priority for interpersonal forgiveness that is based on punishment considering the betterment of the Bhikkhu-bhikkhuni-saṅgha. The *Sutta-piṭaka*, which highlights intra-personal forgiveness, centered on personal control, is based on patience. However, patience and loving-kindness are fundamental qualities of forgiveness in the *Sutta* and *Vinaya*. The Pali term *khanti*, a perception is used for both meanings, patience and forgiveness, and also anger-related terms like *kodha*, *āghāta*, *kopa*, *rosa*, *dosa*, *amarisa* demonstrate the connection to repulsive ideas that impede forgiveness. The seven methods discussed above for forgiveness, through patience, and loving-kindness are important to use according to the diversity of followers. Consideration of the damage that anger does to oneself, remembrance of the virtue of the enemy, and the giving of gifts are common methods that can be used by anyone who wishes to follow. Review the self and others as owners of their action (*kammassakatā*), dealing with the round of rebirths, reviewing the resolution into elements (*dhātuviniḍḍhoga*), review the special qualities of the Buddha's present and past conduct, which are good for Buddhists. However, when one reads the message through narrative, it can be used to promote forgiveness with patience and loving-kindness. The former three points represent the universal ethics beyond Buddhism or other religions, and the latter four, which are merged with Buddhist beliefs, are more suitable for the followers of Buddhism.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCE

- Andersen, Dines and Helmer Smith, *Suttanipāta*, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, USA: Wisdom Publication, 2000.
- David P. Barash, Charles P. Webel, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. California: Sage Publications, Inc, 2009
- Dauids, Rhys, C. A. F., *The Visuddhimagga of Ven. Buddhaghosa*, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2975.
- Fausbool, V, *The Jātaka Together with its Commentary*, Vol I, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1962.
- Guo-Brennan, Linyuan, *Educating for global Citizenship and sustainability:*



*From theory to practice*, Island Studies Press, 2022.

Hanh, Thich Nhat, *Peace is Every Step*, USA: Random House Group Company, 1991.

Killelea, Steve, *The Peace in the age of Chaos*, Australia: Hardie Grant Books, 2020.

Lama, H. H. Dalai, *The Dalai Lama's Little Book of Inner Peace: The Essential Life and Teachings*, USA: Hampton, 2018.

Louise Diamond, *The Peace Book*, USA: Canori Press, 2001

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and bhikkhu Bodhi, *the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, USA: Wisdom Publications, Revised Version, 2001.

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, *A Pali - English Glossary of Buddhist Technical terms*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007.

Ñāṇamoli, *the Path of Purification*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010.

Norman, K. R. *The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)*, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1997.

Norman, K. R., *The Group of Discourses*, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1992.

Nyānaponika Thera, *Protection Through Satipaṭṭhāna*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010

Piyaratana, Walmoreuwe, Asst. Prof. Ven. Dr, *The Noble Eightfold Path and Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga: A Comparative Study*, Nugegoda: Cybergate Services (Pvt). Ltd., 2024.

Piyaratana, Walmoreuwe. Assist. Prof. Dr. *Essays on Buddhist Studies*, Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2021.

Priya Paker, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*, USA: Riverhead Books, 2018

Recigliano, Robert, *Making Peace Last: A Toolbox for Sustainable Peace-building*, USA: Routledge. 2012

Road Publishing, 2018.

Toll, Eckhart, *The Power of Now: A guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, USA: New World Library, 2004.

Ueshiba, Morihei, *The Art of Peace*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, USA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015.

Walshe, T. W. Thus, *Have I heard, The Long Discourses of the Buddha Dīghanikāya*, London: Wisdom Publication, 1987.



# COMPASSION AND TOLERANCE: NOT WEAKNESS, BUT STRENGTH FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Arvind Kumar Singh\*

## Abstract:

This paper explores the transformative power of compassion (*karuṇā*) and tolerance (*khantī*) from a Buddhist perspective, challenging the misconception that these virtues are signs of weakness. Drawing from the Pāli Canon and key Buddhist teachings, the research highlights how these qualities represent profound strengths essential for human development, inner peace, and spiritual liberation. Compassion, as an active desire to alleviate suffering, and tolerance, as an enduring response to adversity, are shown to be integral to personal and societal well-being. The paper contrasts their roles in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, illustrating their complementary nature in cultivating mindfulness, emotional resilience, and ethical behavior. The discussion emphasizes how these virtues foster social harmony, conflict resolution, and societal justice, making them indispensable for addressing contemporary global challenges. Ultimately, compassion and tolerance are presented not as passive traits but as vital forces for sustainable human development, underscoring their importance in building interconnected, empathetic societies.

**Keywords:** *Compassion (karuṇā), tolerance (khantī), Buddhist ethics, Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, sustainable human development.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, where success is often equated with aggression, competition, and assertiveness, the qualities of compassion and tolerance are frequently dismissed as signs of passivity or weakness. Yet, when viewed through the lens of Buddhism, compassion (*Karuṇā*) and tolerance (*khantī*) emerge not as signs of fragility but as profound strengths that are integral to

---

\* Director International Affairs, Assistant Professor, Buddhist Studies - Gautam Buddha University, India.

human development. Buddhism teaches that these qualities form the bedrock of a peaceful, meaningful life and played a significant role in treading upon the path to spiritual liberation (*nibbāna*). In today's contemporary world scenario, where aggression and competition often dominate, compassion and tolerance are frequently misunderstood as weaknesses. However, from a Buddhist perspective, these qualities are not only fundamental to personal growth but are central to the attainment of spiritual liberation for all living-beings.

This paper explores compassion (*karuṇā*) and tolerance (*khantī*) from the Buddhist perspective, arguing that they represent profound expressions of strength rather than fragility. This paper explores central teachings of the Buddha from the Pāli Canon, illustrating that compassion is a dynamic and transformative force, driven by the desire to relieve the suffering of all beings. In contrast, tolerance demands inner strength to withstand hardship without succumbing to anger or resentment. Through the lens of Buddhist practice, these virtues contribute to the well-being of both individuals and society, guiding practitioners toward a path of spiritual maturity, peace, and enlightenment. Here through this research paper, I am going to examine these two cardinal virtues from Buddhist perspective, highlighting it as an essential tool to overcome suffering, achieving inner peace, and contributing to the well-being of all beings.

## II. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF COMPASSION AND TOLERANCE IN ANCIENT INDIAN TRADITIONS

Compassion (*karuṇā*) and tolerance (*sahishṇutā*) have been integral to India's philosophical, religious, and social fabric since ancient times. These values shaped the ethical foundations of Indian society, influencing governance, interfaith interactions, and everyday life. Ancient Indian texts, including the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, Buddhist and Jain scriptures, and royal edicts, advocate these principles. The historical evolution of compassion and tolerance in Indian traditions can be traced through Vedic literature, the rise of Jainism and Buddhism, and the policies of rulers like Ashoka. This essay explores these themes with references from primary and secondary sources.

In the Vedic Tradition: The *Ṛg Veda* (1500 BCE), one of the oldest known scriptures, emphasizes unity, harmony, and mutual respect. A well-known hymn states: "Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions."<sup>1</sup> This verse reflects openness to diverse perspectives, a foundational aspect of tolerance. The *Atharva Veda* (1200 BCE) also advocates peaceful coexistence, stating: "May we live in harmony, speaking sweet words to each other."<sup>2</sup> The *Upanishads* (800-200 BCE), which delve deeper into philosophical thought, reinforce compassion as a path to spiritual liberation. The *Chhandogya Upaniṣad* declares: "One should see all beings in oneself and oneself in all beings."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ṛg Veda* 1.89.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Atharva Veda* 3.30.3.

<sup>3</sup> *Chhandogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7.

This concept of interconnectedness fosters empathy and non-discrimination. The *Dharmaśāstras*, such as the *Manusmṛti* (200 BCE–200 CE), which have often been criticized for their rigid social codes, also promote kindness by stating: ‘A wise man should treat all creatures as his own self.’<sup>4</sup> Thus, early Hindu traditions laid the groundwork for ethical living based on compassion and tolerance. The *Bhagavad Gita* (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) integrates compassion into the warrior’s duty (*dharma*). In a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, Krishna urges: “He who has no ill will toward any being, who is friendly and compassionate, free from ego and possessiveness, is dear to me.”<sup>5</sup> This teaching aligns compassion with righteous action, influencing later Hindu ethics.

In Jainism: Jainism, founded by Mahavira (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE), placed *ahimsa* (non-violence) at the heart of its philosophy. The *Acharaṅga Sūtra*, an early Jain text, states: “One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, water, fire, air, and vegetation disregards their own existence.”<sup>6</sup> This deep ecological and ethical compassion extended to all life forms. Jain monks practice strict non-violence, even avoiding harm to insects. The Jain principle of *anekāntavāda* (many-sidedness) promotes tolerance by recognizing multiple perspectives, thus fostering dialogue and coexistence.

Ancient India was home to diverse religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and later, various sects like Shaivism and Vaishnavism. The Mauryan, Gupta, and later Chola empires promoted interfaith dialogue. The Tamil epic *Thirukkural* (5<sup>th</sup> century CE), written by Thiruvalluvar, states: “Compassion is the root of righteousness. Even in legal codes, rulers upheld tolerance. The *Arthaśāstra* (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE), attributed to Chanakya, advises that the king should allow all religious sects to live according to their own laws.” This legal pluralism ensured harmony in a multi-religious society.

Ancient Indian traditions stand out for institutionalizing compassion and tolerance across philosophical, social, and political domains. In contrast to rigid exclusivism seen in some other ancient civilizations, Indian traditions promoted adaptability and inclusivity. This ethical foundation influenced later movements like the Bhakti and Sufi traditions, which further emphasized love and acceptance. Modern Indian leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi, drew from these traditions. Gandhi’s philosophy of *ahimsa* was deeply rooted in Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist thought, shaping India’s independence movement. He famously said: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” This ethos continues to inspire global peace movements. The historical evolution of compassion and tolerance in ancient Indian traditions reflects a deep ethical and philosophical commitment to coexistence. From the Vedic concept of universal harmony to Jain *ahimsa*, Buddhist *karuṇā*, and Ashoka’s policies, these ideals shaped Indian civilization. The *Bhagavad Gita* reinforced moral duty with compassion, while legal texts ensured social harmony. These

<sup>4</sup> *Manusmṛti* 6.92.

<sup>5</sup> *Bhāgavad Gītā* 12.13.

<sup>6</sup> *Acharaṅga Sūtra* 1.1.5.

values not only defined ancient India but continue to guide modern ethical and political thought.

Gautama Buddha (5th century BCE) broadened the concept of compassion, elevating it as a universal virtue. The *Dhammapada*, one of the essential Buddhist texts, states: Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the eternal rule.” The Buddha emphasized *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness), encouraging followers to cultivate empathy toward all beings. The Buddhist ideal of the *Bodhisattva*, someone who delays personal enlightenment to help others, embodies the ultimate expression of compassion. Aśoka, the Great (273–232 BCE) inscribed messages of religious tolerance and compassion on his edicts. In Rock Edict XII, he declared: “One should not honor only one’s religion and condemn others, but should honor others’ religions for this or that reason.” His policies promoted vegetarianism, animal welfare, and religious harmony, setting a precedent for state-sponsored tolerance.

## 2.1. *Karuṇā* in Buddhist literature

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is the name of volition for eradication of suffering of others. It is not a simple verbal expression towards beings in suffering but a positive attitude to be one with the suffering of others and making right efforts for its gradual minimization.<sup>7</sup> It is called compassion because it is scattered over the afflicted, stretched out over them by diffusion.<sup>8</sup> Compassion has the characteristic of evolving the mode of removing pain; the property of not being able to bear others suffer; the manifestation of kindness; the proximate cause of seeing the need of those overcome by pain. Its consummation is the quieting of cruelty; its failure is the production of sorrow.<sup>9</sup>

Here the beings in suffering of all planes of existence are its objects (*dukkhijanesu karuṇā*). The beings of the past and those of future do not come in its preview. It embraces the beings of the present state of existence. There is no barrier of place and the states of the beings. Sometimes compassion (*karuṇā*) is intimately associated with the *Dānapāramitā*. Through compassion a *Bodhisattava* perfects himself in every way and at last attains Buddhahood.<sup>10</sup> There are so many references of that in the *Jātakas*, where compassion (*karuṇā*) for all creatures is exhibited through the story of a hungry tigress.

Further it is stated that the Buddha gave up the opportunity, he had of putting an end to samsaric ills by becoming an arahant at the feet of Dipaṅkara Buddha and resolved to fulfill the perfections (*pāramī*) in *samsāra*, so that he

<sup>7</sup> As.192: *paradukkhe sati hadaya kampanam karoti ti karuṇā. kiṇāti vā paradukkham, himsati, vināseti ti karuṇā. kiriyati vā dukkhitesu karaṇavasena pasāriyati ti karuṇā.*

<sup>8</sup> As.192: *kiriyati vā dukkhitesu karaṇavasena pasāriyati ti karuṇā.*

<sup>9</sup> As.193: “*dukkhapanayanakarappavattilakkhaṇa karuṇā, paradukkhasah-anarasa, avihimsāpaccupattihāna, dukkhabhibhūtanamaṇanathabhāvadassanapadatthāna. vihiṃsupasamo tassa sampatti, sokasambhavo vipatti.*”

<sup>10</sup> cf. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Ed.) G. P. Malalasekera Vol.VI Fascicle 3, published by Government of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2002, p. 435 (Article Name ‘*Mahākaruṇā*’ by Lily de Silva).

could become Buddha to save many others from samsāric ills. The Buddha, during his forty-five years of missionary service, each day in the very early hours in the morning, entered a trance called *mahākaruṇā samāpatti* to see who deserved his special attention that day, and it is said that the Buddha travelled long distances to help out such people.<sup>11</sup>

Ācārya Buddhaghosa in his *magnum-opus* work *Visuddhimagga* gives a detailed description of the practice of compassion.<sup>12</sup> In the *Nāmarūpaparicchedakathā*, Ācārya Aniruddha has also highlighted the practice of compassion in the same way as that of the friendliness: While avoiding the rising of sorrow, destroying injury from a distance devoting concentration on compassion (*karuṇājjhāna*), (He) is made to get the glory (i.e., wealth) of loving kindness (*mettā*).<sup>13</sup> The friendliness is called unlimited. There is no limit of the range of its practice. It can be developed to any number of being and therefore, the Buddha has advised whatever being there may be- moving, static, big, very big, medium size, gross in nature, small or just like atom, seen or unseen, living near or far, have come into existence or will come in future- let all be happy, free from ill-will passing the life without any disturbance, directing himself for higher realization. It is further advised that one should not harm anyone in anyway nor looked down others. There should be no anger, ill-will or any desire which may bring suffering to others: Whatever living beings there may be, feeble or strong (or the seekers and the attained) long, stout, or of medium size, short, small, large, those seen or those unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born as well as those yet to be born, may all beings have happy minds.<sup>14</sup> The annoyance and hatred towards such beings were reduced and in due course uprooted.<sup>15</sup>

Let their suffering of variegated nature be eradicated, agonies be destroyed, sinful activities be minimized, fear be reduced, pollutions and impediments be removed away: So nice! The beings may get liberated from sorrowful states in all ways. The disturbance (*upāyāsa*), grief (*soka*) and lamentation (*paridevanā*) of the living beings be brought down (calm down), sinful elements get destroyed, the defiling factors (*saṃkilesā*) be cooled down, impediments (*palibodhā*) be cut down, hatred (*byāpādā*) be destroyed (lit. killed), the misfortune or distress (*upaddavā*) be turned back, miseries (*byasanāni*) get destroyed (get lost), the wrong state (*vipattiyo*) may go away.<sup>16</sup> Let there be wish for compassion to all

<sup>11</sup> cf. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, (Ed.) G.P. Malalasekera, Vol. VI, Fascicle I, published by Government of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1996, p. 145. (Article Name: 'Karuṇā' by W. G. Weeraratne).

<sup>12</sup> *Vism.* 314: *karuṇam bhāvetukāmena pana nikkaruṇatāya ādinavaṃ karuṇāya ca āni-saṃsaṃ paccavekkhitvā karuṇābhāvanā ārabhitabbā.* (Ñānamoli 1997, p.340)

<sup>13</sup> *Nāmarūpapariccheda*, V. 1366: "sokuppattiṃ nivārento-vihimsaṃ durato haraṃ, mettāyamiva pāpeti-karuṇājjhānamappaṇaṃ."

<sup>14</sup> *Sn.V.* 146 - 147.

<sup>15</sup> *M. I.* 424 - 25: *karuṇaṃ bhāvanam bhāvayato yā vihesā sā pahiyissati.*

<sup>16</sup> *Nāmarūpapariccheda*, V. 1361 - 63: "aho sattā vimuccantu - dukkhadhammehi sabbathā;/ sādhu samentupāyāsā - sokā ca paridevanā./ khīyantu pāpadhammā ca - passambhentaṃmayā



beings always; and after the eradication of all sufferings, there must be desire for compassion.<sup>17</sup>

The word *karuṇā* in Mahāyāna Sanskrit texts occurs very frequently. According to the *Prajñāpāramitā* Sūtras, a bodhisattva shows his *karuṇā* by resolving to suffer many torments and agonies in many births to lead others to enlightenment. He does not care for his own happiness, loves all beings as a mother loves her children.<sup>18</sup> In the *Aṣṭasahasrikā*, the Buddha compares the Bodhisattava to an excellent compassionate hero who would never desert the being for whom he is the savior.<sup>19</sup> Āryaśūra and Śāntideva exalt *karuṇā* above all virtues. We see that as emotionalism grew in Buddhism, this virtue was given more importance. In the beginning wisdom (*prajñā*) and mercy (*dayā*) were considered equally important. In fact, *prajñā* is sometimes regarded more than mercy (*dayā*). *Karuṇā* and *Dayā* are necessary for the spiritual upliftment of the Bodhisattva. Both these qualities are very important for the matters relating to the duties of a king. In the early Mahāyāna, Mañjuśrī, the personification of wisdom, is the *primus inter pares* among the Bodhisattavas, while in the later Mahāyāna Avalokiteśvara, the personification of compassion is the first.

The concept of *mahākaruṇā* (universal compassion) is one of the cardinal principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Bodhisattva never accepts *nirvāṇa* though by meritorious and righteous deeds he becomes entitled to it. He deliberately postpones his own salvation until the whole world of suffering beings be saved. Ordinary people of little merit would always take refuge in the all-compassionate Bodhisattva. To pray for the compassion of the Bodhisattva was deemed as one of the best ways of being relieved of all sufferings. As *bodhicitta* aims at the welfare of the beings, there cannot be *bodhicitta* without *karuṇā*. Thus, Mahāyāna doctrine of universal compassion was also adopted in the Tantric Buddhist texts. In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, there is a description that how a devout Bodhisattva was earnestly praying to all the enlightened ones, bent on entering *nirvāṇa*, not to accept the *nirvāṇa*, until the suffering world be saved from the miseries of life, and everyone be helped in realizing perfect wisdom.<sup>20</sup> We find a very beautiful echo of it is the *Jñāna-siddhi* where all the compassionate Buddhas are earnestly requested not to accept their own nirvana, but to wait on and on until all the creatures attain perfect Buddhahood.<sup>21</sup> In the *Sādhana-mālā*, we find it an essential part of many of the

---

*tathā;/ saṃklesā palibodhā ca - samucchijjantu pāṇinaṃ/ byāpādā ca vihāyantu - vinivattan-tupaddavā./ byasanāni vinassantu - vigacchantu vipattiyo."*

<sup>17</sup> *Nāmarūpapariccheda*, V.1365: "iccevaṃ anukampanto - sabbasatte pi sabbathā,/ sab-badukha-samugghātāṃ - patthentokaruṇāyati."

<sup>18</sup> *Karuṇā Puṇḍarika* 122.10 119; *Prajñāpāramitā Śat.* 111. Quoted in the *Buddhist Studies Journal*, Vol. No.6, May 1979, University of Delhi, Delhi, p. 81. cf. Sn.v.149: "mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ - āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe,/ evaṃ pi sabbabhūtesu - mānasā bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ."

<sup>19</sup> *Aṣṭasahasrikā*, XX. 371 – 73.

<sup>20</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Chapter III, vv. 4 - 6, 10 - 11, 13 - 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Jñānasiddhi* of Indrabhūti, published under Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. XLIV,



*sādhana*s to pray to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, bent on nirvana, to wait for time eternal for the benefit of all beings.<sup>22</sup> In the songs of the Dohas of the Siddhācāryas, we find the spirit of universal compassion expressed often in a very nice way. The stress of *karuṇā* in various ways is a characteristic feature also of *Caryāpadas*.

## 2.2. *Khanti* in Buddhist literature

The word *karuṇā* in Mahāyāna Sanskrit texts occurs very frequently. According to the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras, a bodhisattva shows his *karuṇā* by resolving to suffer many torments and agonies in many births to lead others to enlightenment. He does not care for his happiness, loves all beings as a mother loves her children.<sup>23</sup> In the *Aṣṭasaḥasrikā*, the Lord compares the Bodhisattava to an excellent compassionate hero who would never desert the being for whom he is the savior.<sup>24</sup> Āryaśūra and Śāntideva exalt *karuṇā* above all virtues. We see that as emotionalism grew in Buddhism, this virtue was given more importance. In the beginning wisdom (*prajñā*) and mercy (*dayā*) were considered equally important. In fact, *prajñā* is sometimes regarded more than mercy (*dayā*). *Karuṇā* and *Dayā* are the necessary for the spiritual upliftment of the Bodhisattva. Both these qualities are very important for the matters relating to the duties of a king. In the early Mahāyāna, Mañjuśrī, the personification of wisdom, is the *primus inter pares* among the Bodhisattavas, while in the later Mahāyāna Avalokiteśvara, the personification of compassion is the first.

The concept of *mahākaruṇā* (universal compassion) is one of the cardinal principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Bodhisattva never accepts *nirvāṇa* though by meritorious and righteous deeds he becomes entitled to it. He deliberately postpones his own salvation until the whole world of suffering beings be saved. Ordinary people of little merit would always take refuge in the all-compassionate Bodhisattva. To pray for the compassion of the Bodhisattva was deemed as one of the best ways of being relieved of all sufferings. As *bodhicitta* aims at the welfare of the beings, there cannot be *bodhicitta* without *karuṇā*. Thus, Mahāyāna doctrine of universal compassion was also adopted in the Tantric Buddhist texts. In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, there is a description that how a devout Bodhisattva was earnestly praying to all the enlightened ones, bent on entering *nirvāṇa*, not to accept the *nirvāṇa*, until the suffering world be saved from the miseries of life, and everyone be helped in realizing

---

Chapter III, edited with an Introduction and Index by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, published by Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1929.

<sup>22</sup> *Sādhanaṁālā*, Vol. II, (Ed.) Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, published by Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1928, p. 344; quoted in *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* by Dasgupta, Shashi Bhushan, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, Third Edition, 1974, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> *Karuṇā Puṇḍarika* 122.10 119; *Prajñāpāramitā Śāst.* 111. Quoted in the *Buddhist Studies Journal*, Vol. No.6, May 1979, University of Delhi, Delhi, p. 81. cf. Sn.V.149: “*mātā yathā niyaṁ puttāṁ - āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe, / evaṁ pi sabbabhūtesu - mānasā bhāvaye aparimāṇāṁ.*”

<sup>24</sup> *Aṣṭasaḥasrikā*, XX. 371 – 73.

perfect wisdom.<sup>25</sup> We find a very beautiful echo of it is the *Jñāna-siddhi* where all the compassionate Buddhas are earnestly requested not to accept their own nirvana, but to wait on and on until all the creatures attain perfect Buddhahood.<sup>26</sup> In the *Sādhana-mālā*, we find it an essential part of many of the *sādhana*s to pray to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, bent on *nirvāna*, to wait for time eternal for the benefit of all beings.<sup>27</sup> In the songs of the Dohas of the Siddhacāryas, we find the spirit of universal compassion expressed often in a very nice way.

### III. UNDERSTANDING COMPASSION AND TOLERANCE

The *Mettā Sutta* highlights *karuṇā* as a boundless quality essential for overcoming selfishness and fostering universal well-being, and on the other hand the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* discusses *karuṇā* as a mental quality that reduces suffering and supports the path to liberation. Similarly, the *Dhammapada* talks about *khantī* which extols patience as the highest virtue, emphasizing its role in developing resilience and moral strength and in the *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* illustrates how *khantī* (tolerance) ensures harmonious governance and societal stability. There is interrelation between two found in the *Visuddhimagga* which explores how *karuṇā* and *khantī* complement each other in cultivating mindfulness and ethical behaviour, forming the basis for holistic development. Often misconceived as passive or weak, these virtues represent profound resilience, emotional intelligence, and ethical fortitude. *Karuṇā* motivates selfless action to alleviate suffering, fostering empathy-driven leadership and interconnected societies. *Khantī* involves enduring adversity with patience and moral courage, facilitating conflict resolution and inclusivity. Together, they cultivate inner stability, enhance social cohesion, and nurture sustainable human development. This exploration underscores their transformative potential, advocating for their integration into modern approaches to individual and collective growth.

#### 3.1. The essence of compassion in Theravāda Buddhism

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a cornerstone virtue in Buddhism, regarded as essential to the path of enlightenment. It represents a deep and active longing to ease the suffering of others, grounded in wisdom and the understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings. While its essence is consistent across Buddhist traditions, the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasize distinct aspects and methods for cultivating compassion. This essay explores compassion's definitions in both traditions, highlighting their similarities and differences through canonical literature. In Theravāda Buddhism,

<sup>25</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Chapter III, vv. 4 - 6, 10 - 11, 13 - 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Jñānasiddhi* of Indrabhūti, published under Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. XLIV, Chapter III, edited with an Introduction and Index by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, published by Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1929.

<sup>27</sup> *Sādhana-mālā*, Vol.II, (Ed.) Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, published by Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1928, p. 344; quoted in *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* by Dasgupta, Shashi Bhushan, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, Third Edition, 1974, p. 47.

predominantly practiced in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and parts of South Asia, *Karuṇā* is one of the four divine abodes (*Brahmavihāras*), alongside loving-kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). These states of mind are cultivated to develop a heart free from attachment, aversion, and ignorance.

Compassion is defined as a heartfelt wish for the alleviation of others' suffering. It transcends passive sympathy, embodying an active aspiration to relieve suffering without discrimination. The *Dhammapada* eloquently encapsulates this: "May all beings be happy; may all beings be without disease. May all beings experience the sensation of auspiciousness? May nobody suffer in any way?"<sup>28</sup>

This verse underscores *karuṇā* as a universal wish for the happiness and well-being of all, regardless of identity or behaviour.

Compassion in the Theravāda is inseparable from wisdom (*paññā*). Practicing compassion requires understanding the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), its causes, and the impermanence of all phenomena. This wisdom is grounded in the Buddha's teachings on dependent origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) and the three marks of existence (*Tilakkhaṇa*): impermanence (*aniccā*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). The *Itivuttaka* (Verse 36) succinctly illustrates this wisdom-driven compassion: "And how, bhikkhus, does one develop the mind of compassion? One, having seen a person suffering, reflects: 'This being, too, is subject to aging, illness, and death; this being also experiences birth, aging, sickness, and death.'"<sup>29</sup>

The above passage reflects the wisdom-driven compassion in Buddhism, where understanding the shared nature of suffering (*dukkha*) leads to the development of compassion (*karuṇā*) for all beings. The *Itivuttaka* presents such reflections as key to cultivating a compassionate heart and overcoming selfish tendencies. Here, compassion arises from recognizing the universal experience of suffering, fostering a desire to alleviate it.

### 3.2. Compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism

Mahāyāna Buddhism, which developed in India and spread to East Asia, elevates compassion to the central ideal of the Bodhisattva path. A Bodhisattva vows to attain Buddhahood to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. In the Mahāyāna, *karuṇā* is not just an aspiration; it is the foundation of a transformative path that integrates the perfection of wisdom, ethical conduct, and meditative concentration. Compassion in the Mahāyāna is closely tied to the concept of emptiness (*Śūnyatā*). Emptiness reveals that all phenomena lack intrinsic existence, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings. This insight deepens compassion, motivating selfless action for others' benefit. The *Lotus Sutra* articulates this beautifully: "As the great compassionate one,

<sup>28</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations*. Wisdom Publications, 1998, p. 95.

<sup>29</sup> *Itivuttaka: Sayings of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu, **Thanissaro**, *Access to Insight*, 1997.

the Bodhisattva saves sentient beings by compassion, and through benefiting others, he himself attains the ultimate perfection.”<sup>30</sup>

The above passage underscores the central role of compassion (*karuṇā*) in the Mahāyāna Buddhism, where the Bodhisattva’s vow to help all sentient beings is viewed as the highest ideal. By acting compassionately toward others, the Bodhisattva not only benefits others but also progresses toward ultimate enlightenment (Buddhahood). This teaching exemplifies the selfless compassion that defines the Bodhisattva path and the portrayal highlights *karuṇā* as a transformative force, leading not only to the alleviation of suffering but to ultimate Buddhahood.

The Bodhisattvabhūmi by Asaṅga further emphasizes the Bodhisattva’s commitment:<sup>31</sup> “The Bodhisattva’s compassion is not merely a wish for others to be free from suffering but a deep commitment to help all beings attain enlightenment. Compassion is the means by which the Bodhisattva transcends all obstacles and attains Buddhahood, not for oneself alone but for the benefit of all.”

The famous Bodhisattva vow exemplifies this selflessness in the following words: “However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them. However inexhaustible the afflictions are, I vow to put an end to them. However immeasurable the Dharma teachings are, I vow to learn them. However unsurpassable the Buddha’s path is, I vow to attain it.”<sup>32</sup>

Comparative Insights: Despite differing frameworks, the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna agree on compassion’s indispensability for enlightenment. In the Theravāda, compassion is tied to wisdom and the impermanent nature of suffering, while in the Mahāyāna, it underpins the Bodhisattva ideal of selfless dedication to others’ liberation. Both traditions emphasize compassion’s universality, extending to all beings, and its transformative potential. They regard it as a powerful antidote to self-centeredness, cultivated through meditation, ethical conduct, and engagement with the world. Ultimately, compassion in Buddhism transcends personal and doctrinal boundaries, guiding practitioners toward the shared goal of alleviating suffering and attaining enlightenment for the benefit of all.

#### IV. ESSENCE OF TOLERANCE IN THERAVĀDA AND MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

Tolerance, or *Khantī* in Pāli, is a central virtue in Buddhism, widely regarded as essential for spiritual development and fostering peace within oneself and society. In Buddhist teachings, tolerance is not passive resignation or mere endurance but an active, conscious, and wise response to suffering, provocation, or adversity. It involves the ability to endure hardship without

<sup>30</sup> *The Lotus Sutra*, Watson, Burton, trans. Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 324.

<sup>31</sup> Silk, Jonathan. *The Bodhisattvabhūmi: A Translation from the Sanskrit* (Asaṅga in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE). Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> Asaṅga, *Mahāyāna Sūtrālaṅkāra (Bodhisattva’s Path: The Sūtrālaṅkāra)*, trans. Kumarajiva and Khenpo Sodargye, 1999, p. 121.

anger, hatred, or frustration and is closely connected to the practice of patience (*sabari*). While both the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna traditions emphasize the importance of tolerance, their approaches reveal subtle differences. This essay explores the concept of tolerance in these traditions, drawing on canonical texts to highlight its meaning and significance.

**Tolerance in the Theravāda Buddhism:** The Theravāda Buddhism, primarily practiced in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and parts of South Asia, considers tolerance (*Khantī*) one of the ten perfections (*Pāramīs*). These qualities are cultivated to attain enlightenment, with tolerance being vital for overcoming anger and developing wisdom. In the Theravāda tradition, tolerance is understood as the ability to endure hardships without succumbing to negative emotions like anger (*kodha*) or hatred (*dosa*). It involves patience, forbearance, and emotional resilience. The Pāli term *Khantī* conveys not passive endurance but a skilful, wise response to suffering that acknowledges its inevitability in human existence.

The *Dhammapada* underscores the importance of tolerance with teachings such as: “Not by anger is anger pacified; by non-anger is anger pacified. This is a timeless truth.”<sup>33</sup> This verse encapsulates the essence of tolerance in Theravāda Buddhism: responding to anger with patience and non-retaliation rather than perpetuating a cycle of negativity. Tolerance, therefore, is seen as mental discipline, counteracting aversion and promoting inner peace.

As one of the *Pāramīs*, tolerance supports enlightenment by helping practitioners overcome internal defilements and develop wisdom. The *Visuddhimagga*, a foundational Theravāda text, elaborates: “*Khantī* is the ability to endure suffering and unpleasant situations without anger or resentment. It reflects a mature mind that understands the impermanent nature of all things.”<sup>34</sup> This wisdom-rooted tolerance recognizes suffering as part of the human condition and cultivates emotional strength to navigate adversity without anger.

**Tolerance in Mahāyāna Buddhism:** Mahāyāna Buddhism, which developed in India and spread to East Asia, emphasizes tolerance within the framework of the Bodhisattva ideal. A Bodhisattva vows to attain Buddhahood to benefit all beings, making tolerance integral to their path of selfless compassion and wisdom. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, tolerance transcends personal virtue and becomes a manifestation of the Bodhisattva’s compassionate resolve to help others. Asaṅga’s *Bodhisattvabhūmi* states: “The Bodhisattva, by developing tolerance, can endure the suffering of sentient beings without irritation or anger, for he has dedicated himself to their ultimate welfare.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu. Wisdom Publications, 1998, p. 111 (Verse 223).

<sup>34</sup> Nāṇamoli, Bhikkhu. *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011, p. 300.

<sup>35</sup> Silk, Jonathan. *The Bodhisattvabhūmi: A Translation from the Sanskrit* (Authored by Asaṅga in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE). Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, p. 104.



Tolerance here is not limited to personal hardship but extends to bearing others' suffering with a compassionate heart. It reflects the Bodhisattva's unshakable commitment to the welfare of all beings.

Mahāyāna also links tolerance to the realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which teaches that all phenomena lack inherent existence. This insight fosters an understanding of interconnectedness, helping practitioners view suffering and hostility as transient illusions.

The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* emphasizes this connection: "A Bodhisattva, having fully realized emptiness, can remain patient in the face of the most severe provocation because he knows that all suffering is based on illusion."<sup>36</sup>

This wisdom enables Bodhisattvas to respond to adversity with equanimity, rooted in their understanding of the nature of reality.

The *Lotus Sūtra* reinforces this view: "The Bodhisattva who has cultivated the perfection of patience can remain unmoved, no matter what difficulties he faces, because he sees that all things are empty and impermanent."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, tolerance in Mahāyāna Buddhism reflects spiritual maturity, informed by compassion and the realization of emptiness.

Despite differences in emphasis, Theravāda and Mahāyāna agree that tolerance is indispensable for spiritual progress. Both traditions view it as an active, wise response to suffering, characterized by patience and compassion. In Theravāda, tolerance is tied to personal liberation and wisdom, focusing on overcoming anger and understanding the impermanent nature of suffering. In Mahāyāna, tolerance is central to the Bodhisattva ideal, emphasizing compassion for others and the aspiration to liberate all beings. Mahāyāna further deepens the concept by linking it to the realization of emptiness, broadening its scope beyond personal practice to include the selfless commitment to others' welfare.

Tolerance (*Khantī*) is a cornerstone of Buddhist practice in both Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions, serving as a tool for overcoming anger, fostering wisdom, and cultivating compassion. While Theravāda emphasizes tolerance as a *Pāramī* leading to enlightenment, Mahāyāna elevates it as a defining quality of the Bodhisattva path. Regardless of these distinctions, both traditions recognize tolerance as a transformative force, guiding practitioners toward inner peace and the ultimate goal of alleviating suffering for all beings.

#### 4.1. Compassion and tolerance as expressions of strength

Compassion (*karuṇā*) as Strength: In Buddhism, compassion transcends a mere emotional response to suffering. It embodies an active, dynamic wish to alleviate suffering, rooted in wisdom and an understanding of the impermanent

<sup>36</sup> See Conze, Edward. *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary (Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra or Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra)*, Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973.

<sup>37</sup> *The Lotus Sutra*. Hurvitz, Leon. Columbia University Press, 1976, p. 238.



and interconnected nature of all beings. The Pāli term *karuṇā* signifies a profound, heartfelt desire for others to be free from suffering and its causes. This conception goes beyond conventional interpretations of compassion as sympathy or pity. The Buddha emphasized the universality of compassion in teachings such as the verse from the *Dhammapada*:<sup>38</sup> “May all beings be happy; may all beings be without disease. May all beings experience the sensation of auspiciousness. May nobody suffer in any way.” This boundless aspiration extends to all beings, even those who are difficult or hostile, transcending personal attachments and ego-driven desires.

Compassion, often seen as vulnerability in society, is viewed by the Buddha as spiritual strength. It demands emotional maturity, the ability to overcome ego, and the courage to act selflessly, even when confronting suffering. The Buddha’s life exemplifies this strength, as he remained compassionate despite facing personal hardship and hostility. By following his example, practitioners cultivate a heart that embraces adversity with kindness and transcends prejudices.

Tolerance (*khantī*) as Inner Strength: The virtue of tolerance, *khantī*, is not passive resignation but an active process of transformation. It reflects the ability to endure suffering and difficulty without giving in to anger or frustration. *Khantī* aligns with the perfection of patience (*Sabari*), one of the ten *Pāramī* (perfections) necessary for enlightenment. The *Dhammapada* teaches:<sup>39</sup> “Not by anger is anger pacified; by non-anger is anger pacified. This is a timeless truth.” Here, the Buddha underscores that tolerance, grounded in wisdom and understanding, is the antidote to anger and conflict.

Tolerance involves a disciplined mind that acknowledges suffering and responds with equanimity rather than emotional reactivity. It is not about avoiding conflict but addressing it with awareness and wisdom. By cultivating tolerance, individuals’ developmental peace and reduce emotional suffering.

#### 4.2. Compassion and tolerance in interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal challenges and the role of compassion: In daily life, compassion and tolerance foster harmony amidst interpersonal challenges. The Buddha advised in the *Sīla-Vīmaṃsaka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*:<sup>40</sup> “A person who, by enduring the provocations of others, does not give rise to anger is said to have conquered the world.”

The above teaching of the Buddha highlights the inner strength required to remain composed and compassionate, even in difficult circumstances.

The Strength of Compassionate Action: Compassion and tolerance demand active engagement and decision-making. The Buddha’s example

<sup>38</sup> *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu. Wisdom Publications, 1998, p. 235 (Verse 197).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 97 (Verse 223).

<sup>40</sup> *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, and Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans., Wisdom Publications, 1995, p. 112.

illustrates the transformative power of compassionate action. In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, he likened compassion to a mother protecting her child:<sup>41</sup> “As a mother would protect her child, even at the risk of her life, so should one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.”

This boundless love reflects immense emotional resilience and the transcendence of self-interest, embodying true spiritual strength.

### 4.3. Compassion and tolerance for human development

In today’s world, where aggression, competition, and materialism often dominate our daily lives, compassion and tolerance are increasingly recognized as essential for addressing some of the most pressing global challenges. From political conflict to social inequality, environmental destruction to mental health crises, the need for compassion and tolerance is undeniable. These two qualities not only promote individual well-being but are also vital for societal development and global harmony. By exploring the roles of compassion and tolerance, particularly through the lenses of emotional well-being, social justice, and conflict resolution, we can better understand how these values contribute to a healthier, more just, and peaceful world.

**Compassion and Emotional Well-being:** At the core of human development is emotional well-being, and compassion plays a key role in fostering this essential aspect of life. In a world increasingly marked by stress, anxiety, and mental health crises, compassion offers a counterbalance to the negative emotions that can overwhelm individuals. Psychological research corroborates what many ancient traditions, including Buddhism, have long suggested—that practicing compassion is not only beneficial to others but also to oneself. Studies have shown that compassion can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and loneliness, which are becoming more prevalent in today’s fast-paced, digitalized society.

Self-compassion, in particular, is an essential component of emotional well-being. It involves treating oneself with kindness and understanding, especially in times of failure or difficulty, rather than being harshly self-critical. When individuals practice self-compassion, they are more likely to experience emotional resilience and less likely to succumb to feelings of worthlessness or distress. This emotional resilience, in turn, fosters a sense of fulfillment and purpose, as it allows individuals to move through challenges with a balanced and open mind.

Additionally, compassion for others is a powerful tool for building stronger relationships and deeper connections with those around us. When people demonstrate empathy and kindness toward others, they create positive social environments that reduce isolation and promote mutual support. In a world that often prioritizes individual success over collective well-being, fostering compassion can help individuals break through barriers of isolation, enhancing

---

<sup>41</sup> *The Anguttara Nikāya*, Trans. Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publications, 2012, p. 776.

the mental and emotional well-being of society as a whole.

**Compassion and Social Justice:** Beyond individual emotional health, compassion is also a driving force for social change and justice. It motivates individuals and communities to take action to address systemic inequalities, such as racism, poverty, gender inequality, and economic disparity. When people genuinely care about the suffering of others, particularly those who are marginalized or oppressed, they are more likely to engage in actions that seek to address and rectify these injustices.

One of the primary reasons compassion plays such an important role in social justice is that it fosters empathy. Empathy allows individuals to understand the experiences and challenges of those who are different from themselves. By practicing compassion, individuals are more likely to recognize the shared humanity that connects all people, regardless of race, nationality, religion, or socioeconomic status. This empathy is crucial in reducing prejudice and building a more inclusive, equitable society.

Compassion also acts as a powerful motivator for collective action. Whether through grassroots movements, community organizing, or national campaigns, compassionate individuals and groups work tirelessly to create policies and systems that promote equality, justice, and human rights. As a result, compassion becomes the cornerstone of societal harmony, ensuring that efforts to tackle inequality are not only driven by logic or legal frameworks but also by a deep commitment to human dignity and the well-being of all individuals.

**Tolerance and Social Cohesion:** In a world that is increasingly interconnected, diverse, and pluralistic, tolerance has become a key pillar for social cohesion. Tolerance allows for the peaceful coexistence of individuals and groups with differing beliefs, values, and practices. In today's globalized world, people are often exposed to a variety of cultures, religions, and ideologies. While this diversity is a source of richness and innovation, it can also be a source of tension and conflict if not approached with tolerance.

Tolerance involves accepting and respecting differences without judgment, recognizing that diversity is not something to be feared but celebrated. It is the willingness to coexist peacefully, even when one's personal beliefs or values may differ from those of others. In a world that often emphasizes competition and division, tolerance offers a refreshing alternative that promotes collaboration, dialogue, and mutual respect.

Buddhist teachings on *Khanti* (patience) and non-reactivity emphasize the importance of tolerance in fostering social harmony. *Khanti* encourages individuals to practice patience in the face of adversity, to remain calm and composed even amid conflict. This teaching is particularly relevant in today's polarized societies, where divisive rhetoric and hostility often dominate public discourse. By embracing tolerance, individuals and communities create a foundation for civil discourse, where differences can be discussed respectfully and peacefully, rather than through hostility or violence.

**Tolerance and Conflict Resolution:** Tolerance also plays a crucial role in conflict resolution. In an increasingly polarized world, where social, political, and cultural differences often lead to conflict, tolerance offers a non-violent approach to addressing differences. Rather than escalating tensions or resorting to aggression, tolerance enables individuals to engage in dialogue, listen to opposing viewpoints, and seek common ground. In essence, tolerance promotes understanding, which is essential for resolving conflicts peacefully.

In the context of international relations, tolerance is key to resolving global conflicts and fostering cooperation between nations. Diplomatic negotiations, peace treaties, and international alliances often depend on the ability of leaders to tolerate differing perspectives and work toward mutually beneficial solutions. The ongoing peace efforts in areas such as the Middle East or South Asia, for example, often require leaders to put aside deep-rooted prejudices and engage in dialogues that prioritize peace and reconciliation over division and hostility.

On a more personal level, tolerance in interpersonal relationships allows individuals to navigate disagreements and conflicts with grace and understanding. Instead of reacting impulsively or aggressively, tolerant individuals are more likely to take a step back, assess the situation, and respond in a way that fosters collaboration rather than confrontation. This approach not only resolves conflicts but also strengthens relationships and promotes long-term harmony.

**The Power of Compassion and Tolerance for Human Development:** Compassion and tolerance are not merely abstract ideals but practical values that can transform both individuals and societies. Compassion, by fostering emotional well-being and motivating actions for social justice, enables individuals to connect with others on a deep, empathetic level. It encourages a society that is inclusive, equitable, and committed to addressing the suffering of others. Tolerance, on the other hand, provides the foundation for peaceful coexistence in a diverse and interconnected world. It enables individuals and communities to engage in respectful dialogue, resolve conflicts, and build social cohesion despite differences.

Together, compassion and tolerance create a powerful framework for human development. They encourage individuals to care for themselves and others, to seek justice and fairness, and to resolve conflicts in peaceful, constructive ways. In a world that faces complex challenges, these values are more important than ever. By embracing compassion and tolerance, we can create a world that values human dignity, fosters emotional well-being, and works towards a more just and peaceful global society.

## **V. THE INTERCONNECTION OF COMPASSION AND TOLERANCE FOR GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

Compassion and tolerance are indispensable for addressing issues such as climate change, social inequality, and technological advancements: **Environmental Crisis:** Compassion motivates actions to protect the

Earth, while tolerance fosters collaboration among diverse stakeholders. Technological Ethics: Compassion ensures equitable technological progress, and tolerance promotes inclusive debates about ethical implication.

To sum up, *karuṇā* (compassion) is not merely emotional sympathy; it motivates individuals to act selflessly to alleviate the suffering of others. This active compassion fosters interconnection, breaking down barriers of selfishness and creating strong, supportive communities. A compassionate person is not weak but emotionally resilient, capable of facing challenges with equanimity. Such individuals understand the needs of others and prioritize collective well-being, fostering trust and cooperation. Compassion also inspires forgiveness and reconciliation, breaking cycles of conflict and promoting healing.

*Khantī* (tolerance) involves enduring hardships, criticism, and adversities with calmness, reflecting immense inner strength. It requires self-control and a deep understanding of impermanence (*aniccā*). Tolerance enables individuals to approach disagreements with understanding, reducing hostility and fostering peaceful dialogue. By preventing impulsive reactions, it preserves relationships and promotes long-term harmony. Tolerance demonstrates moral fortitude in the face of injustice or provocation, encouraging thoughtful responses over reactive aggression.

Both virtues cultivate mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and ethical conduct, which are foundational for personal and professional growth. Compassion bridges divides, while tolerance ensures respectful coexistence despite differences. Together, they create an environment where individuals can express their potential without fear of judgment or harm. In Buddhism, these two virtues are indispensable for achieving higher states of consciousness and, ultimately, liberation (*nibbāna*) for human development.

Compassion and tolerance are not signs of weakness but vital qualities for personal and collective growth. They allow individuals to connect with others, act selflessly, and resolve conflicts with wisdom and patience. Drawing from Buddhist teachings, these virtues offer a path to inner peace, societal harmony, and global sustainability, fostering a future where all beings can flourish. Far from being weaknesses, *karuṇā* and *Khantī* embody transformation strength which provides the tools to navigate life with wisdom, equanimity, and compassion. In a world often marked by conflict and division, these virtues hold the key to fostering individual and collective human development.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This research paper explores the concept of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *khantī* (tolerance) in Buddhism and its expression through social participation, particularly in Human Development. The central argument is that compassion drives Buddhists to actively engage in alleviating the suffering of others. This compassion is not just an emotional response but a call to action, following the example of the Buddha. While the Buddha's primary concern was spiritual liberation, the practice of compassion in Buddhism expands beyond individual spiritual growth to include social involvement.



Here, it is argued that Buddhist engagement with the world, driven by *karuṇā*, is a significant aspect of the tradition, not just a spiritual practice but an active force for social good. The compassion (*karuṇā*) compels Buddhists to serve others and address social issues. The expression of *karuṇā* in Buddhism is seen through social participation, which includes conflict resolution and social activism. The core belief is that physical and spiritual peace is interconnected, and the path to *nirvāṇa* involves resolving societal issues. The Buddhist tradition is shown to not be reclusive or world-negating but one that actively engages with the world. Examples of contemporary Buddhist social engagement are examined to illustrate how *Karuṇā* is put into action.

The paper further highlights the responses of Buddhists to three major world events: the COVID-19 pandemic, the military coup in Myanmar. These events underscore how Buddhists, motivated by *karuṇā*, take active roles in conflict resolution and social activism. Buddhist organizations like the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation have provided humanitarian aid to those affected by the war, showcasing *karuṇā* through practical acts of compassion. The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated Buddhist social engagement.

Across the world, Buddhist communities helped alleviate the economic hardships caused by the pandemic, offering social services and fundraising for medical supplies and the best example was Vietnam Buddhist Sangha which has demonstrated through such activities during the pandemic period and also of the Vietnamese Monks and Nuns of Gautam Buddha University has done a lot of social services in and around its campus for the needed people. Buddhist temples worldwide engaged in similar acts of charity and support for those affected by the virus, proving that *karuṇā* extends beyond mere emotional sympathy to tangible actions that address human suffering.

The social participation of Buddhists, driven by compassion, contributes significantly to the betterment of society. The acts of compassion displayed by Buddhists inspire others to engage in similar acts, creating a ripple effect of kindness and goodwill. These actions also demonstrate that *karuṇā* can lead to positive societal change by fostering cooperation, sensitivity to others' suffering, and social unity. *karuṇā*, as a guiding principle, has the potential to unite diverse individuals and groups in their shared efforts to alleviate suffering and build a better society, which ultimately led to human development. *karuṇā* is a universal call to compassion, inviting all individuals, regardless of religious affiliation, to act with kindness and sensitivity toward others. By embracing compassion, society can move toward a more just and peaceful future, with Buddhism providing a model of social engagement and activism rooted in altruism.



## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

- Anguttara Nikāya*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu, The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012.
- Anguttara Nikāya*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans., The, Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, Wisdom Publications, 2012.
- Digha Nikāya*, Walshe, Maurice, The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995.
- Majjhima Nikāya*, Bodhi, Bhikkhu and Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Wisdom Publications, 1995 & 2009.
- Samyutta Nikāya*, Bodhi, Bhikkhu, The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.

### Secondary sources

- Basham, A. L. *The Wonder That Was India*. Rupa, 1954.
- Bhikkhu, Thanissaro, trans., *Itivuttaka: Sayings of the Buddha, Access to Insight*, 1997.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu, The *Dhammapada*: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations, Wisdom Publications, 1998.
- Buddharakkhita, Acharya, The *Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*, Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1986.
- Conze, Edward, The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary (*Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* or Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtra*), Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973.
- Doniger, Wendy. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. Penguin, 2009.
- Hookham, S. K., The Mahayana Sutralamkara (*Maitreya-Asaṅga*, 4th-5th Century CE), Sri Satguru Publications, 1991.
- Hurvitz, Leon, The *Lotus Sūtra*, Columbia University Press, 1976.
- Ireland, John D., *Itivuttaka: The Buddha's Sayings*, Buddhist Publication Society, 1997.
- Kumarajiva and Khenpo Sodargye, trans., *Asaṅga, Mahāyāna Sūtrālaṅkāra (Bodhisattva's Path: The Sūtrālaṅkāra)*, 1999.
- Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, The Path of Purification: *Visuddhimagga*, Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011.
- Olivelle, Patrick (trans.). *The Upanishads*. Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Seneviratna, Anuradha. *King Asoka and Buddhism: Historical and Literary Studies*. Buddhist Publication Society, 1994.
- Silk, Jonathan, The Bodhisattvabhūmi: A Translation from the Sanskrit (*Asaṅga* in the 4th Century CE), Brill Academic Publishers, 2014.
- Strong, John S. *The Legend of King Asoka: A Study and Translation of the Asokavadana*. Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Thapar, Romila. *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. Penguin, 2002.
- Watson, Burton, *Saddharmapuṇḍarika Sūtra (The Lotus Sūtra)*, Columbia University Press, 1993.



**BUDDHIST COMPASSION  
IN ACTION:  
SHARED RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**





# SHARING – NOT SAVING: EMPATHY AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS AS PATTERNS OF CONTEMPORARY FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

Asst. Prof. Jitka Cirklová\*

## Abstract:

This article examines the innovative charitable practices of the Czech NGO Brontosauři v Himalájích, focusing on their project “Czech Science to Little Tibet.” Rooted in the serene Himalayan village of Mulbekh, this initiative embodies the core Buddhist principles of interdependence (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and selfless giving (*dāna*), seamlessly integrating them with contemporary sustainable development frameworks. By fostering a holistic approach that harmonizes spiritual wisdom with ecological and social responsibility, it seeks to cultivate a more balanced and ethically grounded model of progress. Through qualitative research, the study explores how the NGO fosters mutual enrichment by positioning Western science and Tibetan traditions as equal contributors to a sustainable educational system. The NGO’s approach contrasts with conventional aid models by prioritizing shared values over asymmetrical relationships. This paper also highlights the transformative potential of Buddhist ethics, particularly as derived from the *Dhammapada* and *Majjhima Nikāya*, in fostering global solidarity. Ultimately, it situates Brontosauři v Himalájích within discussions on spiritual and symbolic capital, demonstrating Buddhism’s potential to inspire holistic development in secular societies.

**Keywords:** *Brontosauři v Himalájích, Czech science to little Tibet, Buddhist ethics, sustainable development, spiritual and symbolic capital.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This text analyzes a contemporary form of charity practices, focusing on the activities of the Czech NGO Brontosauři v Himalájích, which has been active in the Himalayan village of Mulbekh in Little Tibet for over a decade.

---

\* M. A. in Comparative Religion from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Assistant Professor at the Czech Technical University in Prague.

Their latest project, titled *Czech Science to Little Tibet*, aims to provide regular science education with the support of Czech scientists. Located at an altitude of 3,500 meters, Mulbekh is the first Buddhist village on the route from Kashmir to Little Tibet. Since 2008, Brontosauři v Himalájích has played a pivotal role in supporting the development of the local public school, resulting in its students achieving top academic results in the district. The NGO has raised approximately 14 million crowns (57,000 Euros) for school investments, with notable contributions from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Distinguished figures such as former presidential candidate and head of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Senator Jiří Drahoš, have pledged to attend the project's official launch in Tibet.

The research adopts an inductive strategy to explore the intersection of engaged Buddhism, sustainable development, and reciprocity as reflected in the NGO's activities. The study aims to deepen understanding of the role and significance of Buddhist ethics and cosmology in shaping contemporary environmental philosophy and social movements. The Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* (non-self) from the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*<sup>1</sup> emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings, aligning with the NGO's principles. Empathy and compassion (*karuṇā*) are central to the NGO's projects, reflecting the Buddha's teaching on compassion in the *Dhammapada*<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, the case highlights the long-standing interest of Czech society in the political issues of Tibet. This public support reflects a modern form of *mettā* (loving-kindness), as exemplified in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.<sup>3</sup> The study also illustrates how cultural exchange and symbolic capital<sup>4</sup> influence the success of non-profit marketing initiatives in global contexts.

## II. FROM THE CONCEPT OF INTERDEPENDENCE TO A SHARING-BASED AID SYSTEM

Before delving into a concrete case study on the current practices of a local NGO, it is crucial to examine the increasing social influence of values traditionally associated with Buddhism, such as right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), compassion (*karuṇā*), generosity (*dāna*), and interdependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). These principles are increasingly aligned with the broader discourse on sustainable development, shaping ethical considerations and guiding both individual and collective decision-making in personal, professional, and philanthropic contexts. As value constructs, they serve as foundational frameworks that influence priorities and determine levels of engagement with charitable and non-profit initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

The practice of generosity (*dāna*), for instance, is deeply embedded in the Buddha's teachings, as illustrated in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, where acts of giving

<sup>1</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020): 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Dhp* 223.

<sup>3</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya* (2019): 112.

<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu (1984): 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 134



are regarded not only as meritorious but also as essential for fostering mutual well-being and social harmony. When an individual's worldview is anchored in a profound recognition of the radical interdependence of all phenomena (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), their perspective on economic support for marginalized communities is fundamentally transformed. This doctrinal insight, extensively discussed in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, provides both a philosophical foundation and an ethical imperative for compassionate action that transcends mere theoretical contemplation.<sup>6</sup> Such a perspective translates into concrete initiatives aimed at addressing urgent social challenges, such as expanding equitable access to quality education, thereby embodying the spirit of engaged Buddhism.

Support for educational initiatives has long been a cornerstone of charitable and developmental efforts. However, such endeavors are often shaped by mission-driven frameworks that seek to influence, if not entirely transform, the religious, cultural, and ethical orientations of students. This approach, particularly in the context of missionary education, has been subject to critical scrutiny, especially within Western cultural paradigms that prioritize harmony, empathy, and reciprocity as integral aspects of identity. In contrast, the Buddha's teaching on the Middle Path, as articulated in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, offers an alternative model—one that emphasizes balance and moderation rather than the imposition of external cultural or ideological values. This approach fosters an environment of ethical inquiry and self-cultivation, aligning with a more sustainable and inclusive vision of education, in which learners are encouraged to engage with knowledge through the lens of discernment (*paññā*) and personal experience rather than through externally imposed doctrines.<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, as societal and political interest in sustainability has grown, support for projects like the one presented here has shifted from religious to secular frameworks, even engaging the highest academic levels. Sustainability is now understood as a holistic system that requires simultaneous development of local culture, religion, education, and science. This broader interpretation has driven widespread interest in educational initiatives in the Himalayas. King<sup>8</sup> introduced the term trans-Buddhist scales of values, describing “site-specific desires and measures of sought-after outcomes that privilege the economy and economic behavior as techniques for individual, social, and environmental well-being and emancipation.” Building on this, the case study presented here demonstrates how prestigious educational institutions in the Czech Republic have recognized Tibetan medicine, traditional knowledge, and local skills as equal partners alongside Western science in creating a high-quality elementary school project.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* (2023): 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020): 72

<sup>8</sup> King (2016): 89 - 108.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The topics discussed in the text follow the inductive research strategy. The key terms around which our case study was presented in the above part of the paper are bringing together widely discussed issues of education, participation, community, and sharing. These are commonly associated with the study of region and charity. The dimension this paper is adding is directly linked with integrated marketing communication, social media, targeting and value structure changes, and information economy.

The methodology of the research is based on media content analysis, personal interviews, and observation extended through three consecutive years from 2019 to 2021, together with historical analysis of the organization. The interviews were conducted with about fifty informants of various ages, gender, and level of involvement in the support of an NGO. Many of these interviews could be defined as phenomenological<sup>9</sup>. Respondents were asked to describe their motives for support of BvH, their relation to Tibet, and to Buddhism in general. Moreover, their opinion on charity and volunteering in a broader context. Many of them elaborated on their personal experience with Buddhism and openly declared their support of Tibet in its political struggle. One part of the interviews also focused on the usage and role of social media as a communication tool that helped to establish the hybrid community of practice around the Brontosaurus in the Himalayas organization.

The data were codified according to the methodological recommendations for qualitative methods. In order to understand the contemporary dynamic phenomenon, an ongoing ethnography was conducted<sup>10</sup>, as well as social media and press releases were monitored throughout 2022.

### IV. CASE-STUDY OF BRONTOSAURUS – NGO WITH HISTORY AND CREDIT

#### 4.1. The role of institutions in connecting secular and Buddhist values

Among the factors cited as reasons for the growth of Western Buddhist communities is the proximity of Buddhist values, such as compassion (*karuṇā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), and loving-kindness (*mettā*), to those of secular humanism. These values, often referred to as the *brahmavihāras*, resonate more strongly with contemporary secular societies than the values professed by traditional church groups<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, institutions that integrate these values into their framework are perceived as more trustworthy and relatable.

If an institution employs metaphors and practices that are directly connected to meaningful and understandable implications, it can foster familiarity and trust among individuals from secular environments. This is especially true for NGOs that, while rooted in Buddhist values, declare their alignment with secular humanism. Such organizations are often seen as more approachable

<sup>9</sup>Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989): 133 – 146.

<sup>10</sup>Kozinets (2010): 1 – 13.

<sup>11</sup>*Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 98.

than religious institutions that openly pursue missionary objectives alongside their charitable efforts.

Another significant dimension of institutions in societies where individualism is strongly emphasized is their enabling role. Institutions not only provide structure but also empower individuals by offering opportunities and influence that they could not achieve independently. This enabling capacity aligns with the Buddha's teachings on harmonious communities in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, which emphasizes cooperation and mutual support for achieving societal goals<sup>12</sup>.

Bellah<sup>13</sup> expanded the idea of institutions as mechanisms for understanding individual or collective identity, proposing that institutions are also tools for cooperative efforts to build desired forms of society. Respect for cultural heritage, as demonstrated by NGOs like Brontosauři v Himalájích, aligns with the Buddha's guidance on preserving the *Dhamma* in the *Saddhammapaṭirūpaka Sutta*<sup>14</sup>. This case study highlights the process by which an autonomous institution – valuable to Czech society since its inception – became an instrument for supporting shared values. Through financial and material donations, such NGOs embody principles of reciprocity and mutual respect, characteristic of a science-based secular humanistic society in Czechia and a Tibetan community grounded in traditional Buddhist values.

Hnutí Brontosaurus is a large nature conservation group in the Czech Republic, concentrated on the youth. Brontosaurus was founded in 1974, being the first such organization in Czechoslovakia. Hnutí Brontosaurus is a non-profit organization founded back in 1974. There is a symbolic connotation connected with this specific year, since it has been considered and claimed as “The Year of the Natural Environment” at the UN conference in Stockholm, Sweden. The 70s were still very hard for Czech Republic, Moravia, and Slovakia. Back in 1975, the final act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, facilitated in Helsinki, Finland, was signed even by the former Czechoslovakia. Although the general objective was to respect human rights and freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience or religion. The Czech Communist Party struggled to implement and keep this promise. For them, it was just a formality. In 1976, the members of the music group The Plastic People of the Universe were arrested, which caused so much hatred and resistance in the exile environment, and the dissidents. Charter 77, an informal social initiative/ community/ party, was formed and aimed at all the commitments agreed upon in Helsinki back in 1975.

Upon this social and political background, the oldest environmental NGO was established. It was named after Brontosaurus, a name which was at the time widely used as a synonym for dinosaur among the Czechs.

<sup>12</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* (2018): 168.

<sup>13</sup> Bellah (1991).

<sup>14</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya* (2023): 122.

Their main motto, translated from the Czech language: “*Brontosaurus to nepřežil, protože přerostl své možnosti.*” – The Brontosaurus did not make it, since he outgrew his options.” Meaning his possible options at the time to survive. Even though it is impossible to perceive this claim “literally”, it was still very catchy, approachable and relatable for society at the time – both in political and ecological terms.

The founding organization was The Institute of Landscape and Ecology of CSAV of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, along with the members of the “*Mladý Svět* – Young World” editorial board at the time, recognized the lack of a social group of like-minded individuals who:

- (1) Cleanse, protect, and respect mother nature. (2) To work on, solidify and spread awareness about the beautiful local cultural legacies that our land has to offer. (3) To convey, spread and chant the message of respecting mother nature, all the jeopardized creatures and each other. (4) To cultivate social empathy, responsibility, tolerance, and mental resilience. (5) To set one’s priorities straight. (6) To contribute to the upbringing of our youth by exposing them to “what matters in life”. (7) To help form teams and communities of proactive individuals, support them in their drive, ideas, and sustain them while embarking on their self-realization and self-development journey for the sake of all the goals and values mentioned above.

Still, in the same year (1974), many weekend and summer break events already took place both indoors and outdoors. The time spent together at the respective events ended up being so fulfilling, satisfying, fun, and meaningful that later in 1978, the members of the Hnutí Brontosaurus at the time decided to organize the first Summer Camps and summer activities conducted in the summer months once the children finished their studies. This activity was sustained and organized within the Czechoslovak Socialist Youth Union, a politically oriented youth group operating as one of the wings of the Communist Party in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic between the years 1970 to 1990. It elaborated on the so-called “Pioneer organization” which intended to create a “safe place” for children, where all of them were fully and deeply exposed, indoctrinated and lectured about communist ideology.

The Brontosaurus movement and their activities combined meaningful volunteer work with lifelong experiences. Currently, they are based on more than forty years of tradition, visible success, clear goals, and more than 1,000 active members. Every year volunteers of the organization go to cut grass with scythes, vast mountain orchid meadows, plant trees, conduct archaeological and conservation work at excavations and castles, or build a school in the Himalayas.

#### **4.2. From ecological awareness to community of practice**

The primary goal of the NGO is to bring together young people and offer them the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities, enjoy themselves, grow, and contribute positively to the world around them. The Brontosaurus

events are designed to be open to the public, with no prerequisites for membership, experience, or prior knowledge. Universalism is emphasized as a core value of the organization:

It doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl, what your religion is, whether you are doing IT or working in a tearoom. It is in our diversity that our greatest strength is. It is important to have an open mind and a desire to help the world around us. Our events are organized by volunteers for volunteers. Together we help nature, monuments, and people, and the reward is a good feeling and time spent with friends.

This ethos reflects the Buddhist principle of non-harm (*ahimsā*) as taught in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, which emphasizes the importance of protecting biodiversity and living harmoniously with nature<sup>15</sup>. Additionally, the NGO's ecological focus aligns with the *Rukkha Sutta* from the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, which highlights the interconnectedness of humans and the natural environment<sup>16</sup>.

Volunteer events not only promote ecological restoration but also offer participants the chance to develop valuable skills and work-related experience:

We're still learning something. Whether it is building hedgehog houses, team management, castle tower repair, or soft skills from every event, we take away. We are interested in the world around us. Taking into account the opinions and attitudes of others, we seek solutions to the problems of the present and support healthy efforts to move away from the consumer-centered way of life. This spirit of collective learning mirrors the communal ethics outlined in the *Cūlavagga*, where cooperation and mutual support are emphasized as key to addressing societal challenges<sup>17</sup>.

As Bauman<sup>18</sup> argued - community is nowadays another name for paradise lost. This sentiment resonates strongly with the objectives of the NGO. Volunteer events are not only about benefiting the natural environment or preserving cultural heritage; they also aim to foster teamwork, build a sense of community, and encourage personal reflection and growth. Expert hosts and facilitators ensure that events are inclusive, flexible, and engaging, welcoming both new and returning participants. Activities range from weekend events to one-day initiatives, incorporating a mix of charitable work, psychological games, and team-building exercises. The NGO's activities are divided into two main areas: ecological restoration and the preservation of cultural and historical legacies.

#### 4.2.1. Ecological restoration

These initiatives include planting trees, creating flower beds to restore diversity, and enhancing old orchards. Other activities involve meditation and self-discovery while maintaining natural habitats, such as cutting and burning overgrowth to protect rare species in the Bohemian Karst. Volunteers may also

<sup>15</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020): 94.

<sup>16</sup> *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 75.

<sup>17</sup> *Vin.* (2015): 232.

<sup>18</sup> Bauman (2013): 231.



plant tree lines near Břeclav in southern Moravia, focusing on native species like oaks, cherries, and shrubs, and sowing herbs for insects. Projects such as restoring old country roads or building natural barriers to prevent soil erosion reflect the NGO's commitment to holistic environmental care.

#### **4.2.2. Cultural and historical preservation**

Volunteers engage in renovating old cultural centers, castle gardens, and natural settlements while also learning folk dances. These activities take place in stunning locations, such as castles and palaces, fostering an appreciation for cultural heritage and creating shared memories.

The concept of a “community of practice,” originally denoting groups sharing a craft or profession, has been expanded to reflect the process of collective learning within groups united by shared concerns and interests. In this context, the NGO promotes collective efforts to solve societal and environmental problems while offering opportunities for personal growth, such as meditation or self-development programs. The interconnectedness of self, nature, and society-history underpins the organization's worldview, which aligns with both the common dimensions of sustainability and Buddhist values.

#### **4.3. Unique value proposition – creating biotopes of harmony**

The *Brontosauři v Himalájích* movement is acutely aware of Tibet's fragile position in the geopolitical landscape, surrounded by powerful neighbors such as Pakistan and China. Since 1950, India has served as Tibet's primary ally, striving to modernize local infrastructure while safeguarding its sacred culture and traditions. Balancing modernization with cultural preservation remains a key challenge, and the NGO actively works toward integrating technological advancements without disrupting the spiritual and ecological equilibrium of the region.

In 2007, an initiative to foster Czech-Ladakhi educational collaboration was launched through the *La Ngonpo* project, under the Ministry of Culture. This initiative facilitated the first communication between Czech and Ladakhi schoolchildren. By 2008, *Brontosaurus* had established connections with schoolteachers in Mulbekh, leading to the first financial support for school equipment in 2009. Over time, the NGO transitioned from organizing summer camps to managing structured aid projects, mirroring the organization's long-standing tradition in the Czech Republic of combining leisure-time activities with cultural and educational restoration – particularly in Buddhist monasteries.

The NGO's core objective remains unchanged: to introduce modern technology while preserving Tibetan cultural identity. It aims to provide the local community with knowledge on innovations in construction (solar panels, water systems, and sustainable engineering) while reinforcing traditional Tibetan values, principles, and holistic worldviews. The NGO's outreach is not merely a one-way transfer of knowledge but a reciprocal exchange: Czech volunteers learn from Tibetan communities about Buddhist practices, traditional medicine, and sustainable living in harmony with nature. These



exchanges exemplify equanimity (*upekkhā*), ensuring that aid is provided without imposing external cultural dominance<sup>19</sup>. As part of this cultural exchange, the NGO also facilitates classes on Buddhism and Tibetan medicine for Czech volunteers, reinforcing mutual learning and shared ethical responsibility. By 2012, *Brontosaurus in the Himalayas* (BvH) had become a legally recognized entity, allowing it to dedicate long-term resources to improving education in the region ever since.

The NGO's Unique Value Proposition (UVP) lies in its ability to bridge modern science and Tibetan heritage while fostering global solidarity. This approach aligns with Buddhist ethics regarding generosity and the ethical dimensions of giving, as described in the *Dāna Sutta*<sup>20</sup>. However, despite its mission-driven strengths—such as a well-established tradition and diverse activity scope the NGO faces several challenges. Limited marketing resources and low public awareness relative to organizations like the Czech scout movement and Greenpeace remain persistent obstacles. Opportunities include partnerships with influencers, educational institutions, and corporate sponsors, particularly in the areas of sustainability and team-building programs. However, the emergence of competitors with stronger marketing strategies, a more diverse range of activities, and better digital engagement poses a long-term threat to the NGO's outreach and fundraising efforts.

#### 4.4. The role of storytelling in value-based engagement

To strengthen its impact, the NGO leverages narrative-driven outreach as a key tool in engaging new supporters. This practice echoes the Buddha's use of parables and storytelling to convey moral lessons, as seen in the *Jātaka Tales*<sup>21</sup>. Digital communication platforms, particularly video storytelling, serve as a means of sharing rather than simply advertising. Current digital trends underscore the effectiveness of visual content: video campaigns account for nearly 80% of global online consumer traffic,<sup>22</sup> with social media-driven engagement playing an increasingly dominant role in fundraising efforts.

However, the mere presence of digital media does not guarantee success. Effective storytelling requires understanding audience values and aligning content with their worldview. A well-crafted narrative transforms donor participation into a symbolic act of global harmony, reinforcing the perception of giving as an extension of one's ethical and social identity. Through this approach, the NGO cultivates a network of engaged supporters who see their contributions not just as acts of charity but as part of a broader, meaningful movement.

<sup>19</sup> *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 87.

<sup>20</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 113.

<sup>21</sup> *Jātaka Tales* (2022): 56.

<sup>22</sup> Levit (1986): 35.

## V. MARKETING, DIGITAL MEDIA, AND THE ETHICAL FRAMING OF SPIRITUAL ENGAGEMENT

Using marketing and economic theories to describe a spiritually oriented non-profit organization may initially seem counterintuitive or even inappropriate. McKenzie<sup>23</sup> points out that global consumer culture is often perceived as a threat to traditional and authentic religious or spiritual life. However, rather than being inherently opposed to spiritual practice, certain market mechanisms can be adapted to enhance accessibility and engagement without compromising core ethical values. In this sense, digital communication platforms, strategic branding, and storytelling techniques can serve as tools for ethical engagement rather than purely commercial enterprises.

### Figure 1: Unique Value Proposition Structure<sup>24</sup>

This adaptation is evident in how social networks and digital media have become facilitators of value-based communities, enabling individuals to connect around shared ethical and spiritual principles. The Buddhist concept of *dāna* (generosity) exemplifies this dynamic. The *Dāna Sutta* emphasizes that ethical giving fosters social cohesion and generates merit, reinforcing the principle that generosity is not merely transactional but a means of sustaining collective well-being<sup>25</sup>. By applying these principles to digital fundraising and social media campaigns, non-profits can frame acts of giving as ethical participation rather than passive donation.

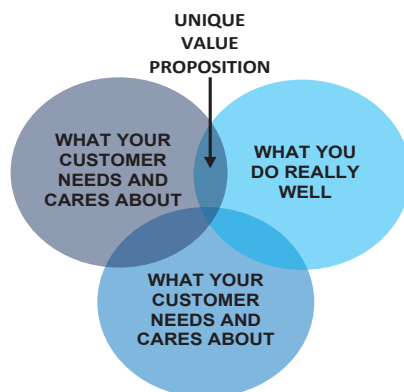
As discussed earlier, institutions can be enabling – they create structures that elevate individual acts of generosity into collective and meaningful engagements. The Buddha's teachings on *upekkhā* (equanimity) further support this approach, advocating for fairness in distribution and impartiality in engagement<sup>26</sup>. This resonates with the Unique Value Proposition (UVP) model, where successful non-profit marketing aligns organizational values with donor expectations, ensuring that both ethical and practical considerations are met.

<sup>23</sup> McKenzie (2015): 598 – 614.

<sup>24</sup> Based on Levitt, Theodore (1986): 67.

<sup>25</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 113.

<sup>26</sup> *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 87.



## VI. THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN CONTEMPORARY ENGAGEMENT

Today, video content has emerged as a dominant force in digital communication. Facebook alone records over 8 billion video views per day, and online videos accounted for nearly 80% of global consumer traffic as of 2020. Despite this, the effectiveness of video-based fundraising or outreach depends not merely on production quality but on strategic audience engagement. A survey found that 83% of marketers and small business owners would create more video content if time and budget constraints allowed. However, the mere existence of digital media does not guarantee success – it requires aligning messages with the values and interests of target audiences.

Buddhist ethics offer a compelling framework for understanding this dynamic. The Buddha frequently used parables and narratives to teach complex moral and philosophical ideas, a strategy reflected in the Jātaka Tales, which convey ethical and social values through storytelling<sup>27</sup>. Similarly, successful non-profit campaigns rely on storytelling to construct compelling narratives that resonate with audiences, turning abstract causes into emotionally engaging and ethically motivating experiences.

Moreover, gift-giving, as seen in Buddhist traditions, is not merely about donation but about reinforcing social and ethical bonds. The act of giving (*dāna*) is a form of self-expression, deeply embedded in both religious merit-making and contemporary value-driven philanthropy. In this way, digital platforms can transform fundraising into participatory engagement, where supporters are not simply financial contributors but active members of a global ethical movement.

By leveraging these insights, the process of creating a “harmonious biotope” becomes not just an ideal but a practical strategy – where marketing, ethics, and spiritual values converge to build resilient, engaged communities.

<sup>27</sup> Ja. (2022), vol. 2, p. 56.

**Table 1: SWOT Analysis of NGO Brontosaurus in Himalaya**

SWOT Analysis	Details
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Nearly 50 years of tradition and a well-established presence.</li><li>- Wide scope of activities, attracting diverse members and stakeholders.</li><li>- Focus on blending modern science with Tibetan traditions, creating a unique appeal.</li></ul>
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Limited marketing and PR capabilities compared to competitors.</li><li>- Low awareness of the NGO’s activities relative to more prominent organizations, such as the Czech scout movement, Greenpeace, and international initiatives like The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award.</li><li>- Dependence on volunteers and local partnerships may limit scalability.</li></ul>
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Expanding collaboration with influencers and digital media for outreach.</li><li>- Partnering with schools, orphanages, and corporations for cultural and environmental team-building activities.</li><li>- Potential to enhance visibility through innovative marketing strategies and by leveraging their unique blend of cultural and scientific initiatives.</li></ul>
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Emergence of competitors with better marketing and PR strategies.</li><li>- Risk of other organizations copying the NGO’s model while offering broader or more diversified activities.</li><li>- Challenges in maintaining donor interest and engagement over the long term in a competitive charitable landscape.</li></ul>

*Source: Adapted from the analysis of the section “Unique Value Proposition – Creating Biotopes of Harmony” in the provided text*

Based on the SWOT analysis, it may seem that a non-profit or charitable

organization faces significant challenges in the competitive and market-driven environment. However, leveraging a Unique Value Proposition (UVP) and the strategic use of digital media – which operate on principles of sharing rather than commercial promotion – can be key to success. As McLuhan<sup>28</sup> famously stated, “the medium is the message,” underscoring that the way an organization communicates is just as important as the content it delivers.

The concept of *dāna* (generosity) in Buddhist teachings reinforces the ethical value of giving, extending beyond financial contributions to sharing knowledge, skills, and support<sup>29</sup>. In this framework, effective non-profit marketing is not about selling a product but fostering genuine connections based on shared principles. The equanimity (*upekkhā*) taught in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* further reinforces the importance of fairness and impartiality in aid distribution<sup>30</sup>.

## VII. BUILDING LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT THROUGH STRATEGIC STORYTELLING

The Brontosaurus in the Himalayas operates like any other NGO, serving social and political purposes without commercial interests. However, in an era of increasing competition for visibility and donor engagement, marketing strategies have become essential. Unlike traditional fundraising, which often relies on emotional appeals, non-profit marketing is rooted in the principles of engagement, reciprocity, and alignment with shared values. This approach mirrors the Buddhist principle of skillful means (*upāya*), which suggests that methods must be adapted to context while remaining true to ethical principles.

A key moment in the NGO’s media strategy was the 2019 social media video campaign, which framed physics education as an urgent need for Tibetan students. The video was shot in Mulbekh, depicting daily life and the aspirations of local children. The narrative followed a mother asking Czech citizens for a physics teacher to help “tame the physics demon” that had captivated her son and other village children. The humorous yet compelling storytelling technique was reminiscent of Buddhist Jātaka Tales, where parables serve to convey ethical and educational values<sup>31</sup>.

The public response was overwhelming: 750,000 views in 9 days, with 7,500 shares. 85 new Himalayan patrons in one week. 130 within two weeks, a total of 225 new donors in a year – significantly exceeding expectations. Senator Jiří Drahoš and Ambassador Hovorka pledged support. Czech Senate recognized the initiative, appointing Drahoš as an official representative.

Despite initial skepticism about whether the campaign would gain traction, it quickly became clear that the video resonated deeply with the

<sup>28</sup> McLuhan (1966): 310.

<sup>29</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 113.

<sup>30</sup> *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 87.

<sup>31</sup> *Ja.* (2022), vol. 2, p. 56.

audience. The campaign illustrated the effectiveness of storytelling in value-driven engagement, reflecting the role of media in shaping social narratives and fostering global solidarity. The momentum from the campaign translated into tangible results. By summer 2022, a new school building was completed, featuring state-of-the-art physics, chemistry, biology, and IT classrooms. The grand opening on July 31, 2022, attracted leading scientists, educators, community leaders, and political representatives. Following the ceremonial opening, volunteers stayed on to deliver the first-ever structured science curriculum in Mulbekh.

The campaign's reach extended beyond financial contributions, fostering a sense of participation among Czech citizens. Donors actively chose which lab equipment to fund (microscopes, thermometers, laboratory scales, etc.). Although only 1 liter of acid was needed, donors contributed 8 liters – indicating enthusiasm for scientific education. Social media comments highlighted public engagement, with responses such as: (1) “For the first time in my life, I’m laughing at the word PHYSICS!” (2) “I regret that I only studied social sciences – maybe I should go teach physics in Tibet.” (3) “I can teach applied physics! Where do I sign up?” These responses demonstrated how storytelling transformed public perception, making science education in Tibet not just an abstract cause but a shared mission.

The long-term success of the campaign was reinforced by widespread endorsements from leading Czech academic institutions, including the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Czech Technical University, Charles University, and Technical University Brno. Support also came from science and education-focused organizations such as Brno Science Centre VIDA, the Czech Astronomic Observatory, and various NGO networks. Public figures actively shared and promoted the campaign, presenting it not merely as a charitable initiative but as a broader commitment to global education and scientific development.

This emphasis on reciprocity and ethical giving was further amplified by extensive media coverage and discussions on Tibetan autonomy, Czech-Tibetan relations, and transnational solidarity. The campaign's impact was felt beyond financial contributions – donors and supporters engaged with the initiative as an opportunity to be part of a movement that transcended traditional philanthropy.

The Buddhist concept of *dāna* (generosity) encapsulates this idea, highlighting how gift-giving is not merely an economic act but a spiritual and social commitment to mutual growth<sup>32</sup>. This was evident in the enthusiastic responses from contributors, many of whom described their involvement as a meaningful investment in a collective vision rather than a simple donation.

By applying digital storytelling, ethical marketing, and Buddhist-inspired reciprocity, the campaign demonstrated how non-profits can shift from

---

<sup>32</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 113



transactional fundraising to value-driven engagement. This approach allowed the NGO to reinforce shared ethical commitments between donors and recipients, fostering a long-term, active community rather than a one-time contributor base.

The Brontosaurus in the Himalayas case study exemplifies how ethical marketing and Buddhist principles can intersect to create sustainable engagement models. Through storytelling, reciprocity, and shared ethical commitments, the NGO transformed what might have been a standard physics education campaign into a widely recognized and deeply resonant movement.

This model aligns with the Buddhist teaching on the interconnectedness of actions and consequences (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), reinforcing the idea that philanthropy is not simply about giving – it is about co-creating ethical communities. By leveraging strategic media outreach and embedding Buddhist ethical principles into its messaging, the NGO successfully built an initiative that was not only financially sustainable but also socially transformative, fostering a global network of engaged, ethically motivated participants.

#### **VIII. POWER OF SHARING – NOT SAVING: A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON BUDDHIST VALUE EXCHANGE PRINCIPLES**

An analysis of social media contributions and interviews with participants reveals a shared perception of the Brontosaurus in the Himalayas initiative as both valuable and trustworthy. Supporters appreciated the humorous and positive approach to advertising, particularly its avoidance of emotional manipulation. Additionally, the campaign's low production costs and efficient messaging were widely acknowledged, reinforcing its credibility and effectiveness. By carefully integrating Buddhist values into the campaign's narrative, the NGO fostered high-quality collaborations between influencers, media professionals, and socially engaged institutions. This interaction created a self-sustaining cycle, in which the media message, the project itself, and public engagement reinforced one another, ensuring continued support.

The rise of digital technologies and social media has drastically lowered the cost of producing personalized advertisements, making them more accessible to a broad audience. However, visual narratives often construct an idealized reality rather than reflecting lived experiences. For instance, a dedicated academic might find himself immersed in the romanticized imagery of volunteering in a remote Himalayan village, drawn in by the idea of authentic engagement in an exotic locale. Social networks have played a crucial role in codifying specific conventions for storytelling, shaping how images and narratives are presented to global audiences.

This phenomenon reflects what scholars have termed “romantic ethic”<sup>33</sup> – the pursuit of authenticity through consumption, where experiences, services, and even ethical engagement are packaged as purchasable opportunities. This dynamic not only fuels consumer culture but also drives individuals to

---

<sup>33</sup> Campbell (1987): 289.

seek symbolic participation in projects that align with their personal values and aspirations. In this way, modern philanthropy and cause-based engagement become vehicles for self-representation, creating new forms of social belonging.

### 8.1. Buddhist perspectives on identity and representation

The Buddhist understanding of “being” provides a meaningful contrast to Western consumerist approaches to identity construction. Unlike monotheistic traditions, which often emphasize absolute truth and moral authority, Buddhism offers a flexible framework of ethical and philosophical guidelines for shaping one’s life<sup>34</sup>. Rejecting the misconception of Buddhism as an ascetic withdrawal from society, this perspective highlights its active role in structuring meaningful existence within contemporary social contexts.

This approach aligns with Stuart Hall’s theory of representation, which argues that identity is not fixed but is negotiated through social, cultural, and linguistic structures. Hall distinguishes between three modes of representation – reflexive, intentional, and constructivist – which together explain how individuals engage with and interpret complex ideas<sup>35</sup>. Case studies on engaged Buddhism provide valuable insights into how Buddhists shape their identities through a combination of inherited traditions and contemporary cultural influences, illustrating a dynamic process of adaptation and self-construction within modern society.

### 8.2. The role of Buddhist value exchange in contemporary philanthropy

A striking example of Buddhist ethical engagement in philanthropy can be found in a widely circulated text from the *Brontosaurus in the Himalayas* website. Accompanied by an image of two hands – one in a business suit drawing cogwheels, the other belonging to a Tibetan Buddhist monk—the text articulates a vision of mutual exchange rather than unilateral aid. Despite lacking explicit religious terminology, the message resonated deeply with both individual supporters and institutions, becoming a widely shared declaration of alignment with the NGO’s principles:

We exchange energy and do not save. We believe that the Czechs have more financial and technical knowledge that can improve the lives of the people of Little Tibet. They have inspirational cultural customs, Buddhist teachings, medicine, and close contact with nature, which can be an important alternative for the Czechs. *Brontosaurus in the Himalayas* allows for a mutual exchange of benefits. We believe that they can secure a better future on their own and do not need our salvation.

This statement challenges the traditional paradigm of charitable aid, which often assumes a one-way transfer of resources from the Global North to the Global South. Instead, it positions philanthropy as a reciprocal relationship, where knowledge, cultural practices, and ethical values flow in both directions, fostering a sense of equality and respect rather than dependency.

<sup>34</sup> Cirklová (2020):134.

<sup>35</sup> Hall (1997): 59.

### 8.3. Buddhist capital and the principle of endless reciprocity

Borup<sup>36</sup> explores the Buddhist approach to value exchange, emphasizing its difference from Western economic models. He describes the foundational principles of Buddhist value transactions as comprising: (1) The cosmological principle of *karmab* – ensuring that ethical actions have ongoing consequences. (2) The institutionalized ritual of *dāna* (generosity) – a structured form of giving that reinforces social bonds. (3) The accumulation of *punya* (merit) – which extends beyond material wealth into spiritual and symbolic capital.

Unlike Western models of economic exchange, which often operate on zero-sum principles, Buddhist value exchanges are fundamentally open-ended and expansive—allowing for continuous accumulation, redistribution, and renewal of ethical and spiritual wealth<sup>37</sup>. This system encourages ongoing engagement rather than finite transactions, reinforcing the long-term sustainability of social projects.

By embracing a global framework of reciprocity and symbolic capital, philanthropic initiatives based on Buddhist ethics create a powerful dynamic for continued engagement and problem-solving. Unlike societies governed by rigid theological or economic constraints, this model fosters a self-sustaining cycle of ethical action, enriching both donors and recipients alike.

At its core, the Brontosaurus in the Himalayas project embodies this search for harmony, aiming to establish a sustainable ecosystem of value exchange, where individuals and institutions collaborate not out of obligation but out of shared ethical commitment. The widely cited text from the NGO's website not only articulates this ideal but also offers a pointed critique of traditional aid models – challenging both missionary-style charity work and neoliberal globalization.

### 8.4. Future directions: Trans-humanism and spiritual capital

A promising area for further research is the intersection of trans-humanism and Buddhist spiritual capital. Ferrando<sup>38</sup> explores trans-humanism's core vision of human enhancement through science and technology, positioning it as a secular form of salvation. This raises compelling questions about how Buddhist principles of ethical accumulation interact with emerging technological paradigms. Could the merit-based accumulation of *punya* serve as a conceptual bridge to trans-humanist ideals? How might Western Buddhists or Buddhist sympathizers integrate digital and biotechnological advancements into their ethical frameworks?

Such inquiries open up new possibilities for understanding how Buddhist ethics, symbolic capital, and contemporary scientific thought can intersect to create new models of ethical engagement – ones that move beyond traditional divisions between religion, economics, and technology.

<sup>36</sup> Borup (2019): 49-58.

<sup>37</sup> Borup (2019): 60 - 9.

<sup>38</sup> Ferrando (2013): 26-32.

## IX. CONCLUSIONS

In the case presented here, Buddhism serves as a form of a certain stabilization network, a structure that offers clear and comprehensively formulated fixed orientation points and trust providers. At the same time, Buddhism does not contradict what is known, and customary for the contributors – i.e. the need for quality education and the problems of its solution, science as an important part of the transformation processes around us. It positively reflects the current secular diverse concept of self, one's own identity and belonging in more complex terms such as sustainability, resilience and the importance of local cultural heritage and community that are not only Western-oriented but also open to other than singular identity with empathy and understanding<sup>39</sup>.

The case of Brontosauři v Himalájích exemplifies how contemporary philanthropy can move beyond traditional donor-recipient dynamics to establish relationships rooted in mutual exchange and shared responsibility. By integrating Buddhist ethics of interconnectedness, compassion, and reciprocity the organization fosters an alternative fundraising model that prioritizes collaboration over unilateral aid. The success of the “Czech Science to Little Tibet” initiative demonstrates the effectiveness of such an approach, illustrating how digital fundraising and ethical marketing can harness storytelling to engage supporters in meaningful ways.

Rather than positioning itself as a savior, the NGO embraces a philosophy of sharing –acknowledging that both Czech and Tibetan communities have valuable knowledge, traditions, and resources to contribute. This reciprocal engagement redefines the role of charity in a globalized world, shifting from transactional giving to participatory involvement. Digital storytelling has played a critical role in fostering this engagement, demonstrating that fundraising success hinges not merely on financial contributions but on cultivating a shared sense of purpose and ethical commitment.

By aligning its practices with both Buddhist principles and contemporary marketing strategies, Brontosauři v Himalájích has positioned itself as a model for sustainable and ethical philanthropy. Its approach highlights the potential for Buddhist ethics to inspire innovative fundraising techniques that resonate with secular audiences, bridging cultural and philosophical divides. The organization's ongoing efforts suggest a broader applicability of Buddhist-inspired reciprocity in shaping philanthropic initiatives that prioritize long-term engagement and collective growth over short-term relief.

Moving forward, further exploration of Buddhist ethical principles in digital fundraising and transnational solidarity could provide valuable insights for the non-profit sector. The intersection of trans-humanism, symbolic capital, and Buddhist ethics also presents promising avenues for future research, particularly in understanding how technological advancements

---

<sup>39</sup> Cirklová (2020): 222-240.

might influence contemporary models of ethical engagement. Ultimately, the *Brontosauři v Himalájích* case demonstrates that philanthropy, when approached as a dynamic exchange rather than mere financial aid, can cultivate a deeper, more sustainable impact on global development.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to all the scientists and volunteers who make science and education more accessible in the most remote places, whether in the Himalayas or anywhere else.

Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Āṅguttara Nikāya*, translated by Thich Minh Chau, Thich Minh Thanh & Thich Nhat Tu (eds.). Hong Duc Publishing House, Hanoi, 2021.
- Dhammapada*, translated by Eknath Easwaran, Nilgiri Press, 2023.
- Dīgha Nikāya*. Pāli Text Society, London, 2018.
- Jātaka Tales*, Vol. 2. Pāli Text Society, London, 2022.
- Khuddaka Nikāya*. Pāli Text Society, London, 2019.
- Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed. V. Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS, London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS, London, 1888 - 2017. Pg. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS, London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., p. *Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu Bodhi*, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS, London, 2002, repr. 2023.
- Samyutta Nikāya*. Pāli Text Society, London, 2020.
- Vinaya Piṭaka*, Ed. H. Oldenberg, Pāli Text Society, London, 2015.

### Secondary sources

- Bauman, Z., *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013.
- Bellah, R. N., *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World*, University of California Press, 1991.
- Borup, J., "Spiritual Capital and Religious Evolution: Buddhist Values and Transactions in Historical and Contemporary Perspective," *Journal of Global Buddhism*, vol. 20 (2019): 49 - 69.
- Bourdieu, P., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London, 1984.
- Campbell, C., *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- Cirklová, J., "Coping with the Quarter-Life Crisis the Buddhist Way in the

- Czech Republic,” *Contemporary Buddhism*, vol. 21, no. 1 - 2 (2020), p. 222 - 240.
- Czech Science for Tibet, *Česká Věda Do Malého Tibetu*, accessed on [September 8, 2022], available at: <http://www.vedadotibetu.cz/>.
- Ferrando, F., “Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations,” *Existenz*, vol. 8 (2014), p. 26-32.
- Hall, S. (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, Inc.; Open University Press, 1997.
- King, S., “Trans-Buddhist Scales of Values,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 23 (2016), p. 89 – 108.
- Kozinets, R. V., *Netnography: The Marketer’s Secret Weapon*, White Paper, 2010.
- Levitt, T., *The Marketing Imagination*, Free Press, New York, 1986.
- McKenzie, J. S., “Right Business, Right Consumption: Controlling Commodification in a Tibetan Buddhist Organization,” *Social Compass*, vol. 62, no. 4 (2015), p. 598 – 614.
- McLuhan, M., *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Signet Books, New York, 1966.
- Thomas, A., *How to Create Effective Video Ads, According to the Research*, accessed on [February 25, 2019], available at: <https://www.inc.com/andrew-thomas/how-to-create-effective-video-ads-according-to-research.html>.
- Thompson, C. J., Locander, W. B., & Pollio, H. R., “Putting Consumer Experience Back into Consumer Research: The Philosophy and Method of Existential-Phenomenology,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1989), p. 133 - 146.



# BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: POLITICS AND BUDDHISM IN 1720 - 1730S IN AND AROUND TIBET

Dr. Baatr U. Kitinov\*

## Abstract:

This article explores the pivotal role of Buddhist compassion in shaping political dynamics in and around Tibet during the 1720s–1730s. Amid ongoing conflicts involving the Dzungars, Manchus, Khoshuts, and Tibetan factions, Buddhist principles gradually emerged as guiding forces in diplomacy and leadership. The recognition of the Seventh Dalai Lama, Kalsan Gyatso, catalyzed fostering peace and unity among warring powers. By analyzing rare archival materials, including correspondence between religious and political leaders, the article highlights the fusion of spiritual authority with secular governance. Figures like Tsewang Rabdan, Galdan Tseren, and Qing Emperors Kangxi and Yongzheng are examined for their use of Buddhist discourse to navigate complex power struggles. The article also explores the contributions of Kalmyk leaders, notably Ayuka and Tseren Donduk, in promoting religious cooperation and cultural diplomacy. Ultimately, the paper underscores how the strategic application of Buddhist compassion not only tempered hostilities but also reinforced trans-regional spiritual and political connections across Central Asia.

**Keywords:** *Tibet, Dzungars, Qing Dynasty, Seventh Dalai Lama, Buddhist compassion, political diplomacy, Central Asia, Kalmyks, Khoshuts, Gelug school.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The article discusses the ideas of compassion manifested in the words and actions of the participants in the events of the 1720 - 1730s in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. During the preceding period, especially in the years of the Dzungars' occupation of Tibet (1717 - 1720), the opposing parties (Dzungars,

---

\* Leading Research Fellow, Institute of Oriental studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

Manchus, Khoshut Oirats, as well as the Tibetans and Mongols) came to the bloody clashes and heavy confrontation. The situation was developing to the worst condition when the political passions gave way to ideas of Buddhist compassion and shared responsibility. Instead of military clashes and murders, sufferings and humiliation, the parties outlined the boundaries and goals of their interests through negotiation processes and wishes, with references to the provisions of Buddhism. Such figures include the Dzungar rulers Tsewang-Rabdan (r. 1697 - 1727) and Galdan-Tseren (r. 1727 - 1745), the Seventh Dalai Lama Kalsan Gyatso (1708 - 1757), the Qing emperors Kangxi (r. 1662 - 1722) and Yongzheng (r. 1723 - 1735), and the Kalmyk rulers Ayuka (r. 1697 - 1724) and Tseren Donduk (r. 1724 - 1735). As a result, the situation with the recognition of the Dalai Lama by all the involved parties helped them to find the real middle way and maintain the peace as long as possible. The author uses various sources, including rare ones (letters of the Seventh Dalai Lama kept in the Russian historical archives).

## II. THE SEVENTH DALAI LAMA: BEGINNING OF THE PATH

From the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the political and religious situation in Tibet became worse due to the misunderstandings between the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso, and some high lamas. In 1706, Tsangyang Gyatso, according to the rescript of the Emperor, was sent to Beijing, but outside Lhasa, the Oirat Khoshut guard of the Lama was attacked by monks from the monasteries of Drepung, Sera and Ganden, who freed him and brought him to Drepung (Kitinov (2015): 43). The Khoshuts demanded the return of the Lama, threatening to destroy the monastery. Wanting to spare the monks from suffering, the Dalai Lama returned to his escort. Having reached the outskirts of Kokonor in their company, he died on November 14, 1706, for unclear reasons, near the small lake of Kunganor.

The Tibetan king Lhawzan appointed Nawang Yeshe as the new Dalai Lama. The majority of the population's rejection of this Dalai Lama determined the search for the "true" incarnation of Tsangyang Gyatso. In 1712, the Kukunor Khoshut leaders Dashi-Batur, together with Daichin-Khoshochi, announced the discovery of Kalsan Gyatso (1708-1757) in Lithang (Kham), who was born a year after the death of his predecessor and who was declared to be the true incarnation of the previous Dalai Lama.

His life from that time turned to an uncertain condition. Thus, the new incarnation was not immediately accepted by Emperor Kangxi, who, of course, understood the importance of the Dalai Lama for the Mongols and Oirats. He asked the Panchen Lama about the authenticity of the incarnation, but the Panchen Lama did not recognize him. At the same time, the opinion of the Kukunor owners (Khoshuts) was important to Kangxi, so despite the Panchen Lama's doubts about the authenticity of Kalsan Gyatso, he nevertheless decided to support the descendants of Gushi Khan and recognized this boy. According to his decree, issued in April 1715, the Lithang Khubilgan was to be temporarily settled in the monastery of Xining. It was ordered to convene "all the Kukunor princes... to hold a congress at which the ideas of imperial

philanthropy would be propagated and the letter under the seal of the Panchen Lama would be read" (Kitinov, Liu (2018): 89).

Eventually, the Emperor allowed the Khubilgan to settle in the Kumbum monastery in the Amdo region, where he arrived in August 1716. From that time, this monastery, which was built by the Third Dalai Lama, became very famous. Many pilgrims visited this place to bow down before the residence of the young Dalai Lama and pay homage.

These events were continued by the capture of Tibet by the Dzungars in 1717, and ultimately the most events of the 1720s-1730s were conditioned by the Dzungarian period in the Tibetan history.

### III. TSEWANG-RABDAN AND GALDAN-TSEREN

The sources do not allow us to determine the time when the Dzungarian ruler Tsewang Rabdan decided to subjugate Tibet. It is known that in 1714, the lamas of Sera, Drepung, and Tashi-lhunpo monasteries turned to him for help in overthrowing Lhawzan, eliminating the "false" Dalai Lama Nawang Yeshe and enthronement of the "true" incarnation - the young Kalsan Gyatso [Rockhill, 1998, p. 32]. The reasons for the lamas of the three leading monasteries' appeal to the Dzungars could have been the following circumstances: 1. the growth of tension in Geluk due to the uncertainty surrounding the figure of the Dalai Lama, and the ambiguous assessment of the actions of the previous Dalai Lama; 2. it is obvious that in the current situation the lamas could not expect help from the Manchu Emperor and the Oirat Khoshuts, who together, with the active role of the desi (desrid), approved the "Nyingma" Tsangyang Gyatso as the Sixth Dalai Lama; 3. the glory of Tsewang Rabdan's uncle, Galdan Boshogtu Khan, who was recognized as the true incarnation of the famous lama Ensa-tulku, and achieved success in strengthening Buddhism's position among the Mongolian nomads.

Of course, there were several compelling reasons for the decision to subjugate Tibet. Tsewang-Rabdan decided to conduct his military operation under the influence of complex reasons. The first reason is connected with the religious factor: the figures of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. According to Tsewang Rabdan, the Sixth Dalai Lama was put in power by the decision of Oirat Khoshuts, but, according the Dzungarian ruler, only that tulku can become the Dalai Lama, who receives approval from all the Oirat rulers (Tsewang Rabdan himself, and the Kukunor taijis) (Archive. File 113. Case 1. 1724: 105). Also, the opinion of the lamas from Central Tibet, who convinced Tsewang Rabdan of the need to fight for the "purity" of the teaching against desrid, was important. As if that was the way to "preserve" the "original" teaching of Tsongkhapa. Probably, the Panchen Lama was considered to be one of those who kept the "purity" of Geluk teaching (Jambadorji (2005): 124.

Since Buddhism was an integral part of politics for the Dzungar leader, the corresponding discourses became relevant in his foreign policy actions. Thus, addressing the Kalmyks, he emphasized the existence of a common religious teaching between them and called for unification (Pozdneev (1883): 276).

The second reason was the political one. Subordination of Lhasa would have allowed Tsewang Rabdan to control the peoples following Buddhism and influence the policies of their leaders. At the time in question, virtually all Mongolian peoples, except for the Dzungars and Kalmyks, were administratively subordinate to the Manchu Qing dynasty, while Tibet was still outside the Qing system of government. But Manchus were increasingly strengthening their position in the northeast of Tibet. Moreover, the clear signs confirmed the Qing's intention to attack Dzungaria. Thus, there was a special decree of the Emperor dated May 16, 1715, according to which an army of 5,000 soldiers recruited in the provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi was sent to Hami, located near south-east border of Dzungaria, and the Qing troops stationed in Kukunor and Khalkha regions were ordered to prepare for a campaign against this Oirat state. Ten days later, Kangxi, in his next decree, singled out three directions for attacking the Oirats: south-east (from Kukunor through Lake Gas), east (through Hami and Turfan), and north-east (from Khalkha through Iren-Khabirga mountains) (Khojaev (1991): 30). To create a base for conducting military operations, in the fall of 1715, the Qing troops occupied Barkul, region not far from Hami.

Anyhow, having gathered a small army (about 6,000 people) in Yarkand, Tsewang Rabdan sent it to Tibet through the Kunlun Mountains. In early August 1717, the Dzungars, led by Tsering Dondub, Tsewang Rabdan's cousin, entered Tibetan Ngari. Soon, several minor skirmishes took place between the parties. The Dzungars spread rumors that they, together with Daichin Khoshuchi taiji from Kokonor, were bringing Kalsan Gyatso, the new Dalai Lama, with them, and such information lowered the morale of the Tibetans (Shakabpa (2010): 417). In the last days of November of the same year, 1717, the Dzungars captured Lhasa. The looting lasted for two days, and not only the lamas of other schools (for example, Nyingma) suffered, but also some representatives of the Geluk school. The Potala and many monasteries in Lhasa suffered significant damage (Jambadorji (2005): 130). The Dzungars executed many prominent Oirat Khoshuts and several Nyingma lamas. Since the Panchen Lama tried to stop the repressions, he was forced to return to Tashi-lhumpo under pressure from the Dzungars (Shakabpa (2010): 421).

Before the Dzungars stormed Lhasa, Lhawzan sent a message to Beijing asking for help, but the Kukunor (Khoshut-Tibetan) army sent to Tibet was unable to support him (Kitinov, Liu (2019): 47-48). In this situation, the Qing Emperor could not rely on the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. Nevertheless, he probably believed in the power of religion and the authority of the clergy and, therefore, decided to involve the head of the Mongolian sangha in resolving the problem:

"The 57th summer [1718], the year of the yellow dog. In the rescript of Shen-tzu uru-shieltu huangdi, given on the 114th day of the 5th moon in Hurin, it was said: "The lawlessness of the Zhungars, by which they killed the great and small lamas of the western country [Tibet], has reached the limits of extremeness. There is no one, besides you, who would bring benefit to the

modern faith... Therefore I have sent [this rescript to you]". According to [this] highest rescript [Zhebtson-g-damba], admonishing and teaching, repeatedly sent ambassadors to Tsewan-rabtan, [the khan] of the Zhungar Olots, who were disturbing the faith in Western Zu" (Pozdneev (1883): 86).

In the autumn of 1720, the Dzungars left Lhasa and returned to their homeland in February of the following year. The Qing garrison was stationed in Lhasa.

After the failure of his military campaign in Tibet, Tsewang Rabdan, in his letter to the Emperor Kangxi dated December 30, 1720, pointed out the reasons that prompted him to seize Tibet. He stated that the Tibetan "king" Lhawzan, after killing 1705 the desrid Sangye Gyatso (who ruled Tibet since 1682), sent a man to him with an offer of friendship. Tsewang Rabdan called on him to purify the teaching from "pollution," but Lha-wang did the opposite, i.e., he continued actions harmful to Buddhism (Kraft (1953): 64-65). This is what caused the Dzungar invasion of Tibet, wrote Tsewang-Rabdan.

Earlier, in another letter sent to the Emperor in the spring of the same year 1720, Tsewang Rabdan refers to the Emperor's previous letter, where he wrote about the Dalai Lama and supported the intention of the Dzungar ruler to rise the power of the Panchen Lama (Kraft (1953): 49).

Tsewang Rabdan wrote Kangxi:

"If the purpose of your efforts is to spread the Teaching and allow the living beings to live in peace, then ... make your contribution to express your inner, righteous opinion" and suggested that the Emperor would issue a decree so that Zhebtson-damba Khutukhtu [Head of the Buddhists of Mongolia] "organizes affairs by the doctrine of the former custom" (Kraft (1953): 50).

The Dzungarian ruler explains: if the events develop negatively, the situation "will be bad for the Teaching, and will also make all living beings suffer" (Kraft (1953): 50). Thus, Tsewang Rabdan emphasizes the need for compassion and calls on the Emperor to assist in establishing peace. His envoy, who was supposed to create an "unbreakable friendship" between the Dzungars and the Khalkhas, and the people of Kukunor, disappeared without a trace. The Dzungar ruler continued to be interested in the issues of preserving the "purity" of the Geluk teachings.

His predecessor, Galdan Boshogtu Khan, founded many schools in Dzungaria to teach monks the sutras and tantras (Das (1984): 154), and "built three (monastic schools) Tarni-yin rasang, Lantram rasakog and Sabdan rasang" (Heissig (1944): 113). Tsewang-Rabdan transferred the temples, of which there were the pointed three, into temples of the Vinaya teachings and thereby significantly strengthened monastic discipline (Sumba (1972): 103).

Under Tsewang Rabtan, Buddhism flourished in Dzungaria. According to S.C. Das, Erteni Zorigtu Khuntaiji Tsewang Rabtan encouraged Buddhism in general and especially the Gelugpa school. He invited the Mahamantris of Tashi-lhunpo named Geleg Rabya and Paljor Gyatoga, and later, inviting Tampa-rabgya from Vashula of Drepung Monastery and many other monks,



he introduced the inner priesthood and service (such as the Upasakas) among his people. Also, he introduced the secret path to the stage of Bodhisattva. Das wrote that like the famous Tibetan ruler Ralpachen, Tsewang Rabtan allocated three families, 6 camels, 40 cows and horses, and 200 sheep for the maintenance of each monk or neophyte (Das (1984): 154).

As noted in the Mongolian work of the first half of the 19th century, "The Crystal Mirror," Tsewang Rabdan "strengthened the teaching of Vinaya, removed three thousand five hundred people from those shabinars [young monks], and left only one thousand five hundred. He greatly contributed to the spread of the Buddhist religion and, having sat on the throne for about thirty years, strictly organized the monastic communities" (Jambadorji (2005): 121). According to the known Russian scholar V. Moiseyev, during the reign of Tsewang Rabdan, all of Dzungaria was covered with Buddhist monasteries and temples (Moiseyev (1991): 35).

After the events of 1717 – 1720 (the capture of Lhasa by the Dzungars), 1723 – 1724 (the Lobsang-Danzin rebellion and the final subjugation of the Kukunor Khoshuts to the empire) and the death of Tsewang Rabdan (1727), his successor Galdan Tseren faced with the task of restoring relations with Lhasa. However, the new Tibetan ruler, Miwang Pholanai, was very cautious about the initiatives of the Dzungars. But anyway, despite the doubts of the Qing Emperor and Miwang Pholanai about the genuineness of the religious zeal of the Dzungars and suspicions that they had insidious plans, a compromise decision was made: the Oirats could send embassies to Tibet, but with the consent of Beijing:

"The fifth year of the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1740), February, I-mao

Emperor Qianlong granted Galdan Tseren the highest decree: "In your report you wrote: 'Our people believe in Tibetan Buddhism, so I wanted to ask to send people to participate in the tea ceremony in the temples of Tibet. However, there is a lot of different cargo, and a hundred people will not be able to transport it, so I urgently ask you to allow me to take 300 people with me.' Earlier, due to the death of Panchen Erdeni<sup>1</sup>, you requested permission to send people to participate in the tea ceremony in the temples of Tibet. I issued a decree to let you through, but there should be no more than 100 stewards. Now you write that 100 people are not enough to take everything away, and you ask to increase it to 300 people. And I grant this request. You must choose people who correctly understand the essence of the matter. Let them come to Donkor (monastery), I will send people to accompany them" (Kitinov, Liu (2019): 49).

The conclusion of peace and the agreement in the religious sphere between the Dzungars and the Manchus were noticed even by the Russian authorities. An archival document states: "The war between the Chinese and the Zengors

---

<sup>1</sup> Passed away at the end of July 1737.



has ended, and according to the agreement it is permitted... to allow Zengor envoys to go to the Dalai Lama for spiritual guidance in the amount of 200 Kalmyks, and it is ordered that these envoys should arrive at the Chinese border in November 1740" (Archive. File 41. 1737 - 1741: 515). And although in January of the following year, 1741, those ambassadors were not yet at the border (Archive. File 41. 1737 - 1741: 517), the embassy eventually arrived in Tibet.

It's doubtful that the Manchu leaders were then concerned about the flourishing of Buddhism among the Oirats solely due to their commitment to this Teaching and the ideas of compassion. However, the text of the documents shows that the parties, in their relations with each other, recognized their own and others' Buddhist inclinations and needs and recognized the Buddhist teaching and mutual responsibility.

#### IV. THE SEVENTH DALAI LAMA: REVIVAL OF COMPASSION

The ideas of compassion and mercy became relevant at that time due to a number of events, the most important of which was the confirmation of the authenticity of the Seventh Dalai Lama and his recognition by all interested parties after November 7, 1719, when Emperor Kangxi wrote his decree. As the famous Tibetan (Oirat) historian Sumba Khambo wrote, a large procession was assembled to bring this Dalai Lama to Lhasa. He lists by name the spiritual and secular leaders from the Kokonor and Khalkha regions who took part in this solemn procession to Tibet (History (1972): 76 - 77). "Thus, the second head of the religion took his place on the lion throne of the Braibun Gandanpobran, and in the Potala of snowy Tibet, great festivities and joys of the five fields of science were held. The great fame spread to all ends that he had become the head of the religion of all Tibet" (History [1972]: 78). On May 28, 1720, the Dalai Lama set out for Lhasa from the Kumbum monastery in Amdo. This event actually this event ended an almost 40-year period of political instability in Tibet.

Dzungars, though they left Tibet, kept interested in holding the contacts with their spiritual leader. Thus, Tsewang Rabdan invited the Seventh Dalai Lama through his ambassadors to spread the teachings in his lands. He also determined that the Dalai Lama has the right to participate in resolving military and political issues; actually, it was the traditional way of cooperation with the spiritual leaders of various religions which existed in Dzungaria (some part of population of the khanate were Muslims).

The real attitude of the Dalai Lama to the peaceful initiatives could be seen in his words and activities. The first manifestations of such attitudes happened when he was sitting in Kumbum and continued in his Lhasa period of life, when the glory of his compassion was spreading among people.

He was in close contact with the Kalmyks in faraway Volga-Caspian edge of Russia. The most famous Kalmyk ruler was Ayuka, who received his Khan title from the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso. The event of granting the diploma and seal could happen on October 25, 1697, when the enthronement

ceremony of Tsangyang Gyatso took place in the Potala, where Ayuka's representative was also present. Probably, the title was delivered to Ayuka at the beginning of the following year, 1698.

Ayuka zealously revered the teachings of Buddhism. The Kalmyk historian of the early 19th century B. U. Tyumen wrote that in his prayers Khan Ayuka repeated: "If the thought of destroying the religion of Buddha is reborn in my mind, then you, Nomin Sakusun (guardian genius), tear out my heart!" (Tyumen (2003): 142 – 143)].

Perhaps there were contacts between these leaders, but still no one such source (like exchanging of messages) is found. But the Russian archives keep the letters from this Seventh Dalai Lama to Tseren-Donduk, Ayuka's heir.

For instance, one letter from the Dalai Lama contains these words:

"In your country, there can be many cases of destruction of peace, but [however] Ayuka Khan, as a generous sovereign, by the power of piety and the memory of Sang Sar, was superior to all the great and small, and for that the Torgout [Kalmyk] state has remained in peace until now." (Archive. File 33. 1737: 7).

Here, Sang-sar Dalai-lama meant the Three Jewels: Buddha, His Teaching, and disciples. Thus, the Dalai Lama correlated the prosperity of the Kalmyks with the generosity of Ayuka and his remembering the essence of the Buddha's Teaching: all actions and their consequences depend on motivation.

This idea is highlighted in the work of this Dalai Lama "Preparing for Initiation" concerning the opinion of Aryadeva<sup>2</sup>:

"To place two boots on the head of the Buddha  
Not without a positive motivation  
And to remove them again -  
Both [actions] lead to birth as a ruler.  
Therefore, whether an action is virtuous or diabolical  
Depends solely on the state of mind" (Meditations (1983): 14).

Here, the Seventh Dalai Lama cites a well-known Buddhist parable about the actions of two people in a situation when water was dripping on the head of a Buddha figure: one covered it with his boots, the other, considering such an action wrong, removed them. Since they both had good motivation, they were reborn as rulers in the next life.

In this letter the Dalai Lama also pointed to the religious merits for the deeds performed by Tseren Donduk in past lives, thanks to which he was able to lead the Kalmyks: "by the power of piety", "by the power of good deeds collected from ancient times", "demonstrating his constancy, and the firm and unshakable content of the two laws" (Archive. File 119. Case 33. 1737: 6).

---

<sup>2</sup> Aryadeva was a famous Buddhist thinker of the 3rd century, one of the "six jewels" of Buddhist philosophy.

In his current life, he continues to honor and serve “Gurban Erdeni” (Three Jewels) and follow the good deeds of his grandfather and father, for which, as the Dalai Lama wrote, “we entrust you over the bodies (Bodhisattvas) to the most perfect one (i.e. Shakyamuni Buddha), so that he does not separate you from your well-deserved deeds” (Archive. File 119. Case 33. 1737: 6 verso, 7).

The Tibetan leader then praises the Qing Emperor Yongzheng for his commitment to the Buddhist faith, thanks to which not only China (“the Eastern country”) but also the entire Universe is at peace and prosperity: “The life and peace of the Universe comes out and the Burkhan [Buddha] power is contained in the holy Eastern country, and we are like the disseminators of that...” (Archive. File 119. Case 33. 1737: 7). He reminds the Kalmyk ruler: “The life and peace of every living being depends on the affairs of the ruler. And for this reason it is incumbent upon you, as a generous sovereign, and upon all others, to follow in faith (the steps of) your father and grandfather, and to maintain true and unfailing friendship among yourselves, and to honor and obey the Gurban Erdeni, and to keep spiritual authority in mind, and to distance yourself from ten sins, and, remembering the present and future life, to follow with reverence ten good and meritorious deeds” (Archive. File 33. 1737: 8).

The Seventh Dalai Lama, like the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, gives the Kalmyk ruler advice on governing the people:

“It is necessary to use the methods to maintain the health and peace of the Torgout [Kalmyk] state, the rulers and nobles and all the common people... [for which it is necessary] to fast three times each month, and it is very necessary to bring the whole people to the point that to obtain well-being, every person who knows how to read prayers, and when one do this, then this can be of great use in the present and future centuries” (Archive. File 119. Case 33. 1737: 8 verso). The last remark is valuable in that it represents an extrapolation (expansion) of the effect of the Buddhist worldview (the law of karma) on society (the social sphere and its institutions), when the fate of the entire people and the state (khanate) depends on the merits and virtues of an individual (each) person.

The Dalai Lama wrote this letter while staying in the area of Gartar (Kham), where he had left for in late 1728 under pressure from Pholanai, who suspected the Dalai Lama of maintaining relations with the Kukunor Khoshuts, in particular with the entourage of Lobsang Danzin, who had made an unsuccessful attempt at rebellion several years earlier (Schwieger (2015): 143). The Dalai Lama was forced to move there from the Potala for almost 8 years. Gartar was located not far from the birthplace of Kalsan Gyatso. Somewhat earlier than this, at the end of October 1728, the Panchen Lama, at the instigation of the court, had taken three small districts (Lhatse, Phuntsoglin, and Ngamrin) under his control. Therefore, the conditions of the circumstances were not good for the Dalai Lama, but he continued to keep the strong belief in his followers, especially if they stayed far away from Tibet. This letter, almost unknown to scholars, makes clear the attempts of the Dalai Lama

to point to the ideas of compassion and mercy as the sources of prosperity and peace for any society, which strongly follow the path of the Three Jewels for the sake of themselves and all living beings.

Another good example of such cordial attitude of the Dalai Lama were his pacifying actions in the Western Tibet, where the interests of rulers of Tibet and Mughal India clashed since the first third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Dalai Lama played a significant role in the conducting the treaty of 1753 between Ladakh and Purik. This agreement settled the conflict between these two Buddhist realms in the Western rim of the Tibetan cultural area (Schwieger (2015): 158).

## V. KANGXI AND YONGZHENG

One of the most important and mighty powers that took a growing interest in the event in Tibet and in surrounding lands was the Qing dynasty, which came to power in China in 1642. Emperor Kangxi considered the slightest nuances of the religious factor in his foreign policy towards Tibet and the Oirats.

For example, while supporting the Dalai Lama as the leader of the Geluk, he showed special attention to the Panchen Lama, the second leader of this school. In January 1713, the Emperor wrote a decree to the Panchen Lama Lobsang Yeshe. Kansi emphasized that he, the Emperor, “always gives honors and complains official posts and titles of those who, adhering to the commandments of Buddhism, observe the monastery rules and study the doctrines” (A collection (1990): 36). After praising the lama for his good deeds in his previous life and for the recently “reverently” sent offerings, the Emperor wrote: “I hereby bestow upon you the title of Panchen erten with the presentation of a seal and certificate... You may now exercise leadership over Tashilhunpo Monastery and all other monasteries under your leadership, as well as over their real estate” (A collection (1990): 36).

He also did not question Khubilgan’s position as the previous Dzungar leader, Galdan, Tsewang Rabdan’s uncle. During the Dzungar - Khalkha war, he wrote: “My first concern is that the people of all lands find a peaceful life, and [I] do not at all rejoice in the defeats of others, seeing my benefit in them” (Martynov (1978): 144).

In a message to the Dalai Lama regarding the cessation of hostilities between Khalkha and the Oirats, the Emperor wrote: “I, the Emperor, govern the world, placing humanity and guardianship at the foundation... Let these be people from foreign lands and distant outskirts, if they get into trouble and come to me, then I will certainly accept [them]... You, lama, profess the Buddhist teaching and transport many living beings [to the other side], freeing them from suffering. These [your] aspirations are similar [to mine]” (Martynov (1978): 154). He considered himself not only a devout Buddhist but also a true emanation of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, which he wrote about in the introduction to the Red Kanjur, published in 1720 in Beijing (Berger (2003): 58).

His policy towards Dzungaria varied from friendly to openly hostile, while remaining constantly aimed at subjugating these Oirats. For instance, in the spring of 1688, the Oirat-Khalkha War began. The troops of the Mongolian Tushetu Khan were defeated by the army of Galdan Bishogtu Khan, and the vast territory of Khalkha (East Mongolia) quickly came under the control of Oirats. Tushetu Khan and his brother, the Mongolian Chief lama Jetsun Damba Khutuktu, fled south and found themselves under the protection of the Manchu troops. Thus, the Kangxi Emperor was also drawn into the situation.

The “Qing Shilu” cites Galdan accusing Tushetu Khan and the Khutukhtu of killing another Mongolian, Dzasaktu Khan and Galdan’s younger brother, to which the Emperor decreed that “Tushetu Khan and the others abandoned their oaths of alliance, killed Dzasaktu Khan, attacked the Oirats, and killed Galdan’s younger brother Dorzhi-Zhab. This is entirely their fault. It is necessary to send people with orders to the Dalai Lama and order him to send the famous Great Lama, along with the ministers provided by the throne, to negotiate with the representatives of Galdan and Tushetu Khan” (Kitinov, Liu (2018): 84). In the summer of 1691, the Emperor convened a Sejm in Dolonnor to officially accept these Mongols into his citizenship in solemn ceremonies. Thus, the Oirat-Khalkha War became the Dzungar - Qing, as a result of which Galdan committed suicide, and the Oirats were destroyed.

After this turmoil period, Dzungaria under Tsewan Rabdan maintained peace with Qing. Thus, despite the above-mentioned readiness of the Emperor to start a war with Dzungaria and refusal to recognize the authority of Tsewang Rabdan in Tibet, Kangxi, when the opportunity arose, entered into negotiations with the Dzungars. He was upset with the Dzungarian occupation of Tibet and used various methods to drive them away from the Snowy land.

From the autumn of 1718 to the spring of 1719, relations between Dzungaria and the Kangxi court began to improve. Ambassadors from Tsewang Rabdan visited the young Dalai Lama in Kumbum in the autumn of 1718 on their way to Beijing, where an agreement was reached that the Dzungar army would leave Tibet (Petech (1972): 69-70). It was already been noted above that the Seventh Dalai Lama was brought to Lhasa with a large escort of Manchu troops led by Prince Yunti.

When the Dzungars were driven out of Tibet, on the occasion of such an important victory, a stele with the inscription of Kangxi “Restoration of Peace in Tibet” was erected on a stone stele opposite the Potala: “I acted in this matter for the sake of eliminating enemies, benefiting the submissive, pacifying the people and restoring the faith” (The Central (1996): 4). The Emperor acted in this conflict as a wise ruler-Chakravartin, the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, who sought to restore justice by peaceful and military means.

With the death of Kangxi, after the events in Kokonor in 1723 and the clashes between the Dzungars and the Qing troops, the parties found themselves in a difficult situation. The Qing asked for peace, and Mongolian and Khoshut ambassadors arrived to the Dzungars with the same request: “so as not to fight and to live in friendship as before” (Archive. File 113. Case 1.



1724: 60). To “pacify” Tsewang Rabdan, the new Emperor Yongzheng sent a lama to Dzungaria (probably in the spring of 1723). The Russian agent L. Lang reported to the Russian Collegium of Foreign Relations that “by order of His current Governing Majesty, a lama ... was sent with a certain secret commission to the kontysh [i.e., Tsewang Rabdan]. However, there was a rumor among the people that this was supposedly done to present peace proposals, since the kontysh had already ordered the Chinese court to be informed through the same lama that he was not inclined to enter into peace on generous terms, but if His Bogdykhan Majesty [Emperor], in his resolution, remained him [Tsewang Rabdan] to become the Chinese vassal, then he would oppose it with all his might” (Russian (1978): 383). Tsewang Rabdan proposed a truce on the condition that the Qing troops be withdrawn from the borders of his lands, for which he promised “friendly neighborliness” [ibid.]. Emperor Yongzheng agreed and withdrew the army, leaving guard detachments on the border. That same spring, in April 1723, Yongzheng gave orders to prepare for the withdrawal of the Qing troops from Tibet, and in 10 years, only one amban with limited military forces would remain in Lhasa.

These events prevented the Russian Captain Ivan Unkovsky, who arrived in the urgu (court) of Tsewang Rabdan Khuntaiji, from agreeing with Russia and Dzungaria. “And my request to build cities [in Dzungaria] was because the Chinese have been attacking my uluses [peoples], and now the old Amugoli Khan [i.e. Kangxi Emperor] has died and his son has taken his place and sent ambassadors to continue to be friends... and the Chinese have begun to be in a bad state. For this reason, I do not need cities now”, Tsewang Rabdan told Unkovsky on August 4, 1723 (Archive. File 113. Case 1. 1724: 67).

Yongzheng continued his father’s policy of supporting Tibetan leaders. Thus, when the Dalai Lama was moved to Gartar (Eastern Tibet), Yongzheng made an inscription on the foundation of the monastery where the Dalai Lama resided. In it, the emperor refers to the history of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s arrival at court and emphasizes the need to continue this tradition for the benefit of prosperity of the Tibetan Buddhism. To confirm his concern for the faith and the Dalai Lama, the Emperor regularly sent him money and gifts, supplied him with everything necessary for a comfortable stay, and inquired about his health» (The Central (1996): 163).

In recognition of the Emperor’s services to the maintenance of Buddhism, Yongzheng was depicted as a lama in a portrait in the Sung chu temple, the Beijing residence of high-standing lama Chanakya Qutuqtu. This was done because the Emperor was perceived as the keeper of the crown of Geluk and the universal doctrine, as a lama with unrivaled compassion.

## VI. AYUKA AND TSEREN DONDUK

The last Kalmyk ruler, who personally met with the Dalai Lama, was Ayuka. In January 1682, Ayuka attended a reception with the Fifth Dalai Lama, i.e., literally three months before his death. The arrival of the Kalmyk ruler is reported in the “Biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama”, written by desrid Sangye



Gyatso. It is written, that on January 10, 1682, the Dalai Lama was present at a series of services conducted by young monks of the Namgyal Monastery for his longevity, after which he gave a blessing and audience to several "special" persons, among whom were mentioned the Torgot (Thor-khod, Torgot) Ayoki (A-yo-khi, Ayuka), two ambassadors from Boshogtu Khan, a certain Derbet taiji and others, as well as about 300 ordinary Oirats (Sangs rgyas (1999): 298). The meeting of the Kalmyk and Tibetan leaders was of great importance for the former: Ayuka personally introduced himself to the first hierarch of his teaching; at that time, Ayuka was able to establish close relations with the desi.

Most likely, Ayuka decided to visit the Dalai Lama to personally inform the latter about the state of affairs in the Kalmyk uluses, and before that to negotiate with the Dzungarian Galdan Boshogtu Khan, with whose envoys Ayuka arrived in Lhasa. Largely due to this trip, it was possible to make peace between Kalmyks with the Dzungars the same year. It can also be assumed that Ayuka's visit to Dzungaria influenced the Dzungarian nobleman Tsagan-Batyr's decision to come with his ulus to the Kalmyks in 1686. This was the only case of a noble Dzungar ruler migrating to the Kalmyks during the period of the growth of Dzungaria's power.

The fame of Ayuka's spiritual achievements reached the Tibetan hierarchs. Pholanai also highly valued the activities of Ayuka (Zhabs (1981): 355). In the religious policy of Ayuka Khan, Buddhist prescriptions and the demands of the Yasa of Genghis Khan converged: peaceful coexistence of all the faiths of his subjects.

The Kalmyk sangha had significant political influence in the Khanate. The chief lama of the late years of the Ayuka period was the famous Shakur-lama. Originally, he was a Kalmyk monk who spent more than 20 years in Tibet and became the head of the Shakhor Drepung dastan. After the request of Ayuka to the Dalai Lama, he came back to Kalmyks in 1719. This lama was able to achieve the important results quite quickly: he managed to prevent a conflict between Ayuka and Dasang (the eldest son of Chakdorzhap, who was the eldest son of Ayuka himself); he met with the representatives of the Russian authorities both personally and through his envoys (for example, through lama Batur-Ombo). The lamas participated in all significant political events of the khanate, and the Shakur-lama often attended them in person. Lama's activities were highly valued by the Russian Astrakhan governor A.P. Volynsky: "... there is little hope in all the [Kalmyk] rulers, only their main spiritual Shakur-lama shows great loyalty and zeal for His Imperial Majesty" (National Archives. File 36. Case 18: 95). Probably the most significant case where Shakur Lama was able to realize his managerial potential to the maximum, in other words, where the Buddhist factor showed its influence on politics, was the resolution of the succession issue. The events happened like this: On February 19, 1722, Chakdorjap, appointed by Ayuka earlier in 1714 as his successor with the transfer of the seal from the Dalai Lama, passed away, and Khan himself died two years later, in February 1724. Shakur Lama apparently initially took the side of Tseren Donduk, the next eldest son of Ayuka. The lama claimed: "The khan

entrusted me with the care of his son Tseren Donduk and the improvement of his uluses” (Archive. File 119. Case 2. 1736: 29).

When Tseren Donduk became Khan, he sent in December 1729, the a delegation to the Dalai Lama to conduct the religious ceremonies, as well as to get the Khan diploma for Tseren Donduk. While this delegation was traveling to Tibet, envoys from the Qing Emperor Yongzheng came to Kalmyks in the summer of 1731, bringing letters from the Dalai Lama and the Emperor. Unfortunately, not all documents and messages have survived. The letter from the Dalai Lama was discussed earlier. Here, I’d like to call one’s attention to the letter from the new Kalmyk ruler, Tseren Donduk, to the Qing Emperor. It is noted in the letter: “... both the spiritual and secular authorities – each according to its dignity – you calmly maintain ... your virtues shine in all countries, you maintain the throne of Manju-Shiriin<sup>3</sup>, and rule in eight countries, on which you remain unshakable from all passions” (Besprozvannykh (2008): 287). The Kalmyk ruler reported about himself that he “is staying in a remote region in faraway border, professing the faith of Manjushri and submitting to the spiritual authority of Khan Zyunkembai<sup>4</sup>, and myself stay in prosperity” (Archive. File 62/1. Case 12. 1731-1732: 103). The emphasis on his faith in the Bodhisattva Manjushri in the context of perceiving the Emperor as an emanation of this Bodhisattva (“Holder of the throne”) allows us to conclude that Tseren Donduk had a high spiritual level of veneration for the Qing ruler. The significant religious status of the Emperor is again emphasized at the end of the letter by mentioning the “throne supported by lions”<sup>5</sup> (Besprozvannykh (2008): 288).

Judging by the style of the Kalmyk envoys’ addresses, the Emperor, although endowed with sacredness, was also perceived as a political figure and one who contributed to the strengthening of the Buddhist faith and even personified its effectiveness. This is how Jimba-Jamso, the envoy of Donduk-Ombo, the next Kalmyk ruler, addressed the next Qing Emperor Qianlong: “The creator of both – God’s widespread and most noble laws and the state, not leaving the whole people by mercy and contenting the most confidently the whole people with various embellishments prepared by the great and most spacious throne, first high ruler, Your most noble Bogdykhan’s lordship...” (Archive. File 119. Case 41. 1737-1741: 378).

Thus, the political and religious leaders of the Kalmyks were deeply devoted to the Buddha’s teaching and incorporated its ideas of compassion and mercy into their actions and daily lives.

---

<sup>3</sup> This is about the belief in the Bodhisattva Manjushri, who was personified (whose emanation was) by the emperor.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Geluk school, whose personal patron was the Bodhisattva Manjushri, and Tsongkhapa himself was revered as his incarnation.

<sup>5</sup> In the Buddhist tradition, a throne supported by lions is an attribute of the power of the universal ruler.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The war state of 1717 - 1720 ended in a certain sense unusually: the conflicting parties (the leaders of the Dzungars, Manchus, Tibetans, and Kalmyks) turned to the Buddhist precepts of compassion and mercy both in words and in actions. One of the most important reasons for this development of events was the recognition of Kalsan Gyatso by all participants in the events as the true reincarnation of the Dalai Lama.

Tsewang Rabdan's military operation in Tibet was based not only on strategy and tactics but also on knowledge of the intricacies of Tibetan Buddhism, which was demonstrated by the Dzungar ruler in his correspondence with Qing officials. Tsewang Rabdan turned to Buddhist formulations in search of peace and compromise in relations with the Qing rulers. His pro-Buddhist policy was continued by his son, Galdan Tseren, whose flexible policy allowed the Dzungars to maintain ties with Tibetan spiritual leaders and under whom Buddhism reached its highest flowering in the Dzungar Khanate.

The Qing Emperor Kangxi repeatedly asserted his peaceful ideas and actions. Of course, much in this area was done based on political expediency, but one cannot deny the fact of the Emperor's religious zeal, perceived by believers as an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Manjushri. The ideas of compassion were also inherent in his successor, Emperor Yongzheng, who, literally immediately upon ascending to the throne, declared the need to end the war with Dzungaria and the subsequent withdrawal of Qing troops from Tibet. He provided active support to the new, Seventh Dalai Lama, and his care for people and living beings was even depicted in lama clothing.

Of interest are the Kalmyk rulers of the same period, Ayuka and Tseren Donduk. A study of little-known archival letters from the Seventh Dalai Lama to Tseren Donduk and Tseren Donduk's appeal to Emperor Yongzheng reveal a picture of the deep respect of the Kalmyk leaders for the Buddhist teaching, the essence of which is compassion.

Mercy and compassion in Buddhism are by no means synonymous with forgiveness and all kinds of assistance because, in this case, they contradict the theory of karma - the basis of Buddha's Teaching. The main principle in the implementation of the feeling of mercy and compassion in Buddhism is the focus on a specific result, active compassion, and shared responsibility. All this was demonstrated by the participants in the political process in and around Tibet in the 1720s - 1730s.

## REFERENCES

- A *Collection of Historical Archives of Tibet*, 1990, Beijing, Cultural Relics Publishing House.
- Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire*, File 62/1, Relations of Russia with China, op. 62/1, case 12, 1731-1732.
- Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire*, File 113, Zengor Affairs, op. 113/1, case 1, 1724.
- Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire*, File 119, Kalmyk Affairs, op. 119/1, case 2, 1736.
- Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire*, File 119, Kalmyk Affairs, op. 119/1, Case 33, 1737.
- Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire*, File 119, Kalmyk Affairs, op. 119/1, Case 41, 1737-1741.
- Berger, P. A., 2003, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China*, University of Hawaii Press.
- Besprozvannykh, E. L., 2008, *Kalmyk-Chinese relations in the 18th century*, Volgograd, VolsU Publishing House.
- Das, S. Ch., 1984, 'Rise and Progress of Buddhism in Mongolia (Hor)'. *Tibetan Studies: Sarat Chandra Das*, ed. by Chattopadhyaya A., Calcutta and New-Delhi.
- Heissig, W., 1944, *Ein mongolisches Textfragrment über den Olötenfürsten Galdan. Sinologische Arbeiten*, Deutschland Institut Peking, No. 2.
- Jambadorji, 2005, *Crystal Mirror. History in the works of learned lamas*, Moscow, Scientific Publications KMK.
- Kitinov, B. U, 2015, 'Shakur Lama: the Last Attempt to Build the Buddhist State', *Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture and Society*, ed. by Vesna Wallace, Oxford University Press.
- Kitinov, B. U., and Liu, Qiang, 2018, 'Qing source on the role of religion in the relations between the Oirats, China and Tibet', *Astrakhan regional studies readings: collection of articles*, ed. by A. A. Kurapov, E. I. Gerasimidi, A. N. Alieva, Astrakhan, Sorokin Roman Vasilievich.
- Kitinov, B. U., and Liu, Qiang, 2019, 'Religion in the Oirat Policy of the Qing Dynasty', *Bulletin of RUDN, Series General History*, Vol. 11, No. 1.
- Khojaev, A., 1991, *The Qing Empire and Eastern Turkestan in the 18th century (From the history of international relations in Central Asia)*, ed. by the Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR B. A. Akhmedov, Tashkent, FAN.
- Kraft, E. S., 1953, *Zum Dsungarenkrieg im 18 Jahrhundert. Berichte des Generals Funingga*, Leipzig, Veb Otto Harrassowitz.
- Martynov, A. S., 1978, *The Status of Tibet in the 17th-18th Centuries in the Traditional Chinese System of Political Concepts*. Moscow, Nauka,
- Meditations on the Lower Tantras. A Stairway for Ascending to Tusita Buddha-field. From the Collected Works of the II, V, VII and XIII Dalai Lamas*, 1983, comp. And ed. by Glenn H. Mullin, Dharamsala, LTWA.

- Moiseyev, V. A., 1991, *Dzhungar Khanate and Kazakhs (XVII–XVIII centuries)*, Alma-Ata, Gylym.
- National Archives of the Republic of Kalmykia*, File 36. In charge of Kalmyk affairs under the Astrakhan Governor. Op. 1. Case 18.
- Petech, L. 1972, *China and Tibet in the early XVIIIth century: history of the establishment of Chinese protectorate in Tibet*, Second, revised edition, Leiden, E. J. Brill.
- Pozdneev, A. M., 1883, *Mongolian Chronicle of Erdeniin Erihe. Original text with translation and explanations. Materials for the history of Khalkha from 1636 to 1736*, St. Petersburg, Printing house of the Imperial Academy of Sciences.
- Russian-Chinese relations in the 18th century. Documents and materials 1700 – 1725*, Vol. 1, 1978, ed. by Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences S. L. Tikhvinsky, Moscow, GRVL Science.
- Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1999, *Life of the Fifth Dalai lama*, Vol. IV, Transl. by Zahiruddin Ahmad, Aditya Prakashan.
- Schwieger, P., 2015, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation*, New-York, Columbia University Press.
- Shakabpa, T. W. D., 2010, *One hundred thousand moons: an advanced political history of Tibet*. Transl. and annot. by Derek F. Maher, Vol. 1, Leiden, Boston, Brill.
- Sumba Khambo, 1972, *History of Kukunor*, Trans. from Tibetan by B. D. Dandaron, Moscow, Nauka.
- The Central Government's Governance of Tibet and the System of Reincarnation of Living Buddhas. A Collection of Historical Materials from the Qing Period (1996)*, Ed. by Zhao Xuenyi and Chang Weimin. Beijing, Huawen Chubanshe.
- Tyumen, Batur U., 2003, 'The Tale of the Derben Oirats', *Moonlight. Kalmyk historical and literary monuments*, Elista.
- Zhabs drung, tshe ring dbang rgyal, 1981, *Biographie of Pholanai*, Chengdu.





# THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs): WHAT THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY CAN DO

Dr. Henry Dang\*

## Abstract:

The paper explores the significant role the Buddhist community can play in advancing the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The paper highlights the deep alignment between Buddhist teachings and SDG principles, emphasizing peace, quality education, environmental care, and ethical economic development. A major contribution of the paper is its practical proposals, including establishing a global Buddhist center for peace education, organizing Earth Care Day campaigns, developing Buddhist-based business ethics networks, and appointing Buddhist representatives to national SDG committees. The author underscores that Buddhist values—embodied in compassion, mindfulness, and the Noble Eightfold Path - are not only timeless but urgently relevant in addressing today's global challenges. The success of the SDGs, the paper argues, hinges not only on governmental actions but also on the unified and committed engagement of religious communities. With only five years left to 2030, the Buddhist community is called upon to step forward as a powerful force for sustainable peace, well-being, and inclusive development across the globe.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Buddhist values and education, peacebuilding and interfaith cooperation, dhamma-based leadership, environmental ethics in Buddhism.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

We are now living in a world of immense challenges to sustainable development and well-being. Billions of world citizens continue to live in poverty, and they are denied a life of dignity. There are rising inequalities

---

\* President of BuddhaCare; Chairman, Standing Committee on Unity and Solidarity, World Fellowship of Buddhists, Australia.

between and among countries. Unemployment is a major concern. Global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, conflicts, and violence in families, societies, and nations occur around the world. Moreover, we are facing a time characterized by the depletion of natural resources and the effects of adverse impacts of environmental degradation, including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity, and loss of biodiversity.

Truthfully speaking, we, as human beings, are the center of the problem as well as the solution to these global challenges. Intelligent people have created innovations that have bolstered the lives of mankind, such as modern medicine, computers, transportation, communication devices, clean energy, and advanced science and technology. On the other hand, people with selfish and wicked minds have troubled the world with economic crises, environment pollution, climate change, and inequalities, not to mention many more severe problems, such as violence, mass killings, terrorism, and regional conflicts that lead to wars. This is a world of paradox. The world's community is in urgent need of new, creative, and powerful solutions to these challenges for the benefit of all.

In response to the above adverse situation, on September 2015, at a historic UN General Assembly, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (hereunder referred to as the 17 SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by 193 United Nations member states and came into force on 1 January 2016.

This presentation briefly discusses the meaning of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and what the Buddhist Community can contribute at both local and international levels to ensuring the successful implementation of these sustainable development goals.

## **II. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

### **2.1. What are the goals?**

The 17 SDGs to transform our world are:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6: Ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth,

full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use Oceans.

Goal 15: Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.



The Goals aim to mobilize global efforts to put an end to all forms of poverty, tackle climate change, and fight inequalities while ensuring that no one is left behind. Unanimously adopted by the United Nations' 193 member states (**1**), the 17 SDGs apply to all countries and recognize that social, economic, and environmental factors, as well as peace, justice, and effective institutions, are interconnected and vital for sustainable development.

## 2.2. How do they work?

The 17 SDGs and 169 targets are monitored and reviewed using a set

of global indicators. While all countries have the primary responsibility to implement, review, and follow up, everyone also has a responsibility to contribute to the success of the Goals for the benefit of all living beings.

### 2.3. Progress and report

The SDGs Report 2024 is the only UN official report that monitors global progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It finds that only 17% of the SDG targets are on track, nearly half showing minimal or moderate progress, and over one-third has stalled or even regressed. The convergence of multiple global crises has severely hindered progress (2)

With only 5 years remaining until 2030, all countries are mobilizing their efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda to bring tremendous benefits to the world's community. This Agenda is a comprehensive plan of collective action regarded as an incredible turning point for every country, stakeholder, and human being, acting in collaborative partnership, to make this earth a much more livable place where humanity can enjoy sustainable development, prosperity and peace with dignity and tolerance, with no one left behind.

For further information, please go to the United Nations Website: [www.un/sustainabledevelopment](http://www.un/sustainabledevelopment)

## III. WHAT THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY CAN DO

The 17 SDGs seem not to attract much attention of the faith communities, including Buddhism.

It should be noted that a thorough understanding of the SDGs and Buddhist values reveals that the SDGs' philosophy can be found within the Buddha's teachings, delivered more than 25 centuries ago. It is, therefore, believed that they are of close relevance and significance. The key tenets of Buddhist values are profoundly explained in the Five Precepts, Eight-fold Right Path, Dhammapada Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Four Bases of Bonding (Generosity, Endearing Speech, Beneficial Action, Impartiality) in Sangaha Sutra, Ten Royal Virtues (*Dasa-raja-dhamma*), Four Sublime Mental States (Four *Brahma viharas*), Seven Rules (*Satta Apari Haniya Dhamma*), Three Characteristics of Life (Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness, Non-self) and Six Harmony Rules. These teachings can be appropriately applied to several areas of the 17 SDGs, such as Peace (SDG 16), Quality Education (SDG 4), Climate Change (SDG 13), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3)

For example, Buddhism is well known as a religion of Peace as well as a way of meaningful life in peace and compassion. Such Buddhist values have been practiced over the past 25 centuries and are still being valid and observed by this contemporary generation. Adequate peace and compassion practice based on the Buddha Dhamma would certainly enrich and further develop SDG 16 to a higher standard.

Buddhists are therefore expected to play a greater role in addressing and implementing the 17 SDGs, based on adequate Buddhist strategies and action plans, in the next 5 years.

As part of the world community, the Buddhist communities in every country have a responsibility to take part in and significantly contribute to the successful implementation of these SDGs for the benefit of humanity.

What can the Buddhist community do?

Due to time constraints, I wish to briefly recommend some Buddhist SDG programs and initiatives for your consideration.

### **3.1. Peace and quality education programs (SDG 16 and SDG 4)**

#### **3.1.1. World Peace conferences and activities**

Over the past many years, interfaith peace conferences /forums and other activities have been convened locally and globally by many Buddhist organizations, in particular the well-known ones such as the World Conference of Religion for Peace, the World Fellowship of Buddhists, Fo Guang Shan, Tzu Chi Foundation, the UNDV, Dhammakaya Foundation. Such Buddhist activities would be absolutely of greater significance and strength in collaboration with the United Nations, relevant countries, and other Buddhist organizations.

On the **International Day of Peace 21 December each year**, the Buddhist communities in every member country can, in cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre and other religions, organize a **Peace action Conference** to observe the International Day of Peace, which was first endorsed and declared in 1981 by the United Nations Assembly as a shared date to build a culture of peace and promote action for peace (3)

In Australia, the World Inner Peace Australia 2018 conference, to which I had the great pleasure to contribute as Chairman of the Organizing Committee, was held on 22 September 2018 at the Sydney Convention Centre. Australian community and religious leaders and the United Nations representatives came together to celebrate the International Day of Peace, promoting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) and introducing the Inner Peace Education and Practice.

It is also recommended that annually, on the auspicious UNDV celebrations, the Buddhist leaders and participants conduct a mass prayer and/or walk for World Peace along with the UNDV conference.

## **IV. PEACE EDUCATION**

Peace education has been conducted by many Buddhist temples and organizations based on their traditions and resources. Such efforts and activities are much appreciated but would have been more powerful and effective if globally and systematically coordinated. Considering the urgent need for World Peace and responsibility for the United Nations SDGs, it is recommended that.

**4.1.** The Buddhist Communities work closely with the relevant government to provide Peace and Mindfulness education for the community and schools concerned. These collective efforts aim at eliminating domestic violence and encouraging reasonable conflict resolutions in peace

**4.2.** For Buddhist unity and solidarity purposes, Buddhist organizations join hands to

- i. establish an international Buddhist coordinating institution, i.e., “International Buddhist Centre.
- ii. for Sustainable Peace Education” to formulate, develop, and support the healthy development.
- iii. and implementation of a comprehensive Peace and Mindfulness education program based on the
- iv. Buddha’s teachings.

## **V. QUALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING BASED ON THE BUDDHA DHAMMA**

This world really needs a new creative and powerful method to uphold the morality (sila) downturn in this society. This world really needs a proper and balanced education that promotes not only academic excellence but also focuses on selfless and compassionate character building.

Such a Buddhist quality education provided at kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools is necessary to help the young generation understand and practice the Buddhist values to live a meaningful and healthy life in compassion, wisdom, and sustainable development.

Australia is a Christian-dominated country. Occupying about 2.4% of the Australian population -27,204,809 people, according to the 2024 Census (4)- the Buddhist community is highly commended by both the government and other political parties. Every year since 2006, the Prime Ministers and Opposition leaders have sent Vesak messages to the Australian Buddhist community as well as to the UNDV international celebrations in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. The first Buddhist school - Daylesford Dhamma School - was founded in 2009 in Daylesford, Victoria, where its population is almost all of Christian faith. It is, however, a significant fact that students and parents are very happy with the quality of education which this school has provided. The following are Pal Buddhist school in Canley Vale, New South Wales; Hoa Nghiem Buddhist school in Springvale, Victoria ... It is worth noting that Nan Tien Institute is Australia’s first government-approved Buddhist University, while there are many Buddhist studies courses and programs at several Australian universities. The Australian government is considering a Peace and Mindfulness education program recommended by BuddhaCare and the other faith communities.

## **VI. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE (SDG 13)**

### **6.1. Earth care campaign**

The Buddhist community can cooperate with the local and national authorities to run a well-planned campaign to make the people more aware of everyone’s responsibility for environmental protection and climate change.



## 6.2. Earth care day

With the approval of the government concerned, Earth Care Day can be carried out twice a year. On this day, everyone observes the following:

- . Refrain from littering
- . Clean own house and streets
- . Refrain from using motor vehicles and machines if not necessary. Use public transport instead
- . Save energy and water
- . Refrain from killing and consuming alcohol
- . Have vegetarian meals (optional)
- . Behave appropriately with smiling
- . Practice loving kindness and compassion when and where applicable.

## VII. DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH (SDG 8)

### 7.1. Dhamma-based business development

Many businesspeople, when talking about Buddhism and business and politics, tend to assume that the Buddha Dhamma (Buddha's teachings) has little or no role to play in this field. Doing business is nothing relevant and even contrary to the Buddha Dhamma. Some managers and leaders may want to distance themselves from the Buddha Dharma. Some others go as far as to regard Buddhism as a hindrance to business and economic development. In fact, this is a misunderstanding of the Dhamma as taught by the Buddha.

The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra* tells us what the Buddha talked about sustainable business when he inspired the five trade men through his conduct, personality and teaching. As a result, they became the first disciples of the Buddha, who continued to run their business based on the Buddha Dhamma. Business should be understood in a positive, meaningful way that can bring about well-being, inspiration, benefits, and positive changes in peace and happiness. In this context, Buddha is regarded as a great sustainable business teacher. Following his path, many well-known Buddhist organizations such as Fo Guang Shan, Rissho Kosei Kai, Tzu Chi International, Dhammakaya Foundation, World Fellowship of Buddhists, just to name a few, have demonstrated their great achievements in sustainable business development led by their highly esteemed leaders who base their leadership and management on the Buddha Dhamma.

### 7.2. Dhamma-based leadership and management

Considering current economic, social, and political crises, challenges, and conflicts potentially igniting more extended wars, the world needs more than ever before the right leadership and management that can bring about genuine, mutual benefits, well-being, and happiness in sustainable peace for humanity. Over the past many decades, thoughts of leadership and management have changed significantly shifting from egocentricity to altruism; from profit focus to well-being focus; from individual-family possession to owner- employee

share; from concealment and dishonesty to transparency and integrity; from owner-centered to employee and client-focused management and human-centered leadership, etc. If these theories combine with the key tenets of Buddhist values as stated in Dhammapada Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Four Bases of Bonding (Generosity, Endearing Speech, Beneficial Action, Impartiality), Sangha Sutra, Ten Royal Virtues (Dasa-raja-dhamma), Four Sublime Mental States (Four Brahma viharas), Seven Rules (Satta Apari Haniya Dhamma), Three Characteristics of Life, just to name a few (5), the world community would be able to formulate and develop an advanced humanistic philosophy and model of leadership and management to make this world a much happier place of sustainable development. I am delighted to have learned that some Buddhist researchers and leaders have been raising their voices on this matter. May I request you to give more thought of and take it into your serious consideration.

### **7.3. Buddhist business mutual assistance network**

Business Buddhists have been talking about this network over the past many years at various Buddhist business conferences in Thailand, Korea, Japan, Singapore, and the USA. But no adequate action plan has been developed. In the wake of the ongoing unstable and challenging business landscape, would it be the right time for the Buddhist business community to join hands in establishing a Buddhist Business Mutual Assistance Network? Would it be feasible and necessary to have a special conference on this subject – Buddhist Business Mutual Assistance Network as soon as possible?

## **VIII. PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS (SDG 17)**

### **Buddhist Committee on United Nations SDGs**

In each United Nations member country, the Buddhist communities and businesses join and actively contribute to the National Government Committee for the UN SDGs. At the international level, the world Buddhist community should have Buddhist representatives working on the SDGs at the UN headquarters in New York.

May I briefly conclude this presentation with the belief that our Buddhist unity and solidarity together with a strong commitment to working for peace, well-being, and a better future of all sentient beings are key contributing factors to success. May I trust that the fruitful outcome lies in the hands of the Sangha, Buddhist leaders, and the Buddhist practitioners like you, who have kindly spared your precious time and energy to join this knowledgeable and meaningful conference.

Thanks for your kind attention.

## REFERENCES

- Ang C Hong, Dhamma-based Leadership, Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia, 2021, p.153 -159
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Census 2024, Key statistics, Canberra, 30 June 2024
- Herbert V. Guenther, Philosophy and Psychology in the Abhidhamma, Shambhala Publication, 1976
- Martin Wright, Justice for Victims and Offenders: A restorative response to Crime, Waterside Press, 1996
- Sach, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future, Sustainable Development Report 2024, Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press, 2024
- UN Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) Policy Briefs and Papers, A New Agenda for Peace, 20 July 2023
- United Nations Assembly Resolution 70/1 September 2015, [www.un/sustainabledevelopment](http://www.un/sustainabledevelopment)



# BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION THROUGH PROMOTING ENGAGED BUDDHISM: AN ALTRUISTIC ROLE OF KARMAYŌGĪ KṚPĀSARAṆA MAHĀTHĒRŌ (1865 - 1926) IN PRE-PARTITION BENGAL

Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury\*

## Abstract:

Even though the term “engaged Buddhism” has been systemically coined since the 1960s, it has a long history that goes back more than a thousand years when the historical Buddha (563 - 483 BCE) began to spread his teachings and took holistic actions that guided people in practicing an ethical life and encouraged people to extend compassionate action, humanity, equality, and inclusiveness. Following the timeless spirit of engaged Buddhism, numerous altruistic-hearted compassionate Buddhist practitioners have contributed for the sake of humankind; Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō (1865-1926) was one of them. In recognition of his significant humanitarian services, moral-spiritual support, and social welfare, Bengali people honor him with the title “Karmayōgī”, which alludes to “a hermit who is tirelessly dedicated to humankind,” and frequently address him as “Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō”. This research outlines a historical overview of engaged Buddhism, highlighting how the spirit of “engaged Buddhism” profoundly impacted Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō to initiate his journey toward philanthropic services for the well-being of humankind. To fill the gap in an academic study about the contributions of Theravāda-based pioneer philanthropists, this paper seeks to reveal the selfless activities made by Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō and his tenderhearted support in alleviating the hardships faced by Buddhist communities in pre-partition Bengal, which encompassed East Bengal, now named Bangladesh, and West Bengal, presently known as Kolkata, India. By doing so, this paper also aims to shed light on Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō’s thoughtful works, such as his contributions to the

---

\* Lecturer, College of Religious Studies, Mahidol University, Thailand.

religious and educational welfare of the Buddhist community in undivided Bengal.

**Keywords:** *Compassion, Engaged Buddhism, Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, Buddhism in Bengal, Buddhist Philanthropist.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term “engaged Buddhism,” also known as “socially engaged Buddhism,” refers to a Buddhist social movement in the modern era. Sallie B. King,<sup>1</sup> in her book *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, mentions that engaged Buddhism is a contemporary form of Buddhist practice that engages actively yet nonviolently with society’s social, economic, political, social, and ecological problems. Ann Gleig proposed engaged Buddhism as a range of nonviolent social activist projects, such as peacemaking, human rights, environmental protection, rural development, and combatting ethnic violence.<sup>2</sup> Incorporating Buddhist teachings with contemporary social justice, the term “engaged Buddhism” was popularized when Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891 - 1956) and Thich Nhat Hanh (1926 - 2022) dedicatedly initiated humanistic Buddhism in response to colonialism, modernity, and secularization.

Even though the term “engaged Buddhism” has been systemically coined since the 1960s,<sup>3</sup> it has a long history that goes back more than a thousand years from when the historical Buddha (563 - 483 BCE) began to spread his teachings and took holistic actions that guided people in practicing an ethical life and promoted humanity, equality, and inclusiveness. Following the timeless spirit of engaged Buddhism, numerous altruistic-hearted Buddhist practitioners have contributed for the sake of humankind; Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō (June 22, 1865 - April 30, 1926) was one of them. Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, a Theravāda-based Buddhist philanthropist, made outstanding contributions to the spread of Buddhism, developing local social philanthropy and extending humanitarian and education in undivided India and Boṅgabhūmi,<sup>4</sup> which includes present-day Bangladesh and West Bengal

<sup>1</sup> King (2009): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Gleig, Ann. “Engaged Buddhism.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. 28 Jun. 2021; Accessed 30 August 2024. <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-755>.

<sup>3</sup> Gleig (2021): 1.

<sup>4</sup> Boṅgabhūmi refers to the Bengali region, particularly the lands where Bengali, or Bangla, is considered the primary language to speak. Prior to India’s partition in 1947, both Bengal regions, including East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh) and West Bengal (now a state in India), were unified. In addition to the term, Boṅgabhūmi, it consists of two words: Boṅga and bhūmi. The term “Boṅga” implies “Bengal” [unified Bengal], whereas “bhūmi” signifies “land.” From the geo-cultural standpoint, Boṅgabhūmi denotes the unified territory that includes modern-day Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. Indeed, most of the people in Boṅgabhūmi speak the same language, Bangla, and have similar customs, traditions, and cultures.

Chowdhury, Sanjoy Barua, ‘Historical Legends of the Buddha in the Region of Bong-



in India.<sup>5</sup> During the British colonial era in undivided India, when Theravāda Buddhism was reforming in the Bengal Delta,<sup>6</sup> Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō took on a significant role in spreading Buddhism by establishing several monasteries, Buddhist organizations, and educational institutions. He earned respect and appreciation from the local and global devotees for his unwavering benefactors in reshaping society and Buddhist propagation. Recognizing his massive humanitarian services, moral-spiritual support, and social welfare, Bengali people honor him with the title “Karmayōgī”<sup>7</sup> and frequently address him as “Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō”.<sup>8</sup>

However, little research has been conducted on Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō to date. Previous studies on Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō have been limited in scope.<sup>9</sup> They highlighted his social welfare, Buddhist propagation services, and organizational activities.<sup>10</sup> Although writings by Silānanda Brahmācārī,<sup>11</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhipal, and Shimul Barua briefly cover his biography and contributions to the formation of a noble society in Boṅgabdhūmi, including modern-day Bangladesh and West Bengal, it says little about his activities with Buddhists and non-Buddhist communities. Therefore, more research into Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō’s contribution to the broader Buddhist communities in

---

abhumī’, in Courtney Bruntz, and Brooke Schedneck (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Lived Buddhism* (online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 Feb. 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxford-hb/9780197658697.013.34>, accessed 14 Mar. 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Mahāsthābira (2021): 202 – 203.

<sup>6</sup> Chowdhury (2024): 95 – 119.

<sup>7</sup> The term “Karmayōgī” has the same meaning in Bengali and Sanskrit. In terms of grammatical structure, the word “Karmayōgī” is divided into two parts: *Karma* and *Yōgī* (*Karma* + *Yōgī*). The term “Karma” here refers to “work” or “services”, whereas the term “yōgī” denotes “a noble meditator” or “a practitioner”. Recognizing Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō’s contributions, devotees and followers have given him the title “Karmayōgī” to express his dignity and tireless welfare services for the sake of sentient beings. It is worth noting that for the past hundred years, Bengali Buddhist monks and devotees have been using the title, “Karmayōgī” exclusively for Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō in attributing his legacy and significant charitable and philanthropic services to Bangladesh and the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>8</sup> Chowdhury (2021a): 52.

<sup>9</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 46 – 48.

<sup>10</sup> Shimul Barua (2015): 38.

<sup>11</sup> Silānanda Brahmācārī was a prominent Buddhist scholar who lived from December 25, 1907, to February 5, 2002. Like the renowned philanthropist Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, Silānanda Brahmācārī was born in the prominent spiritual village of Unainpūrā. It is worth noting that Silānanda Brahmācārī was a disciple of Jñānīśbara Mahāsthābira (December 20, 1887–October 28, 1974), a renowned Theravāda-based Buddhist scholar and meditation master. Silānanda Brahmācārī, a prolific scholar, wrote various books in Bengali, Hindi, and English, as well as conducted translation projects from Pāli to English and Bengali. *An Introduction to Abhidhamma*; *The Dhammapada*; *Mahāśānti Mahāprēma*; *Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa*; *The Eternal Message of Lord Buddha*; *Visuddhimagga*, *The Saṃyukta Nikāya* (translation) and others are amongst his notable works.

present-day Bangladesh, West Bengal, India, and beyond is required. In general, current research on Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's altruistic and humanitarian services to Buddhism and societal welfare is still in its infancy and lacks a systematic arrangement analysis.

Based on the life, legacy, philanthropic contributions, and times of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, this paper is designed into three separate parts. The first part explores Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's early biography, including the history of his entrance into the spiritual path; the second one delineates his altruistic services to establish spiritual institutions to propagate Theravāda Buddhism in undivided India and modern Bangladesh, and the ending section reveals his philanthropic activities for educational welfare with highlighting the overview of his entire humanitarian services.

## II. EARLIER BIOGRAPHY OF KARMAYŌGĪ KṚPĀŚARAṆA MAHĀTHĒRŌ

Kṛpāśaraṇa was born on June 22, 1865, in Unainpūrā,<sup>12</sup> a notable spiritual village in the Patiya subdistrict of the Chattogram district, present-day Bangladesh. His father was named Ānandamōhan Barua, and his mother was named Ārādhana Barua.<sup>13</sup> He was the sixth child of his parents. Because of his father's poverty, young Kṛpāśaraṇa was deprived of the opportunity to attend school. In his commemorative biographical book, *Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa*, prominent Silānanda Brahmācārī stated that, despite the reality that young Kṛpāśaraṇa wanted to study at school and would have been privileged to acquire formal education, he did not express his sorrow to his father if he was regretful of his deprivation and poverty.<sup>14</sup> When Kṛpāśaraṇa was just ten years old, his father, Ānandamōhan Barua, died unexpectedly. His mother,

---

<sup>12</sup> Unainpūrā is one of the prominent spiritual villages of modern-day Bangladesh where a number of Buddhist scholars and monks grew up, leading to the spread of Theravāda Buddhism in Boṅgabdhūmi and the Indian subcontinent over centuries. Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthērō (June 17, 1928 - March 21, 2020), the 12th Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh, recorded fourteen prominent Buddhist monks born in Unainpūrā on a white stone rock. The white-stoned rock edict was depicted in 1982 and respectfully placed in the Unainpūrā Laṅkārama on the eve of auspicious Buddha Pūrṇimā (Buddhist Year 2525). We learned about sixteen Buddhist monks who came from Unainpūrā, including two modern monks and they are: (1) Śrīmat Jaṇḍharā Mahāsthābīra (1600 - 1672); (2) Śrīmat Dhruba Mahāsthābīra (1630 - 1690); (3) Śrīmat Cāda Mahāsthābīra (1630 - 1690); (4) Śrīmat Krēmīlāhā Mahāsthābīra (1700 - 1780); (5) Śrīmat Thānā'i Mahāsthābīra (1720 - 1785); (6) Śrīmat Hrepasu'i Mahāsthābīra (1725 - 1790); (7) Śrīmat Mōhana Chandra Mahāsthābīra (1730 - 1780); (8) Śrīmat Mukulacāna Mahāsthābīra (1730 - 1795); (9) Śrīmat Sudhana Candra Mahāsthābīra (1735 - 1810); (10) Śrīmat Saṅgharāja Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana Mahāsthābīra (1838 - 1905); (11) Śrīmat Jagaṭ Chandra Mahāsthābīra (1852 - 1948); (12) Śrīmat Gaurachandra Mahāsthābīra (1850 - 1910); (13) Śrīmat Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāsthābīra (1865 - 1926); (14) Śrīmat Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra (1928 - 2020); (15) Śrīmat Bōdhipāla Bhikkhu (1968 - 2020) and (16) Śrīmat Bōdhitmitra Mahāsthābīra (1970 - Present).

<sup>13</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 46 - 48.

<sup>14</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 13.

Ārādhana Barua, became a widow and was unable to care for her children. Young Kṛpāśaraṇa worked as a laborer in a relative's house to comprehend his mother's plight, earned two takas (currency equivalent to the British India period), and gave that money to his mother for family expenditures. Ārādhana was flabbergasted after she saw young Kṛpāśaraṇa's heart was so philanthropic. With a compassionate heart, Ārādhana realized that Kṛpāśaraṇa was born to aid and help others and that he should be initiated into the path of awakening by being a Buddhist monk.

Under the mentorship of a noble preceptor (*upajjhāya*), Sūdhancandra Mahāsthābira, Kṛpāśaraṇa was ordained as a novice (*sāmaṇera* or *pabbajjā*) on April 14, 1881, at Unainpūrā Laṅkārama, located in the Patiya subdistrict of Chattogram district, present-day Bangladesh.<sup>15</sup> Since becoming a novice monk, Kṛpāśaraṇa Sāmaṇera has been carefully studying Buddhist monastic rules and disciplines (*Vinaya*) from his preceptor. Due to his meticulous learning, Kṛpāśaraṇa Sāmaṇera established himself as one of the top students among his colleagues and other monastic members. Kṛpāśaraṇa received higher ordination (*bhikkhu*) at the age of twenty, under the spiritual preceptor (*upajjhāya*) of Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābira (June 19, 1834 - February 4, 1907),<sup>16</sup> the second Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh.<sup>17</sup> Kṛpāśaraṇa was given a new monastic name, "Chandrajyōti Bhikkhu", by the teacher, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābira, following the Theravāda monastic order (*Vinaya*). He was known by his former name, "Kṛpāśaraṇa", which was given to him by his parents, and his monastic name, "Chandrajyōti Bhikkhu", has never been pronounced.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, he was frequently referred to as Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō by his followers, devotees, and fellow monks.

The Legacy of Ācārya Pūrṇācāra had a tremendous impact on Kṛpāśaraṇa's monastic journey. After Kṛpāśaraṇa received higher ordination, he traveled to Bodhgaya (present-day Bihār, India) with Ācārya Pūrṇācāra. Silānanda Brahmācārī noted that Kṛpāśaraṇa had an insight into Bodhgaya while he was reflecting on the decreasing status of Buddhism in India and the entire Indian

<sup>15</sup> Brahmācārī (1950) 13; Bodhipala (2005):17; Shimul Barua (2021): 273.

<sup>16</sup> Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana Mahāsthābira (June 19, 1834 – February 4, 1907), the second Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh, was a pioneer reformer of Theravāda Buddhism in modern-day Bangladesh as well as the Indian subcontinent. Unainpūrā, a well-known spiritual village of Bangladesh, is where he was born. Mr. Paul, a British-based government officer, inspired Ācārya Pūrṇācāra to learn the *Tipitaka*, or Triple Baskets of Buddhism. After learning about *Bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha* (The monks' codes of disciples), he was motivated to reform Theravāda Buddhism in undivided India, including modern-day Bangladesh. Under the spiritual direction and preceptorship (*Upajjhāya*) of Saṅgharāja Sāramēdha Mahāsthābira (1801 - 1882), Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana was ordained as a *bhikkhu* (higher ordination). Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana was one of the founding members of Rāmañña Nikāya of Sri Lanka in 1864 (Mahāsthābira 2009, 174 - 175).

<sup>17</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 13 - 15.

<sup>18</sup> Shimul Barua (2021): 274.

subcontinent.<sup>19</sup> He was thinking about the possibility of reviving Buddhism in India and beyond at that time. Promising Kṛpāśaraṇa thought of how to bring devotees and seekers back together by working together to help one another and defend Buddhism and the Buddhist community from mass extinction. As a devoted Buddhist follower, Kṛpāśaraṇa was inspired by the Buddha's instruction that monks should walk for the welfare of the multitude and the happiness of many sentient beings (*Bahujan-hitāya bahujana-sukhāya*).<sup>20</sup> Kṛpāśaraṇa's journey into Buddhism matured during his first pilgrimage, owing to his teacher's encouragement and his intrinsic philanthropic nature<sup>21</sup> blossomed.

### III. KARMAYŌGĪ KṚPĀŚARAṆA MAHĀTHĒRŌ AS A BUDDHIST PHILANTHROPIST

After completing his noble pilgrimage to North India, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō ended up going back to Chattogram. Then, he lived in a local Buddhist monastery in the village of Bākkhālī, located in the Patiya subdistrict of the Chattogram district, present-day Bangladesh, as instructed by his teacher, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana Mahāsthābīra.<sup>22</sup> Apart from his monastic responsibilities in the temple, he was pondering how he could contribute to the Buddhist community, protect the devotees from misery, and spread Theravāda Buddhism<sup>23</sup> throughout Boṅgabhūmi and British India, as he had the insight to reflect on his innate humanistic nature.<sup>24</sup> By coincidence, he received a request to spend some time teaching Buddhism from devotees of Kolkata (West Bengal, India) as he contemplated whether or not to begin his philanthropic activities in British India. On June 15, 1886, he arrived in Kolkata and resided in Nabīna Bihāra, on the street 72/73 Maṅgalā lē'ina.<sup>25</sup> While residing at Nabīna Bihāra, he realized that Kolkata required more Buddhist monasteries where monastic members could dwell to work in the community. He established Mahānagara Bihāra on the street 21/26 Bho in Kolkata after

<sup>19</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 14 - 15.

<sup>20</sup> This is the Buddha's famous instruction to his first sixty enlightened disciples (*arahants*) to go forth, for the sake of many. A similar passage also occurs at *Vinaya Piṭaka I* 20, 36 -21, 16 (Bodhi 2000): 413).

<sup>21</sup> As previously indicated, the term "philanthropic nature" expresses the Buddha's instruction to go forth for the sake of many (*bahujana-hitāya bahujana-sukhāya*). Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022), a Vietnamese Buddhist philanthropist, coined the term "engaged Buddhism" to describe Buddhism-inspired philanthropy and social activism (Gleig 2021, 2).

<sup>22</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 15.

<sup>23</sup> Theravāda Buddhism was restored in Chattogram during the time of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, and it later extended throughout Boṅgabhūmi, a unified Bengal that included modern-day Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. Professor Deepak Kumar Barua remarked that Theravāda Buddhism began to reform in the Bengal region in the early nineteenth century (Barua 2021, 209). Dharmādhār Mahāsthābīra, on the other hand, stated that Theravāda Buddhism was reintroduced in Caṭṭagrāma in 1864, under the direction of the first Saṅgharāja, Sāramēdha Mahāsthābīra (Mahāsthābīra 2009, 172 - 173).

<sup>24</sup> Shimul Barua (2021): 274 - 275.

<sup>25</sup> Bodhipala (2005): 17 - 19.

understanding the significance of having more Buddhist temples there. (Barua 2021, 210) Although Mahānagara Bihāra was founded in Kolkata as a rental building, it is crucial to note that it was Kṛpāśaraṇa's first Buddhist monastery to be established.

During his time at Nabīna Bihāra, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō was concerned by how disorganized and ignorant the Buddhist communities in Kolkata were of the Buddha's teachings. After realizing the need to establish a social society and protect the ethnic Buddhist communities of Boṅgabhūmi, Kṛpāśaraṇa was compelled to start a Buddhist organization in the heart of British India. He intended to form a Buddhist institution that would encourage devotees and seekers to interact with each other's thoughts and preserve their faith in the Triple Gems of the Buddha, his teachings, and the noble community. He founded the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā (Bengal Buddhist Association)<sup>26</sup> in Kolkata on the eve of Prabāranā Pūrṇimā (*Āśvinī Pūrṇimā*) on October 5, 1892.<sup>27</sup> A well-known modern philanthropist and Buddhist scholar, Bhikkhu Bodhipala, asserts that Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā was one of the pioneer Buddhist organizations in undivided British India.<sup>28</sup> In describing the hardships of Kṛpāśaraṇa along the way to founding Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā, Silānanda Brahmācārī noted as follows:<sup>29</sup>

One of his dreaming noble initiatives was the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā, to which Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō devoted all of his time throughout the years. Despite his unwavering commitment and full energy, it took a while for this organization to become successful. Kṛpāśaraṇa continued to be forbearing and passionate about his work throughout the journey, encouraged by the guidance of his teacher, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābira. While Kṛpāśaraṇa was striving on his own, a Buddhist devotee by the name of Gōpāla Sinha Caudhurī extended his compassionate assistance and support to him so that his dream project could advance. After that, kind-hearted local followers began to support him and provide financial assistance in accomplishing his noble cause. Kṛpāśaraṇa saved all of the funds he had received from followers and seekers in order to carry out his aim of establishing the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā. He never spent a penny on personal expenses except for the additional costs he incurred to set up the institution. Over the years, he accumulated a few thousand takas (the equivalent of money in British India). Since Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā lacked any former properties, he purchased a 3600 square foot (5 *kāṭhā*) plot of land on Street 5, Lalita Mōhana Dās lē'ina in Kolkata. At that time, the cost of 3600 square feet

<sup>26</sup> Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh. 2021. "Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha". Available online: [https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Bauddha\\_Dharmankur\\_Sabha](https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Bauddha_Dharmankur_Sabha) (accessed on June 26, 2024).

<sup>27</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 46 - 48.

<sup>28</sup> Bodhipala (2005): 17 - 19.

<sup>29</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 13 - 17.



of land was 4,500 Taka. He used all of his savings and any donations he received to establish the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in combination with the founding monastery (*Bihāra*). In order to properly complete this great endeavor for the benefit of devotees and seekers in Kolkata as well as undivided British India, he borrowed some money from the well-wishers because he did not have enough to purchase the land. Kṛpāśaraṇa laid the foundation of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata in 1901. The monastery was inaugurated in 1903.

After successfully establishing the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata, Kṛpāśaraṇa's name gained widespread recognition among followers and Buddhist aspirants. This prompted him to further his philanthropic activities by establishing sister institutions and organizations in Boṅgabhūmi and undivided India. In 1907, Kṛpāśaraṇa sought the assistance of the District Divisional Commissioner of Lucknow Division to purchase a 7200 square foot (10 *kāṭhā*) plot of land in the Lucknow District of British India so that he could construct a sister institution to Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, which he named "Lucknow Bodhisattva Bihāra".<sup>30</sup> That same year, he established the "Shimla Baud'dha Samiti," another branch institution in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. In 1910, he traveled to Darjeeling to start a new sister institution to the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, and King Bijaya Chandra Mahatāba, the majesty of Bardhaman, funded him to form a monastery on land. The construction of the temple was completed in 1919. After fulfilling his mission in Darjeeling, Kṛpāśaraṇa thought of the devotees of Ranchi, the state capital of Jharkhand. In 1915, he established a new Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra branch in Ranchi with the support of an earlier registration with the British-Indian Government. In 1918, another branch of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra was established in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to his extensive altruistic activities in northern India and West Bengal, Kṛpāśaraṇa made significant contributions to Unainpūrā, the village where he was born. He renovated and reconstructed the ancient monastery of Unainpūrā Laṅkārama in 1921. After being requested to do so by the noble residents of Unainpūrā, he founded a branch of Dharmāṅkūra Baud'dha Sabhā in his beloved village. In the same year, he opened a new Dharmāṅkūra Baud'dha Sabhā branch in the Chattogram Hill Tract (CHT) area of Rangamati.<sup>32</sup> He returned to Kolkata after fulfilling his mission in his hometown of Chattogram. After that, in 1922, he founded a sister institution of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in Jamshedpur, Tatanagar. A well-known Tata company in Jamshedpur, based in Tatanagar, gave him a 60,480-square-foot (1 *bighā* and 1 *kāṭhā*) plot of land to build a Buddhist monastery and meditation center. The last founding

<sup>30</sup> Bodhipala (2005): 17 - 21.

<sup>31</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 46 - 48.

<sup>32</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 48.



monastery of Kṛpāśaraṇa was built in Shillong in 1925.<sup>33</sup>

After his rigorous philanthropic journey, Kṛpāśaraṇa remained devoted to spreading Buddhism in Boṅgabhūmi and Undivided India. Despite all of his challenges and obstacles, he did not give up on his noble aim of establishing Buddhist institutions as the respective branches of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō diligently managed to establish Buddhist institutions for the benefit of devotees and aspirants wherever he had the privilege throughout Boṅgabhūmi and Undivided India.

#### IV. KṚPĀŚARAṆA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE EDUCATIONAL WELFARE

While Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō was working devotedly to establish the branches of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Boṅgabhūmi and Undivided India, he was deeply saddened to observe how educationally inferior Bengali Buddhists were. As a result of the lack of formal education, Buddhist society was unable to advance and adapt to the advancement of rational thought. Professor Shimul Barua wrote in his book, *Mānaba Cintanē Bud'dha Cintā-Jāgaraṇē*, that Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, who was a self-educated person, understood the reason for the Buddhist community's substandard status in both East and West Bengal, i.e., the lack of education.<sup>34</sup> At the fifth assembly of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in 1913, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō delivered the following addresses that emphasized the value of holistic education for the welfare of oneself and others in Boṅgabhūmi:

The distinguished speakers on this occasion spoke about their perspectives on education, which I found interesting. In contrast to a large contingent, we currently only have a limited number of educated people. I do not believe that a small number of educated people can be enabled to significantly impact society and the growth of the economy. Even if there are not many educated people in our society, I am disappointed in many of them because of their selfishness. A person with the right education is one who not only cares for himself and his family members but also contributes to society's welfare and has a generous heart for others. To benefit many people in this society, I expect the people of this noble community to educate themselves internally and externally.<sup>35</sup>

It is significant to mention that Kṛpāśaraṇa had purely philanthropic views on educational welfare, as evidenced by the fact that he established numerous schools and colleges in Boṅgabhūmi. Along with establishing the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and its two-story building, he also founded the "Kṛpāśaraṇa Free Institution," a nonprofit school, in 1913.<sup>36</sup> Despite being

<sup>33</sup> Bodhipala (2005): 18.

<sup>34</sup> Shimul Barua (2021): 275.

<sup>35</sup> Hemendu Bikash (1990): 43.

<sup>36</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 46 - 48.

located on the grounds of a Buddhist monastery called Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, this school used to accept students of all religious backgrounds and provides free education in both Bengali and English. With the assistance of the prominent Buddhist scholar, Dr. Benimadhab Barua (B.M. Barua),<sup>37</sup> Kṛpāśaraṇa supervised this institution, which immediately drew the attention of locals.<sup>38</sup>

When Kṛpāśaraṇa was founding the “Kṛpāśaraṇa Free Institution”, he had another thought: the importance of education for individuals of all ages, from young children to elderly people. He also understood the significance of education in enabling working people to advance both morally and materially by securing respectable positions. In 1916, Kṛpāśaraṇa started an evening school to benefit working people in affiliation with Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā<sup>39</sup>. With the help of Mr. W. C. Wordsworth, a former director of the Education Ministry of the Bengal territory in British India, Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā received government funding for running both Kṛpāśaraṇa Free Institution and the Evening School for Working People.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, Kṛpāśaraṇa's friendship with Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee,<sup>41</sup> a former Vice-Chancellor of Kolkata University, grew, and his moral vision expanded to encapsulate the educational welfare in Boṅgabhūmi. Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra<sup>42</sup> recognized Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō and

---

<sup>37</sup> Dr. Benimadhab Barua, also known as Professor B. M. Barua (December 31, 1888–March 23, 1948), was a pioneer scholar of Indology Studies and the first Asian to receive a D.Litt from the University of London in 1917. Under the supervision of Dr. T.W. Rhys Davids and Mrs. Rhys Davids, Dr. B. M. Barua accomplished his research, entitled “Indian Philosophy: Its Origin and Growth from Vedas to the Buddha” (Benimadhab 1921, pp. v - xiii). In 1913, he took a position at the University of Kolkata as a guest lecturer. In 1918, he was promoted to a full professorship and continued to work there until the end of his life. Dr. B. M. Barua was a prolific scholar who authored 86 research papers, and 18 texts in English, along with compiled 7 books and 22 research articles in the Bengali language (Shimul Barua 2019, 28). Since 1909, he had been a member of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and had generously assisted Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's philanthropic efforts in Boṅgabhūmi and Undivided India.

<sup>38</sup> Shimul Barua (2021): 276.

<sup>39</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 47.

<sup>40</sup> Shimul Barua (2021): 277.

<sup>41</sup> Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee (June 29, 1864 – May 25, 1924) was a well-known Bengali educator, jurist, and mathematician. He served as vice chancellor at the University of Calcutta for four consecutive, two-year terms (1906–1914). Due to his strong sense of self-worth, courage, and academic integrity, he was frequently alluded to as “Banglar Bagh,” which translates to “the royal Bengal tiger of Boṅgabhūmi” (Barua 2019, 52).

<sup>42</sup> On June 22, 2015, a significant congregation was held in Unainpūrā Laṅkārama (located in the Patiya subdistrict of Chattogram district, present-day Bangladesh) to commemorate Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's 150th birthday (Barua 2015, 11 - 30). The assembly was presided over by Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra (June 17, 1928 – March 20, 2020), the 12th supreme patriarch of Bangladesh. The late Saṅgharāja, Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra, spoke about Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's educational welfare and asserted that

Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee's friendship was a shining example of noble companionship or *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*.<sup>43</sup> However, this friendship significantly influenced the establishment of traditional studies and secular education in Boṅgabhūmi. Kṛpāśaraṇa convinced Sir Ashutosh that since the current education structure is based on university affiliation, rural schools, and colleges should recognize Kolkata University as a model of contemporary universities. This affiliation was supposed to encourage pupils from underprivileged schools and colleges to compete for jobs with graduates from prestigious secular institutions.<sup>44</sup> Deeply influenced by Kṛpāśaraṇa, Sir Ashutosh helped to establish academic ties between Kolkata University and the rural institutions of Chattogram, including Mahamuni Anglo-Pali Institution; Silak Dowling Primary School; Kartala-Belkaine Middle English School; Noapara English High School; Andharmanik High School; Naikaine Purnachar Pali School; Dhamakhali High School; Pancharia Middle English School; Satbaria Girl's School and Library; Unainpura Primary School; Unainpura Junior High School; Rangunia English High School; M.A. Rahat Ali High School; Sakhpura English School; Rangamati School and Library.<sup>45</sup>

Kṛpāśaraṇa was not only concerned with establishing secular education but also reflected on the promotion of ancient Indic languages, such as *Pāli* and Sanskrit. At the request of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee approved the authorization for the Department of *Pāli* Studies to be formed at Kolkata University in 1907.<sup>46</sup> It is noteworthy that Kolkata University<sup>47</sup> was the first South Asian institution to introduce a program in *Pāli* Studies. In addition to promoting *Pāli* Studies within the institution, Kṛpāśaraṇa paid attention to promising young scholars so that they would integrate their education and have access to adequate research privileges for future endeavors. Due to Kṛpāśaraṇa's thoughtful guidelines and support, Benimadhab Barua

---

Kṛpāśaraṇa's welfare mission could not be carried out without Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, who warm-heartedly extended his assistance and offered him additional guidelines on how to do so. Kṛpāśaraṇa and Ashutosh shared the same passion for helping the community in a comprehensive approach. Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra further addressed the outstanding friendship between Kṛpāśaraṇa and Ashutosh functioned as a prime example of *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* from a Buddhist perspective.

<sup>43</sup> The *Pāli* word *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* renders the Sanskrit term *kalyāṇa-mitra*, which signifies admirable companionship or noble friendship. According to the Buddha, *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* refers to those who are advanced in virtue, engaged in noble discussion, extend generous help when required, and consummate in discernment. For a detailed analysis, see *D III* 180; *A IV* 281.

<sup>44</sup> Bodhipala (2005): 20 - 21.

<sup>45</sup> Shimul Barua (2019): 279; Bodhipala (2005): 19.

<sup>46</sup> Shimul Barua (2019): 278.

<sup>47</sup> Following Kolkata University's footsteps, contemporary Indian universities such as Delhi University, Pune University, Naba Nalanda University, Gautam Buddha University, and Magadha University, as well as present Bangladeshi institutions such as the University of Dhaka, University of Chittagong, and Government City College of Chattogram, established *Pāli* and Buddhist Studies (Chowdhury 2020, 110 – 120).

blossomed in his academic career and made tremendous contributions to *Pāḷi* and Buddhist Studies as well as Indology. It is crucial to remember that Benimadhab Barua received the British government's funding for his education at the University of London. This application was brought to light when Kṛpāśaraṇa sincerely asked Sir Ashutosh to send a recommendation to the British government and the university so that the officials may accept Benimadhab Barua's funding request.<sup>48</sup>

Since Kṛpāśaraṇa realized the merits of education for socio-economic progress, he also placed a strong emphasis on women's education. In 1913, he founded the "Baud'dha Mahilā Sam'milanī" organization to enhance the welfare of women.<sup>49</sup> "Baud'dha Mahilā Sam'milanī" was formed to unify women and inspire them to pursue education for the sake of both themselves and society. During the women's assembly at Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in 1913, he stated that every woman deserves the same rights as males and that a woman can work outdoors just like a man can.<sup>50</sup> A female education specialist named L. L. Jennie graciously assisted Kṛpāśaraṇa in launching a scholarship program for women's education. It is worth mentioning that this fellowship for women provides financial support to women pursuing academic education in school, college, and university, as well as vocational training.<sup>51</sup>

As part of extending social welfare through education, Kṛpāśaraṇa recognized the significance of establishing libraries and journals. Professor Shimul Barua noted that the glorious legacies of Nālandā Mahāvihāra passionately inspired Kṛpāśaraṇa.<sup>52</sup> In 1909, he founded the "Guṇālāṅkāra Library" at the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata. With the assistance of "Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā", he collected a large number of books, manuscripts, and Buddhist scriptures for the library so that scholars and

---

<sup>48</sup> Roy, Ajay. 2018. "The Life of Kripasaran Mahashtavir." Available online: [https://dharma-documentaries.net/life-of-kripasaran-mahashtavir?fbclid=IwAR06brdRvtZymwdPLE0cN3Sx\\_vtkmor3dTOWN7O\\_4xVOvnCG8EUNLg3DisE](https://dharma-documentaries.net/life-of-kripasaran-mahashtavir?fbclid=IwAR06brdRvtZymwdPLE0cN3Sx_vtkmor3dTOWN7O_4xVOvnCG8EUNLg3DisE) (accessed on June 22, 2024).

<sup>49</sup> Brahmācārī (1950): 47.

<sup>50</sup> Hemendu Bikash (1992): 52.

<sup>51</sup> Shimul Barua (2021): 281.

<sup>52</sup> Shimul Barua (2021): 282; Nālandā Mahāvihāra or Nālandā University, a vestige of ancient India's glorious past, was regarded as one of the most prestigious educational institutions that represented the foremost Buddhist scholasticism of that time. Nālandā Mahāvihāra University was founded by King Śākrāditya (reign. 467 – 473 CE.) in the fifth century. Historically, Nālandā was recognised as an essential location where the Buddha often taught. His chief disciple, Śāriputra was born in Nālandā and taught his benevolent mother the essence of the Dharma. A few hundred years after Buddha's departure, reputable Buddhist scholars often gathered to teach and exchange the Dharma at Nālandā. With the inception of the Gupta period (240 – 550 CE.), Nālandā Mahāvihāra University continued to flourish as a prestigious educational institution. A Tibetan account recorded that 30,000 students and 20,000 teachers resided at Nālandā Mahāvihāra University. As the Pāla Dynasty (750 – 1162 CE.) came into power, the growth of Nālandā Mahāvihāra University extended into Central Asia and Europe. (Chowdhury 2020, 110 – 125).

educators could continue their research and studies to acquire knowledge and wisdom.<sup>53</sup> Aside from establishing a library, he became aware of the value of academic journals, which allowed scholars to publish their research papers, articles, and academic works. He founded the “Jagatjyōti,”<sup>54</sup> a monthly Buddhist journal, in 1908. Two renowned scholars, Guṇālaṅkāra Mahāsthābira and Sāmaṇera Pūrṇānanda Sāmī, were given the responsibility of editing the “Jagatjyōti” by Kṛpāśaraṇa.<sup>55</sup> Since its founding, the esteemed journal “Jagatjyōti” has continued to shed light on social and cultural awakening in Bangladesh and India, as well as all over the world.

As mentioned in the discussion above, Kṛpāśaraṇa’s passionate contributions to educational welfare followed the steps of an awakening society in Boṅgabhūmi and undivided India. Understanding the value of education for both men and women, he devoted his life to founding schools, colleges, libraries, and publications and supporting local academics and educators. However, his thoughts about educational welfare were much ahead of his time.

#### V. KṚPĀŚARAṆA’S NOTABLE EVENTS AND SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN PRE-PARTITION BENGAL AT A GLANCE

The table below, categorized by year, lists the noteworthy life events, accomplishments, and philanthropic contributions of Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō.<sup>56</sup>

Year	Significant Life Events and Social Contributions of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō
1865	Kṛpāśaraṇa was born on June 22 in the prominent spiritual village of Unainpūrā, located in the Patiya subdistrict of the Chatto-gram district, Bangladesh. His father was named Ānandamōhan Barua, and his mother was named Ārādhana Barua.
1875	Kṛpāśaraṇa’s father, Ānandamōhan Barua was died.
1881	On April 14, Kṛpāśaraṇa was ordained as a novice ( <i>sāmaṇera</i> or <i>pabbajjā</i> ) by a noble preceptor, Sūdhanchandra Mahāsthābira.

<sup>53</sup> Hemendu Bikash (1992): 47.

<sup>54</sup> “Jagatjyōti” established by Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, which became one of the leading Buddhist journals over a century ago. Jagatjyōti became one of the leading Buddhist journals, publishing a plethora of high-quality articles and research papers on Buddhist anthropology, history, contemporary issues, archaeological data, scriptures, culture, and literature (Brahmacārī 1950, 47 - 48)

<sup>55</sup> Brahmacārī (1950): 47 – 48.

<sup>56</sup> Shimul Barua (2021): 279 - 285; Bodhipala (2005): 17-21; Brahmacārī (1950): 46 - 48.



1885	Kṛpāśaraṇa received higher ordination ( <i>bhikkhu</i> ) under the spiritual guidance and preceptor ( <i>Upajjhāya</i> ) of the second Saṅgharāja (supreme patriarch), Ācārya Pūrṇacāra Chandramōhana Mahāsthābīra (June 19, 1834 - February 4, 1907). Then, Kṛpāśaraṇa traveled to Bodhgaya (present-day Biḥār, India) accompanied by his master. In the same year, his mother, Ārādhana Barua, died.
1886	Kṛpāśaraṇa arrived in Kolkata (present-day West Bengal, India) on Tuesday, June 15. He lived in Nabīna Biḥāra, on the street 72/73 Maṅgalā lē'ina.
1889	He stayed in Mahānagara Biḥāra, on the street 21/26 Bho in Kolkata.
1892	On October 5, on the eve of Prabāranā Pūrṇimā (Āśbinī Pūrṇimā), Kṛpāśaraṇa established Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā (Bengal Buddhist Association).
1893	Accompanied by Mahābīra Bhikkhu, Kṛpāśaraṇa visited Lucknow, Allahabad, and Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh (present-day North India).
1896	Kṛpāśaraṇa attended the coronation ceremony of King Bhubanamōhana Roy of Chakma Circle in Rangamati, Chatto-gram Hill Track (CHT) of present Bangladesh.
1900	Kṛpāśaraṇa purchased a 3600 square foot (5 kāṭhā) plot of land on street 5 Lalita Mōhana Dās lē'ina in Kolkata. At that time, the cost of 3600 square feet of land was 4,500 Taka, equivalent to British India's currency.
1901	Kṛpāśaraṇa discovered Jatavana Biḥāra, <sup>57</sup> a historical Buddhist archeological site in present-day Uttara Pradesh (UP), India. In the same year, he laid the foundation of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Biḥāra in Kolkata.

<sup>57</sup> According to *Pāli* literature, the Buddha spent 19 rainy retreats (Vassa) in the Jetavana Biḥāra during his 45 year monastic career. During the time of the Buddha, a prominent wealthy merchant named Anāthapiṇḍika (Sanskrit: Anāthapiṇḍada) offered Jatavana Biḥāra to the Buddha and his noble followers (see Dha-a I. 3)



1902	The second Saṅgharāja, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābīra (June 19, 1834 - February 4, 1907) received his “Mahāsthābīra” recognition at Rājānagara Śākyamūni Bihāra of Chattogram Hill Track (CHT) of present Bangladesh, led by Kṛpāśaraṇa and his fellow noble Buddhist monks (bhikkhū). In the same year, he traveled to Burma (present Myanmar) on a pilgrimage.
1903	On the eve of the holy Āṣārhi Pūrṇimā, Kṛpāśaraṇa Bhikkhu spent a rainy retreat ( <i>Vassa</i> ) at Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata, which was ready to launch for devotees and monastic members. It is worth noting that Guṇālāṅkāra Mahāsthābīra (1874–1924), an eminent Bengali Buddhist monk, traveled from Chattogram to Kolkata to visit Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. Due to his extensive knowledge of Buddhism and abilities in compiling Dharma poetries, the most Venerable Guṇālāṅkāra Mahāsthābīra was also known as “Jñānaratna Kabidhajjā”. In the same year, Pūrṇacandra Baṛuṃyā, also known as Pūrṇānanda Sāmī, a well-educated Dharma endeavor, was ordained as a Buddhist monk by Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō. Pūrṇānanda Sāmī (1878–1928) was considered Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō’s first disciple.
1905	The Tibetan spiritual leader, Tasi Lama, was warmly welcomed and respected by Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra on December 31. In the same year, the Prince of Wales of the United Kingdom paid a visit to Kolkata. The Bengal government hosted a reception at which, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō met with the Prince of Wales at the time and bestowed a Buddhist blessing on him.
1906	Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō ordained Nagēndralāla Baṛuṃyā as a novice ( <i>sāmaṇera</i> or <i>pabbajjā</i> ) on the eve of Māghī pūrṇimā. For the sake of Nagēndralāla Sāmaṇera’s esteemed Buddhist education, he sent him to study higher Dharma Studies on Ceylon Island (present-day Sri Lanka).
1907	The District Divisional Commissioner of Lucknow Division aided Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō in obtaining a 7200 square foot (10 kāṭhā) plot of land in the Lucknow District of British India for the purpose of establishing a sister institution of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. He named the Lucknow

	institution “Lucknow Bodhisattva Bihāra”. In the same year, he founded a sister organization of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā called “Shimla Baud’dha Samiti” in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Northern India.
1908	On the eve of the holy Āṣārhī Pūrṇimā, a monthly basis Buddhist journal named “Jagatjyōti” was published jointly edited by Guṇālaṅkāra Mahāsthābīra and Sāmaṇera Pūrṇānanda Sāmī. In the same year, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō assigned responsibility for maintaining the Lucknow Bodhisattva Bihāra construction site to Kālikumāra Bhikkhu. Another Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā sister institution was established in Dibrugarh, Assam. Kṛpāśaraṇa returned to Burma (present Myanmar) on a pilgrimage.
1909	Kṛpāśaraṇa returned to his birthplace Unainpūrā (Patiya subdistrict of Caṭṭagrāma district, present-day Bangladesh) to attend the funeral of his teacher, the second Saṅgharāja, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābīra. Both Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābīra and Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō were born in the same village, Unainpūrā, by coincidence. The same year, he founded the “Guṇālaṅkāra Library” at the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata. On December 28, he brought to the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra a rare stoned Aṣṭadhātu (eight metal or <i>octo-alloy</i> ) Buddha statue, which was 5 ½ feet in height. A chief Buddhist monk from Akyab (present-day Myanmar) offered 6,000 takes to purchase and establish the Aṣṭadhātu Buddha statue.
1910	The thirteenth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Thupten Gyatso Jigdral Chokley Namgyal (February 12, 1876 - December 17, 1933) was invited by the British Indian Government to visit West Bengal. Kṛpāśaraṇa invited the thirteenth Dalai Lama to pay a visit to the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. The noble community of the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, led by Kṛpāśaraṇa, welcomed the thirteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet with open arms. Apart from spiritual visitors, a number of representatives of the British Indian Government paid a visit to the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra that year. Mr. Butler and Mr. Kairail, both British Indian high-ranked officers, paid visits to the

	Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra on January 23 and February 12, respectively. Kṛpāśaraṇa traveled to Darjeeling in July to establish a sister institution to the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. The same year, he called for a mass youth congregation at Kolkata's Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra.
1911	Kṛpāśaraṇa visited Sri Lanka on March 18 after being invited by Anāgarika Dharmapāla (September 17, 1864 - April 29, 1933). The following year, the Central government hosted a reception in Delhi, where he, accompanied by Guṇālaṅkāra Mahāsthābīra, reunited with the Prince of Wales for the second time and bestowed a Buddhist blessing on him.
1912	Kṛpāśaraṇa traveled to Lucknow and Delhi with Anāgarika Dharmapāla. Students from Chattogram studying in Kolkata organized a congregation in which students from all religions, including Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, actively participated. He established a student dormitory in Kolkata to assist Buddhist students in Chattogram and elsewhere. In the same year, he visited Assam for philanthropic and missionary purposes.
1913	Baudha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra was built as a two-story structure. Kṛpāśaraṇa Charity Elementary School was founded. For the first time, a female Buddhist organization, "Baud'dha Mahilā Sam'milānī," was founded in Kolkata at Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra.
1914	Inspired by Kṛpāśaraṇa, the Vice-chancellor of the University of Kolkata, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee (June 19, 1864 - May 25, 1924) and the British-Indian high-ranking officer, Mr. Butler, recommended a brilliant Bengali scholar, Benimadhab Barua (December 31, 1888 – March 23, 1948), who received a government scholarship to study in London. As a result, B. M. Barua received an MA in Greek and Modern European Philosophy from the University of London. He received a D. Lit (Doctor of Literature) degree from the same institution in 1917. Dr. B. M. Barua was the first Asian to obtain a D. Lit degree; his dissertation was titled "Indian Philosophy - its Origin and Growth from the Vedas to the Buddha."
1915	Anāgarika Dharmapāla was invited by Kṛpāśaraṇa to visit Chattogram in modern-day Bangladesh, where he had been honored and respected by the Bengali Buddhist community. In the same year, a memorable ceremony honoring Kṛpāśaraṇa took place

	at Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, which Anāgarika Dharmapāla and Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee attended. During this special ceremony, a marble statue of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō was erected at Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. This year, he reached another milestone in his effort to establish a sister institution to Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Ranchi, the state capital of Jharkhand. On December 6,
	Ranchi's institution received former registration from the British-Indian Government.
1916	Kṛpāśaraṇa established another charity school for working students who can manage their time in the evening after finishing their daily duties. Guṇālankāra Mahāsthabīra, his lifelong Dharma colleague, died this year. The street in front of Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra was renamed "Buddhist Temple Street" after approval from the Kolkata Municipality Office, and the name has remained the same.
1917	Sir Thomas Gibson-Carmichael (March 18, 1859 - January 16, 1926), a Scottish-British Liberal politician and colonial administrator, visited Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra on February 28. This year was one of the most pleasurable for Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō because it marked the return of Dr. Benimadhab Barua (B. M. Barua) at the end of his successful completion of a D. Lit degree from the University of London. The noble community of Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra organized a felicitation to celebrate Dr. B. M. Barua's achievement, which was organized by Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō. Sir Dēbaprasāda presided as the chief guest at this congratulatory ceremony. In the same year, he traveled to Bhutan, a Himalayan country.
1918	On May 28, a new branch of Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra was opened in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. Mrs. Jennie, a professor at Bethune College in Kolkata, led "Mahilā Sam'milānī" at the Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra.
1919	In Darjeeling, devotees, and followers celebrated Kṛpāśaraṇa's 54th birthday with reverence. The majesty of Bardhaman, King Bijaṃ Cāṁda Mahatāba, offered a plot of land for the establishment of a Buddhist monastery. In the same year, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō went to a Buddhist fair in Sitakundo, Bangladesh.

1920	On April 10, Mr. Ronaldsay, a representative of the British colonial empire who ruled the Bengal region, paid a visit to Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. In order to facilitate receiving the award, “Sambud’dhā Cakrabartī” by Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kolkata), Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō organized a congratulatory program
	at Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. This year was notable for another reason: Śībānanda Bhāratī, a Hindu ascetic, was ordained as a Buddhist monk under the noble guidance and preceptorship of Kṛpāśaraṇa. After becoming a Buddhist monk, Śībānanda Bhāratī was renamed Bōdhānanda Bhikkhu.
1921	Kṛpāśaraṇa founded a branch of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in his birthplace, Unainpūrā. The old monastery of Unainpūrā was renovated and rebuilt with the help of the noble villages. In the same year, he established another branch of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in the Chattogram Hill Tract (CHT) area of Rangamati.
1922	Kṛpāśaraṇa established a branch of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in Jamshedpur, Tatanagar. A 60,480-square-foot (1 Bighā and 1 kāthā) plot of land was offered to Kṛpāśaraṇa by a prominent Tata company for the establishment of a Buddhist monastery and meditation center in Jamshedpur, Tatanagar.
1924	Kṛpāśaraṇa called for an international Buddhist conference to be held in Kolkata. He built a <i>Bhikṣu Sīmā</i> or Upasatha Hall and laid the groundwork for Buddha Dhatu Caitya (a monument where the Buddha’s holy relics are restored) in Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. During the Buddhist lent day, monastic members gather in <i>Bhikṣu Sīmā</i> (ordination hall) to recite Pātimokkha, whereas Buddha Dhatu Caitya is a monument where devotees restore the Buddha’s relics to pay veneration and respect.
1925	Kṛpāśaraṇa founded a Buddhist monastery in Shilong. He also visited his newly established temple in Darjeeling.
1926	Kṛpāśaraṇa passed away on Friday, April 30, in Kolkata.

1927	Kṛpāśaraṇa's body was returned to his birthplace, Unainpūrā, as per his final wish. The grand funeral ceremony was led by Buddhist monks and organized by a large number of devotees and followers of Kṛpāśaraṇa and was held in the spiritual village of Unainpūrā.
------	--

## VI. CONCLUSION

Throughout his life, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, who had an altruistic and philanthropic nature, continued his humanitarian activities for Boṅgabhūmi's social and educational welfare as well as moral advancement. His early association with Buddhism and Buddhist teachings undoubtedly grew into his intrinsic compassionate nature. Inquiring into Kṛpāśaraṇa's life reveals that he set up his career path as a philanthropist, following in the Buddha's footsteps to go forth for the welfare of the multitude and the benefit of many sentient beings (*Bahujaṇ-hitāya Bahujaṇ-sukhāya*).<sup>58</sup> In recognition of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's selfless contributions, expressing his dignity and tireless welfare services for the benefit of society, the devotees and followers of Boṅgabhūmi conferred upon him the honorific title of "Karmayōgi". Since then, he has been widely renowned as "Karmayōgi Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō".

Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō was far ahead of his time when it came to philanthropic endeavors to establish the splendid Buddhist institutions: "Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā" and "Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra" and their noble branches. Moreover, his unconditional service for educational welfare, such as funding schools and colleges in affiliation with the leading institutions, made a notable contribution to the advancement of education in the rural areas of Boṅgabhūmi. Kṛpāśaraṇa persisted in his humanitarian efforts despite all of his hardships and obstacles, just like a Bodhisattva who generated the thought of awakening (*bodhicitta*) for the benefit of all sentient beings until they attained ultimate liberation.<sup>59</sup>

Since the beginning of the last century, the magnificent works and legacies of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō have been enriching Bengali society. Kṛpāśaraṇa was a source of inspiration for his charitable endeavors. Following in the footsteps of Kṛpāśaraṇa, several Theravāda monks made notable contributions to the social and educational welfare in Boṅgabhūmi, including Biśud'dhānanda Mahāthērō, Jyōtipāla Mahāthērō; Śud'dhānanda Mahāthērō; Prajñābansā Mahāthērō; Dr. Bōdhipāla Mahāthērō; Saṅghapriya Mahāthērō; Śasanarakṣitā Mahāthērō; Śaranasēna Mahāthērō, etc. Thus, Bengali communities in Boṅgabhūmi reverently recall the contributions of Karmayōgi Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō as long as the people of the territory of Bengal have kept going to honor their legacies and heritage.

<sup>58</sup> See S IV. 5, 237.

<sup>59</sup> Jamspal (2019): 2 - 20.



## Abbreviations

A	<i>Āṅguttara Nikāya</i>
D	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
S	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
Dha-a	<i>Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā</i>

References to *Pāli* texts refer to the *Pāli* Text Society (PTS) editions.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Āṅguttara Nikāya*, Ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1885 - 1900. Tr. F. L. Woodward and E.M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1932 - 1995.
- Dhammapada*, Ed. S. Sumaṅgala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K. R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.
- Dīgha Nikāya*, Ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.
- Khuddakapāṭha*, Ed. Ven. Ñāṇamoli, *The Minor Readings and the Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, PTS, London, 2015.
- Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed. V. Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.
- Brahmacārī, Silānanda. (1950). *Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa* (কর্মযোগী কৃপাশরণ) [Karmayogi Kripasharan]. Kolkata: Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra.
- Bodhipala, Bhikkhu. (2005). *Kripasaran: An Epitome of Buddhist Revival*. Kolkata: Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā.
- Barua, B. (1921). *A History of Pre-Buddhist Indian Philosophy*. Calcutta: The University of Calcutta Press.
- Barua, D. K. (2021). *Śrad'dhēya Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō: Bhāratabarṣē Thēravāda Baud'dhōdharmēra Nabajāgaranēra Pathikṛt* (শ্রদ্ধয়ে কৃপাশরণ মহাথেরো: ভারতবর্ষে থেরোবাদ বৌদ্ধধর্মেরে নবজাগরণেরে পথকৃৎ) [The contribution Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō for reinstalling Thēravāda Buddhism in Indian Subcontinent]. In S. B. Diamond, S. B. Chowdhury, et al. (Eds.), *Jyōtirmayā Dharmasen* (জ্যোতর্ময় ধর্মসেনে) [Walking into the light of Dharmasen]. Chattogram: Purba Publishing, p. 209 - 212.
- Barua, B. P. (2007). *Buddhism in Bengal*. Kolkata: Barun Kundu.

- Barua, S. 2017. *Bāṇlādēśē'r Baud'dha: Itihāsa-Aitihya O Aitihya* (বাঙালীর বৌদ্ধঃ ইতিহাস ও ঐতিহ্য) [Buddhism in Bengal: history and tradition]. Dhaka: Bangladesh University Grand Commission.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu, (Trans.). (2000). *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Chowdhury, S. B. Historical Legends of the Buddha in the Region of Bongabhumī. In C. Bruntz & B. Schedneck (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Lived Buddhism* (online ed., Oxford Academic, 22 Feb. 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhdb/9780197658697.013.34>, accessed 14 Mar. 2025.
- Chowdhury, S. B. (2024). A Forgotten Inscription on the Narrative Study of Buddhist Transmissions in Boṅgabhūmī: From the Buddha's Time to the Modern Period. *Studia Orientalia Slovaca*, 23 (2): 95 – 119.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2018). The Legacy of Atiśa: A Reflection on Textual, Historical and Doctrinal Developments to Enrich Buddha Dhamma from the Azimuth of Vikramśilā to Modern Era. *JLABU: Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities* (Vol. 11, No.1), edited by Weerasak Jayadhammo. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press, p. 414 - 426.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2020). The Rise and Fall of Indian Buddhism. In *Walking in The Footsteps of the Buddha*, edited by Dixey, Richard and Wangmo Dixey. California: the light of the Buddhadharma Foundation International (LBDFI) and Dharma Mangalam Press, Ratna Ling, California, USA, p. 35 - 210.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2021a). "Buddhist Transmission in Bangladesh: Past through Present". In *Amitabha* (Issue no. 20), edited by Shyamal Barua. Chattogram: Ani Printing & Publications, p. 49 - 52.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2021b). "A Commemorative Biography of His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero". In *Jyōtirmayā Dharmasen* (জ্যোতির্ময় ধর্মসেনে) [Walking into the light of Dharmasen], edited by Sajib Barua Diamond, Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury, et al. Chattogram: Purba Publishing, p. 436-437.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2022). *Walking into the Light of Dhamma*. Songkhla: International Buddhist College, Thailand. Accessed April 28, 2022. <http://ibc-elibrary.thanhsiang.org/node/981>
- Gleig, A. (2021). *Engaged Buddhism*. London: Oxford University Press. Accessed June 30, 2024. [https://buddhistuniversity.net/content/articles/engaged-buddhism\\_gleig-ann](https://buddhistuniversity.net/content/articles/engaged-buddhism_gleig-ann)
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2020). Enacting Social Change Through Meditation. In the *Oxford Handbook of Meditation, Oxford Handbooks Online*, edited by Miguel Farias, David Brazier, et al. London, and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hemendu Bikash, Chowdhury. (1990). *Jagatjyōti: A Special Edition Commemorating Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's 125th Birthday*. Kolkata: Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1992). *Commemorating the 100th Years of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā*. Kolkata: Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā.

- \_\_\_\_\_. (2014). *Jagatjyōti: 150th Birthday Tribute to Anagarika Dharmapala and Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee*. Kolkata: Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā.
- Jamspal, Lozang, (Trans.). (2019). *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* The Bodhisattva Way of Life. Ladakh: Ladakhratnashiridipika Leh.
- King, Sallie B. (2009). *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Hawaii: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Roy, Ajay. (2018). *The Life of Kripasaran Mahashtavir*. Accessed June 22, 2024. [https://dharma-documentaries.net/life-of-kripasaran-mahashtavir?fbclid=IwAR06brdRvtZymwdPLE0cN3Sx\\_vtkmor3dTOwN7O\\_4xVOvnCG8EUNLg3DisE](https://dharma-documentaries.net/life-of-kripasaran-mahashtavir?fbclid=IwAR06brdRvtZymwdPLE0cN3Sx_vtkmor3dTOwN7O_4xVOvnCG8EUNLg3DisE)
- Ratanasree, Bhikkhu. (2022). *Jagatjyōti: A Special Edition Tribute to Achariya Hemendhu Chowdhury*. Kolkata: Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā.
- Sunandapriya, Bhikkhu. (2010). "Bāṇālir Paricchanna Dhārār Baud'dha" (বাঙালীর পরচিহ্নন ধারার বৌদ্ধ) [The pristine heart of Bengali Buddhists], In *Jagatjyōti* (জগতজ্যোতি) [Jagatjyoti], edited by Hemendu Bikash Chowdhury. Kolkata: Dharmāṅkūra Baud'dha Sabhā.
- Shimul Barua. (2012). *Bānlāra Baud'dha: Itihāsa-Aitihya O Sanskr̥ti* (বাংলার বৌদ্ধঃ ইতিহাস ঐতিহ্য ও সংস্কৃতি.) [Buddhism in Bangladesh: History, heritage, and culture]. Chattogram: Anōmā Sanskr̥ti Gōṣṭi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2015). *Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō Smārakagrantha* (কর্মযোগী কৃপাশরণ মহাথের স্মারকগ্রন্থ) [A Memorial book in honoring Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō]. Chattogram: Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō Sārdhaśatajanmaśatabarṣa Udayāpana Pariṣada.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2019). *Bēṇimādhaba O Uttarādhikāra* (বেনীমাধব ও উত্তরাধিকার) [The Legacy of Benimadhab]. Chattogram: The Kharimāṭi Printers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2021). *Mānaba Cintanē Bud'dha Cintā-Jāgarāṇē* (মানব চিন্তনে বুদ্ধ চিন্তনে-জাগরণে) [The Buddha's insights for Humankind]. Chattogram: The Kharimāṭi Printers.
- Mahāsthābira, Dharmādhār. (2009). "Bānlādēse Sad'dharma Punarut'thānē Pradhāna Ācāryagana" (বাংলাদেশে সদ্ধর্ম উত্থানে প্রধান আচার্যগণ) [The contributions of Buddhist monks for reinstalling Buddhism in Bangladesh]. In *Buddhism in Bengal*, edited by Brahmanda Pratap Barua. Kolkata: Barun Kundu, p. 169 - 180.
- Mahāsthābira, Dharmasen. (2009). "Yugaśraṣṭā Saṅgharāja Ācāriyā Pūrṇacāra" (যুগস্রষ্টি সংঘরাজ আচারিয়া পূর্ণাচার) [The timeless legacy of Ācārya Pūrṇacāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābira]. In *Mahājñānī mahājana* (মহাজ্ঞানী মহাজন) [The Wisdom of great scholars], edited by Sathipriya Barua. Chittagong: Gandhara Art Press, p. 16 - 19.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2021). "Unainpūrā Lankārāma" (উনাইনপুরা লঙ্কারাম) [Unainpura Lankaram]. In *Jyōtirmayā Dharmasen* (জ্যোতির্ময় ধর্মসেন) [Walking into the light of Dharmasen], edited by Sajib Barua Diamond, Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury, et al. Chattogram: Purba Publishing, p. 436 - 437.

- Muṭsud'dhi, Umēśa Candra. (1988). *Barua Jāti* (বড়ুয়া জাতি) [The Baruas]. Kolkata: Dharmāṅkūra Baud'dha Sabhā.
- Pathak, Suniti Kuma. 2022. *Baud'dha Prabandhamālā* (বৌদ্ধ প্রবন্ধমালা) [Essays on Buddhism]. Kolkata: Dharmāṅkūra Baud'dha Sabhā.

# UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Efendi Hansen Ng\*

**Abstract:**

This paper explores the Buddhist principles of unity, inclusivity, and compassion, focusing on their relevance to promoting world peace and sustainable development. Anchored in the theme of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025, “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development,” the discussion underscores the transformative role of Buddhist compassion in fostering shared responsibility for human development. By examining doctrinal teachings, historical practices, and contemporary applications, the study highlights how Buddhist insights can guide humanity toward equitable and harmonious coexistence. This paper argues that by integrating Buddhist compassion into global frameworks, we can address pressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

**Keywords:** Unity, inclusivity, compassion, sustainable development, engaged Buddhism.

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Day of Vesak serves as a global platform to celebrate the birth, enlightenment, and parinirvana of the Buddha while also fostering dialogue on contemporary issues through a Buddhist lens. This annual observance, recognized by the United Nations in 1999, emphasizes Buddhism’s contribution to global ethics, interreligious harmony, and the promotion of human dignity.<sup>1</sup>

---

\*Vice Chairman, Mahayana Buddhist College Indonesia.

<sup>1</sup> Gethin, R. (1998). *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press.

The 2025 Vesak celebration in Vietnam, themed “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development”, offers an opportune moment to reflect on the enduring relevance of Buddhist teachings. In the face of global challenges such as climate change, poverty, inequality, and cultural fragmentation, this year’s theme reinforces the capacity of Buddhist principles to guide moral and sustainable choices in public policy and personal life.<sup>2</sup>

This paper examines the role of unity, inclusivity, and compassion in advancing world peace and sustainable development. Through textual analysis and applied examples, it highlights how ancient teachings, such as the Four Brahmavihāras and the Noble Eightfold Path, remain relevant for fostering mutual understanding and ecological awareness.<sup>3</sup>

It also delves into the sub-theme, “Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development”, to explore how collective efforts, grounded in compassion, can address modern global challenges. Acts of Buddhist compassion, such as interfaith cooperation, disaster relief, and educational outreach, reveal how *karuṇā* is not merely a contemplative ideal but a pragmatic ethic for social transformation.<sup>4</sup>

## II. BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY

The teachings of the Buddha emphasize interconnectedness, which forms the foundation for unity and inclusivity. This emphasis is not merely philosophical but deeply practical, offering a blueprint for how societies might navigate the complexities of modern interdependence. The idea that our actions impact others - both near and far - resonates strongly in today’s globalized world, where climate change, pandemics, and economic crises transcend borders.

The doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) posits that all phenomena arise in interdependence, underscoring the interconnected nature of existence.<sup>5</sup> This principle serves as a reminder of humanity’s shared fate and the importance of collective action in addressing global challenges. In ecological discourse, this teaching aligns with systems thinking, where the wellbeing of the whole depends on the balanced functioning of its parts.<sup>6</sup>

Inclusivity is further rooted in the Buddha’s teaching of the *Four Brahmavihāras* (divine abodes): loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). These

<sup>2</sup> Harvey, P. (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Queen, C., & King, S. B. (1996). *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. SUNY Press.

<sup>4</sup> Sivaraksa, S. (2005). *The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the 21st Century*. Silkworm Books.

<sup>5</sup> Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha Taught*. Grove Press.

<sup>6</sup> Kaza, S. (2000). *The Attentive Heart: Conversations with Trees*. Ballantine Books.



qualities encourage individuals to transcend social, cultural, and economic barriers, fostering harmonious coexistence. Their cultivation fosters not only inner peace but also social engagement grounded in ethical responsibility and empathy.<sup>7</sup> As such, these teachings serve as a moral compass for shaping inclusive communities, public discourse, and policy grounded in dignity and mutual respect.

### III. BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE

#### 3.1. Nonviolence (*ahimsa*) as a principle of peace

The concept of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, is central to Buddhist ethics. It is not merely the absence of physical harm but a proactive commitment to kindness, patience, and the alleviation of suffering in all interactions. The principle calls for cultivating thoughts, speech, and actions that do not injure, even subtly, thereby nurturing an environment of trust and security within families, communities, and nations.

By abstaining from harming others, individuals contribute to a culture of peace. This includes not only abstaining from overt acts of violence but also refraining from verbal abuse, discrimination, or neglect that can erode human dignity. In a world rife with conflict, where reactive aggression often dominates responses to perceived injustice, the practice of *ahimsa* offers a path to transform retaliation into understanding and compassion.<sup>8</sup>

The Buddha's advocacy for nonviolence is exemplified in the Dhammapada: "Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the eternal rule."<sup>9</sup> This verse reflects not only a moral imperative but also a profound psychological insight into the cycle of violence. It asserts that retaliation only perpetuates suffering, whereas love and forgiveness break the chain.

This teaching provides a foundation for conflict resolution and reconciliation. Its relevance is increasingly evident in peacebuilding initiatives across the world, where Buddhist approaches have informed practices of dialogue, restorative justice, and trauma healing.<sup>10</sup> Embedding *ahimsa* in political, educational, and community frameworks enables societies to resolve tensions constructively and fosters inclusive relationships built on mutual respect.

#### 3.2. Meditation and mindfulness for inner peace

Inner peace is a prerequisite for world peace. This core tenet of Buddhist philosophy emphasizes that sustainable peace on a societal and global level must be rooted in the personal transformation of individuals. When people are internally fragmented or governed by anger, fear, or delusion, their external

---

<sup>7</sup> Salzberg, S. (2002). *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Shambhala Publications.

<sup>8</sup> Keown, D. (2005). *Buddhism and Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Dhammapada, Verse 5. Translation by Narada Mahathera.

<sup>10</sup> Queen, C.S., & King, S. B. (Eds.). (1996). *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. SUNY Press.

actions inevitably reflect this unrest. True peace, therefore, is not merely the absence of war or conflict but the presence of inner clarity, compassion, and non-attachment.<sup>11</sup>

Buddhist meditation practices, particularly mindfulness (*sati*), cultivate awareness and equanimity, enabling individuals to approach conflicts with clarity and compassion. By consistently observing one's thoughts and emotions without clinging or aversion, mindfulness allows for greater self-understanding and emotional balance. This form of introspective training refines the mind, softens reactivity, and builds the mental stability needed to engage in nonviolent communication and empathetic listening - skills essential to conflict resolution.<sup>12</sup>

#### IV. BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

##### 4.1. Right livelihood and ethical economics

The Noble Eightfold Path's emphasis on right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) advocates for ethical and sustainable economic practices. In Buddhist ethics, livelihood is not merely a means of economic survival but a spiritual practice that should reflect harmlessness (*ahiṃsā*), compassion, and moral integrity.<sup>13</sup> The Buddha discouraged trades involving weapons, intoxicants, human trafficking, animal slaughter, and poisons – professions considered destructive to both individual karma and collective welfare.<sup>14</sup>

This principle discourages professions that harm living beings or the environment, promoting economic activities that align with ecological and social well-being. In the context of today's global economy, where profit often takes precedence over people and the planet, right livelihood serves as a call to reimagine economic models rooted in fairness, sustainability, and mindful consumption.<sup>15</sup> Ethical businesses grounded in Buddhist principles aim not only to avoid harm but to actively contribute to community resilience, environmental protection, and social justice.

Examples of Buddhist-inspired economic models, such as “Gross National Happiness” in Bhutan, illustrate how spiritual values can shape national development strategies.<sup>16</sup> By integrating the right livelihood into policy and education, societies can foster economies that are compassionate, inclusive,

---

<sup>11</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. (2003). *Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community, and the World*. Free Press.

<sup>12</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey, P. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>14</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya* 5 (AN 5.177). The Five Trades Not to Be Taken Up.

<sup>15</sup> Schumacher, E. F. (1973). *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. Blond & Briggs.

<sup>16</sup> Ura, K., Alkire, S., Zangmo, T., & Wangdi, K. (2012). *A Short Guide to Gross National Happiness Index*. Centre for Bhutan Studies.

and sustainable - aligning individual economic choices with the broader goal of harmonious coexistence.

#### 4.2. Environmental Ethics in Buddhism

Buddhism's reverence for nature is evident in texts such as the Jātakas, which recount stories of the Buddha's previous lives, often emphasizing the interdependence of all forms of life. These tales portray animals, trees, rivers, and even celestial bodies as sentient or symbolically significant, deserving of compassion and ethical regard.<sup>17</sup> One notable narrative - the story of the Bodhisatta offering his body to a starving tigress - vividly illustrates the Buddhist ideal of *dāna* (generosity) and the extension of loving-kindness (*mettā*) to all sentient beings.<sup>18</sup>

The foundational Buddhist concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination) provides the philosophical framework for understanding ecological interdependence. Just as no being exists in isolation, no ecosystem is independent of human actions. The destruction of forests, contamination of rivers, and extinction of species ultimately contribute to human suffering, highlighting the moral imperative of environmental responsibility.<sup>19</sup>

Modern Buddhist responses to ecological degradation are increasingly visible in Indonesia, a nation rich in biodiversity and cultural pluralism. In Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist temple and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, environmental efforts have merged with cultural and spiritual preservation. Monastics and lay communities have collaborated with local authorities to promote eco-tourism models that integrate mindfulness practices with nature.<sup>20</sup> Events such as the annual Waisak Festival now include forest clean-ups and tree-planting ceremonies near the temple complex, reflecting a holistic view of spiritual celebration and ecology.

Buddhist organizations in Indonesia, such as WALUBI (Perwakilan Umat Buddha Indonesia) and Sangha Agung Indonesia, have launched initiatives to raise ecological awareness among youth and urban populations. In Jakarta and Surabaya, temples have adopted "green temple" programs, introducing recycling stations, solar energy, and water conservation systems as practical expressions of Buddhist ethics in daily life.<sup>21</sup> These efforts resonate with the Five Precepts and the Noble Eightfold Path, particularly the principle of Right Livelihood, encouraging ethical consumption and sustainability.

---

<sup>17</sup> Collins, S. (1982). *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Cowell, E. B. (Ed.). (1895). *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>19</sup> De Silva, P. (1998). *Environmental Philosophy and Ethics in Buddhism*. Macmillan.

<sup>20</sup> Walton, M. (2018). *Buddhism and Development: Communities in Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia*. Routledge.

<sup>21</sup> Yin, W., & Santoso, H. (2021). *Greening the Dharma: Sustainable Temple Practices in Indonesia*. *Buddhist Journal of Southeast Asia*.

Furthermore, Indonesian Buddhist communities have extended compassion to non-human life through wildlife rescue campaigns and vegetarian advocacy. In 2022, members of the Theravāda Dhamma Society partnered with environmental NGOs to support mangrove reforestation in North Sumatra, aligning ecological recovery with meditative retreats for lay practitioners. Such projects embody the spirit of non-harming (*ahiṃsā*) and promote a deeper awareness of humanity's role in safeguarding the planet.

Internationally, Indonesia's Buddhists have participated in regional forums on Buddhist environmental ethics, including contributions to the Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective. These engagements underscore how Buddhist teachings in the Indonesian context contribute meaningfully to transnational efforts in climate justice and ecological harmony.<sup>22</sup>

By aligning traditional Buddhist values with modern ecological realities, Indonesian Buddhist communities offer a compelling model for spiritual environmentalism. Their lived practices affirm that the Buddhist path is not only a route to personal liberation but also a foundation for collective environmental healing.

## V. COMPASSION IN ACTION: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

### 5.1. Altruism and Social Engagement

The *Mahayana* concept of the *bodhisattva* - an individual who vows to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings - epitomizes the ideal of compassion in action.<sup>23</sup> This foundational figure does not seek liberation for personal attainment but remains within the world to serve others through acts of kindness, sacrifice, and ethical engagement.

This altruistic spirit has served as a powerful catalyst for social transformation across Buddhist communities. In Indonesia, the principle of *karuṇā* is reflected in the multifaceted work of Buddhist organizations such as Yayasan Buddha Tzu Chi Indonesia. Inspired by the *bodhisattva* ethos, this organization has established hospitals, donated housing to disaster victims, and mobilized thousands of volunteers during national crises, including the 2004 tsunami in Aceh and the 2018 Lombok earthquake.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, education remains a crucial avenue for compassion in action. Institutions such as SMA Maitreyawira and Sekolah Cinta Kasih not only provide formal education but also integrate character-building programs rooted in Buddhist values. Students engage in social projects such as food drives, visits to orphanages, and environmental conservation campaigns, fostering empathy and civic consciousness from a young age.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective (GBCCC). (2015). *The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change*.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, P. (2009). *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. Routledge.

<sup>24</sup> Yap, M. (2017). *Tzu Chi's Mission in Indonesia: The Spirit of the Bamboo Bank*. Indonesian Journal of Religious Studies.

<sup>25</sup> Setiawan, I., & Hendra, D. (2020). *Education and Service: Buddhist School Models in*

The spirit of compassionate action also extends into interreligious cooperation. Paramita Foundation, for instance, has worked alongside Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities to address poverty and health disparities in underdeveloped regions of East Java and North Sulawesi. This interfaith engagement demonstrates the relevance of Buddhist compassion in multicultural societies and reinforces the path of the bodhisattva as a bridge-builder in pluralistic contexts.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, the Young Buddhist Association of Indonesia (YBAI) has become a platform for youth engagement in global ethical issues. Through digital campaigns and international forums, Indonesian Buddhist youth actively participate in movements for climate justice, social equity, and mental wellness, reinforcing the Mahayana view that bodhisattvas remain in samsara to uplift others.

These practices illustrate that altruism, as expressed in the bodhisattva ideal, transcends doctrinal discourse and finds profound expression in real-world contexts. The Indonesian Buddhist experience affirms that compassion in action is not limited to individual virtue but constitutes a collective responsibility toward human development and societal well-being.

## 5.2. Engaged Buddhism

Engaged Buddhism, a modern movement rooted in traditional teachings, emphasizes the application of Buddhist principles to address social, political, and environmental issues.<sup>27</sup> This dynamic strand of contemporary Buddhism does not retreat from worldly affairs but rather embraces the world as a vital arena for compassion and ethical action. The emphasis is not merely on personal enlightenment but on collective liberation and systemic transformation through the lens of the Dharma.

One of the most influential proponents of Engaged Buddhism is Thich Nhat Hanh, whose teachings and activism during the Vietnam War embodied the union of mindfulness and nonviolent resistance. He advocated for a “mindful society” in which each citizen recognizes the suffering of others and responds with care and presence.<sup>28</sup> His vision of “interbeing” highlights the deep interdependence among all beings and environments, making every act of social and environmental responsibility an expression of Buddhist practice.

In Southeast Asia, Engaged Buddhism has taken diverse forms. In Indonesia, the tradition has found unique expression in grassroots initiatives led by Buddhist youth groups, such as Dharmaduta Mahasiswa Buddhis Indonesia (DMBI). These collectives organize workshops on social justice,

---

Contemporary Indonesia. *Journal of Humanistic Education*.

<sup>26</sup> Ng, E. H. (2023). *Compassion in Action: Case Studies of Buddhist Interfaith Humanitarian Projects in Southeast Asia*. Mahāyāna Insight Review.

<sup>27</sup> King, S. B. (2009). *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. University of Hawaii Press.

<sup>28</sup> Hanh, T. N. (1993). *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change*. Parallax Press.

mental health awareness, and environmental stewardship in regions affected by poverty and marginalization.<sup>29</sup> They incorporate Buddhist ethics into civic education, community service, and intercultural dialogue, promoting a Dharma that is responsive to the challenges of the 21st century.

Engaged Buddhism also contributes to environmental justice. The Buddhist Community of Borobudur, located near the ancient Mahayana temple complex, has launched conservation efforts to protect sacred heritage sites and surrounding ecosystems. These efforts draw from traditional ecological wisdom found in Buddhist texts, coupled with modern environmental science, demonstrating how the Dharma can guide sustainable development policies at the local level.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, Engaged Buddhism provides a valuable framework for peacebuilding in regions prone to religious conflict. In cities like Medan and Yogyakarta, Buddhist leaders have joined interfaith peace forums to address extremism and promote inclusive citizenship. These collaborations, grounded in principles such as right speech and non-harming, mirror the ethical activism practiced by historical figures like the Buddha and Emperor Ashoka, who both advanced nonviolence through statecraft and teaching.<sup>31</sup>

Through its emphasis on lived ethics, structural awareness, and compassionate action, Engaged Buddhism reaffirms that the path to enlightenment is not detached from the world's suffering but is intricately intertwined with efforts to alleviate it in every sphere of life.

## VI. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN APPLYING BUDDHIST INSIGHTS

### 6.1. Addressing structural inequalities

While Buddhist teachings advocate for equality, implementing these ideals in a world marked by structural inequalities remains challenging. Buddhist philosophy teaches the fundamental equality of all beings through the doctrine of non-self (*anattā*) and the potential for all to attain enlightenment.<sup>32</sup> However, in practice, social disparities related to class, caste, ethnicity, and gender continue to persist across societies.

To overcome these barriers, a multisectoral approach is necessary - one that involves the synergy between religious leaders, governmental institutions, and civil society organizations. Religious communities can play a transformative role by raising ethical awareness and empowering marginalized populations. For example, in Indonesia, Buddhist organizations such as Majelis Buddhayana

---

<sup>29</sup> Ardiyanto, R. (2021). Youth Buddhist Engagement in Indonesian Civil Society. *Southeast Asian Buddhist Review*.

<sup>30</sup> Kusuma, D. (2019). Borobudur Buddhist Communities and Environmental Protection. *Journal of Religion and Environment*.

<sup>31</sup> Harvey, P. (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha Taught*. Grove Press.



Indonesia have collaborated with local governments to provide educational scholarships, health services, and livelihood training for rural communities in Central Java and West Kalimantan.<sup>33</sup>

Such initiatives draw from the Buddhist principle of *dāna* (generosity) and the commitment to compassionate action. They also exemplify how religious ethics can inspire practical solutions to social injustice. Moreover, Buddhist temples increasingly serve as community centers, offering not only spiritual guidance but also shelter for the homeless, legal aid, and counseling for women experiencing domestic violence - demonstrating the application of *karuṇā* (compassion) in structural reform.<sup>34</sup>

In addressing structural inequality, Buddhism's emphasis on interdependence offers a powerful perspective. It challenges the isolation of economic, political, and social domains and instead promotes an integrated vision of development rooted in dignity and mutual respect. As seen in Indonesia's pluralistic society, interfaith cooperation has also emerged as a critical strategy. Joint efforts between Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Confucian communities have created peace zones in conflict-prone regions such as North Sumatra, where economic programs and educational campaigns are implemented collectively.<sup>35</sup>

By aligning Buddhist values with social justice frameworks, structural inequality can be addressed not only through policy reform but also through spiritual awakening and community-driven compassion. This approach underscores that addressing inequality is not merely a matter of distribution but also one of human dignity, ethical conduct, and collective transformation.

## 6.2. Interfaith dialogue and collaboration

Unity and inclusivity necessitate interfaith dialogue. In a world shaped by religious diversity and increasing geopolitical tensions, fostering dialogue between traditions is not merely a moral aspiration but a practical necessity for peaceful coexistence and global sustainability. Buddhism, with its emphasis on nonviolence, tolerance, and understanding, offers a unique foundation for building bridges between communities.

By engaging with diverse religious traditions, Buddhism can contribute to a global ethic of compassion and cooperation. The Buddhist concept of *upāya* (skillful means) encourages practitioners to communicate in ways that resonate with others' worldviews while maintaining a commitment to ethical clarity and mutual respect.<sup>36</sup> Through shared values such as compassion,

<sup>33</sup> Ng, E. H. (2020). Buddhist Social Engagement in Rural Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Religion and Society*.

<sup>34</sup> King, S. B. (2005). *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*. University of Hawaii Press.

<sup>35</sup> . Haryanto, A. (2018). *Building Peace Through Religious Pluralism in North Sumatra*. Interfaith Dialogue Series, Indonesia Peace Foundation.

<sup>36</sup> Keown, D. (2005). *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

nonviolence, and reverence for life, interfaith efforts can transcend theological differences and inspire collective action on pressing global challenges.

The Parliament of the World's Religions has highlighted the potential of such dialogue in fostering mutual understanding. At its 2015 gathering in Salt Lake City, representatives from Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Indigenous communities jointly endorsed a declaration on climate justice - illustrating how religious traditions can unite to advocate for the planet's well-being.<sup>37</sup>

In Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, where religious pluralism is constitutionally protected and culturally practiced, interfaith initiatives have played a vital role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Buddhist leaders from Mahayana and Theravāda traditions regularly participate in forums such as the Interfaith Harmony Week and the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), collaborating with Muslim, Christian, and Hindu leaders to promote peaceful dialogue and community development.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, youth-led interfaith projects supported by Buddhist universities, such as the Buddhist Mahapajapati Institute in North Sumatra, have created platforms for joint ecological projects, interreligious education, and arts-based reconciliation programs. These initiatives not only dismantle prejudice but also empower the next generation to embody the values of unity and shared responsibility.<sup>39</sup>

As humanity confronts complex global threats - ranging from ecological collapse to ideological extremism - interfaith dialogue remains a powerful mechanism for cultivating empathy, building solidarity, and anchoring development in shared ethical principles. Within this spirit, Buddhist engagement in interfaith efforts is not simply an extension of religious diplomacy but a manifestation of its core teachings on compassion, equanimity, and universal responsibility.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The Buddhist principles of unity, inclusivity, and compassion offer profound insights for addressing the dual challenges of world peace and sustainable development. By embracing these teachings, individuals and societies can foster a culture of shared responsibility and collective action. The United Nations Day of Vesak 2025 provides a platform to explore these insights, inspiring global efforts toward a harmonious and sustainable future.

At the heart of Buddhism lies the recognition of the interconnectedness of all life. This awareness cultivates not only a sense of individual accountability but also a collective moral imperative to care for others and the planet. Unity is not merely the absence of conflict but an active engagement in building

---

<sup>37</sup> Parliament of the World's Religions. (2015). Declaration on Climate Change. Salt Lake City.

<sup>38</sup> Azra, A. (2006). *The Public Role of Religions in Indonesia*. University of Melbourne Press.

<sup>39</sup> Ng, E. H. (2022). Youth Interfaith Engagement in Buddhist Institutions in Indonesia. *Journal of Global Religious Dialogue*.

understanding and solidarity across boundaries - national, cultural, religious, and economic. In a time marked by political polarization, climate crises, and widening inequalities, Buddhist unity offers a vision of oneness grounded in empathy and mutual interdependence.

Inclusivity, likewise, is rooted in the Buddhist understanding that all beings possess the potential for awakening. This radical equality transcends social hierarchies and affirms the inherent dignity of every individual. Inclusivity in the Buddhist context is not limited to tolerance but involves an active commitment to embrace diversity, uplift the marginalized, and dissolve barriers that hinder communal flourishing. The values of loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity guide this process - not as abstract ideals but as lived practices shaping human relationships and institutional structures.

Compassion, as a foundational virtue, is both the spiritual force behind inner transformation and the ethical compass for external engagement. It demands that one not only alleviates suffering but seeks to understand its root causes. Compassion moves beyond charity to justice, beyond sympathy to solidarity. Whether expressed through right livelihood, environmental stewardship, education, or interfaith collaboration, compassion remains the ethical thread weaving individual actions into a broader tapestry of social good.

The challenges confronting humanity today - climate change, conflict, displacement, poverty, and technological disruption - cannot be resolved through policy or science alone. They require a moral reawakening and a spiritual vision that grounds action in wisdom and compassion. Buddhist teachings provide not only the tools for personal transformation but also a framework for collective ethical action. They remind us that development devoid of compassion is unsustainable, and peace without justice is fragile.

As nations and communities gather to commemorate Vesak, this moment invites more than celebration - it calls for commitment. It is a time to reflect on the Buddha's legacy not as distant history but as a living source of guidance. By integrating mindfulness, ethics, and compassion into the fabric of global development efforts, humanity can chart a path toward a more peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable future. The spirit of Vesak challenges us to see beyond individual interests and embrace a shared destiny rooted in wisdom, harmony, and universal dignity.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999).
- Dalai Lama, *The Art of Happiness* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998).
- Damien Keown, *Buddhism and Bioethics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995).
- Eknath Easwaran, *The Dhammapada* (Tomaes: Nilgiri Press, 2007).

- Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).
- Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007).
- Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (New York: Hachette Books, 1994).
- Ng, E. H. (2020). *Buddhist Social Engagement in Rural Indonesia*. Indonesian Journal of Religion and Society.
- Ng, E. H. (2022). *Youth Interfaith Engagement in Buddhist Institutions in Indonesia*. Journal of Global Religious Dialogue.
- Ng, E. H. (2023). *Compassion in Action: Case Studies of Buddhist Interfaith Humanitarian Projects in Southeast Asia*. Mahāyāna Insight Review.
- Santideva, *The Bodhicaryavatara*, trans. Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Setiawan, I., & Hendra, D. (2020). *Education and Service: Buddhist School Models in Contemporary Indonesia*. Journal of Humanistic Education.
- Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).
- Yap, M. (2017). Tzu Chi's Mission in Indonesia: *The Spirit of the Bamboo Bank*.

# CARE OF INOCHI, OR HOLISTIC SPIRITUAL CARE, OFFERED BY BUDDHIST CHAPLAINS: REALIZATION OF BUDDHIST DHARMA AND PRACTICES

Rev. Eishin (Fuminobu) Komura\*

## Abstract:

The Rinbutsuken Institute for Engaged Buddhism, founded in Tokyo in 2007, promotes “clinical Buddhism,” which addresses spiritual suffering not only in hospitals but across society. Since 2013, the institute has trained Buddhist chaplains (Rinsho Bukkyoshi) to offer emotional and spiritual care to individuals facing hardship. Their approach, termed *Care of Inochi* (いのちのケア), emphasizes holistic support—interlinking physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being.

Rinbutsuken chaplains joined Jikei University Hospital’s palliative care team in 2017 to provide compassionate end-of-life care. Over five years, they identified key categories of spiritual pain and types of chaplain involvement. Two patient cases illustrate their role in offering presence, comfort, and connection with meaning.

Rooted in Buddhist principles like loving-kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), wisdom (*prajñā*), and dependent co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*), Buddhist chaplaincy fosters healing and mutual spiritual growth. The process is not one-directional; chaplains also deepen their insight through the *Triple Wisdom*—learning, contemplation, and practice. “Strong back, soft front,” as coined by Rev. Joan Halifax, represents the ideal posture of resilience and empathy. Seven essential capacities of Buddhist chaplains were identified.

This model reveals chaplaincy as a transformative path for both caregiver and recipient, grounded in engaged Buddhist practice.

**Keywords:** *Engaged Buddhism, Buddhist chaplaincy, clinical Buddhism, spiritual care, palliative care, Rinsho Bukkyoshi, Care of Inochi, maitrī, karuṇā, pratītya-samutpāda, holistic health.*

---

\* Associate Research Fellow, Director, Japan Buddhist Council & The Rinbutsuken Institute for Engaged Buddhism

## I. THE RINBUTSUKEN INSTITUTE FOR ENGAGED BUDDHISM

The Rinbutsuken Institute for Engaged Buddhism (*Rinsho-Bukkyo-Kenkyujo*, or 臨床佛教研究所, abbreviated as “Rinbutsuken” hereafter) was established in Tokyo, Japan, in 2007.<sup>1</sup> Affiliated with the Zenseikyo Foundation & Japan Buddhist Council for Youth and Child Education (全國青少年教化協議會, or “Zenseikyo”),<sup>2</sup> it engages in comprehensive research and education on social issues and their solutions based on Buddhism.

Zenseikyo is a public interest incorporated foundation established in 1962 by over sixty Buddhist sects in Japan in cooperation with the related business enterprises. Its goal is to contribute to the healthy and sound growth of children and adolescents and support their families both in Japan and worldwide. It is developing various projects to help young people become familiar with the Buddhist teachings that do not drift in the changing world and grow as a person with a sturdy mind following the teachings. Some of the projects are:

(i) Education of the younger generation through the Buddhist teachings to help them cope with the challenges of the society, such as bullying, school absenteeism, and juvenile crimes

(ii) Aiding children in need overseas by offering education and welfare for those who live in the slums and on the streets

(iii) Natural disaster relief to aid the young people and others who are afflicted both materially and spiritually

(iv) Fostering the cooperation of the Buddhist priests and the society, including the training the practitioners to meet the various needs of the society

In the Japanese name of Rinbutsuken (*Rinsho-Bukkyo-Kenkyujo*), the word ‘rinsho’ (臨床) means “clinical,” ‘bukkyo’ (佛教) means “Buddhism,” and ‘kenkyujo’ (研究所) means “research institute.” As we approach the problems in the society from a Buddhist standpoint, we selected the word “Engaged Buddhism” as an English translation of the combination of Japanese words. We maintain the Buddhist emphasis on the practical transformation of the suffering (*duhkha* or 苦) of human society. We regard the word “clinical” not only as the bedside of sick people but also as other actual scenes of suffering in society, such as poverty, homelessness, and recluses. In this way, we intend to develop the Engaged Buddhism that meets the contemporary needs of Japanese society.<sup>3</sup>

Entering the 21st century, we see that the form of globalization that prioritizes economic development has advanced rapidly all over the world. Looking at the situation in Japan, the values steeped heavily in the primacy of economics have become dominant in society. Not only adults but also children must make decisions about their lives based on these narrow-minded

<sup>1</sup> The Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism [on line].

<sup>2</sup> Zenseikyo Foundation, Japan Buddhist Council for Youth and Child Education [on line].

<sup>3</sup> The Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism (ed.) (2013).



values. Amidst this situation, Japanese youths have begun losing their dreams, committing crimes, and withdrawing from society, sometimes choosing suicide in the end. At Rinbutsuken, we base our work firmly on this social situation.

As we establish ourselves in a holistic point of view, we research the challenges of domestic, school, and social education as well as offer mainstream society a wide range of perspectives of Buddhism about the ideal forms of education and welfare that focus on human sentiment. Further, we support Buddhist priests and religious persons to carry out their roles in the contemporary society and to conduct activities at the temple that have a great benefit to the society. We also design and provide consultation concerning educational programs.

An outline of our activities is as follows:

(i) Investigative Research

Investigation of people's awareness of Buddhism and funerals, which are the central activities of Japanese Buddhist priests and temples, as well as analysis of their underlying understanding and needs. Further investigation of temple-related activities.

(ii) Training

Holding training on activities that contemporary priests and temples are requested to and should engage in, based on our investigation and analysis.

(iii) Program development

Creating programs for young priests to expose themselves to the current social situation. Further, it creates public programs for youth education based on Buddhist educational themes.

(iv) Consulting

Conducting consultation with Buddhist priests and temples for developing activities at the temple that have a high level of public benefit and tackle contemporary issues, based on the needs of society and people.

(5) Disseminating Information

Disseminating widely through the internet and our newsletter useful information about our research, analysis, and results on activities held by temples.

## II. RINSHO BUKKYOSHI, OR BUDDHIST CHAPLAINS

The current major program among the Training (2) is to train and certify *Rinsho Bukkyoshi* (臨床佛教師), or Buddhist chaplains. A *Rinsho Bukkyoshi* is a Buddhist practitioner who faces and works on the various sufferings of the contemporary society related to birth, aging, sickness, and death and acts based on professional knowledge and practical experiences.

Recently, the role of the Buddhist practitioners in society is being reexamined in Japan, while the number of Buddhists who work on social issues such as poverty, suicide, solitude, and spiritual care is increasing. On the other hand, many Buddhists express the paucity of opportunities to learn the

social contribution of Buddhists systematically and comprehensively. They are looking for a way to make use of their faith and belief in their social activities.

We sincerely wish that the number of Rinsho Bukkyoshi who have the understanding and expertise on social issues will grow, and they will support as many people as possible to ease their sufferings. Rinsho Bukkyoshis who work in Japan are also expected to meet the spiritual needs of the Japanese people who have the spirituality that is inherently influenced by Buddhism.<sup>4</sup>

Rinbutsuken is conducting a training program to educate Buddhists to become Rinsho Bukkyoshi. Through the program, the students learn the knowledge and the practical and clinical skills required for serving in education, welfare, or medicine.

We have developed this training program with the training systems in other countries and regions as reference, such as Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)<sup>5</sup> in the Western countries and Buddhist chaplaincy training in Taiwan<sup>6</sup>. We coach the Buddhists aiming for them to grow and to be certified as Rinsho Bukkyoshi who offer spiritual care at different locations where people suffer from birth, aging, sickness, and death.

The program consists of the following three steps spanning twenty-four months:

STEP 1 Classroom Lectures

To learn the basics of Buddhist spiritual care

STEP 2 Workshops

To master skills of care in a face-to-face situation

STEP 3 On-the-Job Training

To practice at the site of care, such as hospitals and nursing homes

After the completion of these steps and passing a final examination, a certificate will be given to the trainee.

This program started in 2013 partly in response to the emergence of the need for spiritual care for the survivors of the East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that occurred in 2011. So far, eight programs have been conducted, and about six hundred students have been trained as Rinsho Bukkyoshi. They are serving their local communities as spiritual caregivers at hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutions.

### III. CARE OF *INOCHI* – HOLISTIC SPIRITUAL CARE<sup>7</sup>

We named the spiritual care that the Buddhist chaplains provide “Care of *Inochi*” in Japanese. *Inochi* is one of the Japanese words that corresponds to the English word “life.” The contemporary meaning of the word is the mortal life or

<sup>4</sup> Jin, Hitoshi (2024).

<sup>5</sup> ACPE Manuals (2025)b [on line].

<sup>6</sup> Yoshimizu, Gakugen (2017).

<sup>7</sup> Jin, Hitoshi (2024).

the continuation of existence from birth to death, humanity, or the invaluable essence of things. Inochi came from the ancient Japanese words “*chi*,” which means the power, and “*i*,” which means the breath. Thus, the Inochi meant the power of breath originally. The English word spirituality corresponds to *prāṇa* in Sanskrit, which originally meant breath and developed to express soul and spirit. This naturally corresponds to Inochi.

We regard spiritual care as follows: Spirituality is the primordial source of power that enables humans to be existent with self-identity. Care of Inochi, or spiritual care, is the emancipation of this fundamental power of the care recipients.

In 1998, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposed a definition of health. A human is healthy when they are well physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Spirituality is not dispensable for health.<sup>8</sup> These four elements are not separate but interconnected. We believe that in spiritual care, we need to pay attention to the conditions of the other three elements of the care recipient at the time we meet with them. Care of Inochi is the holistic spiritual care that is based on this belief.

The primordial source of power for the existence of a person is their relationship with some things that give meaning to life and death for them. Something can be their essential self, the society including families, or other something great. Something great may be God, the Buddha, nature, the universe, or ancestors.

People fall into crisis and feel spiritual pains when this relationship is not going well. Spiritual care is to support those people experiencing the spiritual pain to find a safe space to face the pain and to open their heart to share it with someone else and hopefully connect with something great and ease the pain.

An example of the activities of the Rinsho Bukkyoshi, who provided Care of Inochi, is shown in the following sections.

#### IV. INVOLVEMENT OF RINSHO BUKKYOSHI IN THE PATIENT CARE AT THE JIKEI UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL<sup>9, 10</sup>

The Jikei University Hospital (東京慈恵会医科大学附属病院) originates from the Seiikai (成醫會) Medical Training School that was founded in 1881 by Dr. Kanehiro Takagi. He was a military physician of the Satsuma Clan before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. In 1875, he moved to England to study at St. Thomas' Hospital and Medical School. He was deeply impressed by British medicine, which was based on humanitarianism, and upon returning to Japan, he resolved to build a hospital and medical school for the poor who had been abandoned by medical care. Later, in 1887, at the request of the Empress at that time, the hospital, named after “Jikei (慈恵),” was established as the

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Health and Welfare (1999) [on line].

<sup>9</sup> Jin, Hitoshi (2019).

<sup>10</sup> Jin, Hitoshi and Yoshimizu, Gakugen and Uchiyama, Miyuki (2022).

Tokyo Jikei Hospital. Jikei means charity with compassion.<sup>11</sup>

While he was in England, many people asked him what his religion was. He was embarrassed because he did not have the right answer to that question. He was not able to call himself a Buddhist, a Shintoist, or a Confucian with confidence. He found that he did not have a solid religious worldview or a view on life and death. On the other hand, the medical institutions in England had religion on the basis. When he came back to Japan, he made up his mind to provide holistic care combined with medicine and religion in Japan.

“Treat the patient, not the disease.”

This phrase, which is the philosophy of the Jikei University School of Medicine, expresses the importance of facing the person suffering from illness and treating them as they are, rather than just looking at the diseased “organ.”

As he thought that his spirituality was a syncretism of various religious faiths, just as many other Japanese, he kept a stance of interfaith stance. He was open to incorporating different religions into the basis of management of the hospital and the treatment of patients.

In 1902, he started a lecture series on spiritual cultivation for the medical staff and the patients. It continued for nearly thirty years with the lecturers including famous modern Buddhist scholars, such as Dr. Junjiro Takagusu, who led the edition of Taisho Tripitaka. It ended around 1930 when the national polity ideology started to propagate.

The involvement of religious ministers and practitioners in patient care at The Jikei University Hospital was resumed in 2017. Three Buddhist chaplains from the Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism, the graduates of the training course at the institute, and the supervisor were welcomed by the palliative care ward of the hospital.

Here, we report the results of our Buddhist chaplains’ services during the first five years. The number of patients we met was one hundred and ten. Sixty-seven % were female, and the rest were male. From these numbers, we sense the tendency of withdrawal of men. Most of them are reluctant to open their mind to others and lean on someone else.

The age groups were:

30s (6%), 40s (15%), 50s (27%), 60s (20%), 70s (15%), 80s (17%).

Most of them (93%) were cancer patients. The number of noncancer patients who receive spiritual care is growing. This reflects the fact that more and more medical staff has become interested in spiritual care. With the involvement of Buddhist chaplains in spiritual care as a part of patient care, the awareness has gradually spread in the hospital that all the patients and their families are prone to spiritual pains.

## V. SPIRITUAL PAINS OF THE PATIENTS

We categorized the factors of spiritual pains of the patients we encountered

---

<sup>11</sup> The Jikei University Hospital [on line].

into the following five items.

### **5.1. Struggling with self-identity**

- This includes
- The agony of watching myself becoming weak
- The pain of not being able to live life in the way I want up to the moment I die

Loss of dignity because I am a patient in the hospital

A woman in her forties tried to move to the window, dragging her body, saying, "I feel miserable, having such an appearance. I want to jump to die from the window."

Another woman asked, "May I put on makeup?" Some "hated the wheelchair." A woman appealed with tears, "Doctors see me only as a set of data." A male patient who had been spending days with medical examinations lamented, "I feel just like being kept in a research institution."

The care providers, including the chaplains, need to remember the severity of the pain of losing self-dignity.

### **5.2. The pain of having to stay alive**

This includes

- The pain of having to continue living the remaining short lifetime fighting with the disease
- The pain of causing a burden for the family and the society

Many patients expressed the hardship of being forced to continue to live by receiving various treatments against their original will to end their lives in the hospital when they arrived there. They appealed, saying, "Let me die soon," "Please kill me," "I am exhausted," "No more, it's over," or "It will be easier if I die in an instant."

Others suffer from the agony of necessity to continue their lives by asking their family members and the hospital staff to take care of their matters due to the loss of physical capabilities. Some patients said, "Please set the treatment expenses aside for the house mortgage."

The medical staff needs to establish a relationship of trust with patients. For example, they should avoid forcing patients to accept aggressive treatments against their will.

### **5.3. Feelings about life**

This includes

- Fear of death or struggle with death
- The anguish of parting from one's loved ones (one of the eight sufferings in the first Noble Truth)
- Premonition of death
- The worldview of after afterlife

- Feeling of loneliness

Most patients naturally fear death. Fear has two elements: the physical pains before dying and the loss of self. However, few honestly put it into words. A woman expressed her fear: “I have never thought that dying is so fearful and lonely.” A ninety-year-old man asked, “Isn’t death painful?”

A young mother expressed her caring heart for her survivors: “I wish to come back to welcome my children when they end their lives.”

We believe that it is important for a chaplain to send a message to the patients that will lessen their fear and loneliness before their final day.

#### **5.4. Will to live**

This includes

- I thought that I would recover health
- It is difficult to give up

Patients say, “I cannot pass before my parents,” “I want to celebrate another birthday,” or “I want to continue to watch my children grow.” The feeling of “I cannot give up” sometimes changes to “I will give up.” Behind the feeling of giving up lies an emotion of abandoning with the understanding of reality. There is no regret or resentment anymore.

When the reality of unavoidable death becomes clear, patients will be able to move forward by accepting themselves as they are.

#### **5.5. Life reflection**

This includes

- Meaning of life review
- Regret and reconciliation

It was an impressive and memorable scene to watch a patient who had been in discord with their family for a long time start to grow regret towards the end of the terminal stage and finally left after reaching reconciliation. Some said, “I caused my wife a lot of trouble,” “I did not take good care of my family because I had been a workaholic,” or “I wanted to see my parents from whom I had been alienated for a long time.”

### **VI. ENGAGEMENT OF CHAPLAINS IN VISITS WITH PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

The Involvement of chaplains in the meetings with the recipients of spiritual care consists of the following items.

#### **6.1. Listen to storytelling**

It is to encourage the care recipient to tell their stories and listen to them attentively. We Buddhist chaplains ask them the meaning of their words and make them clearer. We encourage them to recall the connection with their important persons. This way, we support them to sort out their emotions and review their lives.

Late Dr. Hayao Kawai, a prominent clinical psychologist, repeated in his



lectures, “The other’s mind cannot be known unless we hear their life stories.” This means that it is not possible to perceive a person’s mind without taking their relationship with others into consideration. It shows the importance of seeing human comprehensively in their relationship with others. This point of view has something in common with the fundamental thought of Buddhism, dependent co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda* or 縁起).

During the attentive listening, we Buddhist chaplains try to accept what the care recipient says as their life story. It becomes necessary to reconstruct the part that they do not talk about or just cannot utter.

## 6.2. Accept their thoughts and feelings

We chaplains accept what the care recipient says as a matter of course. We chime in to acknowledge and affirm them. We follow the other golden rules of communication, such as rephrasing and summarizing what they said or speaking for them.

## 6.3. Send a message of “I am listening to you.”

We chaplains express sympathy with the patients and prepare an atmosphere in which they can feel a sense of belonging.

Buddhism teaches that there are donations (*dāna*) other than treasures: The seven non-treasure donations (無財七施)<sup>12</sup>. We Buddhist chaplains value them, especially eyes of loving-kindness (慈眼), tender face with smiles (和顔), and words of loving-kindness and compassion (愛語), when we meet with the care recipients.

## 6.4. Stay present

It is very important to continue to stay by the care recipient, even without doing anything. A motto for chaplains is “not doing but being.” It is to share the time with them and to keep them from loneliness.

Sometimes, no words are necessary. An old man was in the end stage of illness. He asked a chaplain to keep holding his hand. The chaplain stayed with him for nearly two hours without saying anything.

Being present is a valuable way of spiritual care for the person in need.

## 6.5. Focus on the now

We chaplains guide the patients to focus on the present time instead of dreaming of the future. We suggested a patient live the given remaining life fully, asking him, “Isn’t it a great present for your family?”

By focusing on the present time, patients will eventually realize that they have no hope or no future. This realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā* or 空) of themselves will lead to accepting the unavoidable death.

## 6.6. Religious care

<sup>12</sup> The Sutra of Miscellaneous Jewels ( ) vol 6. in Sa ga ikik ta Taiśotripi aka ( ) No. 203 [on line]

Some patients, mostly male, said, “I will become nothing,” or “It is over when I die.” At those times, we talked to them, “There will be a life that continues after death,” or “You will meet with your family and friends in the other world.” A patient was puzzled when he heard it. Later, at some point, he asked us, “May I believe in what you said?”

For us humans living in this age of advanced science, it is not easy to accept and believe such a view of the world after death. Moreover, it is not allowed to advertise or impose religious views in a public place such as the university hospitals. However, some people are unconsciously seeking a view of life and death. Buddhist chaplains play an important role in meeting such needs.

When appropriate, we chaplains offer prayers for patients and their families.

Care for families

As the patients near the end of life, it becomes more and more valuable for them to have a close relationship with their families. We suggest the families stay with them and talk to them as much as possible.

We offer hugging or physical contact care for the families when we think it necessary.

Other offerings

Most patients can practice meditation while they are lying in bed. We guide them to focus their attention on their breaths and stay “here and now.” By being “mindful,” they gradually become thankful to the people around them, nature, and their ancestors.

Sometimes, chaplains recite poems and read picture books for the patients.

Among the spiritual pains that the patients expressed, the one related to dying was the majority. Naturally, almost all people are afraid of death. The phrase those who are facing death expect to hear most is “You do not have to be afraid of dying.” It is not an easy matter for the chaplains to utter this appropriately at an appropriate time.

The story that a patient tells often has many spiritual pains, which are complicatedly entwined. They sway from one direction to another. This is an example of challenges for the chaplains to face their spiritual pains. Not interrupting their talk or moving ahead of the conversation is the chaplain’s basic attitude in attentive listening. Listening to them thoroughly will lead to having respect for their dignity.

### **Case 1**

Mr A, who was in his fifties, had pancreatic cancer that had infiltrated to the spine and could barely raise his upper body because the lower body was paralyzed. He said that he could not die because he had two high school boys. On the other hand, he said, “Please kill me because there is no use living in such a state.” He could not eat or drink and kept his life only with the intravenous drip.

When the chaplain visited him for the first time, he tried to establish rapport by attentive listening and encouraging him to review his pains and his life.

When the chaplain visited him on the next and the last visit, the chaplain

recognized that he was supported by his love of his family. The chaplain taught him about the donation of a smiling face (和顔施). “When you show your painful face to your family, they will feel pain too. The medical staff will feel the same way. It may be difficult, but could you show them your smiling face even a bit? It is the most valuable thing you can do at this moment.”

It was difficult for Mr A even to say a word. He stayed silent for a while with his head down then he raised his eyes and smiled at the chaplain. Seeing the smile, the chaplain learned that he had overcome his pains and even his death.

## Case 2

The patient was a foreign woman in her forties. The palliative care doctor asked the chaplain to communicate with her in English as she was not fluent in Japanese. When the chaplain met her, she had a life expectancy of one month with metastatic ovarian cancer.

At the first visit, the chaplain focused on attentive listening and confirmed her life history. At the second visit, the charge nurse said, “The patient seems to have delirium. She is pointing toward the ceiling, repeating to say ‘I am afraid.’” When the chaplain asked the patient what she was afraid of, she did not reply. However, he thought that she was afraid of the Lord’s judgment as she was Roman Catholic. He repeated to her, “God is always by your side. He will be your protector all the time.” He prayed together with her, too.

She had unfortunate experiences of an adulterous life. The chaplain thought that she was suffering from God’s judgment and the fear of falling to hell. At the later visits, he repeated to her, “God will surely save you.” Her delirium had gradually lessened, and she started to smile at the chaplain.

## VII. THE FOUNDATION OF BUDDHIST CHAPLAINCY – BUDDHIST DHARMA AND PRACTICE

As the Buddha taught, we humans experience various sufferings during our lifetime from birth to death. He emphasized the practice of loving-kindness and compassion that saves others from suffering and wishes for their happiness (*maitrī and karuṇā* or 慈悲), which is inseparable from wisdom (*prajñā* or 智慧) that saves them from suffering. The Buddhist chaplains empathize with the suffering of people and empower them in their lives. Chaplains’s spiritual care is an act of Buddhist loving-kindness and compassion that is supported by wisdom.<sup>13, 14</sup>

A bodhisattva is an ideal model of practitioner in Mahāyāna Buddhism, who postpones their liberation until all the others are freed from their sufferings. We value the four actions of bodhisattvas to save the sentient beings: *catur samgraha vastu*, or 四攝事<sup>15</sup>. They are donation (布施), words of loving-kindness and compassion (愛語), altruism (利行), and identity-

<sup>13</sup> Komura, Fuminobu (2014).

<sup>14</sup> Komura, Fuminobu (2019).

<sup>15</sup> Nakamura, Hajime, et al, (ed.) (2009).

action (同事). The fourth is to stand in the same place as the care recipient, share their emotions, and empathize with them. We emphasize this in training the Buddhist chaplain candidates.

For the Buddhist chaplains who offer spiritual care, the gaze of loving-kindness and compassion towards the care recipients is indispensable. Late Dr. Hajime Nakamura, a prominent scholar of Buddhism, explained loving-kindness and compassion as “to be in the same circumstances with the others.”<sup>16</sup> It implies that loving-kindness and compassion are inevitable for spiritual care. The following are the important elements of loving-kindness and compassion.

- 隨喜：Be happy when others are happy.
- 隨悲：Try to share others’ suffering by staying beside them even if the suffering has no solution.
- 恭敬：Meet with anyone with deep respect for their dignity.
- 還愚：Be always aware of our incompetence.

What is important in the Buddhist chaplaincy is to meet with all the living creatures with respect based on the deep understanding of the “mutual dependence of lives” taught by the Buddha as dependent co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda* or 緣起). We are kept alive in the connections with our ancestors over time and in the spatial connections with the beings living now, not only humans but with animals and plants. We chaplains remember this fact and stand at the same or a lower level than the care recipients. For the people suffering from the pains of illness or the pains of facing death, the realization of dependent co-arising as the essential state of all beings will surely lessen their pains. We believe that having a view of the afterlife or the continuation of life after death will give them a light of hope.

Being a chaplain is not a one-way act of serving others who are in spiritual or emotional need. The chaplain can learn and grow. It supports the spiritual growth of the caregiver. “The religious professionals must undergo an inner transformation in becoming a chaplain.”<sup>17</sup> The traditional principle of CPE education is the Action-Reflection-Action learning model.<sup>18</sup> One of the current authors suggested an alternative model based on the traditional Buddhist teaching. It is the Triple Wisdoms (三慧) of 聞、思、修 that is the cycle of Learning, Contemplating, and practicing.<sup>19</sup>

This incorporates meditation for a chaplain to center themselves to reflect on what they did for the care recipients and what they experienced in doing it. The style of meditation may vary depending on the Buddhist tradition of the chaplain. It may be *zazen*, *śamatha*, and *vipaśyanā*, or visualizing the Buddha or chanting the name of Buddha (念佛).

<sup>16</sup> Nakamura, Hajime (2010).

<sup>17</sup> Jin, Hitoshi and Watts, Jonathan S (2016).

<sup>18</sup> ACPE Manuals (2025)a [on line].

<sup>19</sup> Samford, Monica (2021).

American Zen master and educator Joan Halifax expressed the ideal attitude of Buddhist chaplains as

“Strong back, Soft front.”<sup>20</sup>

This means that a chaplain opens their soft heart of loving-kindness and compassion to the care recipient, but the heart is supported by their unwavering belief in faith that is not visible to the other person. This way, Buddhist chaplains are ideally able to serve any person regardless of their religion or faith tradition, including non-religious or spiritual people.

This leads to the idea of interfaith spiritual care.<sup>21</sup> We Buddhist chaplains try to be interfaith, offering care to the recipients regardless of the difference of their religion or spirituality. They are ready to offer religious care, such as chanting prayers or reciting a part of sutra or Holy Scripture of the care recipient's faith tradition only when requested by them or it is regarded as appropriate at that time.

In summary, the following are the seven capacities required for the Buddhist chaplains that are supported by Buddhist dharmas and practices.

- Capacity to know oneself

It is to be aware of who I am and what I am.

- Capacity to listen

It is the basis of communication with care recipients.

- Capacity to understand the structure

It is important to know in what social structure or environment the care recipients are suffering.

- Capacity to empathize with the care recipients

It is to stand in the same shoes with the care recipients.

- Capacity of skilful means (*Upāya*, or 方便)

It is first to understand the recipient's capacity to learn. Then, the chaplain chooses the words to talk to them based on their life history or what is important for them.

- Capacity of perseverance

It is to keep staying with the care recipients, not leaving from the difficult situations. For chaplains to be fully present in a non-anxious and non-judgmental way in front of them means to be free from attachment.

- Capacity to believe

It is to believe in oneself and the Buddha. For the Buddhist chaplains, it is essential to have their solid view of life and death and believe completely in the Buddha Nature (佛性) that the person we meet is endowed with.

Thus, chaplaincy is a valuable opportunity for Buddhists not only to

---

<sup>20</sup> Halifax, Joan (2008).

<sup>21</sup> Konishi, Tatsuya (2023).

exercise loving-kindness and compassion but also to reflect on themselves and grow as a Buddhist practitioner. We thank the Buddha for letting us encounter this valuable role of spiritual caregiving.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we presented the altruistic activities of the Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism, headquartered in Tokyo, Japan. The important element of the activities is the training of Rinsho Bukkyoshi, or the interfaith chaplains with firm faith in Buddhism. What they offer is named Care of Inochi, which means holistic spiritual care. It is based on our belief that spiritual health is deeply interconnected with other aspects of health: physical, mental, and social.

As a major activity of Rinsho Bukkyoshi, we presented the initiative of joining the palliative care team of the Jikei University Hospital. The chaplains offered Care of Inochi to the patients who are mostly at the end-of-life stage and their families, as was shown in two example cases. Based on our experience of chaplaincy service at this hospital, we identified the factors of patients' pains and the main aspects of chaplains' involvement in meeting with the care recipients.

Spiritual care by chaplains is an act of benefiting others, which is loving-kindness and compassion of wishing others be happy and free from suffering as the Buddha taught. They are inseparable from wisdom to liberate the practitioners from their suffering.

The teaching of the Three Wisdoms, or learning, contemplating, and practice, is an ideal model of a chaplain's spiritual growth. We identified seven capacities that are required for Buddhist chaplains.

Thus, chaplaincy is a valuable path for Buddhists to carry out loving-kindness and compassion as well as to grow spiritually.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- ACPE Manuals (2025)a [on line]. Available at: <https://www.manula.com/manuals/acpe/acpe-manuals/2016/en/topic/category-e-professional-development> (Accessed: 20 February, 2025).
- ACPE Manuals (2025)b [on line]. Available at: <https://www.manula.com/manuals/acpe/acpe-manuals/2016/en/topic/definition-of-terms> (Accessed: 20 February, 2025).
- Halifax, Joan (2008) *Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Jin, Hitoshi and Watts, Jonathan S (2016) 'The Development of Buddhist Chaplaincy in the United States & Its Meaning for Japan'. *Journal of The*



- Nippon Buddhist Education Research Association*, vol 27. Tokyo, Japan: The Nippon Buddhist Education Research Association.
- Jin, Hitoshi (2019) 'Role of Buddhist Chaplains – Spiritual Care and End-of-Life Care'. in *2019 Annual of the Institute for Life and Death Studies*, Toyo Eiwa University. Tokyo, Japan: Lithon Publication. (in Japanese).
- Jin, Hitoshi and Yoshimizu, Gakugen and Uchiyama, Miyuki (2022) 'The History and the Current State of "Care of Inochi" at The Jikei University Hospital'. *Journal of the Nippon Buddhist Education Research Association*, vol 30. Tokyo, Japan: The Nippon Buddhist Education Research Association. (in Japanese).
- Jin, Hitoshi (2024) 'The Practice of "Care of Inochi" at The Jikei University Hospital'. *Journal of New Remedies and Clinics*. Vol 72, No 2. Tokyo, Japan: Iyaku Joho Kenkyusho. (in Japanese).
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon (2005) *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Hyperion.
- Komura, Fuminobu (2014) *Chaplaincy as a Bodhisattva Path – Thus Have I Learned-*, A Master's Thesis presented to Naropa University. Boulder, CO.
- Komura, Fuminobu (2017) 'Mindfulness in Chaplaincy: From the Perspective of a Buddhist Priest' in *Mindfulness: Traditions and Compassionate Applications, Proceedings of the Third Conference: The International Association of Buddhist Universities*. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University: Ayutthaya, Thailand, pp. 337-338.
- Komura, Fuminobu (2019) 'Spiritual Care as an embodiment of Buddhist Loving-kindness and Compassion: A Buddhist Chaplain's Perspective', in *Buddhist Approach to Harmonious Families, Healthcare and Sustainable Societies, Proceedings of United Nations Day of Vesak 2019*. Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist University Press.
- Konishi, Tatsuya (2023). *Interfaith Spiritual Care – Toward the Root of the Dialogue with Eternity*. Yokohama, Japan: Shumpusha Publishing. (in Japanese).
- Ministry of Health and Welfare (1999) 'On the Proposal of Revising The World Health Organization Constitution' [On line]. Available at: [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/www1/houdou/1103/h0319-1\\_6.html#:~:text=%E5%B9%B3%E6%88%90%E5%B-C%91%E5%BC%90%E5%B9%B4%E3%81%AEWHO,%E5%AD%98%E5%9C%A8%E3%81%97%E3%81%AA%E3%81%84%E3%81%93%E3%81%A8%E3%81%A7%E3%81%AF%E3%81%AA%E3%81%84%E3%80%82%E3%80%8D](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/www1/houdou/1103/h0319-1_6.html#:~:text=%E5%B9%B3%E6%88%90%E5%B-C%91%E5%BC%90%E5%B9%B4%E3%81%AEWHO,%E5%AD%98%E5%9C%A8%E3%81%97%E3%81%AA%E3%81%84%E3%81%93%E3%81%A8%E3%81%A7%E3%81%AF%E3%81%AA%E3%81%84%E3%80%82%E3%80%8D) (Accessed: 10 February 2025). (in Japanese)
- Nakamura, Hajime (2010) *Loving-kindness and Compassion*. Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha. (in Japanese).
- Nakamura, Hajime, et al. (ed.) (2009) *The Dictionary of Buddhism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Tokyo, Japan: Iwanami Shoten. (in Japanese).
- Samford, Monica (2021). *Kalyāṇamitra: A Model for Buddhist Spiritual Care*,

*Volume 1.* Sumeru Press Inc.: Manotik, Canada

The Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism [on line]. Available at:

<http://www.zenseikyo.or.jp/rinbutsuken/english/index.html> (Accessed: 20 November, 2024).

The Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism (ed.) (2013) *Introduction to Rinsho Buddhism*. Kyoto, Japan: Hakuba Sha. (in Japanese).

The Sutra of Miscellaneous Jewels (雜寶藏經) vol 6. in *Samgaṇikikṛtaṃ Taiśotripitakam* (大正大藏經) No. 203 [on line]. Available at: <https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT2018/master30.php> (Accessed: 10 February 2025). (in Chinese).

The Jikei University Hospital [on line]. Available at: [https://www.hosp.jikei.ac.jp/jikei/keyword\\_01.html](https://www.hosp.jikei.ac.jp/jikei/keyword_01.html) (Accessed: 10 February 2025). (in Japanese).

The Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism (ed.) (2013) *Introduction to Rinsho Buddhism*. Kyoto, Japan: Hakuba Sha. (in Japanese).

Yoshimizu, Gakugen (2017) 'On the Inauguration of the Training Program for *Rinsho Bukkyoshi*'. *Proceedings of The Buddhist Culture Studies*, vol 26. Taisho University: Tokyo, Japan. (in Japanese).

Zenseikyo Foundation, Japan Buddhist Council for Youth and Child Education [on line]. Available at: <http://www.zenseikyo.or.jp/> (Accessed: 20 November, 2024). (in Japanese).

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF THAI-VIETNAMESE ENGAGED BUDDHISM: A CONVERGENT ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MINDFUL CIVIC ACTION

Prof. Manuel Antonio Ato del Avellanal Carrera\*

## Abstract:

Since its genesis in Southeast Asia in the 1960s, engaged Buddhism is a concept that has been used to describe a variety of religious movements in Asia and the West emphasizing the capital role of civic action in religion as their main feature, and including under this category similar groups going back to the late 19th century.

However, not every kind of social action performed by a Buddhist group or individual falls under the criteria of engaged Buddhism. In that regard, this paper offers a comprehensive definition of the concept and the ethical framework of its social philosophy, which reveals a high consistency between the founders of the movement: from the emergence of the concept with Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh to the foundation of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists - INEB under the guidance of Thai social activist and writer Sulak Sivaraksa in the late 1980s. With that aim, this comparative study focuses on the philosophical convergence of their works.

Under these considerations, engaged Buddhism's social philosophy appears as a post World War II Southeast Asian and, later on, pan-Asian and global phenomenon in a context of interaction with Western culture, constituting a paradigm shift in Buddhist ethics. Furthermore, in its ongoing development, it shows seven key features: (1) civic action-oriented; (2) critical and hermeneutical; (3) insightfully interdependent; (4) mindfully and spiritually-rooted; (5) nonviolent and compassionate; (6) interreligious and globally driven; and, (7) tolerant and politically unbiased.

**Keywords:** *Engaged Buddhism, civic action, Thich Nhat Hanh, sulak sivaraksa, social justice, non-attachment, interreligious dialogue.*

---

\* Lecturer at the Center for Oriental Studies, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the 20th Century, engaged Buddhism – a term coined by Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh – emerged as a new way of understanding Buddhism, gaining recognition for its mode of emphasizing the pivotal role of civic action in religion and constituting a reference for other religious movements.

Since then, other prominent religious leaders and scholars in Asia and the West have similarly appropriated the term to address the need for an active involvement of Buddhism in a wide range of social causes. To mention a few notable ones which are identified with the engaged Buddhist movement besides Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh (Vietnam) and Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa (Thailand), we have Ven. Maha Ghosananda (Cambodia), Sri Lankabhimanya A. T. Ariyaratne (Sri Lanka), H. H. The XIV Dalai Lama (Tibet), Ven. Cheng Yen (Taiwan), Ven. Pomnyun Sunim (South Korea), and in the U.S.A., Robert Aitken Roshi, Joanna Macy, David Loy, Roshi Joan Halifax, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, among many others.

Moreover, the concept also has been used to refer Buddhist movements before the appearance of the term, such as Dharmapala's Maha Bodhi Society (South Asia) in the late 19th Century, and then Ambedkar's Navayana (India), Buddhādāsa's Dhammic Socialism (Thailand), and Taixu's Humanistic Buddhism (China).

Considering that diversity of religious manifestations labeled as engaged Buddhism, mainly in the past three decades and increasingly in recent years, there have been practical efforts to establish a common platform between them towards cooperation, being the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) – the larger organization of its kind – the most notable example of that goal. Moreover, there have been relevant theoretical attempts to define their shared principles and nature, such as the vast works of Sallie B. King and Christopher S. Queen.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute in that elucidating task, offering a comprehensive definition of the concept of engaged Buddhism and the features of its social philosophy, by exploring the ethical framework that lies at its core in the works of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa, whose teachings constitute the pillars of the movement. In that sense, a better understanding of what engaged Buddhism represents in its Southeast Asian roots can provide an insight into the development and expansion of the new social role of Buddhism across Asia and beyond, in the context of the menacing social challenges that contemporary global culture faces.

In that regard, this paper focuses on the comparative analysis of the convergent philosophies of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa, which develop the basic principles to sustain and promote Buddhist civic action. However, it starts by offering a brief description of their historical background: from the emergence of the concept in Vietnam in the 1960s to the foundation of INEB in Thailand in the late 1980s.

## II. THICH NHAT HANH AND THE EMERGENCE OF ENGAGED BUDDHISM

Thich Nhat Hanh was a young monk in Vietnam when in 1954, he was asked to write a group of articles about Buddhism for a local newspaper, where his first reflections on Buddhism and its role in society were publicly shared. At that time, the country was officially divided into two after the Geneva Accords, between the communist North and the non-communist South under Catholic President Ngo Dinh Diem, as a result of the long struggle for independence initiated many years ago.

It is in that national political context of war where the concept of engaged Buddhism first emerged as a call for action among the Buddhist community, particularly the monastics, to change the way of living their religion and join forces for the cause of peace by taking specific steps. In that regard, Thich Nhat Hanh remembers:

When I was in Vietnam, so many of our villages were being bombed. Along with my monastic brothers and sisters, I had to decide what to do. Should we continue to practice in our monasteries, or should we leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering under the bombs? After careful reflection, we decided to do both – to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We called it engaged Buddhism.<sup>1</sup>

However, it was not only the horror of war that inspired Thich Nhat Hanh to take action. As he recalls in his 1967 book “Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire”, during the French Occupation of the country and since the 1920s and 1930s there was a modern movement in Vietnam for the revival of Vietnamese Buddhism, which provided the religious context where his understanding of Buddhism developed. Western colonialism used Catholicism, among other means, as an ideology to rule the country. Furthermore, in response to that, nationalism and Buddhism were combined in defense of the Vietnamese identity in the face of the foreign invaders.

In the following decades, the Buddhist revival would result in a large group of monks traveling abroad to other Asian countries and the West for studying purposes, which ultimately influenced the education of the Vietnamese Buddhist practitioners. Their new reflections on the social role of Buddhism would also contribute to the creation of social welfare Buddhist organizations conducted by monastics.

Regarding that new religious atmosphere, Thich Nhat Hanh described in his early 1950s articles the need for Buddhism to “enter into life, [into] social life.”<sup>2</sup> Later on, in his 1967 book, he first coined the term “engaged Buddhism”, referring to this way of understanding the social dimension of Buddhism.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Peace is Every Step. The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> See: Thich Nhat Hanh. “*Dharma Talk: History of Engaged Buddhism*”.

<sup>3</sup> Cf.: “Thich Nhat Hanh. Biography”.

From the very beginning, such a notion implied not merely wishful advocacy for peace. On the contrary, engaged Buddhism entailed a precise way of compromising Buddhism with civic action:

The responsibilities of the religious leadership in Vietnam have been both to raise their voices in the natural concerns of religious people for the suffering of their fellow citizens, and to find explicit, active ways in which to implement those concerns and find a way to end the war. Raising their voices in their religious concerns about the war is not enough; they must also develop clear, rational, and concrete steps in the direction of a realization of peace.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the international context surrounding Vietnam played an important role in the times where the concept of engaged Buddhism emerged, since their struggle for independence and identity was not isolated. Colonialism and war were phenomena taking place in other Asian countries and, in similar ways, challenging Buddhism to respond and inspiring revival Buddhist movements in those countries as well. This might be seen as part of a broader trend which German scholar Heinz Bechert characterizes as Buddhist Modernism, which is a non-uniform Asian phenomenon that describes the interest in Buddhism's renewal across Asia since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of its interaction with Western culture.

### III. SULAK SIVARAKSA AND THE FOUNDATION OF INEB

During the following decades after the war, the modern social role of Buddhism in Asian societies was a growing topic of discussion among different Buddhist leaders. In that way, such reflections would lead to an important moment in the history of engaged Buddhism in the late 1980s.

In February 1989, a conference was held in Uthaitani, Thailand, to share common problems among the international Buddhist community, and to evaluate means of cooperation between the Buddhist groups to address those issues and reach out to other religious and social organizations. Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhists from eleven countries, mainly from Asia but also some coming from America and Europe, and other non-Buddhist observers participated discussing social topics from a Buddhist perspective such as alternative education and economics, spiritual training, peace activism, human rights, gender issues, ecology, among others. As the primary outcome of the meeting, the establishment of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists - INEB was approved as a formal organization to strengthen the bonds and promote the collaboration between engaged Buddhist individuals and organizations and with "relevant non-Buddhist groups."<sup>5</sup>

As described in the Vietnamese context for the development of engaged Buddhism, also in this conference a deep sense of Buddhism's renewal was

---

<sup>4</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> See a detailed summary of the conference in: "International Engaged Buddhist Conference", p. 37 ff.



found among the participants:

The present problems and suffering of people in Asia are indicative of the fact that we have lost touch with the true meaning of Buddhism”, and from that concern derived the urge of an “education for the sangha and the need for modernization to allow Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis to function effectively in society.”<sup>6</sup>

Sulak Sivaraksa was the leading promoter of that initiative and remained as Founder Chair of INEB. As Matteo Pistono accurately describes, Sivaraksa’s work has a foundation “in a reinterpretation of traditional Buddhist teachings applied to modern socio-economic, ecological, and political dilemmas.”<sup>7</sup>

The collection of writings of Sulak Sivaraksa on the many issues related to engaged Buddhism is quite vast. One of its core topics deals with the rise of consumerism promoted by the mass media under the control of transnational corporations in our modern societies and how it reinforces greed, one of the three poisons (*triviṣa*) that are the root of human suffering according to classical Buddhism, in a delusional pursuit of happiness. Going back to the times of INEB’s foundation and focusing on his beloved Thailand, he wrote:

The present Siam is no longer what it was. It has become earthly Thailand. (...) Unless we re-examine our traditions in the light of our present social realities and the social system, Buddhism –or any religion for that matter– becomes a kind of decoration for the ‘new religion’ which could be Consumerism, Capitalism, or Communism. (...) We must therefore understand the system we are in and in doing so we, as Buddhists, must try to go back to our roots in Buddhism.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly to Thich Nhat Hanh’s context, Sivaraksa’s engaged Buddhism deals with the influence of foreign powers in modern Asian societies generating new causes for human affliction and challenging Buddhism for a response from a renewed point of view, which brings a fresh look on classical Buddhist teachings to the modern world.

In fact, along with the formal foundation of INEB, Thich Nhat Hanh was appointed as one of the three patrons of the new organization, with H.H. the XIV Dalai Lama and Ven. Maha Ghosananda. These three acclaimed religious leaders, representing the three main Buddhist historical traditions (*Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna*), were skillfully invited by Sulak Sivaraksa as an inspiration for the pluralism of the international engaged Buddhist network. In their living example and teachings are expressed the strong similarities surrounding the contexts where the social philosophy of engaged Buddhism emerged and developed, namely: the burden of colonialism in Asian countries; the horror of war at a new dramatic scale only possible by the power of modern technologies; and the need of an active and peaceful Buddhist commitment

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Cf.: Pistono, Matteo. “Sulak Sivaraksa by Matteo Pistono”.

<sup>8</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa. “*Renewal: A Buddhist Perspective*”, p. 28.

with the social struggles of contemporary global society.

In Cambodia, the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch Maha Goshananda was a survivor of the Pol Potian genocide during the Khmer Rouge era in the 1970s. Despite losing all of his family during the civil war, he devoted himself to the reconciliation of the confronted sides in his country. Joining efforts to rebuild Cambodia after the war and reinforce the Buddhist tradition of his country, he led meaningful peace walks to raise awareness about peace and forgiveness, the right to vote, the need to outlaw landmines, protecting the forests, among other causes. Joining the rising engaged Buddhist way of life, he encouraged his monastics to develop a new role in society:

We Buddhists must find the courage to leave our temples and enter the temples of human experience, temples that are filled with suffering. (...) The refugee camps, the prisons, the ghettos, and the battlefields will then become our temples. We have so much work to do. (...) Many Cambodians tell me 'Venerable monks belong in the temple'. It is difficult for them to adjust to this new role, but we monks must answer the increasingly loud cries of suffering.<sup>9</sup>

Coming from Tibet, the most recognized Buddhist leader in the world, His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama has become an internationally renowned symbol for peace. In 1959, the Dalai Lama has led the Tibetan people to a religious and political path of compassion toward humanity, including the invaders, as a key principle of their struggle to free Tibet. Such a life-changing experience has inspired him to go beyond his country and promote in the whole world a kind of civic action under the principle of universal responsibility. In that sense, he explains:

While the main emphasis of the Buddha's teachings is on inner development, that is no reason for Buddhists not to participate in the society in which they live. We are all dependent on others and so responsible to others. The fundamental aim of Buddhist practice, to avoid harming others and if possible, to help them, will not be fully achieved simply by thinking about it.<sup>10</sup>

Such extreme experiences of suffering and despair have shaped the contours of engaged Buddhism's social philosophy. In that sense, Sulak Sivaraksa clearly conceived engaged Buddhism since the beginning not as an independent movement, but as a trend to develop across all the Buddhist traditions. Since those times, INEB has grown across Asia and the West, constituting the central platform for engaged Buddhist movements in the world, where prominent international organizations cooperate, such as Ven. Cheng Yen's Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, Ven. Pomnyun Sunim's JungTo Society, and Sri Lankabhimanya A. T. Ariyaratne's Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, among many others.

---

<sup>9</sup> Maha Ghosananda. *Step by Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion*, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> Dalai Lama, the XIV. "Foreword", p. 9.

#### IV. THE ETHICAL FRAMEWORK OF THAI - VIETNAMESE ENGAGED BUDDHISM

The brief historical account of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism shows that it constitutes a new social philosophy, which finds its inspiration in the Buddhist tradition, and emerges by its interaction with Western culture in a context of deep social suffering and motivation for a renewal of Buddhism to respond to the social and political challenges of contemporary society. Although this does not mean that there have not been social Buddhist principles in the past. However, the main scholars who have studied this movement, such as Sallie B. King, Christopher S. Queen, Damien Keown, and Peter Harvey, tend to coincide that it represents a paradigm shift in Buddhist ethics, which offers innovative responses to address the social ills of contemporary society by combining elements of tradition and modernity with a degree of civic involvement not seen before in Buddhist history.

Certainly, the imperative of civic action constitutes the central characteristic of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism, although it cannot be reduced solely to that. Such imperative entails a set of seven key features according to the comparative study of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa's works presented here, which are the following:

##### 4.1. Civic action-oriented

The most important feature in the emergence of engaged Buddhism – or socially engaged Buddhism as Sulak Sivaraksa prefers to call it, underscoring the social dimension of the Buddhist commitment – is the moral obligation to take action in front of social suffering. Here the monastics and lay members of the Buddhist *saṅgha* find their purpose of serving society as a consequence of their spiritual practice.

In that sense, Thich Nhat Hanh affirms that “mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what is the use of seeing? We must be aware of the real problems of the world. Then, with mindfulness, we will know what to do and what not to do to be of help.”<sup>11</sup>

Traditionally in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, which is the religious context from which Thich Nhat Hanh comes, this enlightened compassion towards the others would be expressed by, for example, helping people to foster their spiritual liberation by sharing the insightful Buddhist practice with them, under the premise that the main root of human suffering resides in the delusion in our minds. However, under this new paradigm, the compassionate action involves using means for alleviating the material causes of social suffering. This outlook regards lay and monastics, who shall find the strength in their secluded practice to come back from it and assist those in need, a proposal that represents a remarkable paradigm shift in Buddhist ethics.

Moreover, this view regarding the social role of Buddhism is not only subscribed to but applied by Sulak Sivaraksa in general to the role of religion in

---

<sup>11</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Peace is Every Step. The Path of Mindfulness in Every Day Life*, p. 91 - 92.

society. In that sense, he states that “spiritual considerations and social change cannot be separated. (...) To be truly religious is not to reject society but to work for social justice and change. Religion is at the heart of social change, and social change is the essence of religion.”<sup>12</sup> In times of crisis, he believes that the prophetic aspect of religion, and in this case of Buddhism, consists in calling for a more just and peaceful order, without postponing it for an eventual future. Hence, the imperative of civic action is understood as a central factor for engaged Buddhism and overall, for religion.

Now, as Thich Nhat Hanh explains, the proper means of action should be chosen according to the particular situation under the guidance of a mindful discernment as an outcome of the Buddhist spiritual practice. In that sense, as Christopher Queen points out, the engaged Buddhist movements provide a “new focus on the causes, varieties, and remedies of worldly suffering and oppression” which can involve “modern methods of education, mass communication, political influence and activism, jurisprudence and litigation, and yes, even fundraising and marketing”<sup>13</sup>.

Indeed, those different types of means correspond to a broad notion of civic action, which characterizes Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism. From concrete ways to give social aid to sophisticated measures seeking major changes in our social, political, and economic system, the scope of civic action is vast under the paradigm of engaged Buddhism’s social philosophy. In that way, regarding the different types of social commitment, specific actions might be perceived as too political or too engaged, while others might be considered as not engaged enough. Nevertheless, that extensive range and diversity are inherent to engaged Buddhists’ notion of civic action.

#### 4.2. Critical and hermeneutical

The second feature of engaged Buddhism’s social philosophy consists in having a critical and hermeneutical approach to traditional Buddhist teachings and applying them to the social situations of the contemporary world. Looking at the social dimension of the Buddha’s teachings, Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa develop that potential in order to offer solutions for the current causes of social suffering. In that regard, two topics of early Buddhism are frequently addressed under an innovative look: the five ethical precepts and the three unwholesome roots or poisons.

The five precepts (*pañca-sīla*) constitute the fundamental vows that lay Buddhist practitioners across all the traditions take as their core ethical principles, which have a succinct formulation and can be generally described as refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, incorrect speech, and intoxication. However, under the ethical framework of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism, these basic notions are expanded to the extent of developing their social implications in the global culture.

<sup>12</sup> Sivaraksa, Sulak. *Seeds of Peace. A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Queen, Christopher S. “Introduction: The Shapes and Sources of Engaged Buddhism”, p. 11.

That is the sense of the Five Mindfulness Trainings<sup>14</sup> elaborated by Thich Nhat Hanh. As he explains, these trainings “are based on the precepts developed during the time of the Buddha to be the foundation of practice for the entire lay practice community. I have translated these precepts for modern times, because mindfulness is at the foundation of each one of them. With mindfulness, we are aware of what is going on in our bodies, our feelings, our minds, and the world, and we avoid harming ourselves and others. Mindfulness protects us, our families and our society”<sup>15</sup>.

The precept of not killing also indicates, in this case, not supporting others’ acts of killing, which for example implies observing a vegetarian diet, although that was not an obligation prescribed by the Buddha – a time when monks were not supposed to be selective in the alms-food they received. The precept of not stealing is read as an equivalent for social justice, avoiding all forms of human exploitation and following the principle of right livelihood. The concept of sexual misconduct in the third precept involves not only adultery but also sexual abuse and other forms of harming human integrity, especially regarding children. The fourth one, usually understood as not lying, is reinterpreted here as cultivating loving speech and deep listening to reconcile divided people, religions, and nations. Finally, the fifth precept about avoiding intoxication is understood as mindful consumption, which covers not only the food that we eat but also any products that can cause addiction, including the toxic expressions of the mass media.

In the same way, as the five ethical precepts are expanded in their full social dimension, the concept of the three poisons or defilements (*triviṣa*), namely ignorance, hatred, and greed, are interpreted in their institutionalized version as the root of collective suffering. In one articulation of that vision, Sulak Sivaraksa describes the unregulated free-market economic system as the chief example of how those defilements shape the forms of social organizations. In that way, collective ignorance consists in considering the material wealth as the single criteria for the good life, and transnational corporations led by the quest for commercial profit represent the institutional embodiment of greed. That corporate culture promotes rampant consumerism between the individuals who have to compete with each other, fed by greed and hatred, to achieve a certain status, luxury, and power.

In contrast with the ruling consumerist model of global society, engaged Buddhism proposes an ideal social order governed by the *Dhamma*, in the sense of a universal law of rightfulness and truth rather than just a sectarian reference to Buddhism. By cultivating wisdom, people can realize what suites best for their happiness. In that path, greed can be replaced by an awakened desire for the common good and the practice of generosity. Also, instead of hatred, people can engage in virtuous activities inspired by loving-kindness and compassion.

<sup>14</sup> Cf.: Thich Nhat Hanh. “*The Five Mindfulness Trainings*”.

<sup>15</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. “*The Five Mindfulness Trainings*”, p. 35 - 36.



Now, regarding its sources, engaged Buddhism's social philosophy can be seen as the product of the combination between tradition and modernity. Scholars have debated which one of the elements has a stronger presence in it. However, to oppose one to the other would imply a false dichotomy. As stated before, engaged Buddhism takes inspiration in traditional Buddhist teachings and applies them to a modern context.

In that sense, Thich Nhat Hanh describes engaged Buddhism as a modern creation but inspired by the teachings of the Buddha:

When I was a novice in Vietnam, we young monks witnessed the suffering caused by the war. So, we were very eager to practice Buddhism in such a way that we could bring it into society. That was not easy because the tradition does not directly offer Engaged Buddhism. So, we had to do it by ourselves. That was the birth of Engaged Buddhism.<sup>16</sup>

Precisely, the elements that configure contemporary culture challenge Buddhism to give a response, and in that process, engaged Buddhism arises as a way of reinterpreting the original Buddha's teachings. The social dimension of them means that Buddhism has been concerned about the society in different ways since its beginning. However, the novelty here is the quality and extent of the civic action proposed as an ethical imperative by the Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhist model. A stance that evolves from a critical view of the tradition. As Sivaraksa describes:

Buddhism as practiced in most Asian countries today serves mainly to legitimize dictatorial regimes and multinational corporations. If we Buddhists want to redirect our energies towards enlightenment and universal love, we should begin by spelling Buddhism with a small b. Buddhism with a small b means concentrating on the message of the Buddha and paying less attention to myth, culture and ceremony.<sup>17</sup>

The critical view of the past implies in that way understanding the deficits that modern Buddhism might have had in Asian societies and resignifying the classical teachings according to the new social context, where Western and global culture bring into the discussion key notions such as human rights, social justice, and environmentalism that become part of the engaged Buddhist ethical framework.

#### **4.3. Insightfully interdependent**

Another important principle in engaged Buddhism's philosophy is the correlation between personal and social suffering, which is a kind of insight that comes with the practice of meditation. It allows to understand the impact of each individual's actions, speech, and thoughts in the world, no matter how small they might be perceived, and by that to discern between what not to do, say, or think to avoid harming society and what to do, say, or think to contribute to it.

<sup>16</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *"In Engaged Buddhism Peace Begins with You"*.

<sup>17</sup> Sivaraksa, Sulak. *"Buddhism with a Small b"*, p. 121.



In that regard, for Thich Nhat Hanh, individual conduct cannot be conceived as separated from the social and political dimensions of life. As he explains:

Our daily lives, the way we drink, what we eat, have to do with the world's political situation. Meditation is to see deeply into things, to see how we can change, how we can transform our situation. (...) The nature of the bombs, the nature of injustice, the nature of the weapons, and the nature of our being are the same. This is the real meaning of engaged Buddhism.<sup>18</sup>

Thich Nhat Hanh uses the concept of 'interbeing' to explain this relationship between the social and the individual and how one's existence is interdependent with the others and with the entire world; ultimately, how 'we inter-are'. For him, as Christopher Queen explains:

The relationship between the suffering of others and one's suffering is one aspect of their interbeing. He coined the expression in English to translate the Vietnamese *tiếp hien* (to continuously be in touch [with others] in the present moment) and the notion of cumulative interpenetration found in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (Chinese Hua-Yen; Korean Hwaom; Japanese Kegon).<sup>19</sup>

In that way, engaged Buddhism highlights the classical Buddhist notion of non-separateness between self and world, which shows how human existence depends on innumerable causes, from one's parents to the rays of the sun. However, at the same time, the social connotation of this concept exposes how the world depends on human existence as well. In that sense, Sulak Srivaraksa describes the different layers of that interaction:

Buddhism can give one a sense of 'interbelonging', in which one feels the interrelatedness of all beings and recognizes how one belongs within it. (...) Beginning with critical understanding of oneself, we try to reach a critical understanding of our community, society, nation, and eventually our world. We develop a critical awareness of society and the government, and we examine all established institutions to understand how the mechanisms of greed, hatred, and ignorance operate at the structural level of society.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.4. Mindfully and spirituality-rooted

This particular feature is shared in all the major Buddhist traditions, as the practice of mental cultivation (*citta bhāvanā*) constitutes a capital part – if not the main one – in the core of classical Buddhist teachings, being included in the noble eight-fold path taught by the Buddha, a set of crucial practices leading towards liberation.

<sup>18</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Being Peace*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Queen, Christopher S. "Engaged Buddhism. Agnosticism, Interdependence, Globalization", p. 334.

<sup>20</sup> Sivaraksa, Sulak. *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World*, p. 61.

However, it is worth mentioning this characteristic as one of the defining features of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism, since our authors strengthen the role of meditation as the deep source of engaged Buddhist practice. In that sense, Thich Nhat Hanh explains that:

Engaged Buddhism does not only mean to use Buddhism to solve social and political problems, protesting against the bombs, and protesting against social injustice. First of all, we have to bring Buddhism into our daily lives (...). We should be able to bring the practice from the meditation hall into our daily lives.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, the skillful actions to engage with social suffering should be carefully chosen as a result of a mindful deliberation which comes with the meditative practice.

Moreover, such practice has the capacity of nurturing and inspiring the mind of the hardworking Buddhist activists in their engaged activities. In that way, as exposed by Ven. Santikaro Bhikkhu – a Western disciple of the revered Thai master Ajahn Buddhādāsa – who participated in the founding conference of INEB, there is an “importance of spirituality for activists; to maintain a constructive perspective and avoid burnout.”<sup>22</sup> Meditation, in that sense, not only constitutes a source for engaged Buddhism in its origin but also sustains its practice in time.

Nevertheless, the practice of mindfulness and spirituality is underscored by our authors not only as an individual but as a collective. Thich Nhat Hanh always praises the role of the *Saṅgha* or community of practitioners in the Buddhist path – which is traditionally considered as one of the three jewels of Buddhism, next to the Buddha and his teachings, the Dharma. It is in the *Saṅgha* where the engaged Buddhist activist finds support and spiritual nourishment for his or her committed role in society.

In the same way, Sulak Sivaraksa considers that *kalyāṇa-mittatā* or spiritual friendship, an inspiring concept from the Pāli canon, is the core value of the engaged Buddhist network. As Matteo Pistono explains:

Engaging in open communication was part of Sulak’s understanding of the Buddhist term *kalyana-mittata* or spiritual friendship. The key to being an authentic spiritual friend (*kalyana-mitta*), according to Sulak, is to remain honest to oneself and others. ‘Good friends will tell you what you don’t want to hear’, students often heard him say.<sup>23</sup>

According to this view, improving society is a collective endeavor that demands the cooperation of one’s spiritual peers, Buddhists, and non-Buddhists. This bond of loyalty and solidarity, as well as fraternal criticism and support, is a key element in the ethical framework of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism.

<sup>21</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Being Peace*, p. 58 - 59.

<sup>22</sup> See: “International Engaged Buddhist Conference”, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> . Pistono, Matteo. *Roar: Sulak Sivaraksa and the Path of Socially Engaged Buddhism*, p. 71.

#### 4.5. Non-violent and compassionate

Again, in this case, this feature constitutes a common basis of Buddhist practice in general. Non-violence (*ahimsā*) is a principle for action, and particularly for civic action. Although etymologically, it entails the notion of avoiding harm, it does not imply passivity or indifference. On the contrary, non-violence is the virtuous way of approaching social suffering. In that sense, Sulak Srivaraksa affirms that:

Nonviolence is an effective and very powerful response to conflict. Peace is not merely the absence of war. Peace is a proactive, comprehensive process of finding ground through open communication and putting into practice a philosophy of nonharming (...). It is about avoiding extremes – neither doing nothing, on the one hand, nor responding with similar violence, on the other.<sup>24</sup>

In Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism, it is indeed relevant to highlight the role of non-violence since, in many cases, activists have to find ways to respond to extreme forms of violence, without reacting in the same manner and perpetuating by that a cycle of cruelty. In that way, our engaged Buddhist leaders are living examples of this attitude. Even in front of the most horrifying expressions of social distress, they have cultivated the required peace of mind to serve for the resolution of conflict skillfully.

In the same sense, compassion (*karuṇā*) plays a pivotal role in Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism. The rage that can normally emerge in front of the challenging circumstances of oppression that causes various forms of social suffering is replaced here by a compassionate approach to both the victims and the perpetrators. By looking deeply with awareness at the causes behind the vilest crimes, the engaged Buddhist activist can understand the criminal's situation as one profoundly affected by suffering and poisoned by the three defilements. Only from such mindful understanding a compassionate action and speech can arise towards both the oppressed and their oppressors, which is necessary for helping to overcome the outcomes of harm and injustice.

Coincidentally, embracing these ethical principles, Thich Nhat Hanh affirms that: “nonviolence and compassion are the foundations of a peace movement. If you don't have enough peace and understanding and loving-kindness within yourself, your actions will not truly be for peace. Everyone knows that peace has to begin with oneself, but not many people know how to do it.”<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.6. Interreligious and globally driven

In its beginnings, the work and of our engaged Buddhist leaders have been focused on their respective countries and the deeply compelling circumstances that they were facing there. However, since then, one can find in their writings and teachings a clear sense of global concern for the welfare of humanity and the future of the planet.

<sup>24</sup> Sivaraksa, Sulak. *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, “In Engaged Buddhism Peace Begins with You”.

Going back to the origins of engaged Buddhism in Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh remembers the importance of interreligious cooperation, particularly with the Catholic community:

Both Buddhists and Catholics, along with the other religious groups, have a common base of great importance in their desire for peace and national independence, and actually are working together in these matters. A real communion and co-operation between the Buddhists and Catholics has already been realized in vital fashion (...). The Catholic policy of 'presence', to which I have referred before, is not far from the Buddhist concept of engagement.<sup>26</sup>

Both Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa clearly understood the mental and material causes behind the war, oppression, and social suffering in their respective places. The geopolitics of colonization, the ideological clash between communism and capitalism, the imperialists' strategies of power were all crucial factors in the struggles of Southeast Asia. In that sense, their engaged reflections about the role of Buddhism in their countries became thoughts on the role of Buddhism and religion in general in the world, which constitutes the global approach of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism.

Moreover, since the foundation of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, where non-Buddhist members were invited to join, Sulak Sivaraksa has sought out to work with other religions. As he states regarding the principles of the network, "the focus of INEB's work as such is not the promotion and glorification of Buddhism but the overcoming of suffering through the practice of dharma, which means creating solidarity with individuals and groups who hold similar such values from other religions and other fields of social work."<sup>27</sup>

In that way, Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism actively promotes mutual respect and interreligious cooperation between the major religions in the world and among the Buddhist community itself across their different traditions to jointly address the common issues that they share according to their social concerns.

#### **4.7. Tolerant and politically unbiased**

Engaged Buddhism needs in many contexts to get involved in politics, in order to find long-lasting solutions to the many faces of social suffering. In that process, the engaged activists may find allies on different sides of the political spectrum. They may need to support them in some cases or even compete against others of them when lay Buddhist decide to run for office as a way to serve the public skillfully.

In all of those cases, engaged activists need to keep the right attitude to avoid getting caught in the minutia and hateful rivalries of party politics. That is why the practice of non-attachment to views is, by all means, necessary to avoid losing perspective and remain politically unbiased.

<sup>26</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, p. 86 - 87.

<sup>27</sup> See: "INEB's Cultivation and Practice of Engaged Buddhism".

This approach is present in the first mindful training that Thich Nhat Hanh teaches, as part of a list of fourteen guidelines of his community:

Aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance, we are determined not to be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. (...) We are committed to learning and practicing non-attachment to views and being open to others' experiences and insights to benefit from the collective wisdom. (...) We are determined not to force others, even our children, by any means whatsoever –such as authority, threat, money, propaganda, or indoctrination– to adopt our view.<sup>28</sup>

However, the mindful intention of engaged Buddhism for alleviating the social ills in the world does not mean that Buddhists are inextricably destined to assume positions of social or political power. In that sense, Sulak Sivaraksa explains:

Buddhism is simply a way of mindfulness and peace. The presence of Buddhism does not mean having a lot of schools, hospitals, cultural institutions, and political parties run by Buddhists. Rather, the presence of Buddhism means that all these things are permeated and administrated with humanism, love, tolerance, and enlightenment. These are the characteristics that Buddhism attribute to opening up and developing the best aspects of human nature. This is the true spirit of Buddhism.<sup>29</sup>

That is undoubtedly the true spirit of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism as well. Not a single group but every individual, every social, political, or religious organization can contribute in their specific way to overcome social suffering and lead the way toward the emancipation of the world. In that immense task, engaged Buddhism is already playing a relevant role in the awakening of social compassion and the indispensable wisdom to find the path to spiritual and social liberation.

## V. CONCLUSION

The concept of engaged Buddhism and its social philosophy is a post-World War II phenomenon that originally emerged in Southeast Asia from the interaction between Eastern and Western cultures as a Buddhist response to the unprecedented social suffering experienced in Asian countries in the context of oppressing colonialism and massive armed conflicts. It constitutes a paradigm shift in Buddhist ethics, emphasizing the decisive role of civic action at the core of the religious practice. Moreover, while there are examples of social concern in the history of Buddhism, the extent and quality of the social commitment in this new movement is groundbreaking.

In that sense, the works of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa constitute the pillars of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism. Furthermore, they laid out a convergent ethical framework for the movement, which has offered key

<sup>28</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. "The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings", p. 121 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Sivaraksa, Sulak. "Buddhism with a Small b", p. 122.

principles for the development of engaged Buddhism across Asia and the West. The first one being the imperative of civic action, which demands an active involvement towards the understanding of social suffering and its overcoming.

Nevertheless, civic action under the lens of Thai-Vietnamese engaged Buddhism needs to fulfill certain requirements. It needs to be a mindful civic action, rooted in the practice of meditation that is collectively cultivated among spiritual friends. It is a compassionate and non-violent type of action, which implies a proactive attitude toward the resolution of social conflict. It seeks the well-being of both local and global communities using interreligious and inter-organizational cooperation. In that spirit, by practicing non-attachment to views, it is politically unbiased, avoiding sectarianism and dogmatism in party politics and embracing a tolerant disposition. Ultimately, engaged Buddhist civic action under the Thai-Vietnamese paradigm finds inspiration in a healthy critical and hermeneutical attitude toward the tradition, identifying in the classical Buddhist teaching of interdependence a key factor for recognizing the correlation between individual and social suffering and developing innovative ways to address them.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- “INEB’s Cultivation and Practice of Engaged Buddhism”. *International Network of Engaged Buddhists*, accessed April 25, 2020, <http://inebnetwork.org/about/>.
- “International Engaged Buddhist Conference”. In: *Seeds of Peace*, Vol. 5, No. 2, May 1989, p. 37 - 41.
- “Thich Nhat Hanh. Biography”, *Plum Village*, accessed April 3, 2020, <https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography/>
- Bechert, Heinz. “Buddhist Revival in East and West”. In: *The World of Buddhism*. Edited by Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich. London: Thames and Hudson, 1995.
- Dalai Lama, the XIV. “Foreword”. In: Ken Jones. *The Social Face of Buddhism*. An Approach to Political and Social Activism. London: Wisdom Publications, 1989.
- Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics. Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Keown, Damien. “Buddhist Ethics”. In: *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*. Edited by Hugh LaFollette. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- King, Sallie B. “Elements of Engaged Buddhist Ethical Theory”. In: *Destroying Māra for Ever. Buddhist Ethics Essays in Honor of Damien Keown*. Edited by John Powers & Charles S. Prebish. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2009.



- King, Sallie B. Being Benevolence. *The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.
- Maha Ghosananda. *Step by Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992.
- Pistono, Matteo. "Sulak Sivaraksa by Matteo Pistono", *International Network of Engaged Buddhists*, accessed April 7, 2020, <http://inebnetwork.org/sulak-sivaraksa-by-matteo-pistono/>
- Pistono, Matteo. *Roar: Sulak Sivaraksa and the Path of Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2019.
- Queen, Christopher S. "Engaged Buddhism. Agnosticism, Interdependence, Globalization". In: *Westward Dharma. Buddhism Beyond Asia*. Edited by Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Queen, Christopher S. "Introduction: From Altruism to Activism". In: *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*. Edited by Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish and Damien Keown. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Queen, Christopher S. "Introduction: The Shapes and Sources of Engaged Buddhism". In: *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. Edited by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King. New York: SUNY, 1996.
- Sivaraksa, Sulak. "Buddhism with a Small b". In: *Dharma Rain. Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*. Edited by Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft. Boston, MA: Shambala, 2000.
- Sivaraksa, Sulak. "Renewal: A Buddhist Perspective". In: *Seeds of Peace*, Vol. 5, No. 2, May 1989, p. 28.
- Sivaraksa, Sulak. *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World*. Bangkok: Suksit Siam, 2012.
- Sivaraksa, Sulak. *Loyalty Demands Dissent: Autobiography of an Engaged Buddhist*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998.
- Sivaraksa, Sulak. *Seeds of Peace. A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992.
- Thich Nhat Hanh. "Dharma Talk: History of Engaged Buddhism". In: *The Mindfulness Bell*, No. 49, Autumn 2008, accessed April 3, 2020, <http://www.mindfulnessbell.org/archive/2015/02/dharma-talk-history-of-engaged-buddhism-2>
- Thich Nhat Hanh. "In Engaged Buddhism Peace Begins with You". *Interview by John Malkin*, Lion's Roar, July 1, 2003, accessed 17 April, 2020, <http://www.lionsroar.com/in-engaged-buddhism-peace-begins-with-you>
- Thich Nhat Hanh. "The Five Mindfulness Trainings", *Plum Village*, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/the-5-mindfulness-trainings/>.

Thich Nhat Hanh. *Being Peace*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987.

Thich Nhat Hanh. *Happiness. Essential Mindfulness Practices*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2009.

Thich Nhat Hanh. *Peace is Every Step. The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. London: Rider, 1995.

Thich Nhat Hanh. *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.

# BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: PROMOTING EDUCATION, HARMONY AND STRENGTHENING UNITY THROUGH BUDDHIST MISSIONARY SCHOOLS IN CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS OF BANGLADESH

Ven. Jhubhur Chakma\*

## **Abstract:**

This paper examines the role of Theravāda Buddhist monks in Bangladesh, how Buddhist monks actively demonstrated compassion by providing free formal education to disadvantaged and underprivileged indigenous children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. Since the independence of Bangladesh, many Buddhist monks have played a significant role in promoting educational advancement, social welfare, fostering peace, and enhancing harmony within multicultural ethnic and religious minority societies, particularly in CHT, regardless of race and religion in the region. Their contributions have left a substantial impact on indigenous children in the region, many of whom have since achieved professional success across diverse fields around the world. This study explores how Buddhist monks put compassion into action through accessible general education for disadvantaged indigenous communities, thereby fortifying community bonds and contributing to regional peace and harmony. Despite the critical nature of this work, previous scholarship has largely overlooked the contributions of Bangladeshi Buddhist monks in promoting peace and harmony through education in the CHT. However, this research addresses this gap by documenting the significant educational and societal contributions of Bangladeshi Buddhist monastics, emphasizing their role in promoting peace across CHT's multicultural and multilingual indigenous societies. Additionally, this study highlights and preserves the legacies of key monastic figures whose efforts have significantly

---

\* American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation.

expanded educational access and exemplified Buddhist compassion in action in the region.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist compassion, promoting education, harmony, strength, unity, Buddhist missionary, school, Theravāda Buddhism, monk.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in post-independence Bangladesh enjoyed a unique excluded status under the administration of the British government.<sup>1</sup> In 1884, the British colonial administration had divided the CHT into three circles: the Chakma Circle, the Bohmong Circle, and the Mong Circle. Each of these circles maintained a distinct self-administrative structure based on ethnic leadership while preserving their diverse cultures, traditions, and religious practices.<sup>2</sup> However, the Bengal Border Commission allocated the CHT region to Pakistan in 1947.<sup>3</sup> Following Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the CHT experienced widespread human rights violations and conflicts between the mainstream Bengali Muslim population and various ethnic groups.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, from 1975 to 1997, the region experienced bloody armed conflicts between government security forces and an ethnic armed group known as Santi Bahini (Peace Force), the militant wing of the CHT Solidarity Party (PCJSS).<sup>5</sup>

During the period of armed conflict from 1975 to 1997, Buddhist monks came forward to support orphans and poor indigenous children who had lost their parents during the war and other armed conflicts. Therefore, Buddhist monks went from house to house, collected and brought poor orphaned children to the city, where they provided them with free food, accommodation, education, health care, and other necessities. Within this context, Theravāda Buddhism monks emerged as pivotal figures in advancing social welfare, particularly in the education of indigenous children and the promotion of Buddhism. Through their engagement with disadvantaged communities, Buddhist monks actively applied the Buddhist principle of *karunā* (compassion) by offering free educational programs and other social services.

---

<sup>1</sup> Amena Mohsin (2003). *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson (1909). *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*. Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, p. 12 – 13.

<sup>3</sup> Hosana Jahan Shewly (2023). Sixty-Six Years Saga of Bengal Boundary-Making: A Historical Expose of Bangladesh-India Border. *BISS Journal*, 34 (3), p. 205 - 219.

<sup>4</sup> Md. Faridul Islam (2006). Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Discrimination Against Ethnic Minorities of Bangladesh. *Journal of Ethnic Affair Ethnic Community Development Organization*. II, p. 27 - 30.

<sup>5</sup> Anurug Chakma and Kisha Chakma (2024). Nation-building policies and ethnic conflict in Bangladesh. In A. Author & B. Editor (Eds.), *The aftermath of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971* (1st ed., p. 19 - 22). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003463627>

The monk's initiatives have not only provided critical educational opportunities while fostering peace, inclusivity, and inter-communal harmony within these multi-ethnic communities in the region. Despite the socio-political challenges within the CHT, where ethnic tensions and language barriers often hinder access to traditional education, Buddhist monks have consistently promoted unity and cultural resilience. Their efforts have empowered indigenous children to overcome socio-economic limitations, with many achieving professional success in diverse fields worldwide.

However, the vital role of these monks in promoting peace and educational equity has remained largely unacknowledged in academic literature.<sup>6</sup> In response to this gap, this paper explores the educational contributions of these monastics, who, motivated by the Buddhist principle of compassion, have worked tirelessly to provide access to both general and Buddhist education for indigenous children. This study also fills the current research gap in existing literature by documenting the significant educational and societal contributions of Theravāda Buddhist monastics, emphasizing their role in fostering interethnic and interreligious peace in the CHT. Furthermore, it seeks to honor the legacies of key monastic figures whose dedication to education accessibility and community service has not only shaped individual lives but also strengthened the social fabric of the region. Through a detailed exploration of their work, this paper underscores the monks' commitment to social justice, cultural preservation, and peacebuilding within CHT's diverse communities, placing these efforts in the broader context of the transformative role of religious actors in multicultural, post-conflict societies.

## II. BUDDHIST MONKS AS EDUCATORS IN BANGLADESH

Buddhism functions as a comprehensive educational system rooted in both conventional and ultimate realities, centering on two foundational learning principles: moral education and the exploration of the way of natural phenomena. This dual emphasis integrates ethical development with a deep understanding of reality, guiding practitioners through a process that cultivates both personal virtue and insight into the nature of existence.<sup>7</sup> Buddhist educational theory is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Buddha and emphasizes compassion and moral integrity as central elements of education. Muangkaew (2024) proposes a Buddhist-based learning model to cultivate compassion in higher education students, highlighting its significant impact on their ethical and character development. This approach encourages students to internalize Buddhist principles, reinforcing that educational systems should cultivate empathy and compassion toward others, thereby supporting holistic

---

<sup>6</sup> Ranabir Samaddar (1999). *The marginal nation: Transborder migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> K. Muangkaew, P. Boonsriton, C. Mangkhang, and J. Dibyamandala (2024). Model of Buddhism-based learning to enhance the compassionate mind of higher education students. *Community and Social Development Journal*, 25(1), p. 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.57260/rc-mrj.2024.264481>

growth.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Ozawa-de Silva and Dodson-Lavelle (2011) emphasize training in compassion within educational contexts, focusing on its role in developing moral sensitivity. They illustrate how Buddhist practices of compassion can be integrated into broader educational frameworks to foster empathy and ethical awareness, underscoring their essential role in students' moral development.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the Buddha's teachings on education, particularly on developing wisdom and understanding, can be found in several suttas within the *Pāli Canon*. For example, in the *Kālāma Sutta*<sup>10</sup>, the Buddha encourages a form of education based on critical inquiry, personal experience, and direct knowledge rather than unquestioning acceptance of authority or tradition.<sup>11</sup> In the *Kālāma Sutta*, the Buddha advises the *Kālāma* to critically evaluate teachings and avoid accepting ideas solely based on tradition, hearsay, or authority. Instead, the Buddha emphasizes learning through personal experience and reasoning, promoting an educational approach that values wisdom, discernment, and compassion. This *sutta* underscores the importance of a reflective and investigative approach to learning, aligning with the principles of experiential learning and moral discernment. Another *sutta* that highlights the importance of education and wisdom is the *Parābhava Sutta*<sup>12</sup> (*Sutta Nipāta* 1.6), where the Buddha discusses the causes of downfall and the qualities needed for success and spiritual growth. Here, the Buddha emphasizes that ignorance is a primary cause of suffering and downfall, advocating for the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom as essential to overcoming life's challenges.<sup>13</sup>

The teachings of the Buddha have inspired numerous Buddhist monks to cultivate compassion alongside wisdom, actively engaging in community welfare for the benefit of many. In Bangladesh, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Buddhist monks assumed the role of guardians, serving as pillars of education, cultural preservation, and religious traditions in the region. Unfortunately, these contributions have largely remained unacknowledged, with previous scholarship ignoring this significant field of study within Bangladesh. Historically, many Buddhist monks devoted their entire lives to

---

<sup>8</sup> Muangkaew et al. (2024), p. 199.

<sup>9</sup> Brendan Richard Ozawa-DeSilva (2011). An education of heart and mind: Practical and theoretical issues in teaching cognitive-based compassion training to children. *Practical Matters*, 1(4), p. 1 – 28.

<sup>10</sup> AN. 3. 65.

<sup>11</sup> F. L. Woodward (Trans.). (1979). *The book of the gradual sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya): Vol. I (Ones, Twos, Threes)* (p. 170 – 178). London: Pāli Text Society. Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Trans.). (2013). *With the Kālāmas of Kesamutta (Kesamuttisutta)* (A. I. 188). In *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*. Accessed on November 22, 2024, available at: <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>

<sup>12</sup> Sn. 1. 6

<sup>13</sup> H. S. Jarrett (Trans.). (1913). *The Sutta Nipāta, Vol. I: "The Causes of Downfall"* (p. 11 – 13). London: Pāli Text Society.



community development and to propagating Buddhism through education. This legacy endures today, with many monks still actively involved in social activism and education within the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Somaratne (2019) expands on the role of Buddhist ethics in global moral education, proposing that Buddhist moral teachings can serve as a universal model for ethical education. His study highlights compassion as a guiding principle for ethical living and respect for all life forms, advocating for the integration of Buddhist values, such as kindness and mindfulness, into educational models to promote moral awareness and global citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

Goodman (2014) also emphasizes the centrality of compassion within Buddhist ethics, arguing that the Buddha's teachings offer a practical framework for compassion-centered education. He asserts that this approach encourages students to develop social responsibility and empathy, which in turn contributes to a harmonious and morally aware society.<sup>15</sup> Bijoy P. Barua (2007), "Colonialism, Education, and Rural Buddhist Communities in Bangladesh," provides a comprehensive analysis of the effects of colonial and postcolonial educational policies on the Buddhist communities in Bangladesh.<sup>16</sup> Barua explores how British, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi educational frameworks sought to reshape cultural and social dynamics in these communities, often marginalizing traditional Buddhist educational practices in favor of centralized, economically driven models. Barua contrasts this colonial and state-imposed structure with the Buddhist model, which emphasizes liberation, critical thinking, and environmental consciousness. The paper dissects the colonial education system's motives, including economic exploitation, cultural imposition, and the undermining of Buddhist values. In addition, Barua demonstrates how Buddhist communities have resisted these cultural intrusions through nonviolent actions and educational decolonization, incorporating formal, non-formal, and informal learning approaches. The study presents a detailed historical narrative and advocates for preserving the unique contemplative practices within Buddhist education, while highlighting the contrast with the colonial model's focus on materialism and control.

The chapter "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Promises and Performances" by Fardaus Ara and Md Mostafizur Rahman Khan, published in *Migration, Regional Autonomy, and Conflicts in Eastern South Asia* (2023), explores the unique role that Buddhist monks have played in fostering peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh.<sup>17</sup> This region,

---

<sup>14</sup> G. A. Somaratne (2019). Early Buddhist moral theory for global education in ethics. In Thich Nhat Tu & Thich Duc Thien (Eds.), *Buddhist approach to global education in ethics* (p. 41–60). Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist University Publications.

<sup>15</sup> C. Goodman (2014). *Consequences of compassion: An interpretation and defense of Buddhist ethics* (p. 3 – 5). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Bijoy P. Barua (2007). Colonialism, education, and rural Buddhist communities in Bangladesh. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 37 (1), p. 60 – 76.

<sup>17</sup> Ara, F., & Khan, M. M. R. (2023). The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Promises and

characterized by a history of ethnic and political tensions, has benefited from the peace-oriented efforts of Buddhist monks, who focus on fostering social harmony through educational and community initiatives. Buddhist monks have contributed not only to conflict resolution but also to the construction of an inclusive societal framework that emphasizes cultural understanding and tolerance. This chapter contextualizes the 1997 Peace Accord, signed between the Bangladesh government and the Parbhatia Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), which marked a critical turning point in the region's peace efforts. While initially celebrated, the accord's implementation encountered significant challenges from various opposing forces, complicating efforts toward sustainable peace. As highlighted in this work, the involvement of Buddhist monks exemplifies a grassroots approach to peacebuilding, effectively bridging communities across ethnic and religious lines.

In his 1997 work, "Forgotten Community and Indifferent State", Mannan explores the post-colonial challenges faced by indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and highlights the pivotal role of Buddhist monks in educational and cultural preservation.<sup>18</sup> As local leaders, Buddhist monks fostered education as a means of cultural resistance, countering state-driven integration policies that often marginalized indigenous cultural practices and values. Mannan's analysis underscores how Buddhist monks championed cultural and educational autonomy, positioning themselves as key figures in preserving the CHT's unique heritage and identity amid government standardization efforts. Similarly, Khan's 1997 study, "Social Dimension of Sustainable Development: An Inquiry into the Forest Sectors of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India," extends this view by situating Buddhist monks within the larger framework of sustainable development in Bangladesh's forested regions, including the CHT.<sup>19</sup> Although his primary focus is on sustainable forestry, Khan illustrates how Buddhist monks contributed significantly to education by integrating cultural knowledge with sustainable practices. Beyond their religious roles, monks actively used education to foster environmental awareness and preserve traditional values, reinforcing the community's resilience against socio-economic and political pressures.

Therefore, the monks played a central role in preserving indigenous educational practices, which emphasized Buddhist spiritual and philosophical teachings as a means of cultural resilience. By prioritizing localized education rooted in Buddhist values, the monks established an alternative framework that resisted colonial erasure, advocating for non-violent decolonization and

---

performances. In A. Ranjan & D. Chattoraj (Eds.), *Migration, regional autonomy, and conflicts in Eastern South Asia* (p. 310). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28764-0\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28764-0_12)

<sup>18</sup> M. Mannan (1997). Forgotten community and indifferent state. In Professor Satya Narayana (Ed.), *Society: Tribal studies*. Concept Publishing Company. p. 147

<sup>19</sup> M. R. Khan (1997). *Social dimension of sustainable development: An inquiry into the forest sectors of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India*. Concept Publishing Company, p. 150.

community autonomy. This approach, which prioritizes community-specific values over colonial education, underscores the critical role of Buddhist monks as leaders in cultural preservation. In “Faith and Education in Bangladesh: A Review of the Contemporary Landscape and Challenges,” Roy, Huq, and Rob discuss the intersection of religious and secular education in the CHT, highlighting basic primary and secondary school-based education provided by Buddhist missionary schools. This model integrates secular and religious instruction, fostering a learning environment grounded in Buddhist traditions while adapting to contemporary challenges. The study illustrates how Buddhist missionary-based education serves as a culturally resonant alternative in a predominantly secular educational landscape, preserving indigenous values within a system that lacks consistent governmental support.<sup>20</sup> Buddhist missionary-based education offers a critical perspective on the resilience of general education alongside Buddhist principles, serving as both a source of knowledge and a safeguard for indigenous cultural integrity.

Further, in “Samaj as a Form of Self-Organisation among Village Communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts,” Chakma and Gerharz explore the “Samaj” institution in CHT communities, in which Buddhist monks play a crucial role in education, social cohesion, and welfare.<sup>21</sup> The authors illustrate how monks act as both spiritual and practical leaders within the Samaj, offering informal education and mobilizing community resources to meet collective needs. This structure enables monks to preserve cultural continuity within a framework of self-organization that empowers the community, adapting traditional Buddhist leadership roles to address the evolving demands of local governance. In “Arakanese Chittagong Became Mughal Islamabad: Buddhist-Muslim Relationship in Chittagong (Chottoqram), *Bangladesh*,” Barua provides historical context to the interfaith relations that have shaped CHT’s social fabric, emphasizing the role of Buddhist monks in safeguarding educational and cultural institutions amidst religious tensions.<sup>22</sup> Buddhist monks in CHT serve as protectors of heritage sites and educators who preserve religious teachings while promoting peaceful cohabitation. By navigating these interfaith dynamics, Buddhist education in CHT fosters stability and cultural resilience, underscoring the monks’ dual role as religious and community leaders in a complex socio-religious landscape.

---

<sup>20</sup> S. Roy, S. Huq, & A. B. A. Rob (2020). Faith and education in Bangladesh: A review of the contemporary landscape and challenges. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 79, p. 453 – 455. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102290>

<sup>21</sup> Bablu Chakma & Eva Gerharz (2022). Samaj as a form of self-organisation among village communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. In D. Neubert, H. J. Lauth, & C. Mohamad-Klotzbach (Eds.), *Local self-governance and varieties of statehood* (p. 139). Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14996-2\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14996-2_7)

<sup>22</sup> D. M. Barua (2020). Arakanese Chittagong became Mughal Islamabad: Buddhist-Muslim relationship in Chittagong (Chottoqram), Bangladesh. In *Buddhist-Muslim relations in a Theravāda world*. Singapore: Springer, p. 88 – 90.

A research dissertation conducted by Urmee Chakma, which deserves further review for this paper. In her dissertation, *Empowerment and Desubalternising Voices through Education: A Case Study of Diasporic Indigenous Chakma in Melbourne*, Chakma provides an analysis that, while primarily focusing on the diasporic Chakma community – a Buddhist community – it offers insights into the foundational role Buddhist monks have played in promoting education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, particularly during periods of socio-political turmoil.<sup>23</sup> While her primary focus is on the diaspora, her discussion of cultural resilience and empowerment through education strongly aligns with the role of Buddhist monks in CHT in preserving indigenous culture and identity. Chakma's study highlights how Buddhist monks historically provided free education to underprivileged indigenous children, particularly during periods of conflict and social unrest. Bangladeshi Buddhist monks traditionally served as both spiritual and educational leaders, founding schools and monasteries that provided both Buddhist teachings and secular education. This approach not only brought stability to communities affected by armed conflict but also served as a vital means of cultural preservation, ensuring the transmission of Buddhist and indigenous values to future generations.

The monks' initiatives aligned with Buddhist principles of compassion and service, promoting a holistic approach to education that encompassed moral, spiritual, and academic elements. Buddhist monks in CHT empowered indigenous communities and protected them from cultural erasure by offering free education in a structured, supportive environment. Chakma's work underscores how such efforts by Buddhist monks in education extended beyond conventional teaching, positioning them as pillars of resistance and autonomy, contributing to the community's resilience and continuity. Through these efforts, Buddhist monks emerged as central figures in the socio-cultural landscape of the CHT, reinforcing education as a powerful tool for empowerment and cultural preservation.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine and document the contributions of Theravāda Buddhist monks in the field of education and community welfare in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. This approach provides a rich and nuanced framework for collecting empirical data directly from participants. It enables a comprehensive understanding of the monks' roles in education, social welfare, community building, and cultural preservation. The research design involved in-depth interviews with 15 key informants, including students, teachers, and Buddhist monks from missionary schools in CHT. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to ensure flexibility, allowing participants to share their unique

---

<sup>23</sup> Urmee Chakma (2021). *Empowerment and desubalternising voices through education: A case study of diasporic indigenous Chakma in Melbourne*. Doctoral dissertation, Monash University, Faculty of Education, p. 45.

experiences while maintaining focus on the study's objectives.

Therefore, the qualitative education research emphasizes studying natural settings to deeply understand behaviors and processes in context. It collects rich, descriptive data, focusing on participants' perspectives and interpretations rather than numerical analysis or predetermined hypotheses.<sup>24</sup> This method uses tools like participant observation and in-depth interviews, often involving small sample sizes, to explore complex educational phenomena. Grounded in an inductive and flexible approach, qualitative research draws from interdisciplinary frameworks, ensuring findings are shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts. Lichtman's *Qualitative Research in Education: A user's guide* emphasizes a step-by-step approach to designing and conducting qualitative studies, rooted in educational contexts. It highlights the importance of ethics, reflexivity, and rigor while addressing evolving challenges through practical examples and strategies.<sup>25</sup>

Ethnographic observation complemented the interviews by providing an immersive understanding of the monks' educational practices within the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. This fieldwork involved observing classroom dynamics, teaching methods, and the integration of school curricula, offering valuable insights into how Buddhist educational programs function and their impact on students and the broader community. Additionally, this ethnographic approach highlights the cultural and environmental context of the CHT, emphasizing how local traditions, challenges, and available resources shape the monks' educational efforts. Archival research further provides a historical perspective on the contributions of Buddhist monastics to education in the region. By analyzing literature, records, news reports, and publications, the study traced the evolution of Buddhist monks' involvement in serving the community with broader socio-educational, religious, and cultural objectives, particularly during the post-conflict period.

Moreover, this qualitative approach-incorporating interviews, ethnographic observation, and archival research-offered a multi-dimensional understanding of the Theravāda Buddhist monk's role in education and community development. Interviews captured personal narratives, ethnographic observation provided an immersive understanding of the community's lived experiences, and archival research contextualized these efforts within a historical framework. Collectively, these methods ensured comprehensive documentation and a nuanced understanding of the monk's educational and social contributions, as well as their lasting legacy, thereby preserving their impact for future generations.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Robert C. Bogdan & Sari Knopp Biklen (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 4 – 6.

<sup>25</sup> Marilyn Lichtman (2023). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide* (4th ed). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003281917>, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Samuels, J. D. (2004). Toward an action-oriented pedagogy: Buddhist texts and monastic education in contemporary Sri Lanka. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 72 (4), p. 955 - 971.



#### IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Four key findings emerged from this research study. Buddhist monks in Bangladesh have historically played an integral role in promoting education and Buddhism for social welfare and community development. The findings indicate that without the proactive involvement of Buddhist monks in advancing education, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the literacy rate among the region's Buddhist population would likely stagnate at approximately 77%, as limited access to basic education remains a critical challenge. Therefore, the monks' educational campaigns have had a significant and lasting impact on indigenous Buddhist communities, raising awareness about the importance of education and fundamental human rights, ultimately leading to improved socio-economic opportunities. This shift has not only empowered individuals but has also strengthened the collective resilience of these communities in overcoming structural inequalities and political marginalization.

On November 21, 2024, an interview was conducted with the Most Venerable Jnanashree Mahathera, the 13th Sangharaja of the Bangladesh Sangharaja Bhikkhu Mahasabha Nikāya – the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh (SSCB). As a prominent monastic leader dedicated to education and humanitarian efforts, Jnanashree Mahathera reflected on his initial visit to the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1980. During his visit, he witnessed the widespread suffering of indigenous Buddhist communities, who faced severe deprivation in education, healthcare, and even the fundamental practice of Buddhism. These hardships, he noted, were exacerbated by political instability and systemic persecution against indigenous groups in the region. Recalling this experience, Jnanashree Mahathera made the following statement:

When I first visited the Chittagong Hill Tracts, I saw profound suffering among indigenous Buddhists. Despite their deep devotion, they had lost touch with fundamental Buddhist practices and lacked access to education, healthcare, and basic human rights, all amid political instability. This dire situation disheartened me but also inspired action. I realized education was key to empowering this marginalized community. Engaging with local leaders, I proposed a Buddhist missionary orphanage school to support underprivileged children. With their encouragement, I decided to settle in Dighinala, Khagrachari district, where I founded the first Buddhist missionary school.<sup>27</sup>

Ven. Jnanashree Mahathera has played a pivotal role in addressing the socio-educational needs of Indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. His contributions became particularly significant with the establishment of the Buddhist Orphanage Residential School in Dighinala, Khagrachari Hill District, in 1981. This initiative directly responded to the humanitarian crisis caused by war and conflict, providing essential education

---

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Most Ven. Jnanashree Mahathera, personal communication, November 21, 2024.



and support to children who had lost their parents. Mahathera's efforts align with broader findings on the transformative role of education in fostering peace and addressing post-conflict challenges in CHT.<sup>28</sup> His work also underscores the importance of culturally sensitive educational frameworks, a critical factor in overcoming barriers such as inadequate infrastructure and policies that fail to address Indigenous realities.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, his leadership exemplifies the role of community-led initiatives in empowering Indigenous communities and fostering social cohesion – an approach widely recognized in development research on the CHT.<sup>30</sup> Through his unwavering commitment to education and humanitarian service, Mahathera has left a lasting legacy of empowerment and unity among the Indigenous Buddhist community.

Venerable Jnanashree Mahathera, whose contributions extend beyond the establishment of Moanoghar Residential School, exemplifies the legacy of educational initiatives in the region. He has also established numerous other Buddhist and educational institutions across Chittagong, Joypurhat, and Rangpur districts, leaving an enduring impact on Buddhist education and community welfare in Bangladesh. Similarly, the contributions of other prominent Buddhist monks, such as the 4th Sangharaja of the Parbatya Bhikkhu Sangha Bangladesh (PBSB) – Chittagong Hill Buddhist Association – Venerable Aggamahapandita Tilakananda Mahathera, highlight the transformative role of Buddhist welfare in education and community development.

Venerable Tilakananda Mahathera also made a remarkable impact through his unwavering commitment to community service and educational advancement in CHT. In response to these needs, he founded Kajalong Shisusadan School in Baghaichari, a sub-district of Rangamati, which became a sanctuary for thousands of orphaned and disadvantaged ethnic children during the armed conflict in the CHT. Driven by deep compassion, Venerable Tilakananda Mahathera dedicated his life tirelessly to uplifting underprivileged indigenous children. The school he founded, Kajalong Shisusadan, is now one of the most respected residential schools in the region, offering free education, shelter, and meals for community children. As a result, the institution has created a nurturing environment that fosters growth, learning, and hope for countless children in need, making it a cornerstone of educational and social development in the CHT.

---

<sup>28</sup> Ala Uddin (2015). Education in Peace-building: The Case of Post-Conflict Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. *The Oriental Anthropologist: A Bi-annual International Journal of the Science of Man*, 15, p. 59 - 76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972558X1501500105>.

<sup>29</sup> Emerson Chakma (2024). Challenges of indigenous children's primary education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: Insights from individuals working in education. *International Journal of Educational Management and Development Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.53378/353050>.

<sup>30</sup> Choudhury Farhana Jhuma & Sanjay Krishno Biswas (2021). Exploring the Roles of Grassroots Organizations as Potential Agency: The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. 05, p. 391-400. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2021.5420>.

Buddhist monks in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) play a vital role in advancing education and social welfare among the indigenous communities. Through their dedicated efforts, the illiteracy rate within indigenous communities has significantly declined, highlighting their transformative impact on the region. Among the notable figures, the most venerable Pannya Jota Mahathera, widely recognized as Usala Bhante or Guru Bhante, is well known for his remarkable contributions to spiritual practice and the propagation of the Buddha Dhamma in the CHT. He was one of the most dedicated Buddhist monastic figures and educators in the region. Therefore, his efforts have profoundly shaped education, culture, and the preservation of Buddhist traditions. His initiatives led to the establishment of key religious and educational infrastructures, including Buddhist temples, stupas, and schools, particularly in the Bandarban district, significantly enhancing access to education and preserving Buddhist traditions.

On November 18, 2024, the researcher interviewed with Venerable U Virocana Panna, the abbot of Ramajati in Bandarban and one of the chief disciples of the Most Venerable Pannya Jota Mahathera. Reflecting on the legacy of Guru Bhante, Venerable U Virocana Panna highlighted his transformative role, stating:

Guru Bhante played a crucial role in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities in the Bandarban district, serving as a guiding figure for all indigenous groups by addressing their spiritual, social, and educational needs. He established numerous religious and educational institutions to support underprivileged indigenous children and was a strong political advocate for their rights and welfare. Despite facing challenges from both Buddhist and Muslim groups, particularly over land disputes and political tensions, Guru Bhante remained steadfast. We often stood by him in protecting our temple lands from illegal occupation. The police and army attempted to arrest him multiple times, but we believe his spiritual strength prevented them from succeeding. I cannot imagine what would have happened to our Buddhist community without Guru Bhante. We might have lost all our lands to Muslim settlers, and many of us would have remained uneducated and underprivileged. Today, as we continue to face political and religious challenges in a Muslim-majority country, we fully recognize the hardships he endured for our survival and progress. With his passing, we now confront these challenges without his guidance, and his absence is deeply felt.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, data suggests that Venerable Pannya Jota's educational and humanitarian contributions to the Bandarban Hill District are deeply rooted in addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by the region's indigenous communities. As highlighted by Hossain and Ahmad, hill dwellers in Bandarban struggle significantly with food security and limited access to education, underscoring the critical need for interventions such as Pannya

---

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Ven. Virocana Bhikkhu, personal communication, November 18, 2024.

Jota's efforts in establishing welfare centers and educational institutions.<sup>32</sup> The results of Rizwan et al.<sup>33</sup> make these projects even more crucial as they highlight the importance of community-based support systems in ensuring that women and children in Bandarban do not face food insecurity or financial losses. Furthermore, Jannat et al.<sup>34</sup> illustrate how education and alternative livelihoods can reduce dependence on natural resources, aligning with Pannya Jota's holistic approach to empowering marginalized families. Together, these studies provide a contextual foundation for understanding how Pannya Jota's compassionate leadership has brought lasting positive change to impoverished communities in Bandarban.

On the other hand, Professor Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu, a distinguished Bengali Buddhist leader from the plains, is another prominent monastic figure within the Buddhist community of Bangladesh. His profound influence extends across both the plains and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). With unwavering dedication to education, spiritual guidance, and community welfare, he has significantly improved the lives of underserved populations. As the General Secretary of the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh, Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu has tirelessly promoted the teachings of Buddhism, emphasizing spiritual enrichment and educational empowerment. His early exposure to Buddhist teachings within a devout family laid the foundation for his lifelong commitment to serving marginalized communities and preserving Buddhist values.

Among his numerous contributions, Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu has established a variety of religious and educational institutions that integrate Buddhist principles with formal education. His initiatives specifically target underserved populations, addressing both their spiritual and academic needs. Research interviews indicate that he actively contributes to the preservation and dissemination of Buddhist heritage through the publication of Buddhist literature and the organization of cultural events. His academic role as a professor at Chittagong University further underscores his commitment to nurturing future generations in Pāli language studies and Buddhist philosophy, combining scholarly rigor with spiritual depth. On November 25, 2024, Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu shared insights into his motivations and achievements in an online interview. Reflecting on his upbringing, he stated:

---

<sup>32</sup> Hossain, M., & Ahmad, A. (2017). Livelihood status of hill dwellers in Bandarban, Bangladesh. *The International Journal of Business and Management*, 3 (1), p. 154 - 161. <https://doi.org/10.18801/ijbmsr.030117.18>.

<sup>33</sup> Rizwan, A., Zafrullah Shamsul, S., Alauddin Chowdhury, B., & Khan, R. (2021). Dietary Behavior of Pregnant and Lactating Women of Bandarban Hill District, Bangladesh. *Journal of Nutrition and Food Sciences*, 11(1), p. 1 - 5. <https://doi.org/10.35248/2155-9600.21.11.785>.

<sup>34</sup> Jannat, M., Hossain, M., & Uddin, M. (2020). Socioeconomic Factors of Forest Dependency in Developing Countries: Lessons Learned from the Bandarban Hill District of Bangladesh. *American Journal of Pure and Applied Biosciences*. <https://doi.org/10.34104/ajpab.020.077084>.

My father fought for Bangladesh's independence in 1971, while my mother worked as a school teacher. Growing up, the country's poor economic conditions and the low financial status of its people discouraged many from pursuing education beyond school, college, or university. My mother always told me that when I grew up and achieved success, I must help underprivileged individuals access education. This deeply influenced my lifelong commitment to education. Another pivotal moment came during my attendance at one of Mother Teresa's Feast Days in India, likely in 2008. Learning about her social and community welfare activism profoundly inspired me. Since then, I have actively focused on education and social welfare for community development, particularly for our Buddhist community in both the plains and the hill tracts. I have successfully established eight schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, two dormitories for indigenous students at Chittagong University, and more than ten temples across various locations throughout Chittagong and the CHT.<sup>35</sup>

However, the study also highlights Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu's tireless efforts, which exemplify his dual commitment to education and social welfare. Through his initiatives, he has not only expanded access to education for marginalized communities but also ensured the preservation and promotion of Buddhist cultural and spiritual traditions across Bangladesh. In addition to his scholarly achievements, Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu has distinguished himself through his extensive writings on Buddhist history, culture, and philosophy, which have been published in numerous local and international academic journals and periodicals. His dedication to educating both the Buddhist community and the broader public is evident in his contributions to Buddhist scholarship. Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu's holistic approach to education – integrating academic scholarship with spiritual practice – continues to have a profound influence, enriching Bangladesh's religious and cultural fabric while providing valuable resources for future generations.

According to research participants, the humanitarian crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), characterized by severe human rights violations – including armed conflict, communal attacks, arson, sexual violence, and killings – left the local population highly vulnerable, particularly during hostilities between ethnic armed groups and Bangladeshi security forces from 1980 to 1997. The escalating violence eventually necessitated the relocation of the orphanage school from Dighinala to Rangamati city in 1984, just four years after its founding. Renamed Moanoghar School, this institution has since evolved into one of the most esteemed educational centers for both Buddhist and non-Buddhist indigenous children in the region. In December 2024, Moanoghar Residential School & College celebrated its Golden Jubilee Anniversary, marking 50 years of educational excellence and community service.

---

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Jinabodi Bhikkhu, personal communication, January 25, 2024.

The second finding highlights that Buddhist monks operating missionary non-governmental schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) adhere to the government-prescribed curriculum. This curriculum includes all general and secular subjects, as well as religious studies, ensuring alignment with national educational standards. To analyze the curriculum structure and teaching methodologies of three such schools in the CHT, the researcher conducted fieldwork from October 7 to 10, 2024, at Moanoghar Residential School in Rangapani, Rangamati district.<sup>36</sup> Moanoghar Residential School, registered under the Education Board Act in the Chittagong Division, follows the government-prescribed curriculum and adheres to its educational framework.

Therefore, the Bangladeshi education system classifies grades 1–5 as primary school, grades 6–8 as junior high school, grades 9–10 as secondary school, and grades 11–12 as higher secondary school. After completing the grade 8 board examination and advancing to grade 9, students are encouraged to choose a division of study – arts, science, or commerce – based on their interests. The researcher observed classroom instruction across all levels, including primary, junior high, secondary, and higher secondary divisions at Moanoghar Residential School. At the primary level, core subjects such as Bengali, English, and mathematics form the foundation of the curriculum. At the junior high and secondary levels, students study a broader range of subjects, including Bengali (with a distinct focus on grammar), English (which incorporates grammar as a separate subject), religion (Basic Buddhism), sociology, geography, and history.

In the upper grades of secondary school, students take at least 10–11 subjects, including general subjects and specialized courses based on their chosen division, such as higher mathematics, computer science, chemistry, physics, economics, biology, and accounting. The school follows the government-mandated examination structure, requiring students to participate in four key board examinations throughout their academic journey: at the primary (grade 4), junior high (grade 8), secondary (grade 10), and higher secondary (grade 12) levels. These board exams are administered at government examination centers, where students from both governmental and non-governmental schools sit for standardized evaluations. Successfully passing the grade 12 board examination qualifies students for enrollment in higher education programs in Bangladesh. This analysis of Moanoghar School's curriculum and teaching practices highlights its comprehensive approach to education.

Likewise, other Buddhist missionary and non-governmental schools adhere to the national curriculum while integrating Buddhist values, fostering both academic and moral development to equip students for future academic pursuits and meaningful contributions to society. A distinctive finding of this study is the integration of basic Buddhist practices into the daily routines of residential students at Buddhist missionary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

---

<sup>36</sup> Observation conducted by the researcher at Moanoghar Residential School & College, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, on October 7 – 10, 2024.



(CHT), Bangladesh. These schools encourage both Buddhist and non-Buddhist indigenous students to participate in Buddhist practices during their stay on campus, while allowing non-Buddhist students to follow their own traditional beliefs upon returning home. This exposure provides non-Buddhist students with early-life experiences of Buddhist principles, fostering a broader understanding of cross-cultural, linguistic, and religious dynamics. Such interactions play a crucial role in promoting peace and harmony among the diverse multicultural indigenous communities of the CHT.

The third finding highlights two distinct types of indigenous ethnic Buddhist missionary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh, each employing different teaching methods. These schools are associated with the two largest and most influential indigenous groups in the region – the Chakma and Marma communities. The educational practices within these groups reveal notable differences in their approaches to Buddhist and general education. Chakma Buddhist monks, who primarily manage Buddhist non-governmental and monastic schools, adhere to the government-prescribed curriculum without incorporating a formal monastic system for Buddhist theological studies. Unlike traditional monastic institutions, Chakma Buddhist temples typically do not offer specialized education in Buddhist scriptures, such as the Tripitaka or Pāli language studies. Instead, students from these monastic schools pursue general education through public schools, colleges, and universities, focusing on secular subjects aligned with the national curriculum.

In contrast, Marma Buddhist monks integrate both monastic and general education within their temples and non-governmental Buddhist schools. These institutions adopt a dual approach, combining traditional Buddhist education – such as studies in Pāli and the Tripitaka – with government-mandated secular subjects. This integrated system ensures that students in Marma Buddhist-run schools receive a comprehensive education encompassing both Buddhism and general academics. As a result of these differing educational models, knowledge gaps between the two communities have emerged. The Chakma Buddhist community excels in general education due to their strong emphasis on secular studies through public institutions, but their limited access to formal Buddhist theological education has left them comparatively less advanced in Buddhist studies. Conversely, the Marma Buddhist community demonstrates a more balanced proficiency in both Buddhist and general education, owing to their integration of monastic teachings within their educational framework. This distinction highlights the unique contributions and challenges of the two educational systems within the Buddhist communities of the CHT.

The fourth finding of this study highlights a distinctive approach to education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), where Buddhist monks play a crucial role in supporting the educational needs of disadvantaged and underprivileged indigenous children. Observations and analysis of existing literature reveal the existence of two distinct forms of Buddhism in Bangladesh, shaped by ethnic and cultural identities. The first form, Bengali Barua Buddhism, is practiced by the ethnically Bengali Barua community,



who share cultural and traditional commonalities with Bengali Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. Their religious practices closely resemble those of Western-style Buddhism, adopting Buddhism primarily as a religious practice rather than an ethnic identity. In contrast, the second form, referred to as Jumma Buddhism, represents the indigenous Buddhist traditions of the Hill Buddhists in the CHT, encompassing a diverse range of indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions. Despite their distinct identities, these two forms of Buddhism – Bengali Barua and Jumma – have coexisted peacefully for centuries, fostering harmony without significant political, social, or cultural conflicts. This brotherhood was particularly evident in the post-armed conflict and civil war periods in the CHT, when both groups collaborated to advance education and Buddhism in the region.

This finding suggests that Jumma Buddhist monks have emerged as the primary driving force behind educational and social welfare initiatives for indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), while Bengali Buddhism has played a supportive role in reinforcing their efforts. Together, their combined initiatives have facilitated the propagation of Buddhist teachings and the strengthening of educational frameworks in the region. As a result, this collaboration has established a strong Buddhist presence in the CHT, ensuring the protection of both the spiritual and educational needs of indigenous populations. This finding underscores the transformative role of Buddhist monks in advancing formal education and preserving Buddhist traditions in the region. Without their active participation in educational and religious campaigns, the CHT might have continued to experience severe social, religious, and political challenges, particularly in the realm of education. The dedication and collective efforts of Buddhist monks have had a profound and lasting impact on indigenous communities, fostering resilience and ensuring the preservation of their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Additionally, numerous dedicated Buddhist monks, such as Venerable Aggavamsa Mahathera, Venerable Bimal Tissa Bhikkhu, and Venerable Prajnananda Bhikkhu, among others, played a pivotal role in supporting the community during the post-armed conflict period in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Despite facing significant challenges, many of these monks remained steadfast in their commitment to the welfare of the indigenous population. Some were even forced into political exile due to their involvement in community welfare and advocacy for the Buddhist community in the country.

## V. DISCUSSION

This study identifies four key findings that highlight the transformative role of Buddhist monks in advancing education and social welfare in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), particularly among disadvantaged indigenous communities. Through an analysis of these findings in connection with existing literature, the study explores how the initiatives of Buddhist monks in the CHT embody Buddhist principles of compassion, the factors contributing to their success in promoting education and Buddhism, the challenges they face, and the long-term implications of their efforts for the region. Compassion

(*karuṇā*), a central tenet of Buddhist philosophy, serves as a guiding principle for the monks' initiatives. They manifest compassion not only as a moral ideal but as a practical virtue, addressing both material needs and spiritual guidance through their actions. The Buddhist monks of Bangladesh exemplify this principle by providing essential support, including free formal education and Buddhist teachings, while fostering the moral and spiritual growth of the communities they serve.<sup>37</sup> Their compassionate approach forms the foundation of their efforts to uplift underprivileged populations in the CHT, demonstrating how Buddhist teachings foster resilience and development in marginalized communities.

## VI. EMBODIMENT OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION

The first research finding offers profound insight into the multifaceted role of Buddhist monks in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh during periods of armed conflict. Guided by the Buddhist principle of compassion (*karuṇā*), these monks emerged as key agents in addressing the socio-educational needs of marginalized communities. Rather than remaining passive observers in the face of human-made and natural crises, they actively engaged in initiatives that advanced education, social welfare, and cultural preservation. Their contributions reflect a unique intersection of spirituality, social activism, and resilience. This finding underscores their holistic approach, which extends beyond material support to foster moral and spiritual development among younger generations. The establishment of schools and monasteries as sanctuaries embodies Buddhist ideals of selfless service and communal harmony, nurturing resilience and empathy within their communities.

Buddhist figures such as Dr. Jnanashree Mahathera exemplify the transformative impact of monks in the field of education in the region. As the 13th Sangha Raja of the Bangladesh Sangharaja Bhikkhu Mahasabha Nikāya (BSBMN) and the founder of Dighinala Buddhist Orphanage School and Moanoghar Residential Buddhist Missionary School, his work underscores a deep commitment to addressing the educational needs of disadvantaged children, particularly within the indigenous Jumma community in the CHT. His contributions align with Bijoy Barua's study on the role of Buddhist monks in promoting education in remote areas<sup>38</sup> and Dipen Barua's documentation of his broader societal impact.<sup>39</sup> The finding also suggests that Dr. Jnanashree's initiatives extended beyond education, encompassing the development of key educational and religious infrastructures that have provided long-term support

<sup>37</sup> Zysk, K., & Chaudhuri, S. (1985). Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45, p. 166. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2056861>.

<sup>38</sup> Bijoy Barua (2007). Colonialism, education, and rural Buddhist communities in Bangladesh. *International Education*, 37(1), p. 60 – 76.

<sup>39</sup> Dipen Barua (2020, May 29). Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh appoints Ven. Jnanashree Mahathera as 13th Buddhist Patriarch. *Buddhistdoor Global*. <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/supreme-sangha-council-of-bangladesh-appoints-ven-jnanashree-mahathera-as-13th-buddhist-patriarch/>

for marginalized communities.

The findings also highlight the presence of several influential Buddhist figures, including Venerable Tilakananda Mahathera, the 4th Sangha Raja of Parbattya Bhikkhu Sangha Bangladesh (PBSB); Venerable U Panna Jota (also known as Usala Bhante); Venerable Prof. Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu; Venerable Bimal Bhikkhu; Venerable Prajnananda Bhikkhu; and many other Buddhist monks dedicated to promoting Buddhist teachings and advocating for education in the region. For instance, the results indicate that Venerable Tilakananda Mahathera has played an active role in supporting underprivileged Jumma Buddhist children in the CHT. He established the Kajalong Shisusadan Buddhist Missionary School, which has provided thousands of indigenous orphaned children with permanent homes, along with access to education, food, and accommodation in Rangamati Hill Tract, CHT, Bangladesh.

Conversely, the community in the Bandarban district of Bangladesh recognizes Venerable U Panna Jota as a prominent Jumma Buddhist leader dedicated to promoting both Buddhism and formal education. Data indicates that Venerable U Panna Jota Bhante's contributions extend beyond education and religion, as he has played a crucial role in establishing numerous religious and educational institutions. His tireless efforts have not only improved access to education but have also helped preserve community cultures and traditions. This finding aligns with Subrata Roy's article, "Founder of Golden Temple Passes Away."<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, Venerable Prof. Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu has made significant contributions to education, spiritual guidance, and community welfare, particularly focusing on improving the lives of underprivileged indigenous children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Data suggests that his early engagement with the community prioritized both spiritual enrichment and educational empowerment. As one of the most influential contemporary Buddhist figures, Prof. Dr. Jinabodhi has tirelessly promoted Buddhism and education across both the plains and hill districts of Bangladesh. The findings further indicate that his dedication has significantly enhanced access to education and the teachings of Buddha for many marginalized indigenous Buddhist communities. Consequently, he has established numerous religious monastic schools and educational institutions, providing essential support for indigenous students in both education and cultural preservation. These results align with his online biography (Jinabodhi Mahathero, n.d., para. I - IX).<sup>41</sup> The findings also highlight the severe consequences of wars and conflicts in the aftermath of armed clashes between Bangladeshi security forces and ethnic armed groups from 1980 to 1997. These conflicts led to widespread

---

<sup>40</sup> Subrata Roy (2020, April 17). Founder of Golden Temple passes away. *Dhaka Tribune*. Accessed on December 8, 2024, available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/206749/founder-of-golden-temple-passes-away>.

<sup>41</sup> *About Jinabodhi Mahathero*. (n.d.). *Jinabodhi Mahathero*, Accessed on December 8, 2024, available at: <https://www.jinabodhimahathero.com/about.html>

persecution, including mass killings, arson, communal violence, physical attacks, the rape of Jumma Buddhist women and girls, forced marriages, and coerced religious conversions to Islam. Such events represent multifaceted human rights violations in the region. This finding aligns with Jhubhur Chakma's work, *Jumma Nation and Persecution in Bangladesh*<sup>42</sup> and Richard A. Gray's "Genocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh."<sup>43</sup>

## VII. BUDDHIST MISSIONARY EDUCATION AND SCHOOL CURRICULUMS

The second finding examines the educational curricula implemented by Buddhist missionary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. The study reveals that these schools adhere to the government-mandated curriculum, ensuring alignment with national educational standards. However, some Buddhist missionary schools supplement the national curriculum with Buddhist studies. The government curriculum itself encompasses a broad spectrum of secular subjects, including religious studies, catering to diverse educational needs while maintaining consistency with the national framework. The Bangladeshi education system is structured into four distinct levels: primary school (grades 1–5), high school (grades 6–8), secondary high school (grades 9–10), and higher secondary school (grades 11–12). Each level culminates in a government board examination administered by the Ministry of Education. Upon completing high school, students are encouraged to choose an academic stream—arts, science, or commerce—based on their interests. Additionally, vocational subjects are introduced from grade 8, allowing students to develop specialized skills through vocational schools.

This finding aligns with existing scholarship, including Md. Al-Amin and Janinka Greenwood's study, "The Examination System in Bangladesh and Its Impact: On Curriculum, Students, Teachers, and Society,"<sup>44</sup> and Mirza Mohammad Didarul Anam and Jaohar Nusrat Bina's study, "Implementation of the National Curriculum 2022 of Bangladesh: Possibilities and Challenges."<sup>45</sup> Buddhist missionary schools in the CHT, therefore, integrate this national curriculum into their educational programs.

Further, the third finding highlights two distinct types of Buddhist missionary schools, distinguished by the ethnic identities of their founders:

---

<sup>42</sup> Jhubhur Chakma (2021). *Jumma nation and persecution in Bangladesh*. *Journal of International Buddhist Studies*, 12(1), p. 71 – 84.

<sup>43</sup> Gray, R. A. (1994). *Genocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. *Reference Services Review*, 22 (4), 59 – 79. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb049231>

<sup>44</sup> Amin, A. I., & Greenwood, J. (2018). The examination system in Bangladesh and its impact: On curriculum, students, teachers and society. *Language Testing in Asia*, 8(4), p. 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-018-0060-9>

<sup>45</sup> Anam, M. M. D., & Bina, J. N. (2024). Implementation of National Curriculum 2022 of Bangladesh: Possibilities and challenges. *RIME Journal of Education (RIMEJE)*, 1 (1), p. 65 – 75.

“The Chakma and Marma ethnic groups, both of which play significant roles in the region. Chakma Buddhist missionary schools do not include specific Buddhist literature or Tripitaka studies in their curriculum but focus on delivering formal education in temple or monastic settings. Conversely, Marma Buddhist monastic schools offer both formal education and Buddhist studies, providing a broader knowledge base across various disciplines. The findings indicate notable differences between these two groups. The Chakma community exhibits the highest rate of general education among ethnic groups in the CHT, while the Marma community demonstrates a deeper understanding of Buddhism. This reflects the distinctive priorities and contributions of each group to the region’s educational landscape.

### VIII. CHALLENGES AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

The fourth finding of this study highlights the collaborative efforts between Jumma and Bengali Buddhists in advancing education and community welfare in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The research suggests that Jumma Buddhist monks have played a crucial role as the primary agents driving education and community welfare in the post-conflict period of the CHT. In contrast, Bengali Buddhist monks have provided vital external support, reinforcing the initiatives of Jumma monks when challenges arise, as noted in K. Zysk and Sukomal Chaudhuri’s study.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Bengali Buddhist monks have established numerous Buddhist missionary schools that have served as educational sanctuaries for many underprivileged Jumma Buddhist children. Despite these successes, Buddhist monks in the CHT face significant barriers to expanding educational services. Financial constraints and inadequate infrastructure limit their ability to improve both the quality and scope of education.<sup>47</sup> Political instability and land disputes further complicate these challenges, as monks often face resistance or are monitored by various government agents over their activities. For instance, interviews revealed that monks have had to protect temple lands from encroachment and navigate intricate socio-political dynamics to preserve their institutions. Additionally, there is a lack of a standardized curriculum for Buddhist studies across monastic schools, which has created knowledge gaps between communities. The differences in how the Chakma and Marma groups are taught serve as an example of this.

Nevertheless, the combined efforts of both Jumma and Bengali Buddhist monks have been instrumental in promoting Buddhist teachings and strengthening formal educational frameworks in the region. Their collaboration has fostered a strong Buddhist presence in the CHT, effectively safeguarding the spiritual and educational needs of the indigenous populations. This finding underscores the transformative impact of Buddhist monks in advancing both

---

<sup>46</sup> Zysk, K., & Chaudhuri, S. (1985). Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45, p. 166. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2056861>.

<sup>47</sup> Uddin, A. (2015). Education in Peace-building: The Case of Post-Conflict Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. *The Oriental Anthropologist: A Bi-annual International Journal of the Science of Man*, 15, p. 59 - 76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972558X1501500105>.



formal education and Buddhist practice in the region. Without their dedicated involvement in educational and religious initiatives, the region might have continued to face severe social, religious, and political challenges, particularly in the field of education. The sustained commitment and teamwork of Buddhist monks have had a profound and lasting influence on the indigenous communities, fostering resilience and ensuring the preservation of their cultural and spiritual heritage.

## IX. CONCLUSION

In summary, Buddhist monks have dedicated themselves to several factors that contribute to the success of monastic educational programs in the CHT. First, the integration of secular and spiritual education equips students with academic skills while keeping them grounded in ethical and cultural values. Second, the monks' ability to mobilize local communities and foster trust plays a critical role in sustaining these initiatives. As community leaders, the monks act as mediators and advocates, effectively navigating local challenges. Third, collaboration between Bengali Barua and Jumma Buddhist communities has created a unified front that strengthens the institutional foundations of education in the region. This cooperative effort aligns with previous studies highlighting the collective impact of community-driven educational programs in culturally marginalized regions.

The results show that the long-term implications of monastic education for the CHT are profound. By addressing the immediate educational needs of underprivileged children, monks lay the groundwork for socio-economic upliftment and cultural preservation. The integration of Buddhist principles into education ensures that students develop a strong sense of identity and ethical responsibility, which contributes to community cohesion and resilience. Furthermore, these educational initiatives foster interethnic understanding and harmony, reducing potential conflicts in a region historically marked by political and social unrest.

Moreover, over time, the contributions of Buddhist monks may lead to a more equitable and informed society in the CHT, where education becomes a cornerstone of sustainable development. However, addressing systemic barriers, such as resource limitations and political challenges, remains crucial to maximizing the potential of these programs. Future policies and partnerships that support monastic education can amplify its impact, ensuring that these initiatives continue to benefit generations to come.



## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

- Kālāma Sutta: Anguttara Nikāya* 3.65. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans. (2013). Access to Insight (BCBS Edition). Accessed on November 10, 2024, available at: <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>
- The Sutta Nipāta* Jarrett, H. S., trans. Vol. I, "The Causes of Downfall." PTS English edition. London: Pāli Text Society, 1913.

### Secondary Sources

- Amin, Ad. Al., and Janinka Greenwood. (2018). *The Examination System in Bangladesh and Its Impact: On Curriculum, Students, Teachers and Society*. Language Testing in Asia 8(4), p. 1 – 18.
- Ara, F., & Khan, M. M. R. (2023). *The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Promises and performances*. In A. Ranjan & D. Chattoraj (Eds.), Migration, regional autonomy, and conflicts in Eastern South Asia (p. 310). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28764-0\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28764-0_12)
- Barua, B. (2007). *Colonialism, education, and rural Buddhist communities in Bangladesh*. University of Toronto, 37(1), p. 60 – 76.
- Barua, D. (2020, May 29). *Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh appoints Ven. Jnanashree Mahathera as the 13th Buddhist patriarch*. Buddhistdoor Global. <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/supreme-sangha-council-of-bangladesh-appoints-ven-jnanashree-mahathera-as-13th-buddhist-patriarch/>. Accessed on November 14, 2024. Para. p. 1 - 4.
- Barua, D. M. (2020). *Arakanese Chittagong became Mughal Islamabad: Buddhist–Muslim relationship in Chittagong (Chittagong), Bangladesh*. In Buddhist-Muslim relations in a Theravāda world (p. 88 – 90). Singapore: Springer.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Chakma, B., & Gerharz, E. (2022). *Samaj as a form of self-organisation among village communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*. In D. Neubert, H. -J. Lauth, & C. Mohamad-Klotzbach (Eds.), Local self-governance and varieties of statehood (p.139). Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14996-2\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14996-2_7)
- Chakma, U. (2021). *Empowerment and desubalternising voices through education: A case study of diasporic Indigenous Chakma in Melbourne* (Doctoral dissertation). Monash University, Faculty of Education.
- Goodman, C. (2014). *Consequences of compassion: An interpretation and defense of Buddhist ethics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hossain, M., & Ahmad, A. (2017). *Livelihood status of hill dwellers in Bandarban, Bangladesh*. The International Journal of Business and Management, 3(1), p. 154–161. <https://doi.org/10.18801/ijbmsr.030117.18>
- Hutchinson, R. H. Sneyd. *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*. Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, 1909.
- Jannat, M., Hossain, M., & Uddin, M. (2020). *Socioeconomic factors of forest dependency in developing countries: Lessons learned from the Bandarban Hill District of Bangladesh*. American Journal of Pure and Applied Biosciences.

- <https://doi.org/10.34104/ajpab.020.077084>
- Jhuma, C. F., & Biswas, S. K. (2021). *Exploring the roles of grassroots organizations as potential agency: The case of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 5(4), p. 391 – 400. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS.2021.5420>
- Jinabodi Bhikkhu. (2024, January 25). Personal interview. Conducted in Chittagong, Bangladesh.
- Jnanashree Mahathera. (2024, November 21). Personal interview. Conducted in Chittagong, Bangladesh.
- Khan, M. R. (1997). *Social dimension of sustainable development: An inquiry into the forest sectors of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India*. (p. 150). Concept Publishing Company
- Lichtman, M. (2023). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide* (4th ed. p. 12). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003281917>
- Mannan, M. (1997). *Forgotten community and indifferent state*. In Professor Satya Narayana. Society: Tribal Studies (p. 147). Concept Publishing Company.
- Muangkaew, K., Boonsriton, P., Mangkhang, C., & Dibyamandala, J. (2024). *Model of Buddhism-based learning to enhance the compassionate mind of higher education students*. Community and Social Development Journal, 25(1), p. 187 – 204. <https://doi.org/10.57260/rcmrj.2024.264481>
- Ranjan, A. (2024). *Women in war zones: Rape at the time of Bangladesh Liberation War*. In *The aftermath of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971* (1st ed., p. 310). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003463627>
- Researcher. (2024, October 7–10). Classroom observation at Moanoghar Residential School & College, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. Unpublished fieldwork data.
- Rizwan, A., Zafrullah, S. S., Alauddin, C. B., & Khan, R. (2021). *Dietary behavior of pregnant and lactating women of Bandarban Hill District, Bangladesh*. Journal of Nutrition and Food Sciences, 11(1), p. 1 – 5. <https://doi.org/10.35248/2155-9600.21.11.785>
- Roy, S. (2020, April 17). *Founder of Golden Temple passes away*. Dhaka Tribune. Accessed on December 8, 2024, available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/206749/founder-of-golden-temple-passes-away>
- Shewly, H. J. (2013). *Sixty-six years saga of Bengal boundary-making: A historical exposé of the Bangladesh-India border*. BIIS Journal, 34(3), p. 205–219.
- Somaradne, G. A. (2019). *Early Buddhist moral theory for global education in ethics*. In T. N. Tu & T. D. Thien (Eds.), *Buddhist approach to global education in ethics* (p. 41 – 60). HCM, Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist University Publications.
- Virocana Bhikkhu. (2024, November 18). Personal interview. Conducted in Bandarban, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh.
- Woodward, F. L., trans. (1979). *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya)*. I (Ones, Twos, Threes). London: Pāli Text Society.
- Zysk, K., & Chaudhuri, S. (1985). *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh*. The Journal of Asian Studies, 45 (1), p. 166. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2056861>

# BUDDHIST COMPASSION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Prof. Dr. Projit Kumar Palit\*

## Abstract:

This paper explores the intersection between Buddhist philosophy and human development, emphasizing the necessity of a balanced approach that integrates both material and spiritual dimensions. While modern advancements have improved physical well-being, they have also led to increased psychological distress, alienation, and ethical dilemmas. The teachings of the Buddha advocate for an internal transformation to cultivate compassion, mindfulness, and ethical living as essential components of holistic development. This research examines how Buddhist thought aligns with contemporary human development theories, particularly those proposed by Amartya Sen and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Additionally, it highlights the role of Buddhism in governance, peacebuilding, and ethical decision-making. Through the principles of equity, sustainability, productivity, empowerment, cooperation, and security, Buddhism offers a moral framework that supports sustainable human progress. The study underscores that true human development extends beyond economic growth, encompassing psychological well-being, moral integrity, and collective harmony. The Buddhist perspective, particularly through its concepts of compassion (*karuṇā*) and mindfulness (*sati*), provides a viable path for addressing contemporary socio-economic and environmental challenges while fostering inner peace and global sustainability.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, human development, compassion, mindfulness, sustainable development, UNDP, amartya sen, ethical governance, inner peace.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The basic purpose of human development is to improve the quality of life and dignity of human beings. So, the objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives.

---

\* Professor & Director, Centre for Indological Studies (CIS), Department of History, Assam University (Central University), Silchar, Assam, India.

So the common idea of human development is capacity building for healthy and happy living.<sup>1</sup> But Mankind is challenging the various environmental and developmental problems that create multiple causations, complex interactions, inevitable uncertainty, and unpredictability of the World situation. But modern man has better physical bodies and health in past ages, and he is also immensely nourished mentally and intellectually compared to his predecessor. But we find modern man getting increasingly alienated both from himself and others. He is unhappy, tense, restless, and often inflicts violence on others or commits suicide on himself. Buddha realized the above tragic situation developing even in his time and he warned of its intensification in the decades ahead and emphasized the need for modern civilization to change its direction from human sensuality to human spirituality.<sup>2</sup> Buddha realized the above tragic situation developing even in his time and he warned of its intensification in the decades ahead and emphasized the need for modern civilization to change its direction from human sensuality to human spirituality. When external development is receiving disproportionate attention in the modern world of science and technology, there is an urgent need for a course correction at this stage of human development to emphasize the internal development for achieving lasting peace, satisfaction, contentment, inner equilibrium, and fulfillment, both at the individual level and at collective levels. This was the profound message of ancient Indian wisdom as taught particularly in the Dhamma, and it was reiterated, reemphasized, and reinforced in the lives and teachings of Buddha in the modern age. This teaching engenders a holistic worldview (*weltanschauung*), encompassing both the internal and the external. Humanity is suffering from a conflict of human development.<sup>3</sup> Human Development encompasses both aspects of development - material development as well as spiritual development, which together lead to human fulfillment. Human Development is not one-sided; it has many aspects and takes into account the total and diverse needs, facets, and possibilities of a human being as an individual and human society collectively.<sup>4</sup> The concept of human development depends on the concept of a human being itself. Buddha teachings, the urgent need for a harmonious blend of external and internal development - starting from the physical leading up to the spiritual - for holistic human development at the individual and the collective levels.<sup>5</sup>

## II. THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT AND BUDDHISM

Buddha has knowledge of the armed clash and the king-controlled military force and their activities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) takes action on how Buddhist thinkers have sought to influence leaders to moderate the ways in which they wield power and govern, warning

---

<sup>1</sup> J. V. Rao (1996): 15.

<sup>2</sup> Palit (2019): 113 - 115.

<sup>3</sup> Palit (2019): 119 - 125.

<sup>4</sup> R.R, French,, (2015): 833 - 880.

<sup>5</sup> Mineshima, Hideo,, (1991): 110.

them of the negative consequences of failure to do so for them and their kingdoms. Meanwhile, Sugiki's work (2020a, 2020b) examines measures that Buddhists considered in order to avoid killing during conflict.<sup>6</sup> Buddhism admits that monks and nuns must necessarily distance themselves from war on their path to liberation, lay Buddhists, including rulers and soldiers, must seek to minimize suffering while fulfilling their worldly duties and responsibilities, not least to protect people from attack and improve the conditions of those for whom they are responsible, especially the vulnerable.<sup>7</sup> The United Nations Development Programme investigates how Buddhism might help to regulate hostilities and reduce suffering during armed conflict on its own terms.<sup>8</sup> The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was to explore correspondences between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law and investigate how Buddhism might help to regulate hostilities and reduce suffering during armed conflict on its own terms.<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works on how Buddhism provides meaning, satisfaction, and human life that is long and healthy, with ample scope to acquire education, have a fairly good living standard, and enjoy full political freedom, equipped with assured human rights and elements of self-respect, which may be termed as human development.<sup>10</sup> In the concept of human development, as propounded by Mahbub Ul Haq, he promoted the idea that individuals should be the point of focus in the developmental process and that each phase of economic and other activities must be examined methodically to determine the extent of reward each individual draws from his contributions.<sup>11</sup> According to Amartya Sen, what an individual is capable of doing or not capable of doing, coupled with what an individual is capable of being or not capable of being, is referred to as the capabilities of an individual. The various expressions of the capabilities of an individual can be ascertained by factors such as adequate provision of food, decent housing, easy availability of health and medical services, availability of opportunity for education, and the existence of freedom in political expression. He is of the opinion that the enhancement, growth, and development in the quality of life, along with the prevalence of an atmosphere of freedom, should be the various features that must be viewed when the process of development is analyzed, and not merely the sole economic phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> As per Amartya Sen, the evaluation of development ought to be done from the point of view of enhancing the quality of life based on three factors. The first factor is entitlement, which may be viewed as rights, powers, and privileges such as easy access to opportunities to have education, ease in the availability of medical and health facilities, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew, Bartles, et al. (2021): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Palit (2009): 413 - 425.

<sup>8</sup> Palit (2010): 191 - 200.

<sup>9</sup> Swāmi, Kirtipradānanda (2022): 46.

<sup>10</sup> T. V. Rao (1995): 15.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Development Programme (1997): 15.

<sup>12</sup> Amartya. Sen (1988): 1 - 180.



The second factor is capabilities that follow as a consequence of entitlements, and capabilities mean factors that are capable of equipping people with the chance to freely select from various ways of living.<sup>13</sup> The third and last factor is functioning means the combination of activities done by the individual in the society and his position in the society, which together determines the quality of the existence of the individual in the society. According to Amartya Sen, Buddha assumes that mankind is challenging the various environmental and developmental problems that create multiple causations, complex interactions, inevitable uncertainty, and unpredictability of situations.<sup>14</sup> Buddha first thought a caste was less equal to society and individual human development). As far as the issue of human development is concerned, in the parlance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the mainstay of human development is classified into six basic pillars which are influenced by Buddhist ideas.<sup>15</sup> The six main elements, or the contributing factors, on which the concept of UNDP's Human Development rests are the following:<sup>16</sup>

(a) Equity

There should be impartial, even, and equal opportunity available to each individual, without any distinction of gender, in availing the facilities for both education and health care.

(b) Sustainability

All individuals should be entitled to earn a livelihood that should be able to provide for their sustenance. All individuals should also be able to get equitable and even shares in the overall pattern of dissemination of consumables and other goods.

(c) Productivity

In the economic ecosystem, there should be total involvement and contribution of persons in the course of the generation of income. In order to facilitate this happening, the government has to devise and implement effective social schemes for the people.

(d) Empowerment

Individuals should be free to choose the development factor of their choice, in which they are interested in contributing, and should be free to make the decisions by which their lives are impacted.

(e) Cooperation

It requires the sense of involvement and contribution of individuals in the society as well as the economy. It also requires a sense of belongingness to a particular group or community that may result in joint benefit and mutual enhancement of the group or community.

---

<sup>13</sup> Amartya. Sen (1988): 90 - 180.

<sup>14</sup> Palit (2010): 191 - 200.

<sup>15</sup> Palit., (2010): 191 - 200.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Development Programme (1997): 15.



(f) Security

It calls for some sort of assurance that the openings for growth, expansion, and progress are more or less stable in nature. Individuals should be able to avail themselves of the chances and openings freely, with a feeling of safety, and must have enough confidence about their longevity.<sup>17</sup>

In order to highlight the fact that merely the factor of economic growth is not sufficient enough to evaluate the development index of a nation or an economy, a new tool—the Human Development Index (HDI) - was devised, which took into account the people and their capacities as the benchmark and standards for evaluating the level of development. The three basic key factors that primarily determine the level of human development - a long life with good health, having a good education, and a good living standard - are taken into consideration for arriving at the HDI, which is calculated as the average achievement on these three basic key factors of human development. UNDP's Human Development now accepts the happiness index of Bhutan. The happiness index covers both features of development - material development as well as spiritual development, which together lead to human fulfillment.<sup>18</sup>

### III. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND INDIAN TEXT

Human development is a natural and essential passion of every being. It is better to say that all the instincts, desires, aspirations, ambitions, pursuits, and goals are singular - happiness. Thus every being is apparently craving different ends but is essentially craving a singular end that is human development. It is difficult to find an actual definition of human development.<sup>19</sup> Human development is experienced, but human development is itself not an experience. The one that is experienced and the one that is experiencing still need to be defined. The early Indian's thoughts on human development are reflected in the *Veda*, *Upaniṣad*, and *Bhagavad Gītā*, as well as the *Manusmṛti* (मनुस्मृति). In the Vedic philosophy, the twofold ideology of pravṛtti (outward action) and Nivṛtti (inward contemplation) is spoken of. The Rīg Veda,<sup>20</sup> i.e., the dual purposes of our life are the emancipation of the soul and the welfare of the world.<sup>21</sup> Human development is the ultimate goal and purpose of every human being. A human being is a knower and a doer.<sup>22</sup> Lead me from the *asat* to the *sat*./ Lead me from darkness to light./ Lead me from death to immortality./ Om Peace Peace Peace.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Development Programme (1997): 15.

<sup>18</sup> Swāmi, Kirtipradānanda, (2022): 45.

<sup>19</sup> Palit, (2010): 191 – 200.

<sup>20</sup> *Om asato mā sad-gamaya | Tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya | Mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya | Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*

<sup>21</sup> Swāmi Vivekānanda (2013): 105 - 106.

<sup>22</sup> *Om asato mā sad-gamaya | Tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya | Mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya | Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.*

<sup>23</sup> Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣads - I. iii. 86.

If a person does not have the knowledge of their origin or about oneself, they do not experience happiness but rather suffer from many problems. This truth is expounded in the seventh chapter of the Chandogya Upaniṣads through a dialogue between Narada and Sanatkumara. Narad was a learned man, but despite his vast learning, he was full of sorrow and tension. He approached Sanatkumara, a wise, learned, and knower of self, and told him, "In spite of all the knowledge I have, I am only a knower of words and not a knower of Ātmān (the Self). I have heard from great ones like you that only the knower of the Ātmān crosses the ocean of sorrow. Therefore, since I do not know the Ātmān, I am full of sorrow. Take me; O blessed one, across that ocean of sorrow. Knowledge about oneself, i.e., what we are in reality, helps us to remain at peace."<sup>24</sup> Socrates, a Greek philosopher, insists on 'know thyself.' A person who knows oneself is not only wise but is also full of happiness. The Upanishads consider this world not as a source of problems and unhappiness but as a training ground for a person's self-realization. Arunim knew that in the absence of this knowledge, a person becomes arrogant, egotistical, and selfish. He gives many examples to his son so that he will realize his identity. Egoism, arrogance, and selfishness are the root causes of various problems in this world, like the increase in divorces, environmental problems, family problems, etc.<sup>25</sup> In the same Upanishad, in the second chapter, Panchakosha explained about the material life and spiritual life. This Panchakosa refers to five levels of realities of the human person. These five levels are the physical level, the glossy body (*Annamaya-kośa*), the vital air (*Prāṇamaya-kośa*), the mental level (*Manomaya-kośa*), the intellect level (*Vijñānamaya-kośa*), and bliss (*Ānandamaya-kośa*).<sup>26</sup> As a person, he should develop at all levels through hard work and practice. There should be total development at the individual level. According to S. R. Bhatt, "It stands for the development of all dimensions of human personality - physical, mental, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Mere physical or mental or intellectual development is lopsided and can never be sustainable."<sup>27</sup> If a person achieves this all-round development, he is at peace with himself and also with others. The *Amritabindu Upaniṣads* says that for human beings, the mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation. The mind that is attached to material objects is the cause of bondage, while the mind that is detached and free from desires is the cause of liberation.<sup>28</sup>

*"manah eva manushyānām kāranam bandha-mokṣayoh  
bandhaaya vishayā-saktam muktam nirvishayam smritam"*<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Swamy Sivananda (1998).

<sup>25</sup> S, Vidyashree., Amulya, Bharadwaj (2023): 626 - 35.

<sup>26</sup> S, Vidyashree., Amulya, Bharadwaj (2023): 627 - 30.

<sup>27</sup> S. R. Bhatt. (2004): 98.

<sup>28</sup> Amritabindu Upanishad, verse: 2.

<sup>29</sup> मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः/बन्धाय हवषयासक्तं मुक्तं हनहवथषयं  
स्मृतम् ॥.

It is the mind that, when deluded, creates problems, but when clarified, can directly access the Divine. *Sadasadvivēka* is spoken of in the *Jñāna-yoga* - what is real and what is unreal. Making a distinction between the real and the unreal, and realizing that behind this ever-changing world, there is an unchanging reality, is the essence of the *Jñāna-yoga*.

The four principal *Mahāvākya* (Great Sayings) of the *Upaniṣads* form the basis of the *Jñāna-yoga*. They all express the insight that the individual self (*jīva*), which appears as a separate existence, is in essence part and manifestation of the whole (*Brahman*). The four *Mahāvākya* are:

- (1) Brahman is insight (*Prajñānam Brahma*)<sup>30</sup>
- (2) This Self (*Ātmān*) is Brahman (*Ayam Ātmā Brahma*)<sup>31</sup>
- (3) That essence (*Tat*, referring to *Sat* - the Existent, are you (*Tat Tvam Asi*)<sup>32</sup>
- (4) I am Brhman (*Aham Brahmāsmi*)<sup>33</sup>

The basic teaching of *Jñāna-yoga* - the path of knowledge, as mentioned in the *Upaniṣads* - is that the human being is not merely this body-mind complex. The *Upaniṣads* assert that we have a far deeper dimension; we are the ever-free, ever-pure *ātman*. We are immortal, holy, and perfect beings. The goal of life is to realize our own true nature, to realize the eternal and the deathless *ātman* - which, in the language of the *Gītā*, no sword can pierce, no air can dry, no fire can burn, and no water can melt.<sup>34</sup> The *Upaniṣads* state the progressive states of happiness as follows:

(i) One unit of the joy of celestial humans known as the *gandharvās* (*manuṣya-gandharvāṇām ānandaḥ*)<sup>35</sup> = 100 units of human joy.

(ii) One unit of the joy of divine celestials known as the *deva gandharvās* (*deva-gandharvāṇām ānandaḥ*)<sup>36</sup> = 100 units of joy of *gandharvās* = 10000 units of human joy.

(iii) One unit of the joy of ancestors (*pitṛs*) in their long-lasting world (*pitṛṇāṁ cira-loka-lokānām ānandaḥ*)<sup>37</sup> = 100 units of joy of divine celestials (*deva gandharvās*) = 1,000,000 units of human joy.

(iv) One unit of the joy of those who become gods by birth in the divine heavens, the world of *ājāna* (*ājānājānām devānām ānandaḥ*)<sup>38</sup> = 100 units of joy of *pitṛs* = 100,000,000 units of human joy.

(v) One unit of joy of those who become gods by good deeds is known as

<sup>30</sup> Aitareya Upaniṣads 3.3 of the Rig Veda: परञ्जानम् ब्रह्म.

<sup>31</sup> Mandukya Upaniṣads 1.2 of the Atharva Veda: अयम् आत्मा ब्रह्म.

<sup>32</sup> Chandogya Upaniṣads 6.8.7 of the Sāma Veda: तत् त्वम् अहम्.

<sup>33</sup> Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣads 1.4.10 of the Yajur Veda: अमि ब्रह्मास्मत्सम.

<sup>34</sup> Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 2, verse 23.

<sup>35</sup> एको मनुष्यगन्धवाथणामानन्द.

<sup>36</sup> एको देवगन्धवाथणामानन्द.

<sup>37</sup> एको हपतृणां हचरलोकलोकानामानन्द.

<sup>38</sup> एको आजानजानां देवानामानन्द

*karmadeva* (*karmadevānām devānām ānandaḥ*)<sup>39</sup> = 100 units of joy of those who become gods by birth in the divine heavens = 10,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(vi) One unit of the joy of the immortal ruling gods (*devānām ānandaḥ*)<sup>40</sup> = 100 units of the joy of those who become gods by good deeds known as *karmadevas* = 1,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(vii) One unit of joy of *Indra* (*indrasya ānandaḥ*)<sup>41</sup> = 100 units of joy of the immortal ruling gods known as *karmadevas* = 100,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(viii) One unit of joy of *Bṛhaspati* (*bṛhaspateḥ ānandaḥ*)<sup>42</sup> = 100 units of joy of *Indra* = 10,000,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(ix) One unit of joy of *Prajāpati* (*prajāpateḥ ānandaḥ*)<sup>43</sup> = 100 units of joy of *Bṛhaspati* = 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(x) One unit of joy of *Brahmānanda* (*brahmaṇaḥ ānandaḥ*)<sup>44</sup> = 100 units of joy of *Prajāpati* = 100,000,000,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

This analysis of happiness, *ānanda-mīmāṃsā*, done in the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, glorifies the joy derived in *Brahmānanda*, the supreme bliss, and compares it vis-à-vis the maximum happiness conceivable in human life. It shows humanity that even if one manages to get worldly happiness of the highest degree that can ever be conceived by the human mind, even that human happiness would pale into insignificance when compared to the supreme bliss of *Brahmānanda*.

The *Gītā* classifies happiness into three qualities, which are *Sāttvika* happiness (higher spheres), *Rājasika* (middle spheres), and *Tāmasika* happiness (lower spheres).<sup>45</sup> *Gītā* claims that every individual is the mixture of goodness, emotion, and delusion, and it is determined and predominates.<sup>46</sup> Happiness (*Sukham*) is the athletic state for nirvana. *Nibbāna* is in a higher state than *Sukham* toward salvation with absolute freedom.<sup>47</sup> In order to reach the state of nirvana, 5 chapters of the *Gītā* present the way specifically as follows: “He who has well-being within him, [he] who has joy within himself, [he] who is enlightened within himself, that *Yogī* is the *Brahman* even when he is alive, [and] would get salvation by becoming absolutely free.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>39</sup> एको कमथदेवानां देवानामानन्द.

<sup>40</sup> एको देवानामानन्द.

<sup>41</sup> एको इन्द्रस्यानन्द.

<sup>42</sup> एको बृसिपतेरानन्द.

<sup>43</sup> एको प्रजापतेरानन्द.

<sup>44</sup> एको ब्रह्मण आनन्द.

<sup>45</sup> Chapters 14, 18 trans. P. R. Ramachander.

<sup>46</sup> Chapter 14 trans. P. R. Ramachander.

<sup>47</sup> Paranipe, Anand C. (2013): 1 - 20.

<sup>48</sup> Chapter 5, 24/ trans. P. R. Ramachander.

Those sages who get freedom, desire, and anger, [who] have minds that are peaceful and contented, [and] who are able to realize their souls, [would get salvation within this and in other worlds.<sup>49</sup> According to R.C. Zaehner, the basic dogma of the *Gītā* is that knowing both the self and Brahman, who are one mode of being, changeless and undivided.<sup>50</sup> In addition, he insists that in the *Gītā* there are two stages in the process of liberation: firstly, the realization of the self as eternal, and secondly, the discovery of God as identical in eternal essence but as distinct in power and personality.<sup>51</sup> According to Manu, in order to be happy, a man must maintain perfect contentment and become self-controlled. According to Manu, practice the *Dharma* (duty) through the spiritual path. This path may be opened only by those who attempt total self-restraint of the lower self. As Manu explains *Dharma*:

The ten points of duty are patience, forgiveness, self-control, not stealing, purification, mastery of the sensory powers, wisdom, learning, truth, and lack of anger. Those priests, who study the ten points of duty carefully and, after they have learned it, follow it, progress to the highest level of existence.<sup>52</sup>

#### IV. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND ITS HISTORY

Concepts of human development also originated in ancient times, but they were divided into two parts - the West and the East. Western human development traces ancestry to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Greek humanism was limited to its citizens and excluded the non-Greeks and the slaves from its blessings.<sup>53</sup> Roman humanism was broader but did not also extend to the slaves. They were secular and non-religious. After Christianity, it preached its humanism, based on its narrow theology, first to the peoples of the Roman Empire and, later, to the peoples of Europe as a whole. But this Christian humanism was also exclusive; it was limited to the believers in its narrow creed and dogma; it did not extend not only to non-Christians but also to its dissidents in creed and to all scientists and rationalists. Western humanism in general, and Christian humanism in particular, received their most serious shock from the very violent Thirty Years' War between the Protestants and Catholics in Germany.<sup>54</sup> Man killed a man in the name of a common god and religion, reducing the population of Germany, according to historians, from 25 to 5 million. This was a traumatic experience for all thinking Europeans to sift their faith from god to man. is a shift of faith from god to man was helped by the Europeans' discovery of Greek humanism in the wake of its contact with the thought, culture, and literature of classical Greece in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; this modern Western humanism, strengthened by physical

<sup>49</sup> Chapter 5, 26/ trans. P. R. Ramachander.

<sup>50</sup> Zaehner, R. C (1969): 30.

<sup>51</sup> Zaehner, R. C (1969): 31.

<sup>52</sup> The Laws of Manu, Chap. 5, p. 115.

<sup>53</sup> Swami, Ranganathananda (1990): 14.

<sup>54</sup> Swami, Ranganathananda (1990): 53.

sciences and technology, held out melioristic hopes of full human development in peace and plenty all over the world. It steadily gained strength and prestige for three hundred years, up to 1913 CE. 133 The devastating First World War took place from 1914 to 1918,<sup>55</sup> when Western man hated and killed brother Western man to an extent unprecedented in history. This was followed by the continuous tensions of the post-war years, culminating in the more devastating Second World War, with its additional Nazi brutalities and gruesome murder of millions of Jews. These traumatic experiences shook the very foundations of Western man's faith even in himself, just as the Thirty Years' War earlier had destroyed his faith in God. They shattered his faith even in humanism itself. The Second World War has left Western man with no focus on faith and loyalty either to a god above or man below, breeding in him a cynical attitude concerning all values - religious and otherworldly or human and this-worldly, for ethical and moral; and it has led him to opt for a plunge into a crude materialism and to bend his efforts for the satisfaction of his organic cravings during the short span of his physical existence. This has, in turn, resulted in generating inner tensions, privations, and psychic distortions to an alarming degree. Into this Western human context came a new challenge in the form of the Bolshevik Revolution and the hope of a new human civilization led by the USSR, promising peace and plenty around the world. After impressive achievements in the field of mass human development during its first four decades, this new experiment is also showing severe inner tensions within the individual man and woman in the USSR in the form of an increase in crime, drunkenness, and other psychic distortions, and intense conflicts between one Marxist state and another.<sup>56</sup> Marxist humanism goes far, but not far enough, to ensure human fulfillment. Buddhism helps Marxism to carry its study of man into the depth of the human spirit and to base its undoubtedly promising human experiment on the rock of the divine in man and not on the sands of his physical and organic system.<sup>57</sup> The Greco-Roman and modern Western peoples have achieved a type of human development based on this faith in oneself and the Promethean spark it ignited in them. But with these, they have built up a high level of social welfare and the spirit of human individuality and dignity. But Buddhism pointed out to the people of the West that this did not exhaust the scope of human excellence, the scope of the science of human possibilities. So man is not only a member of a social community or a political personality, but there is also a higher dimension of human development and excellence. That is called the spiritual dimension of human growth and excellence. If the first one is a horizontal and lateral growth, the second one is a vertical and inward growth. Aristotle said that man is a social animal. This is true; we need that gregarious background for our growth, but man has a vertical dimension, which calls for a deepening of his awareness, for spiritual growth within. Even in ancient Greek culture, this higher dimension of excellence was placed before

---

<sup>55</sup> Bipan, Chandra (1982): 235 – 261.

<sup>56</sup> Swami, Ranganathananda (1990): 50.

<sup>57</sup> Swami, Ranganathananda, Swami (2005): 13.



man in the famous dictum of the Oracle of Delphi: 'Man, know yourself.' It is not enough that you know the external environment. There is a profound inner environment also to be investigated and realized. There was only one Greek who understood this truth and realized it, and that was Socrates. He realized himself as the infinite and immortal Ātmān, and the Greeks, who knew only the socio-political dimension of man, the horizontal dimension, could not understand him. It was something beyond their comprehension. They are well-known men wrestling with forces outside and establishing their hegemony over the external world. But the greatness of Socrates was something deep, something subtle. It is a great tragedy that the Athenian state could not appreciate the high spiritual dimension of Socrates, and therefore he was condemned to death. He was described by the judges as a corrupter of the Athenian youth. What a sad description! And what human excellence and greatness! However, the socio-political philosophy of the Greeks could not grasp that character excellence. This is not only the example of Socrates but also we refer to Jesus Christ. Jesus also gave a tremendous message of man's spiritual inwardness. But the socio-political philosophy of the Jews of the time could not comprehend it and condemned him to death. Socio-political character excellence, the Athenians and the Jews could understand and appreciate, but not anything higher than that. In Indian history, we have the example of Bhagavan Buddha of the sixth century BCE who is teaching against Hinduism. Up to 80 years before his death,<sup>58</sup> He was not challenged by others, but his teachings peacefully transformed, in the next few centuries, India and much of Asia. It is a great example of Indian humanism. Humanism cannot coexist with any predatory attitude or behavior; it cannot coexist with any intolerant attitude or behavior either.<sup>59</sup> The Buddhist philosophy was given unique political expressions by several Indian political states at the all-India as well as provincial levels, among whom the most outstanding example was the policy and program of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of the third century before Christ experiencing remorse after his successful but bloody war with his neighboring Kalinga state, Ashoka<sup>60</sup> renounced all wars as the instrument of state policy, and, as proclaimed through his numerous rock and pillar edicts, many of which still exist, he silenced all war drums, yuddha-bheri, and struck the kettle-drums of truth and justice, dharma-bheri; and this not only in the political and international fields but also in the fields of inter-religious relations. is wise policy of non-violence, active toleration, and international understanding was taken up by his successors also at the all-India and provincial levels, who extended welcome and hospitality to successive foreign racial and religious groups and refugees fleeing from persecution from their own countries, like the Jews and the early Christians from West Asia and the Zoroastrians. Bertrand Russell felt the need for knowledge, but he gave a warning to modern man: "Knowledge is power, but it is power for evil as much as for good. It follows

<sup>58</sup> Thaper (2002): 175 – 179.

<sup>59</sup> Radhakrishnan (1969): 381 - 382.

<sup>60</sup> Thaper (2002): 175 – 180.

that, unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, an increase of knowledge will be an increase of sorrow.<sup>61</sup>

## V. BUDDHA AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In the sixth century BCE, Buddha discourses on the different aspects of human life, such as social, ethical, philosophical, psychological, spiritual, political, and economic, besides the principle of good governance and national unity. India is a land with varied diversity in all its inhabitants for a long period. It has its mechanism of sustenance and development. Buddha recognized the power of nature, which is embodied in the sun. Man is a very small part of the cosmos and must be in perfect balance with the whole of it. Buddha acknowledged the power of nature's balance, and he explained how it existed in society by practicing nonviolence.<sup>62</sup> Buddha observed that the use of iron in the third century BCE created ecological problems and peace in the society. Iron extended the people's settlement, cutting down the forest and extending the agriculture field. Agricultural production increased rapidly in society. People brutally killed animals for religious purposes and also for personal interest. People were damaging nature and the environment cruelly. Urbanization was rapidly expanded, which developed ecological imbalance and unhappiness in society.<sup>63</sup> People were also fighting each other cruelly for power and wealth. Most of the people wanted harmony and peace in society. Buddha observed that the mental imbalance of man was the main cause of damage to nature and peace in society.<sup>64</sup> According to Buddha, practicing *dhamma* is indeed a fundamental tenet of human development, as it transcends the boundaries of mere moral philosophy and delves into the realm of holistic progress - personal, social, and spiritual. Through the cultivation of awareness of the "Inner Cosmos" within human life, individuals can discern the structures of "internal existence" and "transcendence," forming a basis for universal human dignity and rights. According to the Buddha (*Dīgha Nikāya*. 2.3.159, *VRI*. 2.73), principles of the *Dhamma* are *akālika* (timeless), *sandiṭṭhiko* (empirical), *ehi-passiko* (verifiable), *vinnūhi* (known by the wise), and individually understandable. Hence, they may be adopted as a standard parameter to examine and verify any problem, subject, or event to ensure sustainable peace in the world. According to Buddha, nonviolence and happiness are not two separate entities but are two halves of one circle; man lives in happiness, and happiness, to some extent, lives in man. Both are parts of the Society. Social development requires the removal of barriers for all the citizens of a nation, enabling them to march onwards towards the fulfilment of their cherished dreams with confidence and dignity. According to Buddhist thought, sustainable peace or happiness and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin. The *Visuddhimagga* and *Atthasalini* mention a few laws, which are *Citta-niyāma* (mind law), *Kamma-niyāma* (action

<sup>61</sup> Bertrand, Russell (1953): 120 - 121.

<sup>62</sup> Palit (2009): 413 - 425.

<sup>63</sup> Palit. (2010): 191 - 200.

<sup>64</sup> Burton, D. (2002): 326 - 345.

law), *Dhamma-niyāma* (phenomenal universal law), *Utuniyama* (season laws), and *Bijaniyama* (seed law). All laws are more effective for the betterment of human society.<sup>65</sup> The words *dhammata* and *niyama* are used as a 'natural law of way', and they mean a righteous path by which everything in the cosmos is also guided by the universe. Since everything moves in the right path, there is hardly any apprehension of one's causing harm to the other. Any imbalance anywhere is bound to affect this harmony. It provides a sense of security for all the members of the universe, resulting in a balance between the whole universe. Mental or physical, which has been called '*anrta*' (the antithesis), is bound to affect the harmony. The *Dhammasangani* is divided into *kusala* (happiness), *akusala* (unhappiness), and *avyākata*, which is neither pleasing nor painful (Palit, 2011) 155-169.). He laid down the model code of conduct for the sustenance of the living world, in particular human beings. Buddha advises the practice of *metta* (loving kindness) towards all creatures, invisible and visible, awaiting birth and born.<sup>66</sup> The Buddha also advocates fervently against killing and destruction of life in any form. Buddha prescribed *Yajñas* comprising *Sīla* (virtue), *Samādhi* (concentration), and *Prajña* (wisdom) to establish a loving and moral society (Labh, 2004). He divided *Sīla* (Virtue) into two - *carittasīla* (duties of performance) and *vārittasīla* (duties of avoidance).<sup>67</sup> A compassionate mind increases self-confidence and inner peace, and it has strengthened the base of sustainable peace, nature conservation (*Saṅgaha*), and sustainable development of society. According to Buddhist behavioral psychology, human actions are divided into three categories: *kāya-kamma* (bodily actions), *vācā-kamma* (verbal actions), and *Mano-kamma* (mental actions). Mental behaviors are the most important of these three categories, since they still influence the other two.<sup>68</sup> Every human mind has five components, which are *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāna*.<sup>69</sup> In Buddhist teaching, mind and matter characteristics are evident, just as they are in human psychology. The components of consciousness or thought (*sampayutta dhamma*) and the units of matter or atoms (*rūpakalpa*) make up the composition of mind and body. The cognitive and non-cognitive components, or mental influences, form the cognition or unit of mind (*citta and cetasikas*).<sup>70</sup>

The *Buddhavacana* (teachings of the Buddha) has fully supported the nonviolence of action of man. Buddhist philosophy deals with the welfare and happiness of the masses (*bahujana hitāya, bahujana sukhāya*). The Buddha powerfully upheld values that are "akin to the modern concepts of human rights".<sup>71</sup> The Buddhist *Pañcasīla* (Five Virtues) represents an acknowledgment

<sup>65</sup> Palit (2019): 113 - 125.

<sup>66</sup> Law (1997): 55 - 67.

<sup>67</sup> Labh, B. (2004): 113 - 120.

<sup>68</sup> Shaky, Anusha (2023): 60 - 70.

<sup>69</sup> Shaky, Anusha (2023): 60 - 70.

<sup>70</sup> Shaky, Anusha (2023): 60 - 70.

<sup>71</sup> Perera (1991): viii.

of both the right to life and the property right. Buddhism supports that all human beings are born with unconditional freedom and accountability, and from a Buddhist perspective, “one is indeed one’s lord” (*attā hi attano nātho*). In Buddhism, *ahiṃsā* is a viewpoint of all human activities. All people love others and are not hurt or killed by others. This feeling of self-preservation and self-love is transferred in thought to other people. 99 and in this way the love for and protection of life come to be promoted. For instance, the Dhammapada echoes this very idea by stating that as all fear death, comparing others with oneself, one should neither kill nor cause to kill.<sup>72</sup> The Buddha felt that the humane sentiment of *appamāna mettā* (boundless friendliness) and *mettacittam* (heart full of love) must be extended to all conscious beings because essentially all life has a desire to protect itself and make itself comfortable and happy.<sup>73</sup> The admirable virtues of Buddhism such as the four characteristics of kindness,<sup>74</sup> i.e., *dāna* (liberality), *peyyāvajja* (kindly speech), *atthacariyā* (sagacious conduct), *samānattatā* (feeling of common good or impartiality); four qualities of character significant of a human being who has attained enfranchisement of the heart i.e., *mettā* (friendliness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *upekkhā* (equanimity), *muditā* (sympathy); ten perfections (*dasa pāramiyo*) of a bodhisatta consisting of *dāna* (liberality), *sīla* (morality), *nekkhamma* (renunciation), *paññā* (wisdom), *virīya* (vigor), *khanti* (tolerance), *sacca* (truthfulness), *adhiṭṭhāna* (self-determination), *mettā* (friendliness), *upekkhā* (equanimity); along with *cāga* (benevolence),<sup>75</sup> *kataññutā/kataveditā* (gratefulness), *gāravatā* (respect), *peyyāvajja* (courtesy), *samānattatā* (equanimity), *nikāra* (humility), *khanti* (tolerance), *saṃtuṭṭhi* (satisfaction) with minimum, *khantisoracca* (gentleness and forbearance), *alīnatā* (sincerity), *anupāyāsa* (peacefulness), (*paranuddayatā*) sympathy with others, *saccavajja* (truthfulness), and above all *ahiṃsā* (non-injury) towards all forms of life (*bijagāma bhūtagāma*) are the foundation blocks of the moral basis of an individual’s association with other fellow beings which would firmly provide to fully understand the aim of the human peace or human development.<sup>76</sup> The Dalai Lama realizes that we are ‘truly a global family’ and by necessity must develop a sense of universality. ‘It is our collective and individual responsibility to protect and nurture the global family, to support its weakest members, and to preserve and tend to the natural environment in which we all live.’<sup>77</sup>

## VI. BUDDHISM AND HUMAN MIND

The *Visuddhimagga* uses the Indic word *cārika* to describe certain temperaments, which simply means “behavior of moving around” or “behavior of conduct.” According to *Pāli* commentaries, there are many personality

<sup>72</sup> Sarao, K T S (trans.) (2009): 129.

<sup>73</sup> Shaky, Anusha (2023): 60 – 70.

<sup>74</sup> Sarao, K T S (2017): 1 – 4.

<sup>75</sup> Sarao, K T S (2017): 1 – 4.

<sup>76</sup> Sarao, K T S (2017): 1 – 4.

<sup>77</sup> Lama, Dalai. (1999): 22.

classifications, but the most prevalent one is found in the text *Visuddhimagga*, which has six temperaments - *cārika* dependent on the leading mind and mental states.<sup>78</sup> These are:

1. The selfish natured (*rāga-cārika*)
2. The hateful one (*dosa-cārika*)
3. The unwise or dull-natured (*moha-cārika*)
4. The trustworthy (*saddhā-cārika*)
5. The wise-hearted (*buddhi-cārika*)
6. The ruminating-natured (*vitakka-cārika*).

The first three are positive, while the remaining three are negative. The negative personalities are more likely to commit crimes than other individuals. 125. In the Buddhist classification of behavioral types of human beings, the approach distinguishes these diverse effects in both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. 126 In terms of moral assessment, Buddhism defines three causes responsible for any immoral activity: *Rāga* (greed), *Dosa* (aversion), and *Moha* (misbehavior, delusion), which develops from the lack of self-awareness. And apart from these three immoralities, Buddha observes some psychological factors that contribute to criminal behavior. These factors are deeply entrenched in one's subconscious mind the whole time.<sup>79</sup> These are:

- Sensual intolerance (*kāmarāga*)
- Resentment, hostility, and a propensity for abuse (*paṭigha*)
- Self-maintenance
- Ego-centric views and different perceptions (*diṭṭhi*)
- Distrust, trepidation, and skepticism are all symptoms of compulsive suspicion (*vicikicchā*).

*Mano*, is an illusion that establishes emotions of equivalence, dominion, and servility. These tendencies exist latent in the subconscious mind, manifesting only when the situations are particularly infuriating. Individuals are unaware of their deep-seated behavior under ordinary circumstances. According to Buddha, only Non-violence and humanity fulfill basic needs for their lives, and to encourage spiritual practice, they fulfill internal peace. The Noble Eightfold Path, the fundamental Buddhist teaching, includes the five precepts in its components on right speech, right conduct, and right livelihood. In Theravada tradition, the five precepts are recited in *Pāli* language.<sup>80</sup> The five precepts are as follows:

- Abstaining from killing living beings.
- Avoiding stealing.
- Avoiding inappropriate sexual conduct.

<sup>78</sup> B. Buddhaghosa (2010): 428.

<sup>79</sup> Shaky, Anusha (2023): 70 - 72.

<sup>80</sup> Anusha, Shaky (2023): 94.



- Refraining from telling lies (falsehood).
- Absence of intoxication.

The five precepts have been described as unfavorable to a society that is peaceful and as social attitudes that bring harmony. In Buddhist texts, the ideal, virtuous society is one in which human beings understand the five precepts. The early Buddhist texts contain numerous references to the five precepts. The precepts are observed as ways to develop a positive self-concept or as a representation of that character. They are described in the *Pāli* Canon as a means of avoiding suffering to oneself and others. They are additionally described as gifts to themselves and others. They are regarded as moral standards that specify what it means to be human, both physically and mentally.<sup>81</sup>

Buddha observed this unkind, unjust, and inhuman custom in the name of religion. He revolted against the same and raised his objections, saying that such *Yajñas* (religious sacrifices) were cruel and worthless. The Buddhist text *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* states that when humanity is demoralized through greed, famine is the natural result. Instead, he prescribed *Yajñas* comprising *Sila* (virtue), *Samādhi* (concentration), and *Prajña* (wisdom) in which there was no killing and the best possible fruits were also obtained.<sup>82</sup> But Buddha Ghosh divided the *Sila* into two: *carittasila* (duties of performance) and *varittasila* (duties of avoidance).<sup>83</sup> He explained the *varittasila*, which are –

1. To abstain from taking life.
2. Not to take what is not given.
3. Sexual purity.
4. To abstain from a false intoxicating drink.

According to him, “Habitual morality is to the broad earth, on which, as their fulcrum or basis, all creatures move, stand, or rest, and again, *Sila* is compared to the sources of the great rivers and the ocean, starting as rill and burn way up in the mountains and ministering to an increasing scale of animal growth as they descend and wax deep and wide, till merged in the ocean.”<sup>84</sup> The attitude of Pragmaticism is clearly expressed in the ‘*Culamba-lunkya Sutta*,’ where Buddha made use of the example of a wounded man.<sup>85</sup> The wounded man, by an arrow, wished to know who shot the arrow, from which direction it came, and whether the shaft was of this kind of wood or another before he would have the arrow removed. The arrow here signifies the sufferings in our daily life caused even by disbalanced happiness and leads one to the removal of the arrow of suffering. This is Buddha’s practical and more personal view in the light of his experience.<sup>86</sup> The *Lokavipatti Sutta* (*An. IV.157, cf. Dn. III. 260, 286*) describes

<sup>81</sup> Anusha, Shakya (2023): 94 - 95.

<sup>82</sup> Labh (2004): 113 – 120.

<sup>83</sup> Law, B.C (1997): 55 - 67.

<sup>84</sup> Law (1997): 55 - 67.

<sup>85</sup> Choudhury & Palit (2010): 1 - 7.

<sup>86</sup> Bhowmick (2004): 136 – 37.



how everyone is subject to the eight worldly conditions (*loka-dhamma*), namely gain and loss (*lābha* and *alābha*); fame/ good repute/ popularity and disrepute/ shame/ obscurity (*yasa* and *ayasa*); blame and praise (*nindā* and *pasamsā*); pleasure and pain (*sukha* and *dukkha*). Recognizing these four pairs of agreeable and disagreeable experiences as impermanent, painful, and subject to change encourages patience and equanimity rather than allowing oneself to be captured by an emotional reaction. Drawing on the second type of *ksānti* supports the first type, acceptance of suffering. Relevant to the third type, tolerance of injurious behaviour, which is important about non-retaliation, is *Dhammapada*, 'As an elephant in the battlefield withstands arrows shot from bows all around, even so, shall I endure abuse. There are many, indeed, who lack virtue.'<sup>87</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION

Buddhist vision and thought is the One Self in all, which evaluates the man as a human being, and not as conditioned by his external variable factors such as race, creed, or political nationality. Universal peace and toleration only create a universal vision of Ānanda or happiness. The Four Noble Truths doctrine plays a central role in understanding and addressing human happiness in line with the dynamics of the human mind. This Buddhist thought did not remain as a vision but was given unique political expressions by several political states at the all-India as well as provincial levels, among whom the most outstanding example was the policy and program of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of the third century before Christ.<sup>88</sup> Experiencing remorse after his successful but bloody war with his neighbouring Kalinga state, Ashoka renounced all wars as the instrument of state policy and, as proclaimed through his numerous rock and pillar edicts, many of which still exist, he silenced all war drums, yuddha-bheri, and struck the kettle-drums of truth and justice, dharma-bheri; and this not only in the political and international fields but also in the fields of inter-religious relations.<sup>89</sup> This wise policy of non-violence, active toleration, and international understanding was taken up by his successors also at the all-India and provincial levels, who extended welcome and hospitality to successive foreign racial and religious groups, and refugees fleeing from persecution from their own countries, like the Jews and the early Christians from West Asia and the Zoroastrians. In the third century BCE, the Mauryan Emperor Asoka demonstrated this tolerance in his rock edicts - '*Samavaya eva sadhuh*', he proclaimed in one of his edicts: 'Concord alone is right.' The Buddha, with great compassion for the world, required his followers to practice the four boundless states (*appamanna*) of loving kindness (*metta*), of compassion (*karuna*), of sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and of equanimity (*upekkha*).<sup>90</sup> This practice of '*metta*' or universal love, begins by suffusing one's mind with universal love (*metta*) and then pervading it to one's family, then

<sup>87</sup> *Dhammapada* translation Acharya Buddhārakkhita (1985): 21 - 115.

<sup>88</sup> Basham A. L. (1983): 39.

<sup>89</sup> Palit, P. K (2011): 155 - 69.

<sup>90</sup> Palit, P.K (2019): 113 - 125.

to the neighbours, then to the village, country and the four corners of the Universe. The message of Buddhism and the principles on which it rests have assumed a new significance in today's world. "Qualities of the human spirit that bring happiness to both self and others".<sup>91</sup> These could also be called the fundamental 'human values' in the sense that these are the things that a human being values - seeks, aspires for, prizes, and pursues. Human development, therefore, is conditioned by the human being's aspiration and goal-orientation, that is, his or her 'value system'. A materially highly 'developed' individual may consider a spiritually developed personality who is rather unconcerned about his 'material development' to be 'undeveloped' or 'underdeveloped'; and vice versa. The concept of 'human development' would therefore crucially depend upon human aspiration and on the aspect of human personality that is being sought to be 'developed'. The external dimension of human development, which primarily deals with material prosperity, takes into account the aspects concerned with social and economic development, and deals with factors such as income, education, and healthy living. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations Organization (UNO) which is subsumed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) point to this external dimension of human development for the most part.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Anguttara Nikāya* IV.157, cf. *Dīgha Nikāya* III (260, 286). (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997). "Lokavipatti Sutta: The Failings of the World."
- Asia Society. "Amartya Sen: A More Human Theory of Development." Available at: <https://asiasociety.org/amartya-sen-more-human-theory-development>
- Bartles, Andrew, et al. (2021). "Reducing Suffering During Conflict: The Interface Between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law." *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2021.1976016>. Published by Taylor & Francis Group, p. 2.
- Basham, A. L. (Ed.). (1983). *Cultural History of India*, Oxford, p. 39.
- Bhagavad Gītā*, Chapter 2, Verse 23.
- Bhagavad Gītā*, Chapter 5, Verses 14, 18, 24 (translated).
- Bhatt, S. R. (2004). *Vedic Wisdom, Cultural Inheritance and Contemporary Life*. New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, p. 98.
- Bhowmick, A. C. (2004). "Ecology in the Buddhist Texts and Epigraphical Records." *Buddhism and Ecology*, New Delhi: Om Publications, p. 136 – 147.
- Buddhaghosa, B. (2010). *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Vajirārāma, Colombo, Sri Lanka, p. 428.

---

<sup>91</sup> Dalai Lama (1999): 22.

- Burton, D. "Knowledge and Liberation: Philosophical Ruminations on a Buddhist Conundrum." *Philosophy East and West*, 52(3), p. 326 – 345.
- Chandra, Bipan. (1982). *Modern India*. NCERT, New Delhi, p. 235 – 261.
- Choudhury, P., & Palit, P. K. "Biodiversity Conservation – A Study from Earliest Times (Buddhism) to the Present Context." *Proceedings of International Conference on Global Climate Change*, 19-21 Feb. 2010, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, p. 1 – 7.
- Dalai Lama. (1999). *Ethics for the New Millennium*. New York: Riverhead Books, p. 22.
- Dīgha Nikāya*, 2.3.159, VRI. 2.73.
- French, R. R. (2015). "What is Buddhist Law: Opening Ideas?" *Buffalo Law Review*, 63 (4), 833 – 880.
- Harvey, Peter. (2004). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundation, values, and Issues*. London, p. 65.
- Labh, B. (2004). "Environmental Awareness in Buddhism." In *Buddhism and Ecology*. New Delhi: Om Publications, p. 113 – 120.
- Law, B. C. (1997). *The life and work of Buddhaghosa*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, p. 55 – 67.
- Mineshima, Hideo (1991) "The Human Rights from the Buddhist Perspective." *The Journal of Oriental Studies*, 30 (1), 110.
- Palit, P. K. (2009). *Religion and Human Development*, as cited in Jena, K. N., Semwal, M. M., & Chatterjee, R. (Eds.), *Bottom-up Approaches and Inclusive Development*, p. 413 – 425.
- Palit, P. K. (2009). *Religion and Human Development*, as cited in Jena, K. N., Semwal, M. M., & Chatterjee, R. (Eds.), *Bottom-up Approaches and Inclusive Development*, p. 415 – 420.
- Palit, P. K. (2010). *Human Development and Early Indian Thoughts*, as cited in Sengupta, K. (Ed.), *Human Development: Multi-dimensional approaches to human well-being*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 191 – 200.
- Palit, Projit Kumar. (2011). "Ecology and Its Identity on the Basis of Buddhist Literature and Philosophy". p. 155 – 169.
- Palit, Projit Kumar. (2011). "Ecology and Its Identity on the Basis of Buddhist Literature and Philosophy". p. 155 – 169.
- Palit, Projit Kumar. (2019). "Buddha and Sustainable World Peace: A Study on His Mindful Leadership". In *Buddhist Approach to Global Leadership and Shared Responsibility for Sustainable Societies*. NVBS, Vietnam: National Vietnam BuddhistSangha, p. 113 – 125.
- Palit, Projit Kumar. (2019). "Buddha and Sustainable World Peace: A Study on His Mindful Leadership". In *Buddhist Approach to Global Leadership and Shared Responsibility for Sustainable Societies*. NVBS, Vietnam: National Vietnam BuddhistSangha, p. 113 – 125.
- Palit, Projit Kumar. (2019). "Buddha and Sustainable World Peace: A Study on His Mindful Leadership". In *Buddhist Approach to Global Leadership and Shared Responsibility for Sustainable Societies*. NVBS, Vietnam: National Vietnam BuddhistSangha, p. 113 – 125.

- Buddhist Sangha, p. 113 - 125, Center, Ha Nam Province, Vietnam, p. 113 – 125. ISBN: 978-955-9373-40-7.
- Paranjpe, Anand C. (2013). “The Concept of Dharma: Classical Meaning, Common Misconceptions, and Implications for Psychology.” *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 25 (1). Department of Psychology, University of Allahabad. SAGE Publications, New Delhi.
- Radhakrishnan, S. (1949). *Gautama Buddha*. Bombay, p. 56 – 58.
- Radhakrishnan, S. (1969). *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*. London, Oxford University Press, p. 381 – 382.
- Rao, J. V. (1996). *Human Resources Development*. New Delhi, p. 15.
- Rao, T. V. (1995). *Human Resources Development Experiences, Interventions, Strategies*. New Delhi: Sage Publication, p. 15.
- Russell, Bertrand. (2002). *Impact of Science on Society*. Originally published in 1953. New York, p. 120 – 121.
- Sarao, K. T. S. (2017). “Human Rights in Buddhism.” *ResearchGate*. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315863913>. DOI: 10.1007/978-94-024-0852-2\_1894, p. 1 – 4.
- Sarao, K. T. S. (trans.). (2009). *The Dhammapada: A Translator's Guide*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Sen, Amartya. (1988). “The Concept of Development.” In *Handbook of Development Economics*, Vol. 1, Edited by H. Chenery and T. N. Srinivasan, Elsevier Science Publishers B.V., p. 1 – 18.
- Shakya, Anusha. (2023). “Buddhist Reformative Ethics and Juvenile Delinquent Rehabilitation: A Case Study.” Unpublished thesis, Delhi University, p. 60 – 70.
- Swāmi Madhavānanda. (1950). *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Almora: Advaita Āśrama, p. 86.
- Swāmi Ranganāthananda. (1990). *Swami Vivekananda and Human Excellence*. Kolkata, p. 14.
- Swāmi Ranganāthananda. (1990). *Swami Vivekananda and Human Excellence*. Kolkata, p. 53.
- Swāmi Sivananda. (1998). *The Principal Upaniṣads*, p. x. Uttar Pradesh: The Divine Life Society.
- Swāmi, Kirtipradānanda. (2022). “Sri Rāmakṛṣṇa’s Teachings and Holistic Human Development – A Historical Study.” Unpublished PhD, Assam University, Silchar, p. 67 – 88.
- Swāmi, Kirtipradānanda. (2022). “Sri Rāmakṛṣṇa’s Teachings and Holistic Human Development – A Historical Study.” Unpublished PhD, Assam University, Silchar, p. 40 – 58.
- Thapar, Romila. (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. London: Penguin, p. 175 – 185.
- The Complete Works of Swāmi Vivekānanda*, Vol. I (2013). (12th ed.). Howrah: Rāmakṛṣṇa Maṭha and Rāmakṛṣṇa Mission, Belur Maṭha. “Non-attachment is complete self-abnegation,” p. 105 – 106.

*The Laws of Manu*, Chapter 5, p. 115.

United Nations Development Programme. (1997). *Human Development Report 1997*. ISBN 978-0-19-511996-1, p. 15.

United Nations Development Programme. (1997). *Human Development Report 1997*, p. 15 – 18.

Vidyashree, S., & Bharadwaj, Amulya. (2023). “Transcending Knowledge: Holistic Education through Upanishadic Insight.” *International Journal of Novel Research and Development*, IJNRD, Vol. 8, Issue 8, August 2023, ISSN: 2456 - 4184, pp. 626 – 635. Available at: [www.ijnrd.org](http://www.ijnrd.org).

Zaehner, R. C. (1969). *The Bhagavad Gītā*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.





# BUDDHISM AROUND THE WORLD – AFRICA: PERSPECTIVES OF AFRICAN BUDDHIST FOLLOWERS

Rev Dr. ILukpitiye Pannasekara Thero\*

## Abstract:

*The study* explores how Buddhism has been introduced and practiced in Africa. The study highlights that Buddhism remains relatively new to many Africans, often encountered through media, literature, and educational institutions like the African Buddhist Seminary (ABS) in South Africa, founded in 1994. Surveying 26 participants from seven African countries, the research finds that most converts were previously adherents of Christianity, Islam, or indigenous traditions. Many were drawn to Buddhism through free monastic training programs and accessible teachings, leading to profound personal transformations. Key practices such as meditation, mindfulness (*sati*), and the Middle Way fostered emotional resilience, compassion (*karuṇā*), and deeper insights into impermanence and karma. The study concludes that Buddhism, when adapted to local cultural contexts, provides practical and ethical solutions for modern challenges, enhancing personal well-being and social cohesion across African communities.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, compassion, African Buddhist followers.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This section aims to explore how Africans perceive the Buddhist way and its teachings. For many Africans, Buddhism is a new concept, often introduced through cultural channels such as Chinese films. These films may spark interest in Buddhism, particularly through the portrayal of Shoaling monks, which serves as an entry point for Buddhist educators and an initial source of inspiration for many.

---

\* Vice President of the World Buddhist Summit (WBS), Japan.

## II. PATHWAY TO BUDDHISM

Some participants encountered Buddhist teachings while using libraries or reading books, often discovering ideas they had never previously encountered. After completing their Advanced Level or Matric studies, many sought opportunities for further education. News about free monastic training in South Africa, often found in newspaper advertisements, motivated them to pursue this path. Consequently, many participants cited newspapers, media, or friends as their first sources of inspiration for engaging with Buddhism.

The African Buddhist Seminary<sup>1</sup> was established in South Africa in 1994 and has since trained many students over three years. After completing their training, many students share their newfound knowledge with friends, reinforcing the community aspect of their journey. According to Buddha's teachings, sharing knowledge and good fortune with others is an important virtue. Most participants first encountered Buddhism through friends and media, with fewer discovering it through independent reading.

## III. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The research included 26 participants from seven African countries, with a gender breakdown of 2 females and 24 males. The countries represented are: (1) Congo: 2. (2) Madagascar: 3. (3) Malawi: 4. (4) Mozambique: 1. (5) South Africa: 8. (6) Tanzania: 7. (7) Uganda: 1

### 3.1 Religious background and transition

Participants came from various religious backgrounds, often practicing the faith of their parents or other religions before exploring Buddhism. After completing the three-year monastic course at ABS, many chose to adopt Buddhism as their primary spiritual path. They now actively incorporate Buddhist teachings into their daily lives. The breakdown of participants' original religious beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

One participant, already a Buddhist, was born into a family of practitioners, which sparked their interest in further study. They perceive Buddhism as scientifically grounded in the concepts of cause and effect.

### 3.2 Educational background

The participants displayed a high average level of education, with most holding at least an Advanced Level/Matric qualification or higher. This educational foundation encourages them to continue exploring and deepening their understanding of Buddhist practice. The breakdown of their educational qualifications.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.3 Age distribution

A significant number of participants belong to the younger age group,

---

<sup>1</sup> ABS.

<sup>2</sup> (1) Christian: 12. (2) Catholic: 5. (3) Islamic: 3. (4) Anglican: 2. (5) Lutheran: 1. (6) Protestant: 1. (7) Baha'I: 1. (8) Buddhist: 1.

<sup>3</sup> (1) M.A: 1. (2) B.A: 6. (3) Diploma: 1. (4) Advanced Level: 18.

which is a positive indicator for the future of Buddhism in Africa.<sup>4</sup>

This young demographic aligns with the Buddha's teachings in the *Dhammapada*, which emphasize the importance of utilizing each stage of life – childhood, youth, and old age – to develop a meaningful and purposeful existence. The introduction of Buddhist concepts to younger generations is crucial, as they can achieve significant growth during this formative period.

#### IV. STAGES OF LIFE AND THE PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM

The Buddha stated in the *Dhammapada* that life consists of three stages: childhood, youth, and The Buddha, as recorded in the *Dhammapada*, elucidates that life unfolds in three distinct stages - childhood, youth, and old age. The wise are those who utilize each of these stages to cultivate their lives with balance and purpose.<sup>5</sup> In particular, youth is regarded as the most crucial phase, as it is during this period that individuals can most effectively harness both their mental and physical capacities. Introducing the younger generation to Buddhist teachings is therefore essential; doing so not only equips them with the tools for personal transformation but also deepens their comprehension of the nature of existence.

In our study, participants articulated numerous benefits derived from their engagement with Buddhism. Their experiences reveal that practicing core Buddhist principles - such as mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and the pursuit of wisdom (*paññā*) - not only enhances personal development but also fosters a more nuanced understanding of life's challenges. These insights provide a valuable guide for those seeking to incorporate Buddhist practices into their daily lives, illustrating how such practices can lead to greater self-awareness and a more harmonious relationship with the world. Ultimately, the reflections offered by these practitioners underscore the transformative potential of a Buddhist way of life, presenting a compelling model for individual and societal growth.

#### V. BENEFITS GAINED THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM

Most participants completed a three-year monastic training course at the African Buddhist Seminary (ABS). After their training, they shared their reflections. Many adopted new lifestyles in line with the five precepts, which entail abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming intoxicants. Below are some of their thoughts regarding the benefits they gained:

The participant's reflections vividly illustrate the transformative impact of Buddhist practice on personal growth. Through dedicated meditation and adherence to the five precepts, they report a profound change in self-identity, noting that they are no longer the person they once were. This transformation is rooted in acquiring knowledge about meditation, the concept of impermanence,

<sup>4</sup> (1) Ages 10-20: 1. (2) Ages 20-30: 16. (3) Ages 30-40: 3. (4) Ages 40-50: 4. (5) Ages 50-60: 1. (6) Ages 60-70: 1.

<sup>5</sup> S. Sumangala Thera (1914), p. 25.

and the significance of ethical conduct - specifically, understanding the Four Noble Truths as the foundation for regulating one's life.<sup>6</sup>

Central to their experience is the embodiment of the Middle Way, as taught by the Buddha. They assert that life should not be defined by its inherent suffering or by an overly optimistic perspective, but rather by how one chooses to live. By internalizing Buddhist teachings, the participant has not only adapted a more balanced outlook on life but has also integrated lessons from other traditions - such as blending aspects of Christian and Buddhist thought - to enhance their capacity for compassion and to mitigate negative emotions.

(1) Living the Middle Way: I strive to embody the Middle Way, as the Buddha taught. Some say life is filled with suffering, while others view it positively. However, I believe the key is not whether life is good or bad but how I choose to live. (2) Internalization of Teachings: While I may not be a perfect practitioner, I do my best to internalize what I have learned, and I find it helpful in my daily life. (3) Integrating Teachings: I was a strict follower of Christianity but struggled to fully understand its commandments. Upon blending Buddhist and Christian teachings, I discovered numerous benefits, including a heightened sense of compassion for all sentient beings and a fear of negative actions. This integration has been a significant benefit of my Buddhist practice. (4) Cultural Understanding: Living with individuals from different cultures has taught me that people of various religions can coexist peacefully. Buddhism promotes tolerance, and as students of diverse backgrounds, we supported each other as one family under the Buddhist umbrella. This experience was invaluable. (5) Emotional Regulation: In the past, I would easily become angry over trivial matters, but I have noticed a positive change. I realize that anger brings no benefit and only harms my mind. While I still experience anger at times, I am learning to manage it. (6) Collective Karma: As an African native, I share in the collective karma faced by our communities. Nonetheless, my capacity for love and compassion towards all beings has grown over time. I continue to reflect inwardly. (7) Learning Patience and Community Living: I have learned about meditation, impermanence, and the importance of causes and conditions. I've also gained insights into living harmoniously with people from diverse backgrounds and practicing patience as a monk. (8) The Zen koans were mentally stimulating and often profound. Our relationships became more relaxed, and stress - such as exam-related anxiety - was significantly reduced. There was always time to address problems that arose or to let them go without grief. Strangers felt comfortable opening up to me. (9) I gained a clearer understanding of the three characteristics of existence, which inspired me to pursue my practice full-time. I developed faith and confidence in being present, regardless of what thoughts or feelings might arise. I learned the significance of taking refuge in the Triple Gems by embracing uncertainty. This realization, achieved through my *vipassanā* practice, taught me that *vipassanā* is not merely a process of letting go, but rather an opening up

---

<sup>6</sup> Author's survey (2023).

to the present moment. This transformation has profoundly changed my life.

Furthermore, their journey emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation. Once prone to anger over trivial matters, they have learned, through practices like *vipassanā*, to manage their emotional responses effectively. This shift has resulted in a clearer understanding of the three characteristics of existence - *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (non-self) - which has inspired a full-time commitment to their practice. They now take refuge in the Triple Gems with a renewed sense of presence, acknowledging the interplay of cause and effect in shaping their life circumstances. Additionally, the participant has cultivated a strong sense of collective responsibility by recognizing their shared karma with their community. This realization has motivated them to serve others and contribute to a more compassionate society. Their narrative further demonstrates an increased openness to diverse cultural experiences, improved communication skills, and the adoption of healthier lifestyle choices, such as abstaining from meat, smoking, and excessive drinking. (10) I readjusted my mindset after realizing that there is more to life than merely adhering to preconditioned beliefs. (11) I began to understand the reasons behind my life's circumstances. I took responsibility for my actions and the causes and conditions that shaped my life. Accepting my karma, I recognized that the most meaningful action is to help others. I vowed to do my best each day to be of service. I came to accept my place within the larger whole, understanding that everything, including myself, is empty and impermanent. (12) I discovered that enlightenment can be achieved through one's own efforts, without relying on intermediaries, such as the church. I learned to understand my mind and myself better, extending *mettā* and *karuṇā* to all beings and engaging in Kuan Yin bodhisattva practice. I met many interesting people along the way and had the opportunity to contribute to the dharma. (13) I developed clarity and calmness of mind, along with greater tolerance for others and an increase in wisdom and compassion. (14) I learned how to conduct my daily life, whether in my neighborhood or other settings, contributing my skills and building relationships. While one cannot be happy all the time, we strive to alleviate our suffering through the Eightfold Path, as taught by the Buddha. Among African communities, understanding Buddhism can be challenging due to its depth and profundity. Although I do not identify as a Buddhist, I find that I thrive by applying Buddhist principles in my life. (15) No matter what mindset I find myself in, I strive to be present, using my awareness wisely and facing situations with a conscientious attitude. I recognize the cause and effect of my actions, and with an open, calm, and transparent mind, I understand my current state and achievements, fostering a sense of strength, maturity, knowledge, and skills that contribute to my mental and spiritual satisfaction. (16) I have come to understand the importance of recognizing my responsibility for everything I do, and the resulting consequences - whether positive or negative. I have learned patience and respect for all living beings, acknowledging their right to exist and thrive. I believe that all beings are on a path toward enlightenment, which fuels my growing compassion and willingness to help others liberate themselves from

suffering. Nowadays, I find that I am much calmer and rarely experience anger, hatred, or negative emotions. My moral conduct has significantly improved since I began learning about Buddhism. (17) I have realized that suffering permeates our world, affecting everyone regardless of wealth or status. My daily thoughts and actions have shifted towards speaking and acting in ways that minimize suffering for others, emphasizing compassion for all living beings. (18) I strive to treat every living being equally by cultivating a compassionate attitude toward all. Previously, I did not treat animals well, but I have since decided to stop eating meat and have become a vegetarian. (19) Practicing Buddhism has allowed me to develop compassion for all living beings and to recognize both my own suffering and that of others, leading to my spiritual growth. (20) I have learned about meditation, the law of karma, and the interconnectedness of all life. In the past, I viewed animals solely as sources of food, but I now understand them as our relatives. My experiences have also taught me how to coexist with people from diverse backgrounds. I have become more adept at explaining ideas and speaking in front of others, abilities I previously struggled with. I have learned Chinese and become fluent in English, expanding my circle of friends beyond just those from Tanzania. I've adopted healthier habits, such as abstaining from smoking, drinking, and eating meat, which have transformed my life significantly. (21) Previously, I felt confined by dogmatic traditional doctrines. Now, I am more open and receptive to a diverse range of genuine and practical experiences – insights I have discovered through Buddhism. My interactions with others have broadened, and my personality has transformed tremendously. (22) Buddhism has opened my mind, enabling me to understand phenomena more clearly.

In summary, these reflections underscore that the practice of Buddhism facilitates a deep, holistic transformation - integrating ethical, emotional, and intellectual dimensions - thereby fostering both individual well-being and broader social harmony.<sup>7</sup>

### **Author's comments**

Many participants now adhere to the five precepts and strive to live according to the Middle Way, as taught by the Buddha. Several had Christian backgrounds, but after exploring Buddhism, one remarked, "When I started blending Buddhism with Christianity, I discovered numerous benefits in my life, including a greater awareness of negative actions and an increase in love and compassion for all sentient beings."

Their perceptions of animals have also evolved; they no longer view them merely as food. One participant stated, "I used to treat animals poorly, seeing them only as sources of food. Now, I recognize them as our relatives and have made the conscious choice to stop eating meat and become a vegetarian." This shift illustrates their significant lifestyle changes.

Many individuals from other faiths believe that liberation requires external assistance. However, these participants have realized that enlightenment can

---

<sup>7</sup> Author's survey (2023).



be achieved through their own efforts, without reliance on intermediaries. They now understand their responsibility for their actions and the resulting consequences – be they positive or negative – reflecting the Buddhist concept of karma.

At the seminary, students from various faiths live together for three years, sharing meals, learning, and practicing together. They have found that people of different religions can coexist peacefully, and Buddhism teaches them tolerance. They practice without criticizing other faiths, fostering mutual respect among all individuals.

They engage in Zen, *Samatha*, and *vipassanā* meditation, incorporating their experiences into daily life. Through *vipassanā* practice, they have learned that it is not merely a process of letting go but rather an opening up to the present moment. This understanding has fundamentally changed their lives.

Additionally, they recognize the importance of helping others, embracing the concepts of emptiness and impermanence. Many express that the most meaningful action in life is to assist others, vowing to contribute positively each day. They have come to accept that they are just a small part of a larger whole, understanding that everything, including themselves, is impermanent.

Participants have developed positive habits, such as abstaining from smoking, drinking, and unhealthy eating, which can significantly benefit impoverished communities by reducing unnecessary expenditures.

Their reflections align with the Middle Way, as taught by the Buddha. They acknowledge that “one cannot be happy all the time; we strive to eliminate suffering through the Eightfold Path.” The responses gathered illustrate how many have transformed their lives through Buddhism, now following the Middle Way as the Buddha emphasized.

## VI. WHAT IS THE MIDDLE WAY?

The Eightfold Path is recommended for everyone to follow. Most respondents are now practicing the Middle Way, emphasizing the importance of self-practice. This understanding is crucial for creating a better society.

Often, people may think they will become disheartened after following this system for just a few days. In reality, many participants have already begun doing meaningful work for others, which ultimately benefits themselves. The following responses illustrate how they plan to continue their practice for their benefit:

(1) Personal Practice: I am committed to practicing these teachings, not just by reading books. People are suffering everywhere, and we must share these valuable concepts. For example, this temple (Nan Hua Temple) is actively donating resources to those in need. Buddhism teaches us how to create merit through acts of kindness. There's also a temple in Congo affiliated with Nan Hua Temple in South Africa, where Master Hui Ren is helping to start a project to assist people. I hope to contribute to this effort. While I am not yet prepared to become a monk due to personal reasons, I aspire to do so when the time is right. (2) Community Support:

I plan to earn money to help address the pressing issues facing Africa, such as war, hunger, and AIDS. I want to provide both material and spiritual support, allowing people to experience the joy of liberation. Without addressing these fundamental needs, true liberation is difficult to achieve.

(3) Spreading Awareness: If I return to Malawi, most people there are Muslims and Christians who have never encountered a Buddhist monk or heard of Buddhism. My first step will be to share my understanding with my family, which will enable them to spread this knowledge further. We can also distribute free books containing Buddhist teachings in my community.

Participants expressed a multifaceted commitment to integrating Buddhist teachings into both their personal lives and broader communities. Many stated that their daily practice - through meditation, the recognition of impermanence, and adherence to the five precepts along with the Four Noble Truths - has fundamentally transformed their identity, enabling them to overcome previous limitations and extend compassion to those in need.<sup>8</sup> (4) Mind Training: I will work on understanding my mind, particularly what anger truly is and its associations. I plan to achieve this by reading various Buddhist sutras, consulting with monks, and practicing meditation. (5) Commitment to Study: I aim to study Buddhism thoroughly, become a monk, and help teach it across the African continent. (6) Ethical Living: I have learned the importance of refraining from killing, stealing, lying, engaging in sexual misconduct, and consuming alcohol. These teachings are vital for leading a moral life, and I intend to uphold them throughout my life. (7) Monastic Aspirations: I have started practicing Ch'an Pure Land teachings at Nan Hua Temple and intend to become an ordained monk in the future. (8) Continued Practice: I plan to remain in robes and practice meditation for as long as possible, interspersed with study and work. (9) Monastic Path: My intention is to continue along the monastic path and become a fully ordained nun. (10) Ongoing Support and Teaching: I will continue attending meditation retreats and practicing Guan Yin meditation. Additionally, I aim to teach meditation to beginners and support Dharmagiri and its teachers, engaging in any other dharma work that comes my way. (11) Bodhisattva Vow: Having taken the Bodhisattva Aspiration vow, I am committed to benefiting all sentient beings. (12) Commitment to Self-Improvement: As I strive for survival, I recognize the value of what I have learned. Understanding the truth is liberating in itself; therefore, I will continue to practice and learn until I achieve enlightenment. I will study diligently to understand more concepts and apply them in my daily life, seeking advice from those with greater knowledge. My goal is to use my understanding to teach and share ideas with others, all grounded in the fundamental teachings

---

<sup>8</sup> Participant Responses (2023).

of the Buddha. (13) Future Aspirations: Whatever circumstances allow, my aspiration is to become an African monk and to propagate the Buddha Dharma in as many countries as possible. Before that, I wish to deepen my study of Buddhism, attend more lectures, and continue my meditation practice. (14) I hope to continue practicing and applying what I have learned to achieve Buddhahood. (15) I plan to meditate at home and introduce this practice to my friends. I have some background knowledge, and if I encounter any difficulties, I can reach out to the Masters in South Africa and Tanzania for guidance. I aim to engage with Buddhism in my local area, where there is a large Hindu temple that we can use as a starting point for our activities. (16) Due to the positive and transparent nature of Buddhism, I wish to integrate its principles into my daily life to foster personal growth, influence others positively, and enhance my relationships. (17) I hope to return to Africa for a period to help create conditions conducive to sharing the Buddha's teachings with those interested in the Dharma.

Several respondents emphasized the importance of living the Middle Way, asserting that true fulfillment is not determined by external circumstances but by the conscious choices made in daily life. This balanced approach, which integrates insights from both Buddhist and other religious traditions, has fostered an increased capacity for compassion (*karuṇā*) and a proactive stance toward mitigating negative emotions.<sup>9</sup> Community engagement also emerged as a vital theme. Some participants plan to generate resources to address pressing issues - such as war, hunger, and disease - by providing both material and spiritual support, thereby creating conditions for collective liberation. Others underscored the need to spread awareness about Buddhist principles in regions where Buddhism is less known, especially among predominantly Muslim and Christian communities, by sharing Dhamma literature and personal insights. In addition, a strong commitment to mind training was evident. Participants described their efforts to deepen their understanding of their own minds through the study of various Buddhist sutras, consultation with monastic teachers, and regular meditation practices such as *vipassanā*. While some aspire to embrace a fully monastic lifestyle, others intend to continue as lay practitioners, contributing to Buddhist teaching and community outreach. Notably, several individuals have taken the Bodhisattva vow, affirming their commitment to benefit all sentient beings. They also highlighted the importance of ethical living and self-improvement as foundations for both personal and societal progress. In summary, the diverse responses illustrate a robust engagement with Buddhist practice that encompasses personal transformation, community support, and the dissemination of Dhamma. These initiatives reflect a holistic approach to spiritual development, promising substantial benefits for individuals and society alike.

---

<sup>9</sup> Participant Responses (2023).

### Author's comments

Participants expressed a desire to engage in charitable work in their home countries. One individual mentioned, "First, I can share my understanding with my family, and then extend it to others." This approach is fundamental to establishing Buddhism in any country: a local person must first understand and practice the teachings, which can then be shared with others, ultimately reducing suffering.

Many participants aspire to become monks and continue their service to African communities. This intention is commendable, as it would facilitate the swift spread of Buddhist activities in local communities. Additionally, these individuals are committed to following the five precepts for a lifetime.

Most respondents are eager to incorporate Buddhist teachings into their lives and strive to set a positive example for others. While many choose to remain lay practitioners, a few are working toward becoming monks or nuns. After beginning their practice, they actively share their insights with family, friends, and others, mirroring the path taken by the Buddha, who first achieved enlightenment and then shared his knowledge with the world. This sequence – understanding followed by teaching – is critical for successful dissemination of the teachings.

### VII. HOW THEY HOPE TO SHARE THEIR UNDERSTANDING WITH OTHERS

(1) Community Projects: I plan to share my knowledge with others and initiate projects to help the poor and needy. We could establish a Buddhist school or introduce Buddhism as a subject in schools. (2) Collaborative Learning: By teaching and working together, we can exchange personal experiences to enrich our understanding. (3) Building Relationships: I will cooperate with others in all required activities to foster strong and meaningful relationships, even if it may be challenging. (4) Exploring Life's Meaning: I aim to help my colleagues understand the deeper meaning of life by analyzing every phenomenon in the world, allowing each person to follow their path. (5) Living by Example: I will demonstrate the teachings through my actions, speech, and conduct. (6) Highlighting Commonalities: I intend to emphasize that, despite different religious practices, the core focus of all religions is peace, compassion, and doing good deeds for others. (7) Spreading Awareness: I will share insights through word of mouth and written communication to help others discover the truth of Buddhism. (8) Teaching Compassion: "I will teach the basic Buddhist precepts, focusing on loving-kindness and compassion. (9) Addressing Questions: If anyone asks me about Buddhism, I will gladly explain and share my knowledge to help develop Buddhist ideas within my community. (10) Personal Growth: I will continue to cultivate my understanding daily, striving to overcome my shortcomings, regardless of the challenges I face. (11) Teaching Meditation: I aim to teach *vipassanā* and give Dharma talks, contributing to the well-being of society as a whole. (12) Right Action: I will perform all actions to benefit those around me. (13) Monastic Commitment: By becoming a monk, I will actively participate in spreading the Buddhist Dharma, especially during our weekend retreats that target Western audiences. (14) Workshops and Retreats:

I will hold workshops on basic Buddhist meditation, introduce others to the Dharma, and share my experiences and insights about Buddhist retreat centers and teachers. (15) Bodhisattva Aspiration: This is part of my Bodhisattva Aspiration vow, in addition to my ongoing commitments over the past seven years. (16) Encouraging Right Livelihood: I will motivate and encourage others to live according to the right principles and the right livelihood. (17) Engagement and Discussion: I will engage in discussions and reflections with others to deepen our understanding. (18) Translating Teachings: In my daily life, I will observe situations and use my knowledge to offer explanations. I also plan to translate some Buddhist scriptures and commentaries into my native language to make the teachings accessible to more people. Eventually, I hope to establish a class to share this knowledge with others, serving as a role model for them. (19) We must be mindful of our mental activities every day and encourage others to do the same. Through these actions, we can foster a world filled with peace and love. I aim to be compassionate, loving, and kind to all living beings. (20) Because of the beauty and authenticity of Buddhist teachings, I will actively seek opportunities to share these values and benefits with others. (21) I do my best to encourage my colleagues to attend the Buddhist seminary to study Buddhism. I feel it is important for them to have the same opportunity to benefit from this experience as I have. (22) I am already sharing the benefits of my practice with my colleagues in the U.S.A. This sharing is part of my duties and responsibilities.

### **Author's comments**

The responses indicate how participants plan to share their Buddhist knowledge with others. One respondent I spoke with in 2003 is now a dedicated monk in the U.S.A. He has begun sharing his valuable insights with his community. After completing his training and being allowed to help others, he embraced this responsibility. Buddhism spreads through understanding; when individuals grasp the principles of Buddhism, they can significantly contribute to their communities. This monk's journey exemplifies how studying and understanding Buddhism can inspire meaningful community service.

Participants expressed strong intentions to share their understanding of Buddhism with others. They hope to teach and collaborate, exchanging personal experiences to develop Buddhist ideas within their colleges and home countries. They also plan to continue holding workshops on basic Buddhist meditation to introduce others to the Dharma.

With their experience in insight meditation, they aspire to convey the deep meaning of life by analyzing the phenomena around them. Ultimately, each individual is encouraged to follow their path, contributing to the creation of a compassionate society free from selfishness and craving.

One participant remarked, "I will confidently share my teachings through my actions, speech, and mind." This aligns with the Buddha's teaching: one must first practice the teachings themselves before guiding others.



They are eager to teach the basic Buddhist precepts, emphasizing loving-kindness and compassion. To enhance understanding, it is crucial to provide local African communities with Dhamma books in their native languages. This accessibility will facilitate a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings. One participant stated, “I will try to translate some Buddhist scriptures and commentaries into my mother tongue so that many people can access the profound knowledge of the Buddha Dharma.” This initiative is significant for spreading Buddhism in Africa.

Additionally, some participants aspire to become Buddhist monks and continue their service to their communities. As one participant expressed, “By becoming a monk, I will actively engage in spreading the Buddhist Dharma wherever I can.”

## **VIII. APPLICATION OF NEW PHILOSOPHIES**

In the following section, we explore how respondents plan to apply their newfound philosophy in their lives. They have identified several similarities between their original religions and Buddhism, allowing them to embrace Buddha’s teachings through these connections.

### **8.1. Similarities between Buddhism and past religious teachings**

(1) Impermanence and Morality: Both Buddhism and Christianity address impermanence –recognizing that things do not last forever—and emphasize values such as compassion, love, generosity, faith, and respect for elders. They both advocate against actions like killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying. Although there may seem to be differences on the surface, the core teachings reflect similar truths about life and morality. (2) Peace, Wisdom, and Non-Violence: Both religions promote peace, wisdom, and non-violence as fundamental principles. (3) Purpose of Religion: In my view, the primary purpose of all religions is to enhance the lives of their followers and to spread genuine love among all living beings, particularly humanity. (4) Universal Concepts: Buddhism teaches that everything in the universe is impermanent, which parallels Jesus Christ’s teaching on the same theme. Both religions encourage avoiding evil and performing good actions during our time on Earth. (5) Five Precepts and Biblical Parallels: The five precepts in Buddhism share similarities with the moral guidelines found in the Bible. While the expression of these concepts may differ, both traditions emphasize karmic retribution – where one’s actions lead to corresponding consequences, as reflected in both Buddhist and Christian teachings. (6) Compassion and Mercy: Buddhism places a strong emphasis on compassion, akin to Christianity’s focus on mercy. Both religions have guidelines (the Ten Commandments in Christianity and the precepts in Buddhism) that encourage generosity and moral behavior. They teach the importance of endurance through suffering. (7) Common Goals: Both religions aim for supreme peace, tranquility, and happiness, while also seeking to aid all sentient beings. Although the paths may differ, they share a common goal of enlightenment or liberation. As the saying goes, “There are many ways to kill a rat,” indicating that people can belong to different faiths while pursuing similar objectives. (8) Loving



Kindness: Both Buddhism and Christianity advocate for loving kindness and compassion towards others and all living beings. (9) Moral Guidelines: Both religions provide moral guidelines that instruct individuals on how to be harmless and helpful in the world. For instance, Christianity emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, while Buddhism elucidates the reasons and methods for achieving understanding and compassion. Many teachings in Christianity may be obscured by superstition and fear, whereas Buddhism offers a diverse range of teachings that accommodate various perspectives, allowing individuals to take responsibility for their actions, leading to conviction and skillful deeds. (10) Teaching Generosity and Compassion: Both religions teach the principles of generosity, morality, loving-kindness, and compassion, aiming to improve the lives of all beings. (11) Refraining from Harm: Both traditions advocate refraining from killing, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct, underscoring their shared moral foundations. (12) Miracles and Spiritual Powers: Some of Christ's miracles bear similarities to the Siddhis (spiritual powers) of yogis. Christ's teachings emphasize love, which resonates with Buddhist teachings on compassion. Furthermore, aspects of the Ten Commandments closely mirror the five precepts of Buddhism. (13) Interpretation and Relation: The relationship between Buddhism and Christianity can vary depending on interpretations of their teachings. (14) Moral Integrity: The main similarity among all religions is their aim to cultivate moral integrity in individuals, guiding them toward joy and happiness. (15) Functional Similarities: Religions share substantive similarities, as they provide ways for humans to meet their needs through established practices, beliefs, and structures. They foster a sense of the holy and the conviction that human existence is rooted in experiences of the sacred. (16) Three Poisons: Buddhism emphasizes the need to eliminate the three poisons: ignorance, hatred, and greed. This aligns with Christian teachings, which also advocate for the rejection of these harmful qualities. (17) Moral Conduct: Buddhism and Christianity both encourage adherents to abstain from harmful actions such as killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming intoxicants.

## **8.2. Similarities between Buddhism and past religious teachings**

**Karma:** Both Buddhism and my previous religion emphasize the principle of cause and effect, teaching that our actions have consequences. The precepts in Buddhism resonate with similar moral teachings in my faith, encouraging kindness and goodness towards others.

**Personal Experience:** I was raised Catholic and attended church regularly, but we did not often read the Bible ourselves; others would do that for us. In Buddhism, we take personal responsibility for our spiritual journey, reading and practicing on our own to attain liberation. While Christianity does not discuss rebirth, Buddhism addresses concepts like heaven and hell. I have practiced both religions and found that the differences are not as significant as they may seem. For example, Buddhism has five precepts, while Christianity has its Ten Commandments, which include similar moral guidelines that promote ethical behavior.

(1) Universal Salvation: All religions emphasize the importance of salvation, albeit through different names and methods. They advocate for moral and ethical observance, teaching followers to cultivate humane qualities. (2) Compassion and Charity: Both traditions stress the significance of compassion towards others and the importance of charity and service. (3) Impermanence: Buddhism asserts that everything is impermanent, a concept also reflected in Christianity. Both traditions teach that we should avoid evil and strive to perform good actions during our time on Earth. (4) Moral Guidelines: Both religions provide moral guidelines that teach individuals to refrain from harming others, including prohibitions against killing, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct. (5) Miracles and Spiritual Powers: Some miracles attributed to Christ are similar to the spiritual powers of yogis in Buddhism. Both traditions emphasize love and compassion in their teachings. (6) Common Goals: Both Buddhism and Christianity focus on achieving supreme peace, happiness, and liberation. Despite their different approaches, they share a common goal of helping all sentient beings. (7) Understanding and Freedom: A central theme in both religions is the idea that individuals have the freedom to choose their paths, which can lead to moral goodness and a quest for joy and happiness. (8) Shared Teachings: The genealogical connections between Buddha and Jesus point to shared origins and teachings, such as the immaculate conceptions of Maya and Mary. Both figures experienced profound spiritual events that shaped their teachings and followers.

### **Author's comments**

There are notable similarities between Buddhism and other religions, which have been extensively documented by scholars. The responses from participants reveal how they perceive parallels between their previous faith (Christianity) and Buddhism.

Many respondents recognize these similarities and find that Buddhism is a positive and accessible practice. This suggests a strong potential for them to engage deeply with Buddhist teachings. From a Buddhist missionary perspective, the survey highlights how students are likely to integrate and act upon their new understanding of Buddhism.

All religions aim to enhance the lives of their followers and promote love among all living beings. Concepts such as impermanence and karmic retribution exist in both Buddhism and Christianity, emphasizing the importance of one's actions and their consequences.

While Buddhism has five precepts and Christianity has the Ten Commandments, both traditions promote similar ethical standards. Participants have noted these similarities, which can ease the transition into Buddhist practice. Recognizing these connections fosters confidence in their spiritual journey.

As we explore their current ideas about Buddhism, many participants have

undergone a three-year course and continue to practice. They have engaged with and understood various aspects of Buddhist teachings, further enriching their spiritual lives.

## IX. CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON BUDDHISM

(1) Open Viewpoint: My perspective on Buddhism is very open, even though my knowledge is limited and my learning process is slow. I recognize that Buddhism is a beneficial religion focused on practical application in daily life rather than rote memorization. Practicing what I learn is essential; without practice, knowledge is meaningless. This practice is not just for monks; it is for everyone. Monks, too, must engage with the outside world, helping those in need and providing support in various ways. (2) Understanding of Buddhism: I know the term “Buddhism” primarily by its name. Historically, Buddha did not label it as a religion. Today, many schools teach Buddhism, but regardless of their differences, they all convey the fundamental teachings of Buddha. (3) Practical Way of Life: Buddhism is a practical way of life that can lead individuals toward liberation from suffering. (4) Detachment from Self: I view Buddhism as a religion that emphasizes detachment from the self. However, it can be challenging to gain interest in regions where egoism and selfishness prevail. (5) Addressing Global Issues: For Buddhism to thrive globally, it must address local problems first. In wealthy countries like those in Europe and America, teaching people about the mind is effective, as they are economically stable. However, in Africa and other developing regions, we must first focus on economic stability before delving into deeper teachings. (6) Cultural Relevance: Buddhism needs to adapt to African culture to establish roots in society. Establishing schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations that reflect Buddhist values is essential for growth. (7) Truth of Buddhism: Buddhism claims to be the ultimate truth and can alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings when understood and practiced correctly. Personally, it has resolved many of the spiritual questions that troubled my mind. (8) Understanding African Context: Buddhist missionaries should recognize that traditional African values have evolved since colonial times. Young Africans must be educated to engage effectively with modern developments. (9) Practical Methods: Buddhism offers practical methods for addressing daily challenges in life. (10) Joy in Learning: I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and apply Buddha Dharma in my life. My search for answers has ended, and I feel confirmed in my convictions; now, I can focus on practicing. (11) Complete Religion: I see Buddhism as a complete religion and way of life that leads to happiness and peace. It represents the only true path to liberation. (12) True Origin: Buddhism should remain rooted in its true origin, the Bodhi Citta, to maintain authenticity. (13) Relevance of Buddhism: Buddhism continuously proves itself as a relevant and uplifting religion. I have yet to encounter a situation that cannot be explained through its teachings. (14) Diversity of Teachings: The Dharma is vast and deep, offering teachings suitable for different types of people. It also encompasses various forms of art, music, and poetry that help individuals appreciate and engage with the teachings in

diverse ways. (15) Current Age: We are in the ‘Dharma-ending’ age, and I am uncertain about the African vision. We await the arrival of Maitreya Buddha to guide us. (16) Spiritual Knowledge: Buddhism provides the best knowledge and a perfect path to spiritual happiness. Whether or not I become a monk, I wish to teach others about Buddhism. It’s vital to find effective means to spread its teachings. (17) Practical Guidance: Buddhism combines positive teachings that help people live happily and support those in need. However, we must not confuse temporary happiness with lasting fulfillment. Buddha taught that reliance on materialistic values leads to disappointment. While pursuing happiness in everyday life, we must also strive for the ultimate goal of attaining Nirvana, free from rebirth and suffering. (18) Cultural Understanding: Those introducing Buddhism to Africa must understand its diverse cultures. Education is crucial for fostering acceptance and understanding. (19) Long Road Ahead: There is a growing awareness of Buddhism in the West, but it will take considerable time for these ideas to gain acceptance in Africa. (20) Future Prospects: My perspective on Buddhism in Africa is that it still has a long way to go, but the growth potential exists. (21) Increased Understanding: I now know more about Buddhism than Christianity, as I have actively studied it and gained a deeper understanding. (22) Buddhism as a Way of Life: Through my understanding, I see Buddhism as a comprehensive way of life. (23) Growth of Buddhism: Buddhism is the fastest-growing religion in the West and serves as a foundation for world peace and happiness.

### **Author’s comments**

From the responses gathered it is evident that many participants believe that Buddhism is not solely for monks practicing within temple walls in pursuit of liberation. Instead, it holds valuable teachings for everyone, allowing anyone to practice Buddhism and witness its benefits. The diversity of Buddhist thought, particularly the Theravada and Mahayana schools, is acknowledged, but students focus primarily on the core teachings of Buddhism rather than the distinctions between different schools. Their main interest lies in grasping the essence of the Buddha’s teachings.

Additionally, many respondents have expressed awareness of their economic struggles. In the past, they were often driven to prioritize financial survival over spiritual pursuits. This focus on daily necessities can hinder their ability to concentrate fully on Buddhism, contributing to a slower learning pace. When individuals come to Africa to teach Buddhism, it is crucial for them to first understand African cultures, values, and languages. Without this foundational knowledge, the learning process can be significantly delayed.

Some practitioners view Buddhism as a practical way of life that guides on living peacefully and ethically in the world. They believe that Buddhism has much to offer in terms of community development within Africa. They suggest that for Buddhism to thrive globally, it must address the specific challenges faced by the communities it seeks to serve. Without offering practical solutions to current problems, it is difficult to engage individuals who are preoccupied with their immediate concerns.

Buddhism outlines practical methods to navigate daily life and overcome challenges. Those who are eager to find spiritual solutions have begun their journey with these teachings, which are new and refreshing to them. One respondent noted, “It has solved many of the unanswerable spiritual questions that were circulating in my defiled and unclear mind.”

However, establishing Buddhism as a widely accepted practice will take time and requires a deep understanding of its principles. As one participant remarked, “It will take a long time for these ideas to be accepted in Africa.” These reflections provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for Buddhism in the region. Next, we will explore the respondents’ most interesting teachings and insights.

## X. FAVORITE TEACHINGS IN BUDDHISM

(1) Four Noble Truths and Kalama Sutra: The Buddha emphasized that one should not accept his teachings as truth without personal experience. It is essential to learn and accept anything that may be beneficial. The Buddha himself left his palace to seek liberation, discovering various methods along the way, ultimately realizing that self-mortification was not the answer. This led him to the Middle Way. (2) Practical Philosophy: I view Buddhism as a philosophy rather than a religion, and I believe that if we truly understand its teachings, the world will improve. My favorite teaching is Emptiness, which conveys that no objects exist independently and that understanding this absence is critical. (3) Understanding Emptiness and Impermanence: My favorite teachings focus on the concept of emptiness and the understanding that everything is impermanent. (4) Core Teachings: The teachings of impermanence, meditation, the Middle Way, and the Noble Truths resonate deeply with me. (4) Noble Truths and Karma: I appreciate the Noble Truths, the Middle Way, meditation, karma, and the concept of rebirth. (5) Impermanence and Karma: I find value in the teachings that emphasize the impermanence of all things, the Noble Truths, the Middle Way, and karma. (6) Buddhist Wisdom: I am particularly drawn to the teachings of dependent origination, karma, rebirth, Buddhist wisdom, and emptiness. (7) Meditation and the Eightfold Path: My favorite teachings include meditation, karma, and the Eightfold Path. (8) Diverse Teachings: There are so many teachings that it is challenging to choose favorites. However, the concepts of self-effort, self-responsibility, self-realization, joy, hope, and conviction stand out. (9) 37 Factors of Enlightenment: I am particularly interested in the 37 Factors of Enlightenment. (10) All Teachings: All teachings resonate with me; I believe in the value of every aspect of Buddhism. (12) Pure Land and Sutras: The “Pure Land Sutras” and the Flower Garland Sutra contain profound teachings that keep my mind engaged. There are many sutras I have yet to read that may become favorites in the future. (13) Main Concepts: I appreciate the three main characteristics of existence – *Anicca* (impermanence), *Dukkha* (suffering), and *Anatta* (non-self) – as well as the practice of *Brahma Vihāra*. (14) Four Ordinary Foundations: I find significance in the Four Ordinary Foundations: Birth, Impermanence, Action, Cause and Result, and Samsara.



(15) Essential Teachings: My favorite teachings include the Eightfold Path, Chan meditation, the Four Noble Truths, Pure Land teachings, Emptiness, and the Ten Precepts. (16) Cause and Effect: I value the teachings on cause and effect and dependent origination. I advise beginners to start with the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, including the Four Noble Truths, moral discipline (precepts), and the Eightfold Path. (17) Core Concepts: My favorites include the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, dependent origination, karma, and meditation. (18) Compassion and Change: I appreciate the teachings on compassion, karma, the Four Noble Truths, and the concept of impermanence, which illustrates that everything is subject to change. (19) Comprehensive Learning: All teachings are significant to me as they guide me closer to liberation. (20) Karma and Personal Responsibility: I particularly resonate with the teaching of karma, the importance of meditation, and the negative consequences of actions such as drinking and smoking. I recognize that understanding these teachings can be universally applied. (21) Philosophical Insights: I value the philosophical aspects of Buddhism, including parables that convey deeper meanings and messages. (22) Merit and Future Creation: The teaching of karma and the cultivation of merit are crucial. I understand that I am responsible for creating my future and that the events of my life result from my past actions. (23) Foundations of Mindfulness: I appreciate the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Noble Truths, karma, and dependent origination.

From the responses, it is clear that participants have a keen interest in various fundamental Buddhist teachings. While these principles can be complex and may require significant time to fully grasp, understanding them can help individuals navigate life's challenges. By categorizing their collective interests, we can outline key topics for further exploration:

### 10.1. Key Buddhist teachings of interest

(1) Rebirth. (2) *Samsara*. (3) Emptiness. (4) Compassion. (5) Philosophy. (6) Impermanence. (7) Meditation. (8) *Brahma Vihāra*. (9) Eightfold Path. (10) Four Noble Truths. (11) *Kalama Sutra*. (12) *Karma* and Rebirth. (13) Dependent Origination. (14) Buddhist Wisdom. (15) Pure Land Sutras. (16) Four Foundations of Mindfulness. (17) Flower Garland Sutra. (18) The 37 Factors of Enlightenment. (19) The Three Characteristics: *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, and *Anatta*

### 10.2. Overview of learning experiences

The students have studied both Mahayana Pure Land teachings and basic Theravada Buddhism. They have also engaged in Zen meditation practices with a resident Zen master at the African Buddhist Seminary. However, many participants expressed a stronger affinity for Theravada teachings. They prefer to continue their studies in Theravada Buddhism, as they find its teachings to be more novel and relevant to their lives compared to the familiar concepts found in Pure Land teachings, which they associate with notions of heaven.

While they initially found the Mahayana system easier to practice due to



its flexibility, they expressed a desire to focus on Theravada teachings internally while potentially identifying as Mahayana monks externally. This indicates their intention to establish a unique Buddhist sangha that integrates elements from both traditions.

The enthusiasm for learning and practicing these principles suggests that they play a significant role in the participants' psychological development. By embracing these teachings, they believe they can achieve personal success and fulfillment.

### XI. SUMMARY TABLE OF RESPONSES

Following is a table summarizing the responses obtained from the participants regarding their favorite teachings and interests in Buddhism.

Teaching/ Principle	Interest Level
Rebirth	High
Samsara	High
Emptiness	High
Compassion	High
Philosophy	High
Impermanence	High
Meditation	High
Brahma Vihāra	High
Eightfold Path	High
Four Noble Truths	High
Kalama Sutra	High
<i>Karma</i> and Rebirth	High
Dependent Origination	High
Buddhist Wisdom	High
Pure Land <i>Sutras</i>	Moderate
Four Foundations of Mindfulness	High
Flower Garland <i>Sutra</i>	Moderate
The 37 Factors of Enlightenment	High
The Three Characteristics	High

This summary reflects the collective interests and aspirations of the participants as they navigate their Buddhist journey.

**REFERENCES**

*Dhammapada*, Buddha, (2004). (E. H. Johnston, Trans.). Motilal Banarsidass. (Original work published ca. 3rd century BCE); Ed. S. Sumangala Thera, PTS, London, 1914.

# BUDDHISTS IN NEW LANDS: COMPASSION VALUES AND ACTIONS TOWARDS BETTER AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURES AND HAPPINESS

Prof. Dr. Jose Antonio Rodriguez Diaz\*

## Abstract:

In the following pages, I present a sociological exploration of the values and practices of compassion among Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries. This study examines how they engage with Buddhism, along with their interpretations, practices, and applications of its teachings. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how Buddhist values and practices adapt to new contexts, contributing to the pursuit of happiness and the creation of more just and sustainable societies. To achieve this, I draw on the first international survey of Buddhist values and practices in Spanish-speaking countries, conducted in 2022. My approach combines two methodologies: one rooted in sociological principles and another that integrates Buddhist teachings with sociology and social network analysis. The primary focus is on the lived experiences of Buddhists, exploring their visions, values, practices, and actions that define their spiritual journeys. By integrating the Buddhist concepts of non-self and dependent origination with relational sociology and social network analysis, I investigate the causal interactions and interdependencies between the values and practices of compassion and the social structures they give rise to. The visions and practices of these Buddhists shape Buddhism as a path of personal and social transformation, guiding individuals toward happiness. The interplay between values and practices forms a cognitive-action social field of Buddhist compassion, which, in turn, reveals the essence of the social and cultural identity of Buddhists in new contexts.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, compassion, social transformation, happiness.*

---

\* Department of Sociology. Faculty of Economics and Business. University of Barcelona, Spain.

## WHAT

This study offers a sociological examination of the values and actions of compassion among Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries. It delves into how these principles are perceived and practiced, serving as a foundation for both personal and social transformation. The work explores their role in the pursuit of happiness and their contribution to the creation of better and more sustainable societies.

Compassion (*Pāli* and *Sanskrit*: *karuṇā*) is one of the central pillars of the Buddhist vision and practice, aimed at alleviating suffering while fostering interconnectedness and positive action for all. Compassion is the wish for others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

In fact, according to the Buddha himself, it is the very essence of the Buddha and, therefore, of perfection. In the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, he affirms:

“Bhikkhus, there is one person who arises in the world for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings. Who is that one person? The Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One. This is that one person who arises in the world for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings.”<sup>1</sup>

And in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, he speaks about the benefits of its practice: “Monks, the idea of compassion, if cultivated and made much of, is of great fruit and great profit.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the XIV Dalai Lama defines compassion as: “Compassion can be roughly defined in terms of a state of mind that is nonviolent, non-harming, and non-aggressive. It is a mental attitude based on the wish for others to be free of their suffering and is associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility, and respect towards the other.”<sup>3</sup> He also emphasizes that its practice leads to happiness: “Therefore, compassion has two functions: it causes our brain to function better and it brings inner strength. These, then, are the causes of happiness.”<sup>4</sup> Compassion, as part of the four immeasurables, is the social essence of Buddhism. Its form is inherently social; it implies a vision and action of interaction with other beings (human or non-human) aimed at their well-being and happiness. It is a primary avenue for creating harmonious relationships - both among individuals and within and between societies. Through this process of interaction, compassion actively shapes the social sphere, striving toward the creation of better societies: those with less suffering, greater happiness, more harmony, reduced conflict, and increased respect for the environment.

<sup>1</sup> AN 1: xiii, 1; I 22 - 23

<sup>2</sup> AN. 46. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York: Riverbed Books, 1998, 114.

<sup>4</sup> Dalai Lama, “Compassion as the Source of Happiness,” *Dalai Lama Official Website*, accessed at, <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/compassion-and-human-values/compassion-as-the-source-of-happiness>

## HOW

I hope to shed light on the values and practices of emerging Buddhist populations, offering insights into the processes of adapting Buddhism to their lives within the Spanish-speaking world, which has been historically dominated by Catholicism. Buddhism has a significant history and roots in Spanish-speaking countries. However, knowledge about the practitioners and followers who make up the Buddhist social world remains limited. To gain a closer look into the world of Buddhist practitioners, I draw on the results of the first international survey conducted in Spanish-speaking countries, centered on their characteristics, values, and practices.<sup>5</sup> I approach the topic using a two-pronged methodology. In the first, more extensive part, I apply a conventional empirical approach to describe and analyze various indicators (used as proxies) of compassion values and practices. Here, I focus primarily on their frequency of occurrence, treating them as independent variables. I begin the exploration of the social world of these Buddhists by examining their sociodemographic characteristics and then proceed to analyze how their spiritual path of personal and social transformation is articulated through systems of values and practices. I seek to understand their worldview - how they see and interpret the world - alongside their ways of acting and shaping it. Finally, I explore how all of this is complemented by the pursuit of life satisfaction and happiness. To identify similarities and differences in these paths based on region, tradition, and gender, I apply basic statistical techniques using the SPSS program. Once these dimensions of compassion in the lives and practices of Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries have been analyzed, I aim to transcend dualistic distinctions and separations between elements and dimensions. By following the principles of dependent origination and interdependence, I seek to understand the causal interrelations between these factors and their role in pathways of transformation toward happiness. I treat the correlations among all elements within the social space as networks of interaction that shape social maps of the world of compassion, tracing paths of both personal and social transformation toward happiness. This represents a new way of analyzing Buddhist social dynamics, introducing fresh measures and meanings that emerge from interaction. To achieve this, I employ the theoretical and technical framework of Social Network Analysis (SNA), using the software UCINET and NetDraw.

## I. BUDDHISTS IN NEW LANDS

Just over half (58%) of the survey responses came from Buddhists living in Latin America, while 40% were from Spain. The respondents were evenly divided between men and women, with a mean age of approximately 51 years (50.7). By

---

<sup>5</sup> "The survey was carried out through Google Forms between July 27, 2022, and December 26, 2022, with 257 valid responses. It is the first survey of its kind conducted in the Buddhist world, with the collaboration of Buddhistdoor en Español and the Dharma-Gaia Foundation. The responses provide an initial but rich perspective on various dimensions of Buddhism in Spanish-speaking countries." *Following the Buddhist Path: Our Values, Religiosity, Spirituality*.

age group, the youngest participants constituted a minority (less than 10%), a third of the respondents were between 30 and 49 years old, and more than half were aged 50 or older (Table 1).

**Table 1. Age groups**

Age	Percentage (%)
18 to 29 years	9%
30 to 49 years	34%
50 years and over	56%

**Table 2. Some sociodemographic characteristics**

Average values		TRADITION			AREA		GENDER	
	TOTAL	Th <sup>6</sup>	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	Men	Women
Age (mean)	50,65	45,26	50,32	52,0	54,1	48,1	49,1	52,7
Age of contact with Buddhism (mean)	34,22	30,6	33,6	34,8	35,5	33,6	31,2	37,9
% Women	49%	33	55	52	53	46%		

A slightly higher percentage of women responded in Spain than in Latin America (53% vs. 46%), and the average age in Spain is somewhat higher than in Latin America (54 vs. 48 years). Globally, female Buddhist respondents are also slightly older than male respondents (53 vs. 49 years) (Table 2). When comparing these Buddhist populations with those in Asia - where 95% of the world's Buddhists reside - we find that the percentage of women is also slightly higher than that of men. However, the overall average age in Asia is somewhat lower (46 years).<sup>7</sup> Unlike in countries where Buddhism is the dominant religion, in Spanish-speaking countries - where Catholicism is predominant - Buddhists do not typically encounter Buddhism early in life. Instead, their engagement with it tends to begin later. In fact, fewer than 20% had contact with Buddhism before the age of 20. Half of the respondents began their relationship with Buddhism between the ages of 20 and 40. The average age at which they first encountered Buddhism was 34 years, during full adulthood, and, on average, they have been practicing for nearly 13 years. In general, Buddhism is not inherited from parents but is instead voluntarily and actively embraced as part of a conversion process.

The first contact with Buddhism was primarily through books (41%) and, to a lesser extent, the internet (26%). A third of respondents were introduced to

<sup>6</sup> Th: Theravāda; Mh: Mahāyāna; Vj: Vajrayāna; SP: Spain; LA: Latin-America

<sup>7</sup> According to data from the World Values Survey 6, in Rodríguez (2018).



Buddhism through social relationships with friends and acquaintances, while fewer than 10% learned about it from their families. The Buddhist social world - including centers, teachers, and talks - as well as its surrounding environment, such as yoga centers and natural therapies, also played a significant role, though to a lesser extent than mass media channels and social connections. A substantial part of their Buddhist practice is shaped by relationships with traditions and schools, as well as with centers and teachers. The two most followed traditions among respondents are Vajrayāna (47%)<sup>8</sup> and Mahāyāna (45%),<sup>9</sup> while Theravāda has a smaller presence (17%). The majority of practitioners (85%) are members or sympathizers of an organization or similar group and have a teacher or role model they follow. More than a quarter (27%) identify with or feel connected to more than one tradition, 29% feel close to more than one center, and 51% follow more than one teacher or spiritual guide. This demonstrates the permeability of jurisdictional boundaries and the decreasing separation between traditions, centers, and teachers, leading to a more interconnected form of Buddhism. These patterns highlight the ways in which different traditions have expanded. There are notable differences in their spread between Spain and Latin America. In Spain, 65% of respondents identify with Vajrayāna (reflecting its strong presence), followed by Mahāyāna (42%), while Theravāda has a smaller following (9%). In Latin America, the distribution is more balanced, with Mahāyāna being the most prevalent tradition (47%), followed by Vajrayāna (35%) and Theravāda (22%). When comparing these regions, we see that the proportion of Vajrayāna practitioners in Spain is nearly double that in Latin America, whereas the proportion of Theravāda followers in Latin America is more than twice that in Spain. These figures reflect distinct models of expansion: Vajrayāna is the predominant tradition among respondents in Spain, while Mahāyāna holds that position in Latin America.

## II. COMPASSION VALUES

A first step in understanding how these Buddhists perceive compassion is to examine the role it plays in their understanding and interpretation of Buddhism.

### 2.1. Views of Buddhism

Buddhists in these new lands view Buddhism as a multifaceted tradition, associating it with multiple concepts simultaneously. A large majority (79%) define it as a “spiritual path,” while a significant number (66%) see it as a “philosophy.” These two dominant definitions emphasize Buddhism as both a path to follow and a way of understanding and interpreting reality. Additionally, many respondents conceptualize it as a set of transformative practices

<sup>8</sup> Of these, 35 per cent belong to the Sakya school, 23 per cent to the Kagyu school, 8 per cent to the Geluk school, 5 per cent to the Rimah movement, and 3 per cent to the Nyingma school.

<sup>9</sup> Of these, 40% are associated with Zen Buddhism, 7% with Pure Land Buddhism, and 2% with Chan Buddhism.

(57%), a system of values (48%), and a way of life (48%). Furthermore, 30% associate it with a path of social transformation. Although less common, a notable portion of practitioners (37%) regard Buddhism as a religion, while 23% consider it a science, and 16% view it as a system of personal therapies (Table 3 and Graph 1). For these practitioners, Buddhism serves as a space that nurtures and strengthens the values of compassion. Compassion is central to their understanding of Buddhism - not only as a worldview (philosophy or religion) but also as a system of values and attitudes (way of life) and as a guiding path with a social dimension. It shapes their perception of reality and stands as a fundamental element of their spiritual journey. Philosophy and religion provide the conceptual framework for compassion, influencing how practitioners relate to others and to suffering. The system of values and way of life reflect the space where compassionate attitudes are cultivated, while paths of transformation reveal the social dimension of these values - translating them into action to confront suffering and promote the well-being of all beings.

**Table 3. Views of Buddhism as:**

In Percent- ages Multiple Re- sponses <sup>10</sup>	TO- TAL (%)	Th	Mh	Vj	Esp	LA	MEN	WOM- EN
Religion	36,6	48,8	37,1	36,7	38,7	35,8	44,4	27,2
Philosophy	66,1	76,7	66,4	67,5	67,9	66,2	64,8	66,9
Science	22,8	32,6	24,1	30,8	20,8	24,3	20,8	23,4
Value system	48,4	44,2	48,3	49,2	54,7	43,9	48,8	46
Lifestyle	48,6	32,6	49,1	48,3	52,8	45,9	49,6	46,8
Therapeutic system	15,6	9,3	13,8	13,3	17	14,9	16	12,9
Spiritual Path	79,9	72,1	81,9	84,2	77,4	81,8	80,8	77,4
Path of social transformation	30,7	25,6	28,4	26,7	32,1	29,7	28	31,5
Transforma- tion Practices	57,1	41,9	55,2	60,8	57,5	56,8	65,6	48,4

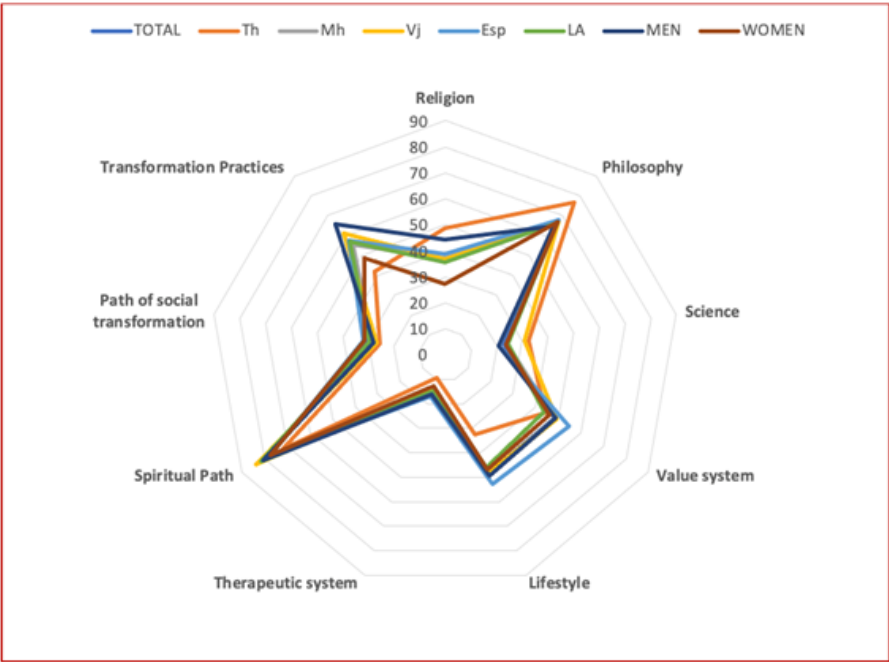
“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain: “LA” Latin America

The various definitions of Buddhism can be grouped into two broad

<sup>10</sup> In this type of question, several answers can be given at the same time.

categories: those centered on meaning and vision - aimed at understanding reality - and those focused on practices that follow from that vision. Compassion plays a central role in both. The dimension of meaning includes associations with philosophy, values, religion, and science, reflecting how practitioners conceptualize Buddhism as a way of understanding reality. The dimension of practice encompasses definitions that emphasize Buddhism as a spiritual path, a set of transformative practices, a behavioral system, and a path of social transformation.

**Graph 1. Views of Buddhism**



For these Western practitioners, Buddhism represents a close relationship between meaning and practice. It forms a structured path that integrates essential elements - defining the spiritual journey and shaping a life project with both goals and methods for achieving them. This path can be understood as the interaction of three key dimensions: philosophy (a way of understanding and perceiving reality), practices for transformation (both individual and social change), and systems of values and behaviors (guiding orientations and practical applications). Compassion emerges as an integral outcome of this combination. Despite geographical distance, Buddhist communities on both sides of the Atlantic share striking similarities, placing equal importance on these core elements. Notably, while men tend to emphasize Buddhism's religious aspects more than women, women are more likely to view it as a practice of transformation. In shaping their understanding of compassion within Buddhism, Theravāda Buddhists stand out in their strong association of Buddhism with philosophy (77%) and religion (49%), significantly more

than Vajrayāna and Mahāyāna followers. In contrast, practitioners of Vajrayāna and Mahāyāna place greater emphasis on Buddhism as a behavioral system, a practice of transformation, and a spiritual path. These differences reflect varying approaches -some practitioners focus more on the practical dimensions of Buddhism, while others prioritize its philosophical and conceptual aspects. Theravāda followers emphasize religion and philosophy, practitioners in Spain highlight Buddhism as a system of values and behaviors, while Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna practitioners predominantly define it as a spiritual path. The motivations for engaging with Buddhism - and the expectations associated with its knowledge and practice - are key to understanding the paths these practitioners take. The primary reasons given for turning to Buddhism, and for embracing it as a way of life, reveal a diverse and complex set of aspirations. The most frequently cited motivations (mentioned by over a third of respondents) can be grouped into three distinct conceptual categories.

**Table 4. Top Reasons to Approach Buddhism**

In Percentages Multiple An- swers <sup>11</sup>	TOTAL (%)	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	MEN	WOMEN
Seeking personal growth	48	44	45	52	50	47	47	50
Seeking greater capacity to deal with problems or situations of suffering	47	61	52	50	44	49	45	49
Pursuit of happiness	34	37	31	38	43	28	36	31
Seeking spiritual guidance	33	33	37	32	28	36	32	34
Possibilities to help others	32	30	36	34	30	32	32	30

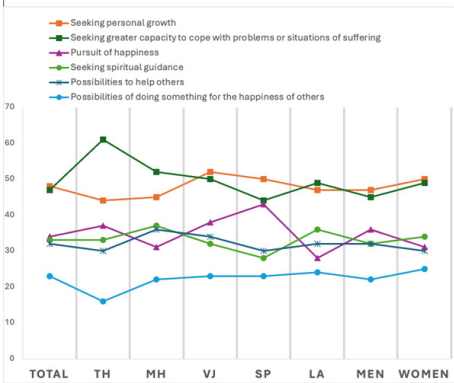
<sup>11</sup> In this type of question, several answers can be given at the same time.

Possibilities of doing something for the happiness of others	23	16	22	23	23	24	22	25
Deepening the practice of Buddhism	33	37	35	31	22	41	35	33
Delving into Buddhist teachings	31	33	35	39	26	35	28	3

“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain; “LA” Latin America

The most prominent reasons for embracing Buddhism are deeply personal. The primary motivations include: Seeking personal growth (48%), Developing greater capacity to confront suffering and life’s challenges (47%), and Pursuing happiness (34%) These responses highlight the functional goals of Buddhism for practitioners - framing it as a path of personal transformation (Table 4 & Graph 2). A second group of motivations focuses on the path to achieving these goals, including: Seeking spiritual guidance (33%), Deepening knowledge of Buddhism (33%), and Enhancing Buddhist practice (31%) A third set of motivations emphasizes compassionate action towards others, with: The desire to help others (32%), and A commitment to contributing to others’ happiness (23%). These motivations illustrate how Buddhism functions as both a personal tool for transformation and an instrument for social well-being. The interplay between empowerment to cope with suffering and compassionate action reflects the central role of Buddhism in fostering a more interconnected, compassionate world.

Graph 2. Top Reasons to Approach Buddhism



The motivations for engaging with Buddhism reveal a journey of personal empowerment, guided by spirituality, and oriented towards helping others. Buddhism is thus perceived as a path of compassion, integrating knowledge, values, and practices to foster both personal growth and social well-being. There are minimal differences between men and women in their reasons for practicing Buddhism. Likewise, Hispanic Buddhists in Spain and Latin America largely share the same motivations, though their priorities differ slightly: In Spain, the primary motivation is personal growth, followed by the ability to cope with suffering, and the pursuit of happiness. In Latin America, the main focus is on developing resilience to suffering, followed by personal growth, and deepening Buddhist practice. These priorities suggest two distinct but complementary narratives: Spain: Personal growth, Coping with suffering, and Happiness. Latin America: Coping with suffering, Personal growth, and Deepening practice. In terms of traditions, Vajrayāna followers tend to emphasize personal growth as their primary goal. Theravāda and Mahāyāna practitioners place a stronger focus on developing the ability to confront suffering. These variations reflect different approaches to the Buddhist path, yet all converge on Buddhism as a transformative tool for both self-improvement and compassionate action.

2.2. Effects and outcomes of being and practicing

Being Buddhist and practicing Buddhism have resulted in important changes in their lives and have strengthened their values and attitudes of compassion. In fact, the vast majority of practitioners (90%) have found either a lot or quite a lot of what they were initially seeking in the knowledge and practice of Buddhism. For the majority of practitioners, being Buddhist has led to radical changes in the meaning of their lives, particularly regarding their perceptions of enemies and society as a whole, which are crucial for fostering peaceful relationships and societies (Table 5, Graphs 3 and 4). It has also transformed their perspectives, interpersonal relationships, and social roles. Altogether, these changes facilitate the practice of compassion and enhance their social orientation.

Table 5. Social effects of practicing Buddhism

In Percentages %	TO-TAL	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	Men	Women
<b>Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life (Multiple Answers)<sup>12</sup></b>								
In relation to enemies	73%	86	71	77	70	69	70	70
Regarding society	68	79	72	70	65	70	68	66

<sup>12</sup> In this type of question, several answers can be given at the same time.

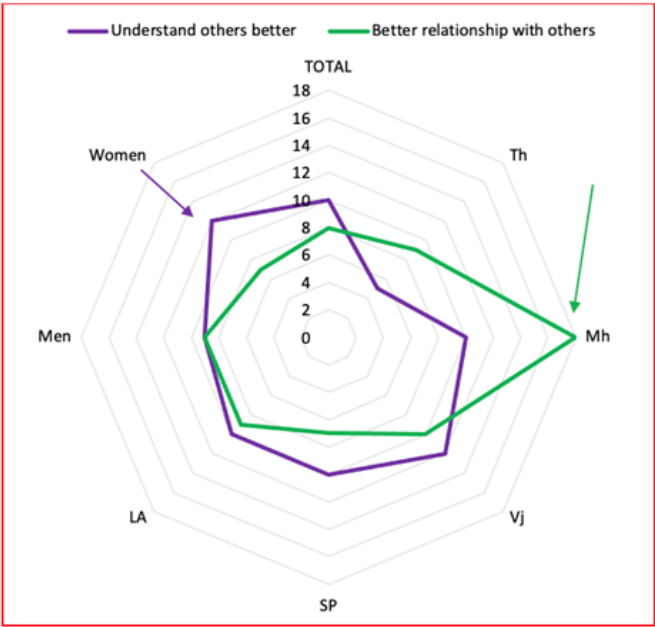


Results from Bud- dhist Practice								
Understand others better	10%	5	10	12	10	10	9	12
Better relationship with others	8	9	18	10	7	9	9	7

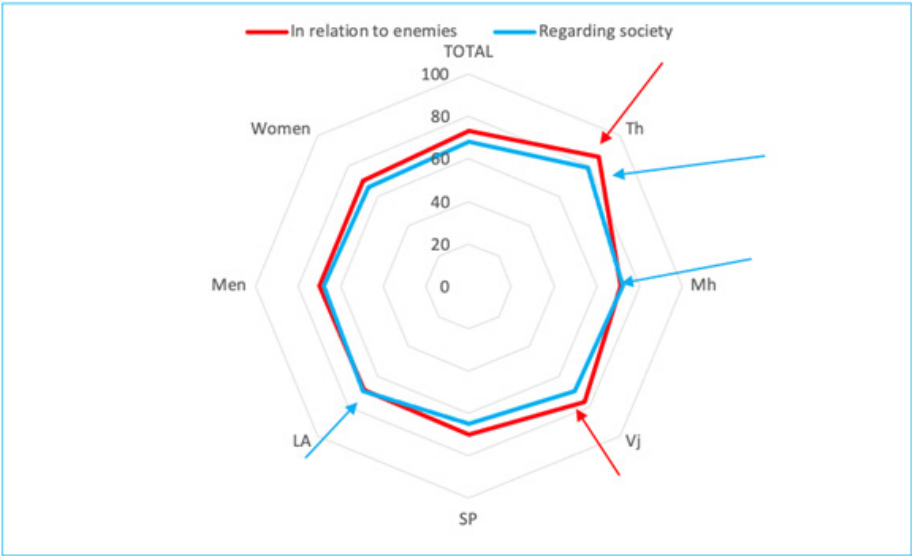
“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain; “LA” Latin America

The overall result is a new life path and new ways of walking it - paths of compassion and social transformation. There are few differences between traditions, regions, or genders in the social effects of being Buddhist and the outcomes of practicing Buddhism. Theravāda and Vajrayāna practitioners emphasize slightly more the effects of Buddhism in changing the meaning of life concerning enemies and society, while Mahāyāna and Latin American practitioners emphasize slightly more the effect of Buddhism in changing the role of society in life. Mahāyāna practitioners particularly highlight the improvement of relationships with others as a result of their practice, whereas women and Vajrayāna practitioners emphasize a greater understanding of others. These data underscore the significance of the social dimension, alongside the personal dimension, in their vision and practice of Buddhism. The result is a spiritual path that integrates both dimensions in compassion.

**Graph 3. Most important social outcome of their practice**



Graph 4. Changes in the Meaning of Life



III. COMPASSION IN ACTION

The vision, orientation, and relationship with others, along with participation in or collaboration with organizations and social activities, shape the social dimension of the spiritual path and the practice of compassion. Trust in others is a central element in understanding both the systems of relationships and the social circles that emerge from them, as well as in defining the social role that Buddhists play. Trust is the foundation of the social dimension of compassion and serves as the driving force for social transformation. Buddhists’ trust in most people is relatively high. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely), the average is 6.82. Levels of trust in others - whether close or distant - shape the social circles of trust in which Buddhists live. Couples, followed by close family members and friends, occupy the central space of the social system of trust, with high averages on a scale from 1 to 5: 4.41, 4.17, and 4.05, respectively. These represent social spaces of strong and cohesive relationships. The second social circle of trust consists of colleagues from Buddhist organizations, associations, and workplaces. The third circle, with slightly lower levels of trust, includes extended family members and people of other religions and/or nationalities. The least trusted, although still above the midpoint on the 1-to-5 scale, are recently met acquaintances (average of 2.8) and neighbors (3.02) (Table 6 & Graph 5).

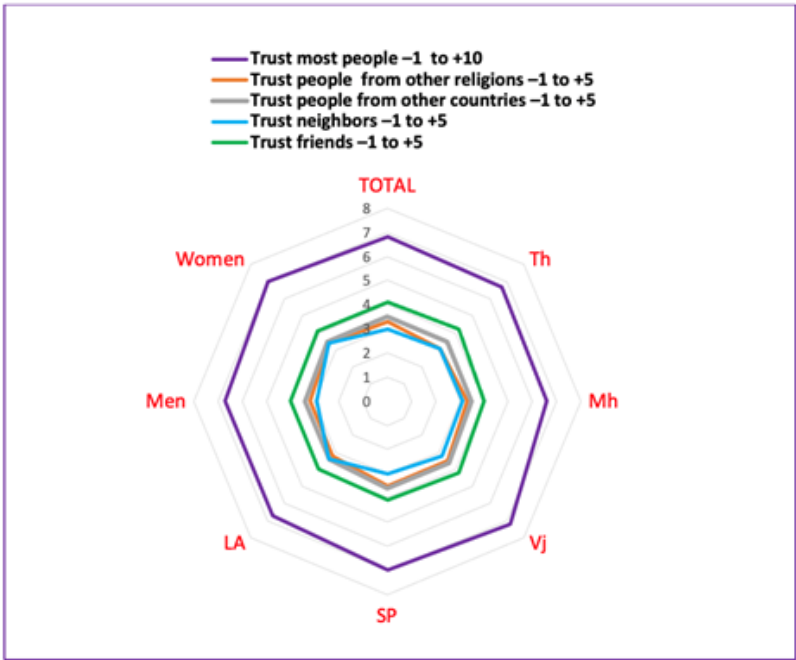
Table 6. Trust

	TOTAL	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	Men	Women
Trust most people –1 to +10	6,8	6,7	6,6	7,2	7	6,7	6,7	7

Trust people from other religions –1 to +5	3,3	3,1	3,3	3,5	3,5	3,2	3,2	3,4
Trust people from other countries –1 to +5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,6	3,6	3,4	3,4	3,5
Trust neighbors –1 to +5	3	3,1	3,1	3,2	3	3,4	2,9	3,4
Trust friends –1 to +5	4,1	4,2	4	4,2	4,1	4	4	4,1

“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain; “LA” Latin America

Graph 5. Trust



Social trust and compassion shape the social role of Buddhists, manifesting in a high level of participation in civil and social organizations of various kinds, primarily oriented toward society. Through this participation, they become part of the broader social fabric and contribute to its structure and dynamics. Buddhists stand out not only as members of religious organizations (36%) but also as active participants in humanitarian organizations (29%), cultural

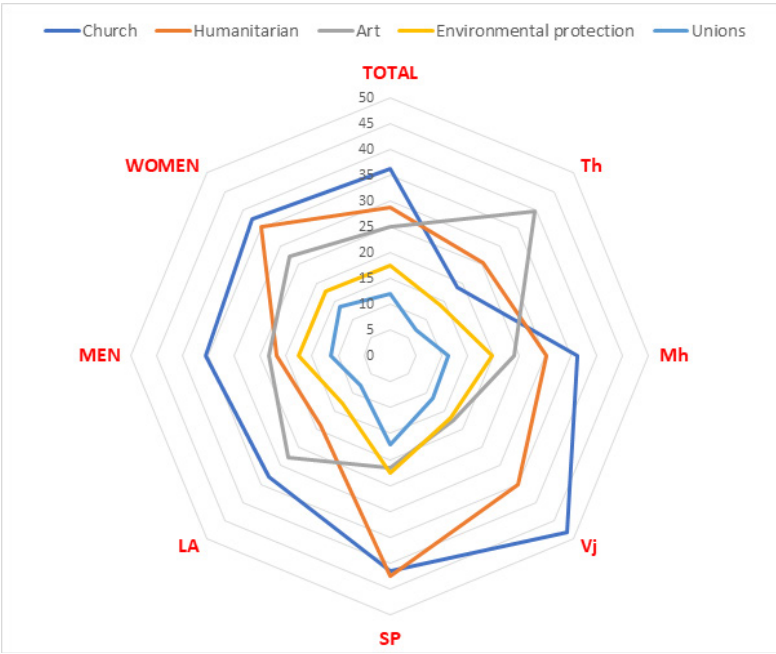
organizations (25%), professional associations (23%), sports and/or leisure organizations (23%), and environmental protection organizations (18%). These are avenues for fostering relationships with the social environment and channels through which Buddhist visions and practices of compassion are disseminated throughout society, with the hope of creating a positive impact (Table 7, Graph 6).

**Table 7. Membership in civil organizations**

%	TO-TAL	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	MEN	WOM-EN
Church	36	19	36	<b>48</b>	<b>42</b>	33	36	38
Humanitarian	29	26	30	35	<b>43</b>	19	22	<b>35</b>
Art	25	<b>40</b>	24	18	22	28	24	27
Environmental protection	18	14	20	17	<b>23</b>	13	18	18
Unions	12	7	11	12	17	8	11	14
Average number of Memberships in civil organizations	2,7	2,5	2,6	2,7	2,8	2,6	2,5	2,8
% of membership	74,7%	65,1	75,9	76,7	<b>81,1</b>	70,3	73,4	76

There are very few differences across regions, traditions, and genders. Most notably, *Vajrayāna* practitioners and Spanish Buddhists have the highest levels of affiliation with religious and humanitarian organizations. *Theravāda* practitioners are distinguished by their strong involvement in cultural and arts organizations, while *Mahāyāna* practitioners and Spanish Buddhists stand out for their notable participation in environmental organizations.

**Graph 6. Membership in civil organizations**



At the same time, they engage in actions related to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which directly align with the essence of compassion - reducing suffering and improving the well-being of all beings. Almost half of the respondents (46%) participate in or collaborate on activities related to the SDGs. The goals in which they are most actively involved (mentioned by more than 10% of respondents) include SDG3: “Good Health and Well-Being” (18%), followed by SDG4: “Quality Education” (12%), SDG5: “Gender Equality” (11%), SDG13: “Climate Action” (11%), and SDG10: “Reduced Inequalities” (10%)

**Table 8. Participation in SDG actions.**

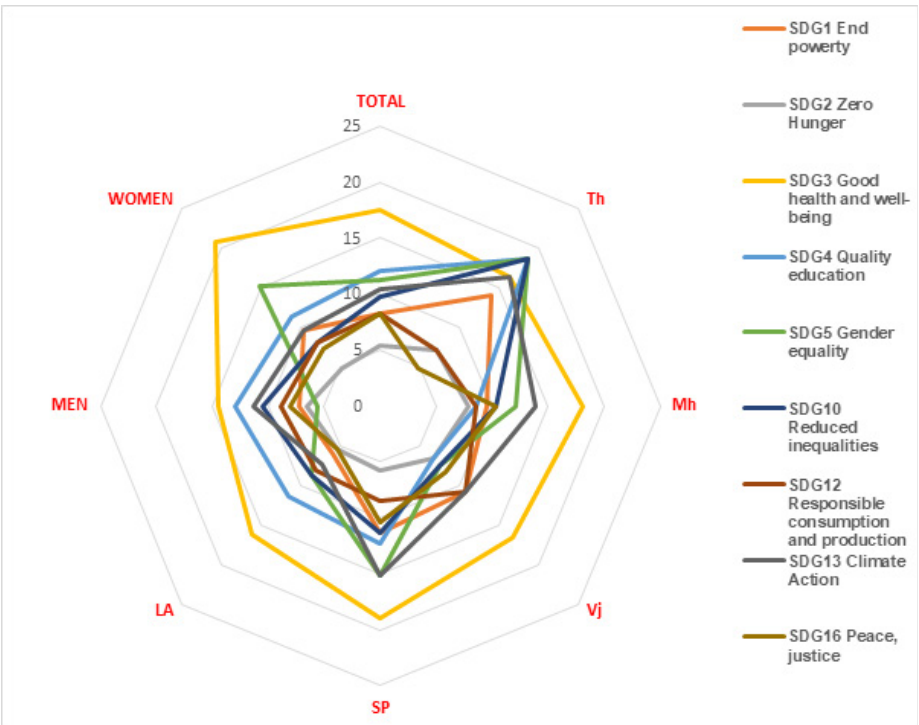
In Percentages Multiple An- swers	TO- TAL	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	MEN	WOM- EN
SDG1 End powerty	8,2	14	9,5	10,8	11,3	6,1	7,3	9,6
SDG2 Zero Hunger	5,4	7	7,8	6,7	5,7	5,4	6,5	4,8
SDG3 Good health and well-being	17,5	16,3	<b>18,1</b>	16,7	<b>18,9</b>	16,2	14,5	<b>20,8</b>

SDG4 Quality education	12,1	18,6	8,6	6,7	12,3	11,5	12,9	11,2
SDG5 Gender equality	11,3	18,6	12,1	7,5	15,1	8,8	5,6	15,2
SDG10 Re-duced inequalities	9,7	<b>18,6</b>	10,3	7,5	11,3	8,8	10,5	8
SDG12 Re-sponsible consumption and production	8,2	7	8,6	<b>10,8</b>	8,5	8,1	8,9	8
SDG13 Cli-mate Action	10,5	<b>16,3</b>	13,8	10,8	15,1	7,4	11,3	9,6
SDG16 Peace, justice	8,2	4,7	<b>10,3</b>	8,3	<b>10,4</b>	5,4	8,1	7,2

There are notable differences in how various Buddhist groups engage in SDG-related actions connected to compassion. Spanish Buddhists, along with Mahāyāna practitioners, are particularly active in initiatives promoting good health and well-being (SDG3). When it comes to climate action (SDG13), both Spanish Buddhists and Theravāda practitioners stand out for their participation. Efforts to combat poverty (SDG1) see significant involvement from Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Spanish practitioners alike. In promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG16), Mahāyāna practitioners and Spanish Buddhists are particularly engaged. Finally, in addressing hunger and food security (SDG2), Theravāda and Mahāyāna practitioners demonstrate strong commitment. These distinctions highlight the diverse ways in which Buddhist communities contribute to global sustainable development goals through compassionate action.

**Graph 7. Participation in SDG actions**





From all this, we can highlight two main avenues of compassion in action: a high level of trust in most people and significant participation in and collaboration with social organizations. These commitments reflect their dedication to social transformation as an integral part of their spiritual path.

3.1. Towards Better Futures

A large majority of Buddhists view the future as open: 44% believe that everything will change, although they do not know how, and 33% see the recent crisis as an opportunity for transformation and improvement. In contrast to this open and/or optimistic outlook, nearly 8% believe that nothing will change, while 17% expect the future to worsen. It is noteworthy that Theravāda practitioners (40%) stand out for considering the recent crisis as an opportunity for a better future. Meanwhile, nearly half of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna practitioners perceive the future as uncertain, though open. Additionally, women are more likely than men to see the crisis as an opportunity for change, whereas men are slightly more inclined toward a pessimistic view, believing that either conditions will deteriorate or nothing will change.

3.2. Creating Better Futures

Aligned with this vision of open futures, and as clear examples of compassion in action, the vast majority of Spanish-speaking Buddhists take active steps to contribute to a better future. Only 2.4% state that they cannot do anything (Table 9 & Graph 8). The primary focus of Buddhists' actions for a better future is environmental care, with 72% engaging in activities related to this area, followed closely by helping others (70%). Personal changes in lifestyle

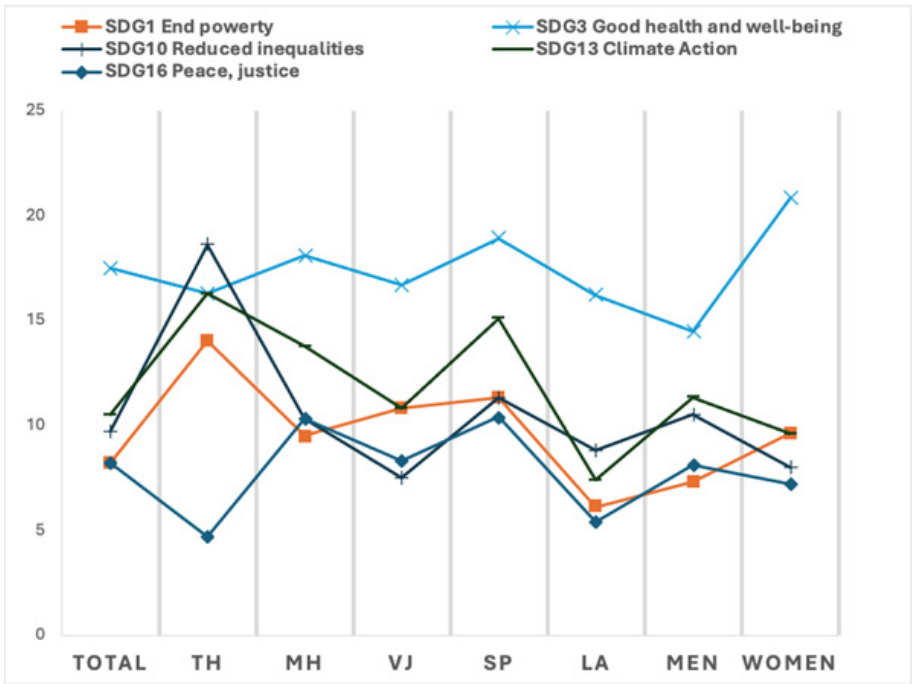
and consumption habits (63% and 65%, respectively) are also used as means to move toward better futures. Just over half of the survey respondents indicate that they are striving to be less selfish (59%) and dedicating more time to being close to their loved ones (55%) to achieve this goal. The two main avenues of action toward a better future center on environmental responsibility and care for others. To create a more sustainable future, Buddhists engage in direct actions, adopt lifestyle changes, and cultivate selflessness. Their commitment to the well-being of others, as part of becoming less selfish and implementing personal changes, manifests in helping others and spending more time with loved ones. These actions for a better future can be seen as expressions of compassion and love - not only for all living beings today but also for those of future generations.

**Table 9. Actions for better futures**

ACTIONS FOR BETTER FUTURES. In %	TOTAL	Th	Mh	Vj	Sp	LA	Men	Women
Change lifestyle	63	61	67	60	52	69	65	59
Change consumption pattern	65	56	64	70	70	58	61	66
Be closer to loved ones	54	40	56	52	51	53	48	58
Be less selfish	59	63	63	65	59	57	61	54
Help others	70	67	71	73	70	68	64	74
Belong to social organizations	38	28	36	44	48	30	33	42
Care for the environment	72	63	74	73	73	68	64	78

There is considerable similarity across regions, traditions, and genders in their visions and actions toward the future. The small differences observed are as follows: Vajrayāna practitioners and Buddhists living in Spain place slightly more emphasis on changes in consumption and collaboration with social organizations. Women stand out for their dedication to helping others and caring for the environment, while Latin American practitioners focus more on lifestyle changes as a means of contributing to better futures. Theravāda and Mahāyāna practitioners emphasize helping others. Compassion guides Buddhists’ social action, whether through participation in civil organizations or involvement in SDG-related initiatives aimed at reducing suffering and enhancing the well-being of all living beings. In this way, Buddhist social action contributes to the creation of better and more sustainable future societies.

Graph 8. Actions for better futures



IV. HAPPINESS

Following the Dalai Lama’s assertion that compassion contributes not only to the happiness of others but also to those who practice it, we now turn to the happiness and well-being of these Buddhists. We conclude this glimpse into the world of these Buddhist communities with a few insights into their quality of life and happiness. The vast majority of Buddhists (72%) consider themselves quite or very happy, compared to 24% who describe themselves as only somewhat happy and 4% who consider themselves unhappy. Additionally, most Buddhists (81%) report enjoying good health, although nearly 20% indicate that they are not in good health (Table 10).

Table 10. Happiness and health

Current Happiness Level			Health Level		
	N	%		N	%
Very happy	(40)	15.8%	Very good	(67)	26.3%
Quite happy	(142)	56.1%	Good	(140)	54.9%
Somewhat happy	(61)	24.1%	Regular	(43)	16.9%
Not very happy	(10)	4%	Bad	(4)	1.6%
Not happy at all	0	0	Very bad	(1)	0.4%

On a scale of 1 to 10 (from least to most), the average happiness score is 7.54, the average life satisfaction score is 7.94, and the average enjoyment of life score is 7.78. In global terms, this is a population that considers itself happy, satisfied, and able to enjoy good health and life.

**Table 11. Happiness**

Average values		TRADITION			AREA		GENDER	
		Th	Mh	Vj	Sp	LA	Men	Women
Happiness	7,54	7,40	7,61	7,60	7,46	7,60	7,33	7,79
Satisfaction	7,95	7,86	7,96	8,0	7,75	7,50	7,77	8,13
Enjoyment of life	7,78	7,62	7,91	7,80	8,08	7,96	7,54	8,01
n	257	43	116	120	102	148	124	125

“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain; “LA” Latin America

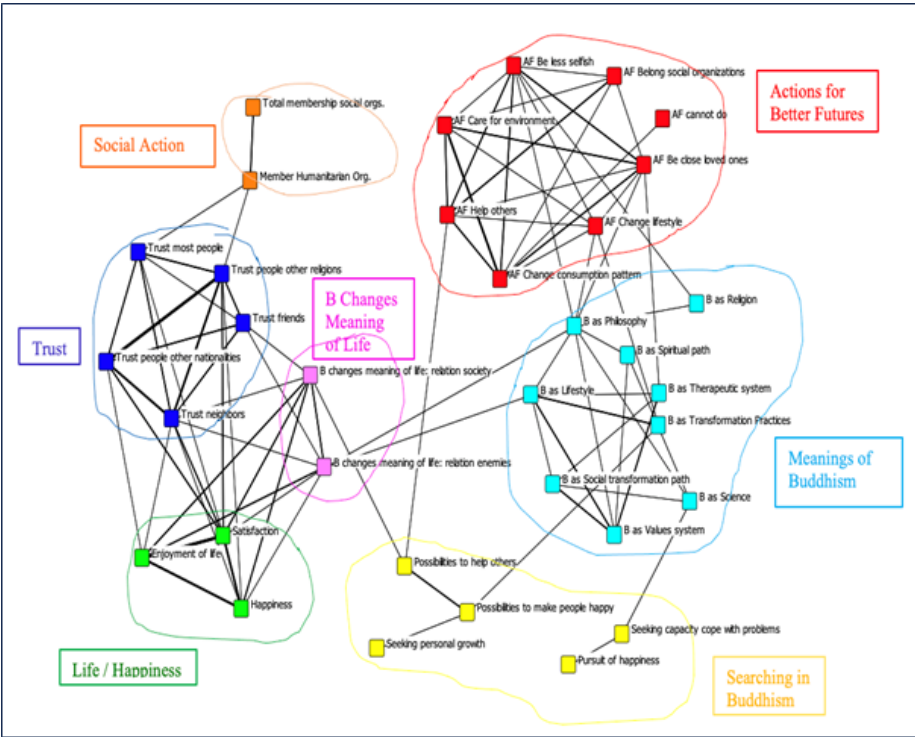
There are no major differences among the three main traditions (Table 11). The only minor distinctions worth noting are that followers of the *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* traditions report slightly above-average levels of happiness, satisfaction, and enjoyment, whereas those of the *Theravāda* tradition are slightly below average. Women exhibit the highest levels across these three well-being indicators, and Latin American Buddhists report a slightly higher level of happiness than Spaniards but a slightly lower level of satisfaction and enjoyment of life. These Buddhists in new lands are not only guided by the values of compassion in their social action but are also happy individuals who are satisfied with and enjoy life.

**V. A NON-DUAL VISION: MAPPING THE BUDDHIST SOCIAL WORLD**

To overcome the meaning-practices duality and to understand Buddhism - as well as the visions and practices of Buddhists in new lands - through central aspects of Buddhism such as *anattā* (not-self or non-duality) and *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination), I now focus on the interconnections among all compassion-related values and actions. The relational approach and Social Network Analysis (SNA) offer a new perspective in which meaning is acquired through relationships, structures, and systems of relations. This perspective is closer to Buddhism: *anattā*, *paṭicca-samuppāda*, and *suññatā* (emptiness). Nothing has meaning on its own; everything acquires meaning through interaction - different interactions result in different meanings. By focusing on correlations, co-occurrences, coincidences, links, or relationships, we can visualize relational systems and structures, thereby mapping social connections. The application of SNA allows for the representation of this

cognitive action structure as a kind of map of Buddhist social DNA. Similar to the Buddhist worldview - where nothing possesses intrinsic existence and everything arises through interaction - relational sociology sees social entities as taking form through relationships. These entities are ever-changing and differ as their interrelated causal components shift. Analyzing the social and the dimension of interdependence allows us to perceive the unseen: the relationships that shape both new and old meanings. It enables us to represent the social world graphically, much like physical maps. For this study, I employ the theoretical and technical approach of SNA using UCINET software, which provides new ways of perceiving relational systems along with novel indicators and metrics for analysis. Some of the key concepts and metrics include: Nodes: Actors or elements that are interconnected, Links: Relationships, connections, contacts, coincidences, or similarities, Network: A graphical representation of the system of interconnections or links created by relationships, Centrality: An indicator of the number of direct contacts or links each node has, Sub-structures: Differentiated systems of relationships within a network, and Social maps: Visualizations and analyses of networks as maps and social pathways - representing communication, interdependence, and causality - offering a visual approach to the Buddhist social universe. In this framework, nodes represent the elements that constitute the Buddhist social cognitive action system, while the lines connecting these nodes signify causal relationships between them. The relational intensity between nodes - indicating the extent to which they influence each other - is represented by the thickness of the connecting lines. The charts and analytics do not indicate the size or frequency of a given element. Instead, they reflect its relational relevance. In other words, everything is understood through interaction. In this dynamic, the most important or central elements are those that engage in the greatest number of interactions. The most central elements, therefore, exert the most influence on the entire system. Graph 9 represents this relational system in the form of a map, illustrating the correlations among variables (proxies for compassion) used in the study. The variables - referred to as nodes in the jargon of social network analysis - correspond to six dimensions: trust, life and happiness, actions for better futures, meaning of Buddhism, searching in Buddhism, and the effects of Buddhism in changing the meaning of life. To facilitate differentiation, the nodes representing each dimension are marked with distinct colors. The system is fully interconnected; all nodes are linked directly or indirectly. This signifies a continuous flow of causal interactions throughout the system. It reflects that values, actions, and practices do not exist in isolation but rather in interaction, forming more complex systems of meaning and practice. As demonstrated in Graph 9, actions for better futures are linked to - and both influence and are influenced by - the meanings of Buddhism according to practitioners. Each combination of elements results in a distinct cognitive action.

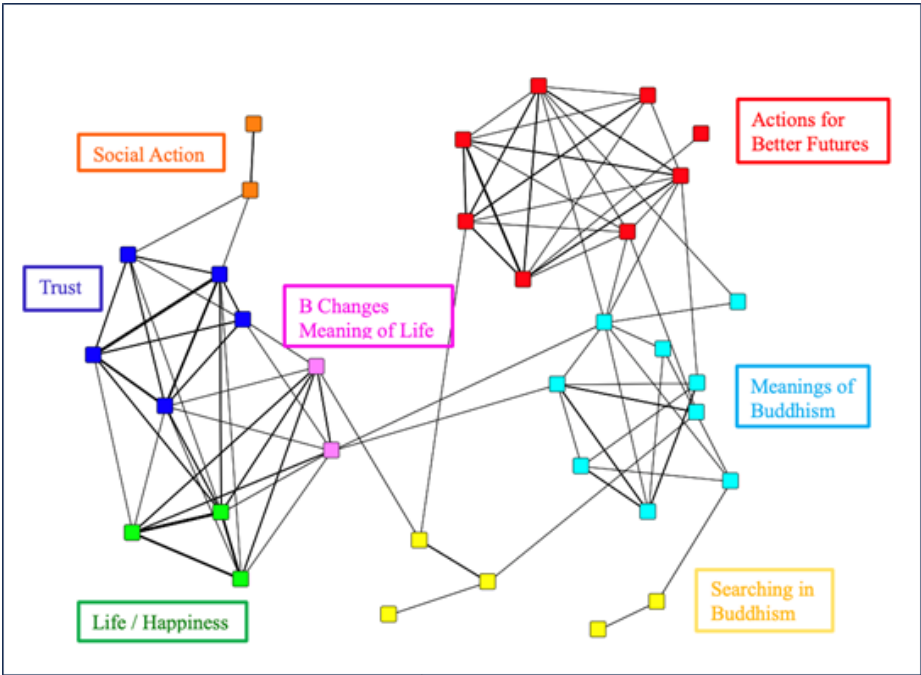
### **Graph 9. Compassion social space**



We can interpret this system as a map - a network of interconnected paths that directly and indirectly link various nodes. It can be visualized much like a subway map, where one station leads to another, ultimately reaching a destination. For example, if Buddhism is perceived as a Religion, it connects to the action for a better future of Being Less Selfish, which in turn leads to the action of Helping Others. This then links to Searching in Buddhism for Possibilities to Help Others, which connects with the effects of Buddhism in Changing the Meaning of Life about Society, and ultimately, all these pathways lead to Happiness. Graph 10 illustrates two major relational groupings (subnetworks): one on the left and the other on the right, with a weak connection between them. Within each grouping, the dimensions exhibit high levels of direct interrelation, forming strongly connected clusters. On the right, the dimensions of Actions for Better Futures and Meaning of Buddhism form a highly cohesive relational structure, primarily linked by the notion of Buddhism as Philosophy. Additionally, connected to Meaning of Buddhism is a weaker structure: Searching in Buddhism. On the left, the dimensions of Trust, Life/Happiness, and Buddhism Changing the Meaning of Life are strongly interconnected. Moreover, the Social Action dimension is linked to Trust, reinforcing the role of trust in shaping social engagement and well-being.

**Graph 10. Buddhist social space, with no labels**

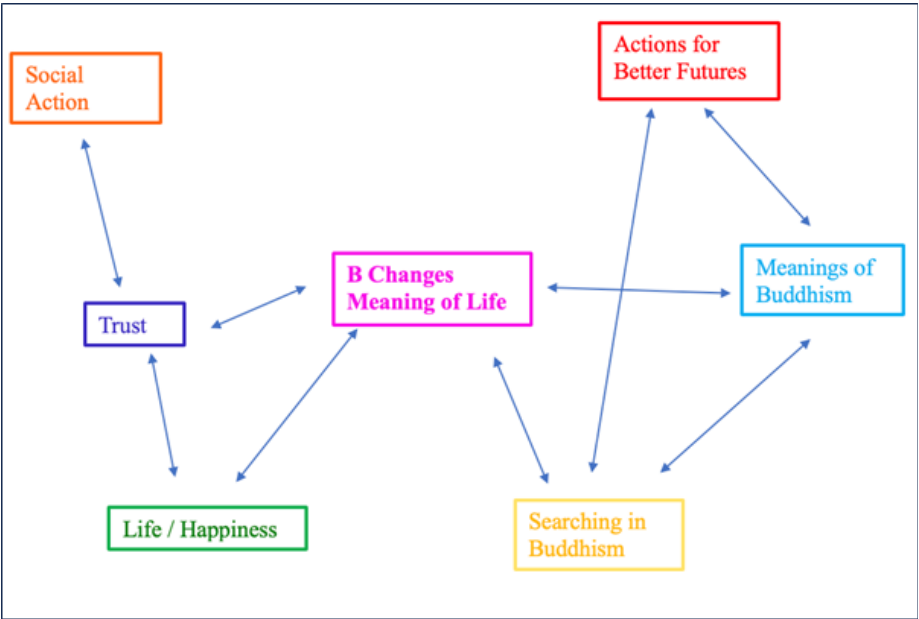




*Linking network: B's Effects on Meaning of Life*

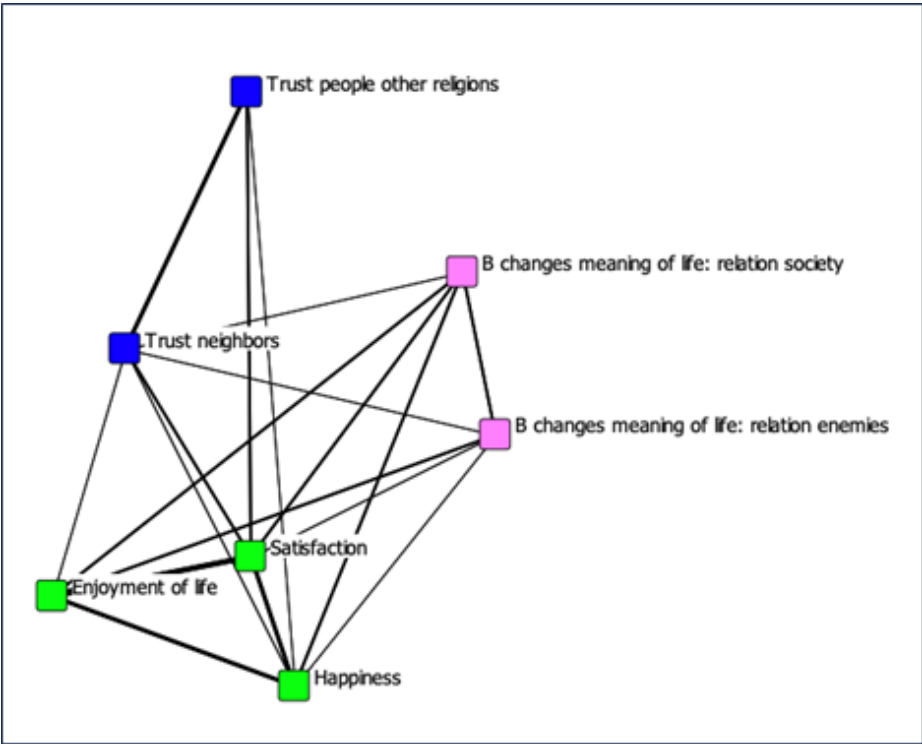
The two major groupings are connected solely through the dimension of Buddhism, Changing the Meaning of Life, which acts as a bridge, ensuring the total interconnection of the network. Specifically, Changing the Meaning of Life about Society is linked to Possibilities to Help Others and indirectly to the Action of Helping Others. Meanwhile, Changing the Meaning of Life about Enemies connects to Buddhism as both a Philosophy and a Lifestyle. Graph 11, which illustrates the interconnections between dimensions, provides a clearer view of how this complex system of compassion-related values and practices is articulated. It reveals a fully connected network, where all dimensions are linked either directly or indirectly. The two major subnetworks (left and right) are held together by the Effects of Buddhism in Changing the Meaning of Life, which serves as the crucial bridge. This dimension plays a key role in maintaining the connectivity of the system, enabling the flow of influences and communication across different aspects of Buddhist practice. It is the most central node in the network, with the highest number of connections, making it the most influential in shaping the dynamics of the system. Without this bridge, the network would become fragmented, severing the link between the left and right subnetworks, and ultimately disrupting the integration of compassion-based values and actions. Thus, Buddhism Changing the Meaning of Life is the central pillar that unites various elements of compassion, facilitating both personal and social transformation.

**Graph 11: Network of dimensions**



At the core of this system of values and practices lies the transformative effect of Buddhism in changing the Meaning of Life. From this central dimension, causal connections extend in both directions - toward Trust and Good Life on one side, and toward Meanings of Buddhism, Expectations from Its Practice, and Actions for a Better Future on the other. This dimension serves as a key pathway for transformation. Viewing this network of interconnections as a map of communication within the compassion space also reveals the paths leading to Happiness. Happiness is directly linked to Good Life (including Satisfaction and Enjoyment of Life), Trust in Others (such as neighbors and people of other religions), and Change in the Meaning of Life (specifically about enemies and society) as a result of Buddhist practice. Each of these dimensions is just one step away - one “metro stop” - from Happiness (Graph 12). However, the rest of the network elements, particularly those in the right-side substructure, do not have direct access to Happiness. They can only reach it by crossing the bridge of Change in the Meaning of Life. Multiple pathways connect different elements of the network to Happiness - some are direct and short, while others require passing through several stations. For example: Very short routes: (1 step, 1 subway stop), from Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life, and from Trust, and also from Quality of Life. (See in Map)

**Graph 12: Direct links to/from Happiness**

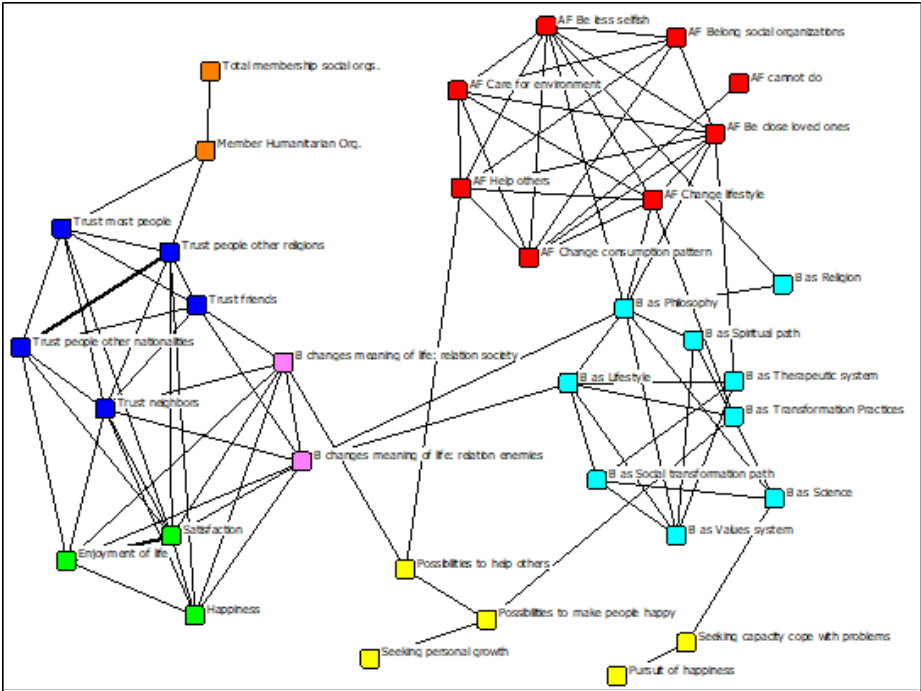


*Direct links of Happiness: Trust, Life, B Changes in Meaning of Life.*

*Links of Happiness to entire network: through B Changes in Meaning of Life*

Firstly, short routes (2 steps, in two stops): From Buddhism as Philosophy or Buddhism as Lifestyle to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding enemies to Happiness. Second, short routes (3 steps, in three stops): From (Action for Better Futures) AF Help Others to (Seeking in Buddhism) Possibilities to Help Others to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding society to Happiness. Thirdly, medium-length routes (6 steps, in six stops): From (Seeking in Buddhism) Pursuit of Happiness to Capacity to Cope with Problems and Suffering to Buddhism as Science to Buddhism as Path of Social Transformation to Buddhism as Lifestyle to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding enemies to Happiness. Lastly, long journeys (11 steps, in eleven stops): From (Seeking in Buddhism) Pursuit of Happiness to Capacity to Cope with Problems and Suffering to Buddhism as Science to Buddhism as Path of Social Transformation to Buddhism as Lifestyle to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding enemies to Buddhism as Philosophy to (Action for Better Futures) Be Less Selfish to AF Help Others to (Seeking in Buddhism) Possibilities to Help Others to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding society to Happiness. Compassion, both as a value and in action, is always a key part of these paths to and from happiness. It not only contributes to a more sustainable and better future but also fosters happiness.

MAP OF COMPASSION AND HAPPINESS



VI. CONCLUSIONS

Compassion is a broad cultural and social identity framework, acting as an umbrella for ways of seeing and acting for the benefit of all beings. Compassion permeates values and guides actions toward a better world with less suffering and greater sustainability. To explore the sociological dimensions of compassion, values, and actions among Buddhists in new lands, particularly in Spanish-speaking countries, I adopt a dual methodological approach. In the first part, the sociological analysis provides an initial picture of Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries, examining their characteristics, their vision and relationship with Buddhism, as well as their compassion-related values, practices, and actions that shape their Buddhist path. How Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries understand Buddhism defines three conceptual spaces where compassion is articulated: as a worldview, as a set of values, and as a path to follow. In terms of the goals they seek to achieve through Buddhist practice, two key dimensions emerge: on the one hand, personal empowerment to confront suffering; on the other, objectives related to compassion, such as the possibility of helping others and contributing to their well-being and happiness. Their vision of Buddhism is complex, integrating knowledge and practices that shape their spiritual path. These practices and activities are strongly oriented toward personal empowerment within the spiritual journey. Within this framework, Buddhism becomes a vital project, with new goals and pathways to realize them. The practice of Buddhism involves a radical transformation that expands the possibilities of compassion,

whether by changing one's perception of enemies or by reshaping one's view of society. This transformation enables a broader social vision, one that aspires toward harmony and the cessation of conflict and suffering. Understanding and cultivating better relationships with others fosters equanimity, which in turn facilitates compassion. The way one perceives others is a fundamental factor in the capacity to act compassionately. Compassion, in both principle and practice, brings us to the social dimension of Buddhism - its role in shaping social dynamics, values, and contributions to the societies in which Buddhists engage. At the social level, it is essential to highlight their trust in others and their active participation in society, including collaboration with social organizations and initiatives aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through these efforts, they contribute to the development of more sustainable and compassionate future societies. On a global scale, this Buddhist population tends to perceive itself as happy and fulfilled, enjoying life as part of its lived experience. In the second part of this study, I engage in a process of abstraction, analyzing the data and variables as components of a system of interactions. Here, I adopt a Buddhist perspective, incorporating concepts of nonduality, dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), and interdependence. Within this approach, what matters most are the social systems that emerge from the interactions between values and practices. I employ relational (network) analysis as a means of synthesizing the social system of compassion at a higher level of abstraction, focusing on causal interactions that shape this system and the new meanings that emerge from it. The interplay between values and actions defines a cognitive-action social field of Buddhist compassion. The resulting map reveals the essence of the socio-cultural identity of Buddhists in new lands. This approach reveals a fully interconnected network in which everything is influenced by everything else. A change in one aspect has ripple effects throughout the entire system. For instance, a shift in the perception of Buddhism - as either a religion or a science—ultimately impacts actions, the purposes sought in Buddhist practice, and even the experience of happiness. Relational analysis identifies two major subnetworks with strong internal cohesion yet relatively weak connections to each other. These two distinct but interrelated domains of cognitive action represent: (1) the area of trust and quality of life and (2) the area of Buddhist visions and their contributions to both personal and social transformation. The connection between these two domains holds the entire system together and shapes the Buddhist social world of compassion. At the core of this system is Buddhism's transformative effect on how individuals understand life and its meaning - particularly in altering perceptions of enemies and society. Indeed, a significant portion of one's access to happiness depends on this shift in perspective. We can understand this network as a system of influences and causal interrelations that shape compassion, as well as a communication map that links various points within the social space. Through this framework, we can trace personal and collective pathways of transformation - both toward and from happiness.

## REFERENCES

- Arroyo, L. (2013). *Espiritualidad, Razón y Discordias: El Budismo ahora y aquí*. Doctoral dissertation, Universitat de Barcelona, Facultat d'Economia i Empresa.
- The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya*. Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012), trans. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Dalai Lama, His Holiness & Cutler, C. (1998). *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York: Riverbed Books.
- Díez de Velasco, F. (2013). *El budismo en España: Historia, visibilización e implantación*. Madrid: Akal Universitaria.
- Vallverdú, J. & Millet, D., eds. (2023). *Estudios Budistas en América Latina y España (I)*. Tarragona: Publicaciones de la Universitat Rovira i Virgili.
- Vallverdú, J. & Millet, D., eds. (2024). *Estudios Budistas en América Latina y España (II)*. Tarragona: Publicaciones de la Universitat Rovira i Virgili.
- Rodríguez, J. A. (2018). "Buddhist Values and Actions Towards Peace and Environmental Protection: A Sociological Perspective." *Journal of International Association of Buddhist Universities*, Special Edition on the United Day of Vesak, pp. 486–505. <https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/Jiabu/issue/view/14809>.
- Rodríguez, J. A. (2020). "La COVID-19: la gran oportunidad para pensar y crear sociedades futuras mejores." *Revista Española De Sociología*, 29(3). <https://doi.org/10.22325/fes/res.2020.43>.
- Rodríguez, J. A., Ramón, A., & Arroyo, L. (2020). "Redes de una organización abierta: El mundo social de un monasterio budista europeo." *Sistema. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 222.
- Rodríguez, J. A. (2019). "Buddhists Contributions to Building More Harmonious and Sustainable Societies: A Sociological Analysis." In Most Ven. Thich Nhat Tu & Most Ven. Thich Duc Thien, eds., *Buddhist Approach to Global Leadership and Shared Responsibilities for Sustainable Societies*. HCM City: Vietnam Buddhist University Series. <http://www.undv2019vietnam.com/Main-Theme/en/26.pdf>.
- Rodríguez, J. A., Mohr, J. W., & Halcomb, L. (2017). "Becoming a Buddhist: The Duality of Ritual and Belief." *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 53. <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/S0733-558X20170000053007>.
- Córdova Quero, H. (2020). "Situación del budismo de la Tierra Pura en América Latina." *Buddhistdoor en Español*. Available at: <https://espanol.buddhistdoor.net/situacion-del-budismo-de-la-tierra-pura-en-america-latina/>.
- Díez de Velasco, F. (2020). "Panorama del budismo en España." *Buddhistdoor en Español*. Available at: <https://espanol.buddhistdoor.net/panorama-del-budismo-en-espana/>.



- Karam, M.A. (2023). "Breve historia del arribo del budismo tibetano en América Latina." *Buddhistdoor en Español*. Available at: <https://espanol.buddhistdoor.net/budismo-institucionalizado-en-venezuela-primeraparte/>.
- Millet, D., ed. (2019–2023). "El budismo en los países de habla hispana: Edición especial." *Buddhistdoor en Español*. Available at: <https://espanol.buddhistdoor.net/ediciones-especiales/budismo-en-paises-habla-hispana/>.
- Pew Research Center. (2014). "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region." Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>.
- Pew Research Center. (2022). "Religious Composition by Country, 2010–2050." Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/interactives/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050/>.
- United Nations. (2015). "Sustainable Development Goals." *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs*. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.
- Usarski, F. (2021). "El budismo en Sudamérica: una perspectiva general." *Buddhistdoor en Español*. Available at: <https://espanol.buddhistdoor.net/el-budismo-en-sudamerica-una-perspectiva-general-quinta-parte/>.
- Usarski, F. (2022). "Huellas del budismo institucionalizado en América Latina." *Buddhistdoor en Español*. Available at: <https://espanol.buddhistdoor.net/huellas-del-budismo-institucionalizado-en-america-latina-primeraparte/>.
- World Values Survey. Available at: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>.



# BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: CHINESE BUDDHISM IN TRANSITION UNDER THE TEACHING OF VENERABLE TAIXU

Ven. Thich Thien Tri\*

## Abstract:

Venerable Taixu was a leading figure in the reform of Chinese Buddhism during the early 1900s. He witnessed the decline of Buddhist followers throughout China while Christian missionaries were successfully converting traditional Chinese Buddhists to Christianity. Rather than rejecting the presence of Christian missionaries, Venerable Taixu sought to understand Christian theology. Through this understanding, he recognized the need to modernize Chinese Buddhism. He believed that only by integrating Buddhism into daily human activities could the tradition endure and spread worldwide.

Unfortunately, Venerable Taixu did not receive much support from the traditional Chinese Buddhist Sangha for his reform efforts. Additionally, he did not live to see the success of his teachings carried out by his students and supporters after his death.

**Keywords:** *Taixu reforms, Chinese Buddhism, Engaged Buddhism, modernization, interfaith dialogue, sangha reform, social activism.*

\*\*\*

## I. VEN. TAIXU - LIFE AND HIS REFORM

Ven. Taixu was born in 1890 and passed away in 1947. In the early Republican period, Venerable was a famous monk and regarded. Taixu is known as a monk of modernization and reform. In *An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians*, Dr. Darui Long writes, “a reformer, Taixu, wanted to change the status of the old Buddhism in China. He accepted new things and was willing to change.”<sup>1</sup> As a monk of modernization and reform,

---

\* M.A. in Religious Studies.

<sup>1</sup> Darui, “An Interfaith Dialogue,” 177.

Taixu tried to change a new face of Chinese Buddhism, and he wished to keep as much Buddhist tradition. However, he thought traditional Buddhists should be adapted to new, modern ways in *Taixu's 'On The Establishment Of The Pure Land In The Human Realm'*, Jones B. Charles says, "Understanding Taixu's 'On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm' requires at least a brief look at his life and religious trajectory before its composition. A detailed biography is beyond the scope of the present work (see Goodell 2012 for a fuller account of Taixu's life). Here we will give only a general overview, particularly to elements of his life and background that help contextualize his Essay."<sup>2</sup> In international obligation, Taixu said that reborn Buddhism should go through the institutionalization of modern academics and renew a face of social activities. In the Western Pure Land of Amitabha, Taixu expressed his idea clearly. Taixu thought that Buddhism was an international and global religion.

Buddha's teaching has spread to the whole world, and human beings have used the teaching to benefit their daily life. Dr. Darui Long says, "In recent years, scholars in the People's Republic of China have published books on the development of modern Chinese Buddhism and its relationship to society. Most of them describe Taixu's contributions and thoughts positively in this area. At least six books about modern Chinese Buddhism have been published since 1989."<sup>3</sup>

The impact on Chinese Buddhism of Taixu, this essay will introduce six important journey Taixu faced and experienced. What are they? Those included: compasses of Taixu has succeeded in his reform, the most significant achievements, non-succeed places in Taixu's endeavors, existing under causes of Taixu's failure to reform in Chinese sangha, attempts to reform aspects between Christianity and Buddhism and analyzed views of Taixu's successes and failures. Impacting on Chinese Buddhism of Taixu.

Ven. Taixu's teaching reappeared in the book of theology of the 1960s and 1970s. Taixu recognized that Chinese Buddhism needed to adopt the Westerner's air from Christianity. That was an air of interfaith dialogue. The message called to embrace between person to person, group to group, or an embrace of different religions. What were the reasons for Taixu to call for the reform of traditional Chinese Buddhism?

*Introduction: Reformulating 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' as an Analytical Category*, Jessica and Rongdao write, "First, they must claim that these novel activities are authentic and venerable. This normally appears in arguments that Buddhism has been engaged with society from its beginning -often portraying the Buddha himself as engaged - either in intent or actuality. Second, they must distinguish themselves from other Buddhist movements that do not share their innovative approach to practice."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Jones, *Taixu's On the Establishment*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 168.

<sup>4</sup> Main and Rongdao, "Introduction: Reformulating," 12.

Jessica and Rongdao believe that “Most often this is accomplished via a historical claim that Buddhist engagement has been suppressed by internal corruption or external oppression, and thus engagement must be found anew through reform and increased social activity.”<sup>5</sup>

## II. COMPASSES OF TAI XU TO SUCCESS IN HIS REFORM

In the spring of 1917, Taixu had a vision and recognized that he and the world had a new change. In progress, Taixu abstained from his evolution to focus on engaging Chinese Buddhism in further planning. It is his plan of reform. In *An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians*, Long Darui commented:<sup>6</sup>

Taixu was one of the most important Buddhist figures in the history of modern China. As a pained and sympathetic witness to the untold sufferings of the Chinese people, he advocated the reform of Buddhism as a response to imperialist invasions and the widespread corruption that existed not only among contemporary government officials but also among Chinese Buddhists themselves. As part of his plan, he outlined the reorganization of the Sangha system in China, seeking to bring Buddhism up to date by making it scientific and socially conscious, thereby eliciting respect from intellectuals and youth alike.

Long Darui Similarly as Long Darui, Charles on “*Taixu’s ‘On The Establishment Of The Pure Land In The Human Realm’*” says, “In the years that followed, many thinkers came forward with plans for China’s uplift, and in many instance these planners believed that religion was an impediment to progress and gave it no positive role in their schemes. At the same time, another segment of the educated classes developed a fascination with Tantric Buddhist magic and ritual (Tarocco 2007, 39-41). In response to these developments, Taixu shifted his focus to clergy education and reform and engaged with the emerging urban culture.”<sup>7</sup>

Ven. Taixu admired him and would like to organize his reform of Japanese Buddhism. He believes that Chinese Buddhism needs an organizational system similar to the Japanese. Studying the Buddhist schedule, education or further, Taixu thanked scholars who helped him open his vision with those subjects. For this reason, in the meeting with Japanese Buddhist scholars, Taixu copied and noted his goal carefully to reform Chinese Buddhism. Furthermore, Taixu decided to incorporate the Japanese Buddhist system and develop a new modern Chinese Buddhism by himself. The universities will be best to spread Buddha’s teaching to youth. Charles writes, “The Japanese model showed how such disparate schools could be ordered in such a way that they kept their identities while collaborating in common pursuits (Goodell 2012, 115). All in all, he found the visit to Japan stimulating for his reform plans, although he

<sup>5</sup> Main and Rongdao, “Introduction: Reformulating,” 12.

<sup>6</sup> Darui, “An Interfaith Dialogue,” 167.

<sup>7</sup> Charles, *Taixu’s On The Establishment*, 16.

did not wish to emulate the Japanese clergy's adoption of clerical marriage and acceptance of meat and alcohol consumption (Goodell 2012, 119)."<sup>8</sup>

### III. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS OF VEN. TAI XU

Ven. Taixu tried to renew the face of Chinese Buddhism in his way. The efforts paid off years later by his disciples. They spread his teaching and improved his goal beyond China. They believed that the organization from their master's reform would spread Chinese Buddhism in the fresh air of its new system. In *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms (Review)*, David writes, "Taixu admired the capacity of Christianity to organize and motivate believes. He attributed this to its associations and its rituals which, through fellowship, inspired followers with the belief that Christianity was a universal religion."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, David says, "However, he completely rejected Christian theology because he felt that it wrongly emphasized the dependence of humanity on god, the idea of the eternal soul, and the belief that salvation comes from God alone. His modernizing efforts adapted such Christian institutions as social welfare, modern schools, proselytizing, and lay participation, but for attaining salvation, he focused on Buddhist theology."<sup>10</sup>

Taixu returned to China from his journey around 1917. At that time, members of the Uniform Virtue were called a 'redemption society' who visited him. After their discussion, some of them changed their minds and followed Taixu to learn Buddhism. That is one of Taixu's successful points. In *Taixu's 'On The Establishment Of The Pure Land In The Human Realm'* Charles writes, "After speaking with Taixu, some of them converted to Buddhism and immediately began planning a new, Buddhist based association that took shape as the Bodhi Society. Several of its first recruits were highly placed members of society who had the means to provide financial support for various activities, such as publishing some of Taixu's early works."<sup>11</sup> At a good point, Taixu knew that he should open a new history of Chinese Buddhism's reform. In this way, Charles writes, "he organized like-minded believers into societies for the joint practice of nianfo so that their practice would, through the mechanism of sympathetic resonance (ganying), allow each practitioner to enjoy the benefit of everyone's practice, thus maximizing the purifying effect."<sup>12</sup>

The other significant achievement of Taixu could be found in his organizational skills to link Buddhist systems. This link will communicate the association of worldwide Chinese Buddhism in different countries. Charles expresses, "Members of this organization would donate all of their private property to it and settle into Buddhist communities, within which each would receive what they needed to maintain an appropriate standard of living. Significantly, Zang says that the result of this plan would be to bring about a

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>9</sup> Wank, "Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism," 222 - 223.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 222 - 223.

<sup>11</sup> Charles, *Taixu's On The Establishment*, 17 - 18.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 19.



‘magnificent Pure Land in this present world’”<sup>13</sup>

Taixu’s thought: the need for Buddhist solutions to accord with modern trends; the centrality of grasping at life and property in the genesis of current conflict; the need for a Buddhist association and the establishment of ideal Buddhist communities; the need for cooperation with local governments; and the use of a term analogous to Taixu’s ‘Pure Land in the Human Realm’ to describe the final result.”<sup>14</sup> From those points above, Charles would like to show people Taixu’s ideas in the form of reform of his goal. On the other hand, Charles says, “Nevertheless, Taixu appears to have built on ideas that were in the air when developing this concept, and one may well wonder whether or not he would have come up with the ‘Pure Land in the Human Realm’ without these influences.”<sup>15</sup>

It is pressing on significant achievements of Ven. Taixu, Charles writes, “When Taixu wrote his Essay in 1926, the Republican government had not yet begun the task of determining its religious policies (Nedostup 2009, 16), leaving Taixu free to imagine an ideal cooperative relationship between Buddhism and the state. This dream of Buddhism working closely with the government and receiving its full support pervades the vision of the Essay.”<sup>16</sup> In the end, Taixu’s life is confirmed by Jiang Canteng. It took at least twenty years for it to reach. Charles has not forgotten to press ‘*On The Establishment Of The Pure Land In The Human Realm*’ again. “However, our purpose here has simply been to contextualize the Essay by placing it within the arcs of Taixu’s life and modern Chinese history. With that done, we may now move on to a survey of past Western writings on Taixu and an analysis of the Essay’s contents.”<sup>17</sup>

#### IV. NON-SUCCEEDING PLACES IN VEN. TAI XU’S ENDEAVORS

In national leadership, in 1912, Ven. Taixu and his friend, Renshan, were struggling with involvement. The reason for working at Jinshan Monastery in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, they organized to make a new modern school. Taixu and his friend did not let the abbot of Jinshan Monastery know their ideal to make plan for Buddhist advancement activities, but it was built as a school. After that, they were allowed to create their goal but were shocked to find out that “they had been tricked. Violent altercations broke out, foreshadowing a long period of conflict and distrust between conservatives and radical reformers in the sangha.”<sup>18</sup>

In *Lay Buddhism in Contemporary China: Social Engagements and Political Regulations*, Zhang and Zhe commented:<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>18</sup> Darui, “An Interfaith Dialogue,” 170.

<sup>19</sup> Zhang and Zhe, “Lay Buddhism,” 38.

The Anti-Right campaigns of 1957 eroded the last vestiges of Buddhism's autonomy. Then, the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976) brought an unprecedented degree of destruction to Buddhism, as both pro-communist and traditional forms of Buddhism were prohibited. Temples were destroyed, and monks were forced to return to lay life. Countless Buddhist relics (including the stūpa of Taixu in Zhejiang) were destroyed.

Zhang and Zhe

In another case, Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk, faced many similar challenges as Ven. Taixu. Thich Nhat Hanh was exiled to another country and was not allowed to return to his country.

In an *Introduction: Reformulating "Socially Engaged Buddhism" as an Analytical Category*, Jessica and Rongdao write, "Throughout Lotus in the Sea of Fire, Nhat Hanh makes two arguments that we believe are typical of socially engaged rhetoric: he rejects 'disengaged' Buddhism, either as a false stereotype or as the result of political oppression; and, he posits 'engaged' Buddhism as its authentic and original form. In other words, he argues that authentic Buddhism is always engaged in society."<sup>20</sup>

In the endeavors of Ven. Taixu and Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh had the organizational skills to set up their goals, but it did not mean that they had someplace not successful.

However, at the end of their lives, they gave life to their endeavors of reforms.

## **V. EXISTING UNDER CAUSES OF VEN. TAI XU'S FAILURE TO REFORM IN THE CHINESE SANGHA COMMUNITY**

Ven. Taixu gave an entire life to reform for Buddhism. He had the best endeavored to find a new way to Chinese Buddhism and the next generation. However, Taixu faced many problems in conflicts with the sangha. The cause happened because they disagreed with the new goal of reform from Taixu. In the end, Taixu knew what he needed to do as a Buddhist leader, and he did it by himself. He believed and followed his private path as Buddha and Bodhisattva blessed. Whenever Ven. Taixu saw problems in his sangha, such as corruption or idleness; he hurt himself. His heart broke in pain. For these reasons, as a leader of the sangha, Taixu endeavored to build a new education system. He hoped that his next generation of the sangha would improve and spread Buddhist education to the whole world through their ideals. Dr. Long Darui commented:

Knowing Chinese weaknesses, Taixu often emphasized Mahayana Buddhism because he considered it to be capable of accepting outside influences, including the work of academics from all countries and the heritage of Chinese culture over the past thousand years. He thought it necessary to attach equal importance to all doctrines arising from the eight sects of Chinese Buddhism. He also held that Chinese Buddhism should not only absorb

---

<sup>20</sup> Main and Rongdao, "Introduction: Reformulating," 13.

Chinese Confucianism and Taoism but should also learn from Christianity. This was where the differences lay between Taixu and Yuanying regarding their respective views as to how best to absorb things from other schools of thought.<sup>21</sup>

Long Darui

Ven. Taixu recognized problems in Buddhist sangha as corruption or idleness. These painful scenes needed to be set up in a new way. It was an inner conflict that Taixu had problems with his sangha community. Buddhist monks' and nuns' responsibilities were not only to chant for dead people or different regular practices.

Instead, their responsibilities needed to engage and improve themselves in a new reform for their education. The Buddhist Sangha's organization needed to breathe fresh air of positive energy. It was a big challenge for Taixu to face, and he endeavored to find a new way to the sangha. However, Ven. Taixu had his existing causes of failure to reform the Chinese Sangha community. Jessica and Rongdao commented, "To simply label the first 'bad' and the second 'good' does not answer this question. Nevertheless, we should say more about the nature of this continuity - the shared soteriology and moral reasoning which lie at the heart of our analysis."<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, they said, "Socially engaged Buddhism is the mirror image of secularization, and will view social action within the 'secular,' as it is structured by a given polity, to be essentially religious and fundamental to awakening. And, interestingly, it will view action within the 'religious,' as structured by a given polity, to be non-essential."<sup>23</sup> Ven. Taixu's new reform was an engaged Buddhism and an educated organization. To him, Buddhism is a belief and practice that enhances human life. It is not a religion that chants only for death. Similar to Jessica and Rongdao, Zhang and Zhe commented:<sup>24</sup>

In this respect, Taixu, who with his "Buddhism for human life" is considered to be the closest to the Nationalist regime, did not renounce his universalist stance, the moral supremacy of religion, nor did he give up on an ideal of independence for monastic authority. Taixu and his disciples maintained that Buddhist cosmology constituted a foundation of values for a genuine democratic state. They were opposed to radical nationalism and had neutralized to a certain degree the xenophobic content of nationalism with the Buddhist notion of "non-self" (*Wuwo Mffe*). Using non-self, Taixu put forward a nationalism that was non-violent and non-existentialist.

Zhang and Zhe

As a sangha leader, Taixu endeavored to build the beauty of change in an organization. In his thought, Buddhist education should be vital in a beautiful community. Taixu saw that both Buddhism and Christianity had problems

<sup>21</sup> Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 175.

<sup>22</sup> Main and Rongdao, "Introduction: Reformulating," 3.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Zhang and Zhe, "Lay Buddhism," 52.

in their ways. It did not develop as his wishes. In *Toward a modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's reforms*, Don writes, "A moderate number of educated persons were appreciative of the Buddhist heritage and hoped expectantly for Buddhist reform and revitalization, but many more concluded that there were few Chinese Buddhist masters of ability anymore, that the average monk had little education or moral virtue, and that institutional Buddhism was effectively and justifiably moribund. Most members of the Chinese sangha were seen to be primarily engaged in performing rites for the dead for personal financial gain and were judged largely incapable of contributing much of significance toward national goals."<sup>25</sup>

Taixu concluded that the Buddhist Sangha and the Christian community faced many similar dilemmas. Ministers and monks were struggling to understand the real purpose of their religious mission. They did not have a strong belief in themselves or what their purposes were. As the leader of communities, Taixu soon found out his view on reforming. However, it was an uneasy goal to serve or say it out. Ven. Taixu received many unexpected conflicts from the sangha and other groups. Don continued his comments:<sup>26</sup>

Turning to Buddhism in China, as it is at present, the first thing to be said is that *externally*, that is, regarding temple buildings, processions, the grandeur of public festivals, etc., Buddhism is decidedly on the decline. In all the provinces, many temples and monasteries have been ruined or badly damaged by the soldiers or by the young people... In many places, the temple lands and other sources of revenue have been confiscated by the authorities, and the funds used for educational purposes. As a consequence, the monks are hustled back into some of the corner buildings where they can't conduct religious ceremonies decently. In some districts, the temples seemingly stand intact, but even there, a marked decrease in income is noticed, and the monks have to struggle hard to secure the most necessary means of living. The result is that many of the inmates are driven to the big cities, where they join the despised crowds of "business monks," who operate in rented houses in bigger or smaller teams, as exorcists or as common priests, chanting masses for departed souls or practicing all kinds of obscure divining methods.

Pittman Don

On the other hand, Taixu had his ideals to reorganize the structure of his own Sangha. He did a restructure and reformed the group and created a perfect organization system within the Buddhist society. Step by step, Taixu tried to keep the sangha community in order. Don expresses on this way, "Chan master Yekai (1852 - 1922) was elected to serve as president and a basic national structure was rapidly developed, the association failed to operate effectively within the year. Its new periodicals, which Taixu had been appointed to edit, ceased publication for lack of adequate funding. Apathy within the sangha, factional distrust, organizational inexperience, and general economic

<sup>25</sup> Don, *Toward a modern Chinese Buddhism*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

difficulties were all contributing factors.”<sup>27</sup>

From another perspective, David Wank has his different and strong idea about Taixu more than Don Pittman. David says, “Furthermore, his peripatetic travels and personal fame in China and abroad, as well as his close contacts with members of the political elite, led many to see him as a publicity hound. But Pittman maintains that Taixu was misunderstood. He cultivated elites because of the reality that a revitalized Sangha would need approval by those who held political power.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, David keeps his comments: “His foreign travels were efforts to proselytize and engage others in interfaith dialogue. For example, Pittman cites Taixu’s trip abroad in 1939 - 1940 as a representative of the Nationalist government, which expected him to enlist foreign support for China’s war of resistance against the Japanese invaders.”<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, an intense pressing on David’s idea, “Taixu’s official status allowed him to meet with many people on his travels, but it seemed that he was intent on discussing the Dharma and never mentioned the war effort.”<sup>30</sup>

They were going through the existing under causes of Ven. Taixu’s failure to reform the Chinese Sangha community, many different authors, gave their thinking negative and positive ways to Taixu. However, Taixu did his best for the Buddhist sangha. Surely, Taixu rebuilt a new organization for the Chinese Buddhist sangha, and he did it well. Therefore, he did not need to look back from his effect.

## VI. VEN. TAI XU’S ATTEMPTS TO REFORM ASPECTS BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM

Ven. Taixu often met with Chinese Christians, and he supported their Union in Chongqing of Chinese Religions. Furthermore, Taixu was in meetings between Buddhism and Christianity to reform a new organization for both religions. In *An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians*, Dr. Darui Long writes, “Seeing what Christians had done, Taixu pointed out that ‘Buddhists should fulfill their obligations as persons, but they also should do something to benefit the public. The Christians devote themselves to advancing the general social welfare. They propagate their teachings by practicing altruism. This is something of significance, and we may adopt it.’”<sup>31</sup>

People will not believe that when Taixu was young, he did not accept Christian ideology or agree with any teaching of Christianity. He knew that World War I had destroyed many lives and many countries, and it was a terrible conflict but less evil than the Westerners’ decision. Moreover, Taixu did not believe that China and Christianity could coexist, and that would be the same as having Christianity and Buddhism together in the same setting. Taixu

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pg. 51

<sup>28</sup> David, “Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism,” 223.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>31</sup> Darui, “An Interfaith Dialogue,” 177.

thought that Christianity and Buddhism's beliefs were entirely different. For those reasons, Taixu rejected the teachings of Christianity.

However, Taixu changed his mind after his journey to different countries, and he recognized the Chinese Buddhist organization's need to change its face. Darui Long writes, "Chinese scholars have mainly focused on Taixu's thought and his activities in terms of the reorganization of the Sangha system that he proposed to accomplish. His call for a dialogue between Chinese Buddhism and Christianity has been generally neglected. Now, as this speech was delivered at a Christian university in Chengdu, one might ask: What was the response? Professor Holmes Welch asked a missionary who heard Taixu's speech about his impression of it. This record is not available in other Chinese sources."<sup>32</sup>

In China, Taixu found the path of Mahayana Buddhism needed in his new reform. Why? Because it did not update for centuries. Mahayana practitioners could not bring their path close to life. Instead, Buddha's teaching should engage in daily living. Don Pittman says, "In response to secular humanists, Taixu argued that their position was fundamentally relativistic. They had misjudged the beneficial contribution that a modern form of Buddhism could make to China's reconstruction and emerging global culture. In response to Christian evangelists, he claimed that a theistic faith was no longer tenable in the modern scientific world. The particular form of civilization that Christianity had spawned was destructive of human community everywhere."<sup>33</sup>

Ven. Taixu exceedingly admired the organizational abilities of Christians. He believed that Chinese Buddhism needed to adopt a comprehensive view. Chinese Buddhism should not hold an old culture and stay in the same step. Taixu expected Chinese Buddhism to update and improve in a new reform. Darui Long writes, "It has exerted a tremendous impact on Chinese life in such areas as modern culture, social benefits, and human spirituality. Chinese Buddhism, however, has made few contributions to our society, though it has a long history and has been very popular in China."<sup>34</sup>

In his later life, Ven. Taixu respected Christian doctrines, and he looked forward to the Chinese's improvement in their spiritual life as Christianity did. On the other hand, Darui Long writes, "When we recall and analyze the background behind the interfaith dialogue that Taixu maintained with Christians during the period in question, we can better our understanding of such efforts at communication among religions. At least we can foster a kind of mutual understanding among people by tracing the significance of the dialogue that took place more than a half century ago."<sup>35</sup>

In different thinking about Taixu to Don Pittman and Long Darui, David

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>33</sup> Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 178.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 168.



Wank has his private seeing that Taixu tried to reform Chinese Buddhism as a modernization. Nevertheless, David says, "His reform efforts were squarely in the mode of Chinese intellectuals who saw themselves as using Western institutions to 'modernize' China while rejecting the ideas and values they were seen as harboring."<sup>36</sup>

David agrees with Don and Long that Taixu admired the organization of Christian activities. However, Taixu did not wholly accept the theology of Christianity. David believes that Taixu recognized a wrong belief of Christian upon on blessing of god. David writes, "His modernizing efforts adapted such Christian institutions as social welfare, modern schools, proselytizing, and lay participation, but for attaining salvation he focused on Buddhist theology."<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, David comments:<sup>38</sup>

He rationalized Buddhist theology in an approach that Pittman terms 'ethnic piety.' Taixu interpreted the visionary dimensions of truth in Buddhism as norms for this-worldly behavior. He held that the Buddhist ideal of emptiness could be achieved not by renouncing this-worldly concerns but rather through selfless engagement with social and political realities. Not only could the path to salvation be found in becoming a monk or nun, but it could be trod by any layperson who followed Buddhist precepts in daily life.

David L. Wank

Going through comments from different authors to Taixu, those writings above give more details about Taixu's attempts to reform aspects between Christianity and Buddhism. Suppose Christianity is known in the whole world for its successful system of educational endeavors and its strong traditions. At the same time, Buddhism has a long history and a power of compassion and wisdom. Taixu had an excellent view of an Interfaith Dialogue, and he endeavored to refresh Chinese Buddhism. Christianity and Buddhism had a good connection in a new reform through an Interfaith Dialogue as Taixu wished.

## VII. ANALYZED VIEWS OF VEN. TAI XU'S SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Ven. Taixu had a hard-working to reform Chinese Buddhism for his entire life. His disciples, Yinshun and Xingyun, became influential Buddhist leaders in Taiwan. They followed and kept Taixu's reform to continue. Taixu's disciples have spread their Buddhist organizational reform to human beings in different countries as Taixu did. Dr. Darui Long comments:

Another student, Xingyun, also went to Taiwan and established the Fo-kuang Shan Buddhist movement, which is the most successful propagator of Chinese Buddhism world, with centers in Southeast Asia, America, Australia, and Europe. Xingyun has also established a Buddhist high school and college in Taiwan and a Buddhist university in Los Angeles, namely, Hsi

<sup>36</sup> Wank, "Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism," 222 - 223.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 222-223.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 223.

Lai University. His temple in Los Angeles, also called Hsi Lai Temple, is the largest Buddhist temple in America and was the host of the 1989 Cobb-Abe Theological Encounter with Buddhism Conference involving the leading Christian theologians in the West.<sup>39</sup>

Long Darui

Although Taixu had his reform endeavors and received good results, he received failures under the causes of the Chinese Buddhist sangha. Taixu had significant conflicts happening to sangha by his reform. The Chinese Buddhist organization did not agree with his ideals of adapting Westerner's spiritual cultures.

They would like to keep their old ones. Taixu faced too many problems between himself and the sangha. For those reasons, he got his failures. In *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, Don Pittman writes, "Taixu's assessment of his ultimate failure to convert the majority of the sangha to his point of view about the need for a complete 'Buddhist revolution' (*fojiao geming*) referred not to the extremity of his ideas but to his unfortunate inability to inspire and lead people in a difficult and divisive time."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Don presses, "Holmes Welch, however, in *The Buddhist Revival in China*, asserts that Taixu's most serious failing was that he did not seem 'to have pondered deeply enough on whether, if Chinese Buddhism was reformed in the manner he proposed, it would still be Buddhist or even Chinese.'"<sup>41</sup>

Like Taixu, Thich Nhat Hanh had faced failure with his sangha in Vietnam. The government and the sangha did not accept his reforms. Moreover, engaged Buddhism and new reforms were strange to an old culture for many centuries. From those same points, Taixu and Thich Nhat Hanh received their failures. In *Introduction: Reformulating "Socially Engaged Buddhism" as an Analytical Category*, Jessica L. Main and Rongdao Lai write, "To illustrate a few features of our revised definition, we will take a closer look at the early writings of the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, to highlight the ways that he embodies the continuity between prewar and postwar socially engaged Buddhism. Next, as an example of resistance to secularism typical of socially engaged Buddhism, we discuss the political struggles of the Chinese reformer, Taixu, and Chinese student-monks active during the first half of the twentieth century. These actors attempted to create the conditions for, and to legitimate, Buddhist social action."<sup>42</sup>

Between 1928 and 1940, Ven. Taixu came to Vietnam to visit. Vietnamese monks and nuns knew him as a Chinese Buddhist Revival. A reformist Vietnamese monk, Tri Hai, propagated the reforms of Taixu in Vietnam. The other famous Vietnamese monk, named Tri Quang, also admired Ven. Taixu's endeavors of reform.

<sup>39</sup> Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 174.

<sup>40</sup> Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Main and Rongdao, "Introduction: Reformulating," 8.

In *The Influence of Chinese Master Taixu on Buddhism in Vietnam*, Elise A. DeVido writes, "Indeed, the Vietnamese monk Tri Quang (b. 1924), a leader in the 1960s Buddhist Struggle Movement, praised Taixu as "the first person to promote Buddhist integration and standardization... (he) organized many conferences for Buddhists all over the world to come together, he drafted a charter for Buddhists in the whole world, he proposed meetings for Buddhists all over the world. He's the first person to say, to standardize and integrate Buddhism, we should spread Buddhism to Europe and America."<sup>43</sup>

Analyzed views of Taixu, he is a reformer and leader of Chinese Buddhism and a champion of Interfaith Dialogue. He passed away in 1947, and subsequent generations of disciples have kept spreading his reforms to many different countries. Darui Long says, "Exhausted from his many labors, he died in 1947, by which time he had barely succeeded in winning control of the Chinese Buddhist association. Taixu's theory aimed at offering benefits to the society and therefore, its functionally lay in its ability to meet the ethical needs of society."<sup>44</sup> Taixu went through his successes and failures to build his reform. He faced many difficult things to succeed in his goal. Like Taixu, Thich Nhat Hanh used to leave Vietnam to rebuild his new reform sangha in French, America, or other countries when Vietnam's political ideologies did not accept his Buddhist modernization. Both Taixu and Thich Nhat Hanh faced socialist, fascist, and democratic or struggling in wars, but they jumped over those to achieve their goals.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a beautiful picture has been drawn about Taixu's entire life through the six steps above, helping readers recognize his great reformed Buddhism. "*An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians*"<sup>45</sup> was a modern system. This affiliated organization's religions embraced religious communities. In Taixu's new creation, he received the most significant achievements, but he also received non-succeeding places in his endeavors.

Ven. Taixu and Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh recognized that Buddhism must bring a newly organized system to obtain peace, freedom, and acceptance. Therefore, they renewed the beliefs and practices of Buddhism with their views of wisdom. Both received many disastrous results from the government and sangha; however, they endeavored to succeed in their personal goals. Moreover, they spread a fresh air of engagement to the next generations, different countries, and other religions. Taixu used his youth attempts to reform aspects between Christianity and Buddhism, and he did it well even though he faced many harmful conflicts. Nowadays, Taixu's disciples, a next-generation, have continued to build many Buddhist Universities in different countries. They have tried to spread an excellent reform organization as Taixu's dream. Modernized Buddhism has to start with the effects of Buddhist leaders, and Taixu was a great one.

<sup>43</sup> DeVido "The Influence of Chinese," 421.

<sup>44</sup> Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 173,

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 167 – 189.

## REFERENCES

- (Review). *China Review International* 9, no. 1 (2003): 222–224. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cri.2003.0054>.
- DeVido, Elise A. “The Influence of Chinese Master Taixu on Buddhism in  
<http://uwest.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly>  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1390330>.
- Jones, Charles B. *Taixu’s ‘On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm’*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. [journals/influence-chinese-master-taixu-on-buddhism/docview/521756264/se-](https://journals/influence-chinese-master-taixu-on-buddhism/docview/521756264/se-)
- Long, Darui. “An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000): 167–189.
- Main, Jessica L., and Rongdao Lai. “Introduction: Reformulating ‘Socially Engaged Buddhism’ as an Analytical Category.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 44, no. 2 (2013): 1–34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44362566>.
- Pittman, Don A. *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu’s Reforms*. University of Hawaii Press, 2001.
- Vietnam. *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10, (2009): 413–458.
- Wank, David L. “Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu’s Reforms
- Zhang, Jia, and Zhe Ji. “Lay Buddhism in Contemporary China: Social Engagements and Political Regulations.” *China Review* 18, no. 4 (2018): 11–40. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26535089>.

# MINDFUL MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR BOROBUDUR: A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Dr. Budi Hermawan, Soegeng Wahyoedi\*

## Abstract:

This study explores the integration of Buddhist values and mindful marketing strategies in managing Borobudur Temple as a sustainable and globally competitive tourism destination. As both a sacred Buddhist site and a UNESCO World Heritage landmark, Borobudur faces challenges in balancing cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and economic benefits. This research introduces a Mindful Marketing Model, which incorporates Buddhist principles - such as *mettā*, *karuṇā*, and the Noble Eightfold Path - into a structured tourism management framework. The model comprises four key pillars: Spiritual Storytelling, Sustainable Tourism Development, Community Empowerment, and Global Recognition, ensuring that Borobudur remains an authentic and sustainable tourism destination. Key strategies include technology-enhanced visitor education, regulated visitor management, and active local community participation, all of which help safeguard Borobudur's cultural and spiritual heritage while fostering economic inclusivity. Findings suggest that a mindfulness-driven marketing approach enhances visitor experiences, strengthens cultural sustainability, and positions Borobudur as a global icon of Buddhist heritage tourism. Future research should explore the potential of Augmented Reality (AR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in creating immersive Buddhist tourism experiences, deepening visitor engagement, and advancing sustainable heritage management practices.

**Keywords:** *Mindful Marketing, Buddhist values, sustainable tourism, mindfulness-based tourism, Buddhist tourism management.*

\*\*\*

---

\* Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana, Indonesia, Padma Dwipa Indonesia Buddhist Research Center.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Borobudur Temple is one of Indonesia's national priority tourism destinations, playing a strategic role in tourism, cultural preservation, and sustainability. As a UNESCO World Heritage site, Borobudur faces significant challenges in managing the growing influx of tourists while preserving its cultural and environmental integrity.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, its status as an internationally recognized religious tourism hub underscores the need for sustainable management. However, efforts to position Borobudur as a premier spiritual destination often lack alignment with long-term cultural preservation goals. Recent reports highlight deficiencies in area redevelopment strategies, emphasizing the need for a more sustainable and culturally sensitive approach.<sup>2</sup> While the influx of tourists generates substantial economic benefits for local communities, it also places immense pressure on Borobudur's physical sustainability and threatens its cultural authenticity. Balancing these impacts remains a critical challenge.<sup>3</sup>

As one of the largest Buddhist monuments in the world, Borobudur embodies an extraordinary cultural and spiritual heritage. Built in the 9th century by the Syailendra Dynasty, the temple serves not only as a site of religious significance for Buddhists but also as an architectural masterpiece of immense cultural value.<sup>4</sup> However, in recent years, the rapid expansion of tourism has posed significant challenges, particularly in balancing economic benefits, spiritual conservation, and environmental protection. These complexities underscore the difficulties of managing a world heritage site that must accommodate diverse and sometimes competing interests.<sup>5</sup>

Borobudur holds immense potential to become a global spiritual icon that promotes peace, harmony, and sustainability. However, its dual role as both a sacred site and a major tourist attraction presents a unique challenge.<sup>6</sup> On one hand, spiritual activities require a solemn and sacred atmosphere, while on the other, tourists often seek entertainment-driven experiences. The absence of a holistic management approach frequently results in a superficial tourism experience, leaving Borobudur's cultural and spiritual essence underrepresented.<sup>7</sup>

A mindful marketing approach offers an innovative strategy to address these challenges by emphasizing authenticity, inclusivity, and a deep connection with cultural and ecological values.<sup>8</sup> In the context of Borobudur, this approach can be realized through strategies such as visitor quotas, educational initiatives that highlight the temple's spiritual significance, and community-

<sup>1</sup> Silaen, et al. (2024), p. 221; Nagaoka (2011), p. 658 - 659; Jati (2023), p. 75 - 76.

<sup>2</sup> Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 7 - 8; Hakim (2023), p. 55 - 56.

<sup>3</sup> Lufiah, Gumantiara, & Ramadhan (2024), p. 47 - 48.

<sup>4</sup> Silaen, et al. (2024), p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 5-7; Jati (2023), p. 74 - 75.

<sup>6</sup> Silaen, et al. (2024): 221; Jati (2023), p. 76.

<sup>7</sup> Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 5-7; Jati (2023), p. 74 - 75.

<sup>8</sup> Hagenbuch & Mgrdichian (2020), p. 2-5; Ndubisi (2014), p. 238 - 240.



centered programs designed to empower residents.<sup>9</sup> Implementing such measures presents a significant opportunity for Borobudur to position itself as a global symbol of Buddhist heritage while promoting sustainable cultural and environmental preservation.

Aligned with global trends in sustainable tourism, mindful marketing seeks to create authentic and meaningful travel experiences. This approach minimizes negative impacts on the environment and local communities while simultaneously preserving cultural heritage, enhancing economic sustainability, and empowering local populations. Through this inclusive framework, Borobudur's tourism can be developed responsibly and sustainably.

Therefore, this study explores the potential of mindful marketing as a strategy to position Borobudur as a global icon of Buddhist heritage. It seeks to integrate sustainable tourism principles with cultural heritage conservation, providing strategic recommendations for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities. By developing a roadmap to establish Borobudur as a global symbol of Buddhist heritage, this study also aims to preserve the temple's spiritual essence. In doing so, Borobudur can reinforce its status as a globally recognized sustainable tourism destination and serve as a model for managing other world heritage sites.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology, integrating case study and phenomenological approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of tourists' and stakeholders' perceptions regarding the management of Borobudur Temple.<sup>10</sup> By examining Borobudur as a cultural, spiritual, and sustainable destination, this approach seeks to capture its multifaceted nature. The case study method provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities in managing Borobudur as a global icon.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, phenomenology is employed to explore the subjective experiences of tourists and local communities, particularly in relation to policies and the spiritual values associated with the temple.<sup>12</sup>

Research informants were purposively selected to encompass diverse perspectives, including domestic and international tourists, local communities impacted by policies, and business operators in the temple's vicinity. This approach ensures that the collected data accurately reflects on-the-ground realities, capturing the perceptions of various groups directly connected to Borobudur Temple.

The primary data collection method consists of semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to explore informants' direct experiences and perceived meanings. These interviews focus on phenomenological dimensions such as

<sup>9</sup> Arintoko, et al. (2020), p. 399-401; Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 80 - 82.

<sup>10</sup> Hagenbuch & Mgrdichian (2020), p. 2-5; Ndubisi (2014), p. 238 - 24

<sup>11</sup> Stake (1995): 85; Gillham (2000), p. 71 - 73.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2022), p. 47 - 49; Moustakas (1994), p. 103 - 105.

spiritual tranquility, cultural appreciation, and the impact of policies on daily life. In addition to interviews, this study incorporates document analysis, examining preservation policies, UNESCO reports, and tourism promotion materials. By integrating qualitative interviews with document analysis, the study provides a deeper understanding of both personal experiences and the broader framework of tourism management.

Data analysis was conducted systematically using a thematic approach. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and organized according to 18 pre-designed key questions. The analysis aimed to identify central themes, including cultural preservation, spiritual experiences, policy impacts, and inclusivity. Key findings highlight the potential of mindful marketing, the integration of local communities, and the strong link between sustainability and cultural preservation. The results were validated through consultations with subject matter experts to ensure accuracy, relevance, and credibility.

The approach adopted in this study offers deep insights into the sustainable management of Borobudur Temple. By examining tourists' subjective experiences alongside the temple's strategic significance at a global level, this research provides new perspectives on tourism policy development that prioritizes not only economic considerations but also the preservation of cultural and spiritual values. By integrating local and global insights, the management of Borobudur Temple can serve as a model for the sustainable governance of other world heritage sites.

### III. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

The conservation of Borobudur Temple's cultural and historical heritage is essential to maintaining its status as a world heritage site.<sup>13</sup> Recognized as one of the world's great architectural and cultural marvels, Borobudur serves not only as a symbol of Indonesia's heritage but also as a testament to the intellectual achievements of past civilizations. These values are reflected in its intricate reliefs and architectural grandeur. Preservation efforts focus on protecting the temple's physical structure from the pressures of tourism, environmental changes, and natural aging. Additionally, conservation strategies emphasize maintaining Borobudur's connection to local traditions, ensuring its role as a center for cultural learning and appreciation.

The Noble Eightfold Path, a fundamental Buddhist teaching, offers a comprehensive framework for the sustainable management of Borobudur Temple. As stated in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 45.8): "And what, monks, is the Noble Eightfold Path? It is as follows: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration."<sup>14</sup> This framework provides guiding principles for various aspects of tourism management. For instance, Right View can shape educational

---

<sup>13</sup> Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 79 - 82; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 71 - 72; Susilo & Suroso, (2014), p. 117 - 118.

<sup>14</sup> Bodhi (2000), p. 1546.

programs that emphasize the temple's spiritual and cultural significance by fostering awareness of interconnectedness and ethical responsibility. Visitor education initiatives may integrate Buddhist teachings on the impermanence of material structures, encouraging tourists to appreciate Borobudur not merely as a historical monument but as a living representation of spiritual values. Similarly, Right Action can inspire local community participation in sustainable preservation efforts. Organizing collaborative workshops on traditional crafts and cultural performances not only supports local livelihoods but also safeguards Borobudur's intangible heritage. By aligning these principles with tourism management, Borobudur can serve as a model of sustainable cultural preservation that embodies core Buddhist values. This approach ensures the temple's physical and cultural integrity while promoting harmony among stakeholders by balancing economic, environmental, and spiritual objectives.<sup>15</sup>

The Buddha's teachings on peace, wisdom, and compassion are universal, and Borobudur embodies these values through its harmonious mandala design. Representing *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion), Borobudur transcends Buddhism, offering a vision of unity, cultural preservation, and spiritual wisdom that resonates globally. As stated in the *mettā Sutta* (Sn 1.8): "May all beings be happy," this sentiment reinforces Borobudur's role as a place of loving-kindness and goodwill.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, *karuṇā* is beautifully expressed in the Dhammapada (Dhp 130): "Putting oneself in the place of another, one should neither harm nor cause others to harm."<sup>17</sup> This principle underscores the ethical duty to protect Borobudur, ensuring its preservation benefits both present and future generations.

These values manifest not only philosophically but also in tangible efforts to sustain Borobudur as a living heritage. Beyond its historical and spiritual significance, the temple serves as a hub for interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange, and scholarly enrichment. By fostering *mettā* and *karuṇā*, Borobudur bridges tradition and modernity, advocating for sustainable tourism that honors its sacredness while allowing people from all backgrounds to experience its spiritual and historical richness. Its preservation extends beyond maintaining its physical structure - it is about safeguarding the values it represents: compassion, harmony, and mindfulness.<sup>18</sup>

Education plays a crucial role in deepening the understanding and application of these values. Well-structured educational initiatives enable both visitors and local communities to appreciate Borobudur's historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. Tour guides, digital technologies, and information centers serve as essential tools in interpreting the temple's intricate reliefs, cosmological design, and teachings embedded in stone. Through education,

<sup>15</sup> Rahula (1974): 92; Harvey (2013), p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Bodhi (2017), p. 179 - 180.

<sup>17</sup> Buddhārakkhita (2007), p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> Harvey (2000), p. 103 - 104, 278; Keown (1992), p. 160 - 161.

*mettā* and *karuṇā* are reinforced, inspiring visitors to view Borobudur not merely as an ancient monument but as a living testament to wisdom and compassion.

Furthermore, cultural preservation requires the active participation of local communities. Sustainable conservation efforts should not isolate Borobudur from the people who have lived around it for generations. Instead, initiatives should engage local artisans, historians, and cultural practitioners in preserving the traditions, crafts, and rituals intertwined with Borobudur's history. This approach ensures that the temple's heritage is not only physically safeguarded but also remains meaningful and relevant for future generations. As the Buddha stated in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 12.1): "When this exists, that comes to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases"<sup>19</sup> - this fundamental principle of dependent origination highlights the deep interconnection between Borobudur and its surrounding community. The temple does not stand in isolation; its cultural and spiritual essence is inseparable from the lives of those who have nurtured it for generations. By integrating traditional knowledge with modern conservation strategies, Borobudur can continue to serve as a beacon of spiritual and cultural enlightenment while exemplifying the Buddhist principles of interconnectedness and shared responsibility.

The physical preservation of Borobudur Temple is a fundamental step in maintaining the integrity of its architecture and reliefs as a world cultural heritage site. As a structure over a thousand years old, Borobudur faces significant challenges, including weather-induced erosion, physical pressure from millions of tourists, and environmental impacts such as air pollution and climate change. Tackling these complex challenges necessitates a comprehensive multidisciplinary strategy that incorporates the expertise of archaeologists, conservationists, and contemporary technological advancements. One concrete effort includes using specialized protective coatings to shield the reliefs from acid rain. Additionally, restricting visitor access to sensitive areas of the temple has been implemented to reduce structural stress.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the Buddha's words in *Dhammapada* (Dhp 276) emphasize: "You yourselves must strive; the Buddhas only show the way"<sup>21</sup>, highlighting that the responsibility of conservation does not lie solely with experts but requires collective effort from all stakeholders - local communities, conservationists, and policymakers alike.<sup>22</sup>

Visitor management is an integral component of preserving Borobudur Temple's physical structure. Policies such as daily visitor limits, designated tourist pathways, and regulated visiting hours aim to mitigate physical impacts without compromising the quality of the tourist experience. Visitor education is a key element of these policies, encouraging tourists to understand the importance of preserving Borobudur as a shared cultural heritage. With the

<sup>19</sup> Bodhi (2000), p. 595.

<sup>20</sup> Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 3; Diarta (2017), p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> Buddhārakkhita (2007), p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> Diarta (2017), p. 102 - 103; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 71 - 72.

support of modern technology, appropriate policies, and collective awareness, Borobudur's preservation can be sustained, ensuring its integrity for future generations.

Education about Borobudur Temple's historical and cultural significance also plays a central role in its preservation. Beyond being a tourist destination, Borobudur serves as a symbol of past civilizations' greatness, offering lessons in history, art, and philosophy. The temple's reliefs depict social life, Buddhist stories, and spiritual journeys that connect the past with the present. Through structured educational programs, visitors can gain a deeper appreciation of Borobudur's importance, promoting more responsible tourism behavior.

Various educational methods have been employed to convey the values of Borobudur Temple. These include trained tour guides, interactive information boards, and digital applications that allow visitors to explore the reliefs and history of Borobudur virtually. Educational programs also incorporate hands-on activities, such as traditional art workshops or storytelling sessions related to Borobudur. Additionally, educational materials emphasize the importance of cultural preservation, creating a meaningful experience for visitors and reinforcing the commitment to safeguarding the temple as a world heritage site.<sup>23</sup>

The relevance of local traditions is a key element in Borobudur Temple's preservation. Traditions such as religious ceremonies, performing arts, and handicrafts strengthen the connection between the temple as a cultural site and the lives of the surrounding community. For instance, the celebration of Vesak Day at Borobudur not only serves as a spiritual moment for Buddhists but also involves the local community on a large scale. This involvement fosters an emotional bond with the temple, making Borobudur a dynamic center of local culture.

Preserving the relevance of local traditions requires collaboration among communities, government, and tourism stakeholders. Programs such as traditional arts training, cultural festivals, and local craft exhibitions help ensure these traditions remain vibrant. Introducing local traditions to tourists through guided tours, cultural performances, or hands-on experiences, such as learning to create Borobudur-specific crafts, is also a strategic step. By preserving traditions, Borobudur becomes not only a symbol of the past but also a living representation of cultural identity. These efforts enrich visitors' experiences while strengthening the commitment to sustainable cultural preservation.

#### **IV. SPIRITUALITY AND MINDFULNESS**

Spirituality and mindfulness are core aspects that elevate Borobudur Temple from being merely a cultural tourism destination to a profound spiritual space.<sup>24</sup> The majestic architecture of Borobudur, combined with

---

<sup>23</sup> Frauman & Norman (2004), p. 381 - 384; Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa (2017), p. 2 - 3; Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff (2017), p. 3 - 5.

<sup>24</sup> Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa: p. 2 - 3; Choe & O'Regan (2020), p. 2, 3, 6.



its rich symbolism, creates an atmosphere conducive to inner reflection and contemplation. The temple's reliefs depict a spiritual journey toward enlightenment, offering a unique experience for visitors seeking peace and spiritual connection. The tranquility and harmony of Borobudur, in its natural surroundings, further establish its position as an ideal location for mindfulness practices, meditation, and introspection.

Borobudur symbolizes the spiritual journey toward Nirvana, the ultimate liberation from the cycle of *samsāra* (rebirth), as depicted in Buddhist teachings. The temple's architectural design, resembling a mandala, reflects this journey. The base represents the realm of desires (*kāmadhātu*), the middle levels depict the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*), and the upper stupa symbolizes the formless realm (*arūpadhātu*)<sup>25</sup>. This structure serves as a metaphor for the progressive path toward enlightenment, where one transcends attachment, materiality, and conceptuality to reach ultimate liberation. As stated in the Dhammapada (Dh. 203), Nirvana (*nibbāna*) is the highest happiness<sup>26</sup>, beyond all worldly suffering, marking the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*) and the attainment of complete spiritual peace.

The reliefs of the Wheel of Life (*bhavacakra*), also referenced in the Lalitavistara Sutra, illustrate the cyclic nature of existence, reinforcing the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).<sup>27</sup> This cycle, as explained in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 12.1, perpetuates suffering through craving and ignorance, emphasizing the necessity of wisdom and ethical living to break free from this cycle.<sup>28</sup> The teachings embedded within Borobudur's reliefs serve as visual scriptures, guiding visitors to reflect on the path of ethical conduct (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) as essential steps toward achieving Nirvana. Integrating these narratives into educational and spiritual tourism programs at Borobudur can provide visitors with deeper insights into Buddhist philosophy while enhancing their spiritual experience. This approach reinforces Borobudur's position as a global icon of Buddhist heritage and a profound space for spiritual transformation.<sup>29</sup>

Mindfulness, known as *sati* in Buddhism, is fundamental to spiritual practice, emphasizing complete awareness and present-moment focus. In *Dīgha Nikāya* 22, the Buddha expounds on the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, stating that mindfulness is the direct path to the cessation of suffering<sup>30</sup>. This practice requires practitioners to cultivate awareness in the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects. This principle is deeply embedded in Borobudur's design, where its intricate reliefs depict the stages of enlightenment as a journey of mindfulness and self-awareness. These reliefs, such as those illustrating the

<sup>25</sup> Krom (1926), p. 7 - 8; Khosla (1991), p. 3 - 5.

<sup>26</sup> Buddhārakkhita (2007), p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> Snodgrass (1992), p. 82; Khosla (1991), p. 30.

<sup>28</sup> Bodhi (2000), p. 533.

<sup>29</sup> Snodgrass (1992), p. 217 - 218; Bechert & Gombrich (1984), p. 231 - 233.

<sup>30</sup> Walshe (2012), p. 335.



Jataka tales or the law of cause and effect, serve as visual guides for visitors to reflect on their life paths, fostering a sense of spiritual connection and contemplation.

Visitors engaging in meditation or silent reflection at Borobudur embody this principle, experiencing the temple not merely as a cultural landmark but as a space to cultivate inner peace and mindfulness. By aligning Borobudur's spiritual offerings with the concept of *sati*, its management can create profound and authentic experiences that resonate deeply with Buddhist values and appeal to global audiences seeking spiritual enrichment.<sup>31</sup> In doing so, Borobudur continues to function not only as a historical monument but also as a living sanctuary of wisdom, guiding seekers on their path to enlightenment through a tangible, immersive experience of the Buddha's teachings.

Borobudur's uniqueness as a center of spirituality lies in its inclusivity, offering visitors from diverse backgrounds a space for reflection and a deeper connection to life's meaning. The global rise of mindfulness-based tourism further strengthens Borobudur's relevance in modern travel. This potential can be maximized through strategic approaches that not only enhance its spiritual and mindfulness aspects but also support the temple's preservation as a world cultural heritage site. These efforts will ensure Borobudur remains internationally respected and positively contributes to the sustainability of the site.

The spiritual experience at Borobudur Temple offers a unique dimension that distinguishes it from other destinations. Many visitors report feeling a deep sense of inner peace and reflection during their visit. Moments like witnessing the sunrise from the temple's summit or strolling among its meaningful reliefs leave a lasting impression. Borobudur's sacred ambiance encourages visitors to contemplate their life journeys, drawing inspiration from the temple's profound spiritual symbolism. For Buddhists, Borobudur is a sacred site of worship, while for others, it offers a universally reflective experience.

The harmony between Borobudur and its natural surroundings, the tranquility of the temple grounds, and its rich historical narrative collectively deepen visitors' spiritual experiences. Many guests see their visit as an opportunity to connect with something greater, whether through religious experiences or the pursuit of personal peace. To enhance these experiences, the temple's management can offer programs like guided meditation tours, mindfulness sessions, or reflective workshops. These initiatives not only enrich visitors' experiences but also reinforce Borobudur's standing as a revered spiritual site.

Meditation and reflection are central elements that reinforce Borobudur Temple's standing as a spiritual tourism destination. The temple's mandala-like design symbolizes the path toward enlightenment, offering an ideal space for visitors to meditate and reflect. The temple's serene atmosphere, especially at

---

<sup>31</sup> Gethin (1998), p. 322 - 323; Ñāṇaponika (2014), p. 16-17; Rinpoche (2013), p. 1 - 4.

sunrise, creates a perfect environment for introspection and mindfulness.<sup>32</sup> These experiences foster a deep connection among individuals from diverse backgrounds, including both Buddhist practitioners and non-Buddhists, establishing Borobudur as an exemplary site for achieving inner peace and contemplative reflection.

Borobudur has immense potential as a center for meditation and reflection, which can be fully realized through innovative programs. Initiatives like guided meditation workshops, yoga sessions, and mindfulness-based reflective tours could be integrated into the temple's management strategy. Introducing mindfulness through digital media or trained tour guides will help visitors appreciate the temple's symbolism as a tool for inner reflection. With its sacred atmosphere and unique architectural design, Borobudur serves not only as an archaeological landmark but also as a profound space for spiritual transformation.

Value-based spiritual tourism at Borobudur Temple highlights its spiritual significance, offering visitors a deeply meaningful experience. The temple's architectural beauty symbolizes the journey toward enlightenment, and its sacred atmosphere elevates Borobudur beyond a mere tourist destination. Visitors embark on a profound inner journey, appreciating not only the temple's aesthetics but also grasping the symbolic meanings behind its reliefs and structures. This experience is both educational and transformative for all who visit.<sup>33</sup>

A value-based spiritual tourism approach can be developed through programs that integrate spirituality, education, and cultural preservation. Visitors can engage in tours that explore the temple's philosophy or participate in guided meditation sessions at strategic spots, such as the summit during sunrise. Programs like art workshops or discussions on Buddhist values further enrich visitor engagement. By promoting Borobudur as a value-based spiritual tourism destination, we not only attract high-quality tourists seeking meaningful experiences but also foster greater respect for Borobudur as a world cultural heritage site.

## V. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable tourism at Borobudur Temple aims to balance the preservation of the site as a world cultural heritage with the growth of tourism as an economic driver. As one of Indonesia's leading tourist destinations, Borobudur faces significant challenges in maintaining its structural integrity and cultural significance amid rising tourist visitation. Sustainability principles are applied through strategic policies, such as limiting visitor numbers, developing eco-friendly infrastructure, and engaging local communities in culture-based

---

<sup>32</sup> Shikalgar, Menon, & Mahajan (2024), p. 120 - 121; Lin & Jung (2023), p. 2110 - 2112; Santos, et al. (2021), p. 350 - 352.

<sup>33</sup> Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff (2017), p. 6 - 7; Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa (2017), p. 2 - 3; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 403 - 405.

economic activities. This approach ensures that tourism not only provides economic benefits but also contributes to the long-term preservation of the temple for future generations.<sup>34</sup>

The Buddhist concept of Dependent Origination highlights the interconnectedness of all phenomena, providing a profound philosophical foundation for sustainable tourism. This principle emphasizes the interconnectedness of cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and community welfare in the management of Borobudur. The protection of Borobudur's cultural integrity not only enhances its appeal to tourists but also generates economic benefits for local communities. These economic benefits can, in turn, be reinvested into environmental conservation efforts, creating a self-sustaining cycle of sustainability. This integrated approach ensures that tourism development is not isolated but thrives in harmony with the broader cultural and ecological systems. By incorporating *paṭicca-samuppāda* into sustainable tourism strategies, Borobudur's management can achieve a balanced approach that aligns with Buddhist teachings while addressing the complex challenges of heritage preservation and community empowerment.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to environmental protection, sustainable tourism at Borobudur places a strong emphasis on visitor education and awareness. These initiatives are carefully designed to enhance visitors' understanding of the temple's historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. Interactive educational programs, including digital applications, guided tours, and cultural exhibitions, play a crucial role in this approach. Through education, visitors not only have meaningful experiences but are also encouraged to adopt more responsible behaviors. This mindset, both directly and indirectly, contributes to the preservation of the temple, ensuring Borobudur's continued sustainability as a world cultural heritage site.

Managing visitor numbers at Borobudur Temple is a strategic measure to support sustainable tourism.<sup>36</sup> As a popular destination attracting millions of visitors each year, the temple faces significant physical pressures that could threaten its structural integrity and reduce the quality of the visitor experience. To address these issues, a daily visitor cap has been implemented. This policy seeks to minimize the negative impacts on the temple while providing a more tranquil and organized experience for visitors. As a result, visitors are able to enjoy a deeper and more meaningful encounter with the site.

In addition to visitor caps, tourist management at Borobudur also involves the creation of designated pathways and the implementation of scheduled visiting times to prevent overcrowding. Technologies like online ticket booking and real-time visitor monitoring systems have significantly improved management efficiency. Visitor education is equally vital in supporting these policies. Digital media, guided tours, and onsite informational resources help raise awareness about the importance of safeguarding the temple.

---

<sup>34</sup> Gilmore, Carson, & Ascensão (2007), p. 253 - 255; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 403 - 405.

<sup>35</sup> Rahula (1974), p. 45 - 48; Harvey (2000), p. 37 - 40.

<sup>36</sup> Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 79 - 81; Hakim (54 - 56), p. 54 - 56.

With effective management, Borobudur can thrive as a sustainable tourism destination, preserving its cultural values while providing visitors with meaningful experiences.

The development of eco-friendly infrastructure around Borobudur Temple is a crucial component of sustainable tourism. This infrastructure aims to minimize negative environmental impacts while maintaining visitor comfort. Examples include the use of sustainable construction materials, optimized water conservation systems, and renewable energy alternatives like photovoltaic panels to meet the electricity needs of the tourism sector. These efforts not only protect the local ecosystem but also promote a harmonious balance between tourism, culture, and the environment.<sup>37</sup>

Eco-friendly infrastructure at Borobudur also includes sustainable transportation options, such as electric buses and bicycles, to reduce air pollution. Integrated waste management systems have been put in place to maintain the cleanliness of the tourist area while simultaneously reducing environmental pollution. Visitor education continues to play a key role in these efforts, with informational boards and digital media used to raise awareness about the importance of environmental conservation. With well-planned infrastructure, Borobudur can set a global example of sustainable tourism that preserves cultural heritage while promoting ecological balance.

Visitor education on sustainability plays a crucial role in preserving Borobudur Temple as a world cultural heritage site. Various methods are used to deliver this education, including tour guides, informational boards, and interactive digital applications. Visitors are strongly encouraged to understand the impact of their actions on the ecological system, cultural heritage, and the architectural integrity of the temple.<sup>38</sup> This education not only provides information but also raises awareness, motivating visitors to follow designated pathways and keep the site clean. In doing so, visitors actively contribute to the preservation of the temple.

Comprehensive sustainability education programs can greatly enhance the visitor experience at Borobudur Temple. For instance, educational tours focused on environmental management, such as waste management systems and the use of renewable energy, allow visitors to gain a deeper appreciation for conservation efforts. Workshops or seminars involving visitors, local communities, and conservation experts further broaden understanding of the importance of collaboration in preserving Borobudur. Through this approach, visitors not only have meaningful experiences but also contribute actively to its preservation. These initiatives support Borobudur's long-term sustainability as a respected global tourism destination.

---

<sup>37</sup> Daneshwar & Revaty (2024), p. 2795 - 2798; Vashishth, Mishra, & Malviya (2023), p. 1 - 2.

<sup>38</sup> Guluzade (2023), p. 3 - 4; Wang, et al. (2021), p. 2 - 3; Fischer, et al. (2017), p. 546 - 547.

## VI. INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Inclusivity and accessibility at Borobudur Temple are essential to ensuring that people from all walks of life can experience this site as a world cultural heritage.<sup>39</sup> Borobudur is designed as an open space for both domestic and international visitors, regardless of their cultural, religious, or physical backgrounds. Inclusive policies include providing accessible facilities, such as those designed for individuals with disabilities, enabling visitors with special needs to fully appreciate the temple's beauty and spiritual significance. This approach not only upholds Borobudur's universal values but also reinforces its role as a symbol of unity in diversity.

The Buddhist principles of *karuṇā* and *mettā* provide a strong foundation for promoting inclusivity and addressing the societal impacts of tourism management at Borobudur. These principles are reflected in policies that actively engage local communities in the economic and social activities surrounding the temple. For example, initiatives aimed at empowering artisans, promoting traditional crafts, and supporting community-based tourism embody the essence of *karuṇā* by reducing economic disparities and improving the well-being of local residents. At the same time, *mettā* is realized through the creation of an inclusive tourism environment that welcomes individuals from all backgrounds and emphasizes respect for cultural diversity. By integrating *karuṇā* and *mettā*, Borobudur's management goes beyond physical conservation, fostering a deeper connection with the local community and exemplifying the universal values of Buddhism.

The Buddhist principles of *karuṇā* and *mettā* form a strong foundation for promoting inclusivity and addressing the societal impacts of tourism management at Borobudur. These principles are reflected in policies that actively involve local communities in the economic and social activities surrounding the temple. For instance, initiatives aimed at empowering artisans, promoting traditional crafts, and supporting community-based tourism embody the essence of *karuṇā* by reducing economic disparities and enhancing the well-being of local residents. Simultaneously, *mettā* is manifested through the creation of an inclusive tourism environment that welcomes people from all backgrounds and emphasizes respect for cultural diversity. By integrating *karuṇā* and *mettā*, Borobudur's management goes beyond mere physical conservation, fostering a deeper connection with the local community and exemplifying the universal values of Buddhism.<sup>40</sup>

Commitment to accessibility for all is realized through thoughtful infrastructure design and inclusive tourism programs. Facilities, such as dedicated pathways for individuals with disabilities and easily accessible observation areas, ensure comfort for all visitors, including families, the elderly, and individuals with special needs. By creating an inclusive space that offers

<sup>39</sup> Pramadanu & Windasari (2023), p. 4881 - 4888; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 71-77; Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 79 - 83.

<sup>40</sup> Pramadanu & Windasari (2023), p. 4881 - 4888; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 72 - 76.



non-discriminatory tourism experiences, Borobudur strengthens its position as an inclusive and welcoming destination for all segments of society.

Beyond physical infrastructure, accessibility at Borobudur includes non-physical aspects such as multilingual information, diverse tour guides, and interactive digital technologies. Specialized programs, like community-based educational tours and activities involving local residents, are designed to be relevant to various demographic groups. This approach strengthens Borobudur's image as a unifying symbol that prioritizes inclusivity. Moreover, these policies position Borobudur as a model for sustainable and inclusive tourism destination management.<sup>41</sup>

Inclusivity policies promote access for all societal segments, regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Initiatives, such as providing disability-friendly facilities and adjusting ticket prices for different community groups, are strategic steps. Visitor pathways are also managed to meet the needs of all visitors. Through this approach, Borobudur transcends its status as merely a tourism site, emerging instead as an emblem of diversity and inclusivity.

Inclusivity at Borobudur also involves providing equitable access to information and services for all visitors. Multilingual tour guides, interactive digital information, and educational programs are tailored to serve diverse age groups and backgrounds. Collaboration with local communities is a key component of these policies, ensuring that tourism activities involve and empower local residents while prioritizing temple conservation. These initiatives establish Borobudur as a globally relevant destination, reflecting values of openness and equality.

However, challenges related to the perception of exclusivity remain an issue in Borobudur's management. This perception arises when visitors feel that access and experiences at the site are limited to certain groups. Cultural, religious, and economic factors often influence these views. For example, branding Borobudur as a religious destination may create the impression that the temple is only relevant to Buddhists. Additionally, ticket prices perceived as high by some communities reinforce the notion that Borobudur is an exclusive destination, inaccessible to all.<sup>42</sup>

Addressing the challenges of exclusivity perception requires management strategies that promote Borobudur as an inclusive destination. Educational initiatives emphasizing the temple's cultural values and universal spirituality can help dispel these perceptions. Programs such as educational tours for diverse community groups and adjusted ticket pricing for local tourists can enhance accessibility. Multilingual promotions targeting international audiences can also strengthen Borobudur's image as a destination open to everyone. With this holistic approach, the challenges of exclusivity perception can be transformed into opportunities to broaden Borobudur's appeal. This ensures that Borobudur's

<sup>41</sup> Susilo & Suroso (2014), p. 118 - 122; Soesanta, Putra, & Hutagalung (2023), p. 113 - 115.

<sup>42</sup> Pramadanu & Windasari (2033), p. 4881 - 4888; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 72 - 76.



cultural and spiritual values are accessible to all without discrimination, while supporting its preservation as a world heritage site.

## VII. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The social and economic impacts of tourism at Borobudur Temple are critical dimensions in managing this site as a world cultural heritage. Borobudur attracts numerous tourists, fostering economic growth both locally and nationally.<sup>43</sup> The activities associated with tourism create a variety of employment opportunities for the local population, encompassing both formal sectors, such as tour guides and lodging establishments, and informal sectors, including handicraft production and the culinary arts. Additionally, tourism revenue is reinvested in preserving the temple and developing public infrastructure, delivering broad economic benefits while reinforcing the sustainability of site management.

By embedding the principles of *karuṇā* and *mettā*, the economic benefits generated by Borobudur tourism can be distributed more equitably, ensuring that vulnerable communities are not excluded from opportunities. Policies such as promoting local artisans and cultural businesses reflect *karuṇā* by alleviating economic inequalities. Meanwhile, *mettā* is exemplified through initiatives that foster cooperation between stakeholders, creating a shared sense of purpose in preserving Borobudur's cultural and spiritual legacy. These principles strengthen community bonds and promote collective efforts toward achieving sustainable tourism development.<sup>44</sup>

The social impacts of tourism at Borobudur require careful management to balance economic and socio-cultural interests. Tourism plays a significant role in reinforcing regional cultural identity by facilitating the dissemination and appreciation of artistic expressions and traditional practices.<sup>45</sup> However, it also poses potential social pressures, such as shifts in community lifestyles and economic disparities among businesses. Consequently, an integrative and comprehensive management framework is essential to optimize social and economic benefits while mitigating adverse effects. The proactive engagement of local communities in both the decision-making processes and the implementation of tourism policies is fundamental to realizing these objectives.

The well-being of local communities around Borobudur Temple is a priority in managing this destination. Tourism brings immediate economic advantages through the generation of employment opportunities within both the formal and informal economic sectors. Local vendors, artisans, and cultural service providers enjoy more stable incomes as tourist numbers increase. Active community participation not only strengthens the local economy but also

---

<sup>43</sup> Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 82 - 83; Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 7 - 8; Diarta (2017), p. 104.

<sup>44</sup> Harvey (2000), p. 103 - 104; Keown (1992), p. 180 - 181.

<sup>45</sup> Arintoko, et al. (2020), p. 399 - 400; Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 79 - 81.

fosters a sense of ownership toward the temple, encouraging involvement in preservation and promotion efforts. Thus, tourism becomes both an economic driver and a tool for deepening social connections to cultural heritage.<sup>46</sup>

The well-being of communities around Borobudur is measured not only in economic terms but also in the overall improvement of their quality of life. Inclusive management must ensure that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably to prevent social inequality. Investments in educational initiatives, vocational training, and the enhancement of skill sets within local communities represent strategic interventions aimed at augmenting their capabilities in the tourism industry. This approach enables Borobudur tourism to contribute to social well-being while empowering local communities and strengthening their cultural identity amidst modernization.

The well-being of communities around Borobudur is measured not only in economic terms but also in the overall improvement of their quality of life. Inclusive management must ensure that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably to prevent social inequality. Investments in educational initiatives, vocational training, and the enhancement of skill sets within local communities represent strategic interventions aimed at augmenting their capabilities in the tourism industry. This approach allows Borobudur tourism to contribute to social well-being while empowering local communities and strengthening their cultural identity amidst modernization.<sup>47</sup>

These collaborations also foster innovation in developing tourism products and services that cater to modern tourists while respecting local cultural values. Governments and temple administration have the capacity to deliver training and mentorship to regional enterprises with the goal of elevating the quality of their goods and services. The use of digital platforms enables local enterprises to broaden their access to international markets, thereby enhancing their competitive edge on a global scale. Close collaboration between temple management and local businesses ensures that Borobudur tourism develops inclusively and sustainably, delivering long-term benefits for surrounding communities.

Tourism policies around Borobudur Temple significantly impact the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of local communities. Policies such as visitor caps, area restructuring, and access management directly influence the lives of local residents. For instance, limiting tourist numbers aims to preserve the temple's physical structure but may affect the income of communities dependent on tourism. Vendors and tour operators are among the groups most affected. Therefore, tourism policies must be designed inclusively to balance the preservation of the temple with the well-being of the community.

Inclusively designed policies should also consider the social impacts on the structure of local community life. Changes in policy often require communities

---

<sup>46</sup> Soesanta, Putra, & Hutagalung (2023), p. 112; Susilo & Suroso (2014), p. 117.

<sup>47</sup> Guluzade (2023), p. 1 - 2; Sofianto (2018), p. 27 - 30.

to adjust to new regulations, which may result in opposition or difficulties in implementation. On the other hand, policies that actively engage communities in the decision-making process can significantly enhance their sense of ownership regarding conservation initiatives. Open dialogue between temple management, government, and local communities is key to designing fair and effective policies. With a harmonious approach, Borobudur tourism can serve as a model of sustainability that integrates cultural heritage preservation with community well-being.

## VIII. GLOBAL PROMOTION AND BOROBUDUR'S POSITIONING

The global promotion and positioning of Borobudur Temple as a world cultural heritage site are critical components of its management. As a cultural and spiritual icon of Indonesia, Borobudur holds immense potential to attract international tourists while strengthening Indonesia's image on the global stage. Effective promotion emphasizes not only the temple's architectural beauty and historical significance but also its unique spirituality and sustainability. By leveraging digital platforms, multilingual campaigns, and collaborations with international organizations such as UNESCO, Borobudur can be positioned as a relevant and competitive world-class destination in the face of global competition.<sup>48</sup>

The Buddha is universally recognized as a teacher whose wisdom transcends religious boundaries, advocating values of peace, compassion, and interconnectedness. Borobudur, as a monumental embodiment of Buddhist philosophy, reflects these teachings through its architectural design and symbolic reliefs. The temple's mandala structure represents harmony and balance, symbolizing the Buddha's vision of a peaceful and unified existence. By promoting Borobudur as an icon of universal values, its relevance extends beyond Buddhists to a global audience seeking inspiration on living harmoniously in a diverse and interconnected world. This positioning resonates with the Buddha's principles of *mettā* and *karuṇā*, making Borobudur a powerful symbol of unity, cultural preservation, and spiritual wisdom.<sup>49</sup>

Borobudur reflects the path to Nirvana, as represented in its mandala-like design and intricate symbolic reliefs. These elements inspire ethical reflection, meditation, and wisdom, guiding visitors on a spiritual journey rooted in Buddhist teachings. By integrating these narratives into its promotional strategies, Borobudur reinforces its identity as a global Buddhist and spiritual icon, offering profound insights into the philosophy of enlightenment.<sup>50</sup>

## IX. MINDFUL MARKETING MODEL FOR BOROBUDUR TEMPLE

Borobudur's standing in global tourism hinges on its ability to offer

<sup>48</sup> Ardhanariswari & Pratiwi (2021), p. 157-158; Soesanta, Putra, & Hutagalung (2023), p. 111-113.

<sup>49</sup> Harvey (2013), p. 278; Hakim (2023), p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> Snodgrass (1992), p. 274-278; Bechert & Gombrich (1984), p. 15-18.

authentic and meaningful visitor experiences.<sup>51</sup> A value-driven approach is central to Borobudur’s promotional strategy, highlighting the temple’s role as a center for spirituality, cultural education, and sustainable tourism. This approach is realized through the Mindful Marketing Model (Figure 1), which integrates four key pillars: Spiritual Storytelling, Sustainable Tourism Development, Community Empowerment, and Global Recognition.<sup>52</sup>

Spiritual Storytelling emphasizes Borobudur’s Buddhist heritage and cultural significance, using narratives that resonate with global audiences seeking spiritual enrichment. Sustainable Tourism Development ensures that Borobudur’s tourism practices align with long-term environmental and cultural conservation efforts. Community Empowerment strengthens the involvement of local communities in tourism-related economic activities while preserving their cultural traditions. Global Recognition is the ultimate outcome of these combined efforts, positioning Borobudur as a world-renowned sustainable and spiritual tourism destination.

As depicted in Figure 1, the Mindful Marketing Approach serves as the foundation for these strategies, ensuring that Borobudur’s global promotion aligns with the values of authenticity, sustainability, and cultural integrity.



Figure 1. Mindful Marketing Model for Borobudur Temple

The Mindful Marketing Model illustrates how Borobudur’s global branding is shaped by a structured approach to sustainable tourism. The process begins with the temple’s identity as a Global Icon of Buddhist Heritage, which then informs a mindful marketing strategy emphasizing authenticity and ethical engagement with stakeholders. This strategy is implemented through three interconnected dimensions - Spiritual Storytelling, Sustainable Tourism Development, and Community Empowerment. These elements ultimately contribute to Borobudur’s Global Recognition as a leading destination for mindful and sustainable tourism.

Participation in international tourism exhibitions is a strategic step to broaden Borobudur’s appeal. Producing high-quality multimedia content further enhances its global promotion. Additionally, partnerships with international travel agencies expand Borobudur’s marketing reach. These efforts strengthen Borobudur’s position as a cultural heritage symbol that is not only visually captivating but also reflects a strong commitment to preservation

<sup>51</sup> Soesanta, Putra, & Hutagalung (2023), p. 113; Arintoko et al. (2020), p. 399.

<sup>52</sup> Hakim (2023), p. 54-55; Susilo & Suroso (2014), p. 117-119.

and sustainability.

A culture-based promotional strategy is a vital element in enhancing Borobudur's appeal as a tourist destination. The richness of its history, arts, and local traditions serves as the foundation for this promotion. Borobudur is renowned not only for its magnificent architecture but also as a cultural emblem that embodies the noble values of past civilizations. Promotional campaigns can highlight the stories behind the temple's reliefs, its spiritual philosophy, and its connection to local traditions. Content such as documentary videos, art exhibitions, and cultural workshops involving local communities enriches the promotional experience, offering a unique allure to potential tourists.

Culture-based promotion also integrates local cultural elements into various tourist activities at Borobudur.<sup>53</sup> Activities such as traditional art performances, local culinary showcases, and craft exhibitions in the temple area enhance the visitor experience. Collaborations with local artists, cultural communities, and educational institutions strengthen the cultural dimension of the promotion while creating sustainable creative programs. Digital media promotion and partnerships with international tourism platforms extend Borobudur's reach to global markets. By emphasizing cultural uniqueness, Borobudur not only attracts tourists but also serves as a guardian of global cultural values.

Mindfulness-based tourism adds value to the visitor experience at Borobudur Temple. As a spiritual destination, Borobudur offers a space for reflection, meditation, and deep spiritual connection.<sup>54</sup> The temple's symbolism of the journey toward enlightenment provides an ideal environment for visitors to contemplate the meaning of life and find inner peace. Programs such as guided sunrise meditation at the temple's summit, yoga sessions, and spiritual tours exploring Buddhist philosophy offer unique and meaningful experiences for tourists. This approach further enhances Borobudur's appeal as a spiritual tourism destination.

The mindfulness approach at Borobudur aligns with global trends emphasizing travel that fosters mental and emotional well-being. Technologies such as meditation guide apps or interactive information on the temple's reliefs can be utilized to support this experience. Integrating mindfulness elements positions Borobudur not only as a cultural destination but also as a center for spiritual reflection that resonates with diverse audiences, further supporting the temple's preservation as a globally respected site.

Global collaboration for sustainability is a vital part of Borobudur Temple's management strategy. As a global cultural icon, Borobudur partners with international organizations such as UNESCO, conservation institutions, and global academic communities. These collaborations focus on sharing knowledge about modern conservation techniques, implementing eco-

---

<sup>53</sup> Arintoko et al. (2020), p. 117-119; Hermawan et al. (2019), p. 73-74.

<sup>54</sup> Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff (2017), p. 1-3; Choe & O'Regan (2020), p. 2-4.



friendly technologies, and adopting responsible destination management practices. These efforts help Borobudur maintain its status as a respected global destination while reinforcing its commitment to sustainability.

Global collaboration not only supports preservation but also promotes Borobudur's cultural and spiritual values to international audiences. Programs such as cultural exchanges, international conferences, and global awareness campaigns enhance Borobudur's visibility worldwide. Partnerships with global private sectors, including international travel platforms and technology companies, provide access to resources and innovations that support sustainable destination preservation and management. Through strong collaboration, Borobudur becomes a symbol of cultural preservation and a model for sustainability, inspiring the management of other world heritage sites.

## **X. DISCUSSION**

This study underscores the importance of adopting a mindfulness-based approach to managing Borobudur Temple as a sustainable tourism destination. Mindfulness strategies provide a competitive edge by offering spiritually enriching and educational experiences for visitors. The analysis highlights that mindfulness-driven management can successfully integrate sustainability dimensions, including visitor education, cultural preservation, and active local community participation. Key measures, such as regulating tourist numbers, developing eco-friendly infrastructure, and promoting spiritual values, are crucial for preserving Borobudur's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These strategies not only enhance the temple's global appeal but also support its long-term preservation. However, their success depends on the active and comprehensive collaboration of all stakeholders involved.

The findings also reveal that while tourism generates significant economic benefits for local communities, the high influx of visitors poses risks to socio-cultural balance. Active participation of local communities in tourism management is crucial for optimizing economic gains while safeguarding cultural identity. Collaboration between government agencies, temple administrators, and local businesses plays a pivotal role in creating an inclusive and sustainable tourism framework. Holistic tourism policies that address the needs and aspirations of the local population not only foster a sense of ownership but also strengthen collective commitment to cultural preservation.

By integrating mindfulness practices with robust community engagement, Borobudur Temple has the potential to become a global model for sustainable tourism destination management. This approach not only protects the temple's cultural and spiritual heritage but also generates positive socio-economic and environmental impacts. In doing so, Borobudur will remain a relevant and respected icon of world cultural heritage for generations to come.

## **XI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research is encouraged to explore the application of smart technologies in supporting sustainable tourism at Borobudur Temple. One promising innovation is the development of augmented reality (AR)-based



applications to provide interactive education on the temple's historical and spiritual values. This technology not only enhances visitors' understanding but also creates a more immersive and meaningful experience. Furthermore, comprehensive studies on the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions, including guided meditation practices or sessions dedicated to spiritual contemplation, are of paramount importance. These studies could offer valuable insights into designing value-based tourism activities that enhance the quality of the visitor experience at Borobudur.

Subsequent investigations could also focus on evaluating the implications of visitor capacity regulations on the welfare of surrounding communities and the conservation of Borobudur Temple. Quantitative analysis measuring the relationship between visitor numbers, the level of physical degradation of the temple, and local economic income would provide empirical data to support management policies. This data would enable temple management to formulate more effective and sustainable policies.

Moreover, cross-cultural studies comparing management approaches at Borobudur with those at other world heritage sites could provide a foundation for developing more comprehensive policies. This approach would enable the creation of policies that are adaptable to evolving global needs while preserving Borobudur's relevance as a symbol of world cultural heritage.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that Borobudur Temple holds immense potential as a global symbol of Buddhist heritage, embodying the values of sustainability, spirituality, and inclusivity. A mindfulness-based marketing approach provides a strategic solution for integrating cultural preservation, economic development, and environmental impact management. This approach not only enhances the quality of visitor experiences but also supports the long-term sustainability of Borobudur as a prominent spiritual and cultural site. Measures such as limiting tourist numbers, implementing technology-driven education, and strengthening collaboration with local communities can further elevate its international reputation. With proper implementation, Borobudur can become a globally recognized model of sustainable tourism.

However, challenges such as community resistance to new policies, unequal distribution of economic benefits, and perceptions of exclusivity require serious attention in the management of Borobudur Temple. The effectiveness of management depends not only on the advancement of policy innovation but also on proficient communication with local communities. A comprehensive approach that involves all relevant stakeholders - government authorities, temple administrators, local residents, and commercial enterprises - is essential for addressing these challenges effectively. With a holistic and inclusive strategy, Borobudur can set an example of cultural destination management that prioritizes the balance between heritage preservation and community well-being, while reinforcing its position as a global icon.

## REFERENCES

- Ardhanariswari, K. A., & Pratiwi, K. W. (2021). Strengthening of collaboration strategy through pentahelix model in Borobudur as a super priority tourist destination. *RSF Conference Series: Business, Management and Social Sciences*, 1(4), p. 150–161. <https://doi.org/10.31098/bmss.v1i4.360>
- Arintoko, A., Ahmad, A. A., Gunawan, D. S., & Supadi, S. (2020). Community-based tourism village development strategies: A case of Borobudur tourism village area, Indonesia. *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 29(2), p. 398–413. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.29202-477>
- Bechert, H., & Gombrich, R. (Eds.). (1984). *The world of Buddhism: Buddhist monks and nuns in society and culture*. New York: Facts On File Publications.
- Bill Gillham. (2000). *Case Study Research Methods*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Cheer, J. M., Belhassen, Y., & Kujawa, J. (2017). The search for spirituality in tourism: Toward a conceptual framework for spiritual tourism. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 24, p. 252–256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.07.018>
- Chen, L. I. L., Scott, N., & Benckendorff, P. (2017). Mindful tourist experiences: A Buddhist perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 64, p. 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.01.013>
- Choe, J., & O'Regan, M. (2020). Faith manifest: spiritual and mindfulness tourism in Chiang Mai, Thailand. *Religions*, 11(177), p. 1–15.
- Cohen, E. (2002). Authenticity, equity and sustainability in tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 10(4), p. 267–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580208667167>
- Daneshwar, D., & Revaty, D. E. V. (2024). A Paradigm Shift towards Environmental Responsibility in Sustainable Green Tourism and Hospitality. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 7(05), p. 2795–2798. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v7-i05-33>
- Dhammapada. Buddharakkhita, A. (2007). Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Diarta, I. K. S. (2017a). Between Cultural Preservation and Tourism Industry: Dialectic Relations in Cultural Heritage Tourism Management in Tanah Lot and Borobudur Indonesia. *E-Journal of Tourism*, 4(2), p. 100. <https://doi.org/10.24922/eot.v4i2.36403>
- Diarta, I. K. S. (2017b). Promotion Strategy of Borobudur World Cultural Heritage Site for International Tourists. *E-Journal of Tourism*, 4(2), p. 190–194.
- E. Stake, R. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Fischer, D., Stanszus, L., Geiger, S., Grossman, P., & Schrader, U. (2017). Mindfulness and sustainable consumption: A systematic literature review of research approaches and findings. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 162, p. 544–558. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.06.007>
- Frauman, E., & Norman, W. C. (2004). Mindfulness as a tool for managing

- visitors to tourism destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 42(4), p. 381–389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287504263033>
- Gilmore, A., Carson, D., & Ascenção, M. (2007). Sustainable tourism marketing at a world heritage site. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 15(2–3), p. 253–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09652540701318930>
- Guluzade, S. B. oglu. (2023). The Role of Sustainable Tourism in the Development of Regional Economy. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Economy*, 3(43), p. 1–7. [https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal\\_ijite/30092023/8020](https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijite/30092023/8020)
- Hagenbuch, D. J., & Mgrdichian, L. M. (2020). Mindful Marketing: a Strategy-Based, Branded Approach for Encouraging Ethical Marketing. *Marketing Education Review*, 30(1), p. 15–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10528008.2019.1686993>
- Hakim, F. N. R. (2023). The Dynamics of the Status of Borobudur Temple and the Potential for Developing Community-Based Religious Tourism. *International Conference on Community Development (ICCD)*, 5(1), p. 54–59. <https://doi.org/10.33068/iccd.v5i1.569>
- Harvey, P. (2000, 2013). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from [www.cambridge.org/9780521553940](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521553940)
- Hermawan, B, Salim, U., Rohman, F., & Rahayu, M. (2019). Making Borobudur a Buddhist Religious Tourist Destination: An Effort to Preserve Buddhist Temples in Indonesia. *International Review of Social Research*, 9(1), p. 71–77. <https://doi.org/10.2478/irsr-2019-0008>
- Hermawan, B, Salim, U., Rohman, F., & Rahayu, M. (2019b). Sustainable Religious Tourism: Is the Buddhist Approach Able to Make It Happen? In T. N. Tu & T. D. Thien (Eds.), *Buddhist Approach to Responsible Consumption and Sustainable Development*. Hanoi, Viet Nam: Hong Duc Publishing House.
- Jati, A. P. (2023). Kajian keruangan berdasarkan perilaku pengunjung terkait upaya konservasi pada kawasan Candi Borobudur (Spatial Studies Based on Visitor's Behavior Regarding Conservation Efforts in The Borobudur Temple Area). *Tesa Arsitektur*, 21(2), p. 74–87. <https://doi.org/10.24167/tesa.v21i2.11090>
- Kausar, D. R., Damanik, J., & Tanudirjo, D. (2024). Borobudur as a priority tourism destination: How political economy affects world cultural heritage site management and heritage preservation. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 1366(1). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1366/1/012057>
- Keown, D. (1992). *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-22092>
- Khosla, S. (1991). *Lalitavistara and the Evolution of Buddha Legend*. New Delhi: Galaxy Publications.
- Krom, N. J. (1926). *The Life of Buddha on the Stupa of Barabudur according to*

*the Lalitavistara -Text*. Leiden: The Hague.

- Lailatul Lufiah, Gumantiara, M. I., & Zaky Ramadhan. (2024). Paradiplomacy and its influence on visitor trends at twin world heritage sites: a case study of Borobudur Temple 2018-2019. *Journal of Paradiplomacy and City Networks*, 3(1), p. 42–53. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jpcn.v3i1.39>
- Lin, L. M., & Park, H. J. (2023). Mindfulness and anti-consumption behavior: the role of authentic living. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 35(9), p. 2110–2121. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-06-2022-0492>
- Maurice Walshe. (2012). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: Digha Nikaya*. Boston: Wisdom Publication.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Nagaoka, M. (2011). Revitalization of Borobudur. *Icomos*, 3, p. 658–668. Retrieved from <http://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/1271/>
- Ndubisi, N. O. (2014). Consumer mindfulness and marketing implications. *Psychology & Marketing*, 31(4). <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20691>
- Nyanaponika, T. (2014). *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation: The Buddha's way of Mindfulness*. San Francisco: WeiserBooks.
- Pradana, C. S., Iban, C., & Setyastama, R. (2020). Tourism Impact on Conservation and Utilization of Borobudur Temple After Being Declared as Ten New Bali Tourist Destinations in Indonesia. *Journal of Indonesian Tourism and Development Studies*, 8(2), p. 79–84. <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.jitode.2020.008.02.03>
- Pramadanu, A., & Windasari, N. A. (2023). Determinants of Inclusive Tourism in Borobudur Temple. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review*, 06(07), p. 4881–4887. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/v6-i7-103>
- Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198068679.003.0003>
- Rinpoche, S. (2013). *Boundless Awakening: The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. Virginia: Bird of Paradise Press.
- Rupert Gethin. (1998). *Foudation of Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Santos, C. P. V. dos, Lopes, E. L., Dias, J. C., de Andrade, A. G. P., Matos, C. A., & Veiga, R. T. (2021). From social marketing and service-dominant logic to engagement in mindfulness practice: a field experiment. *RAUSP Management Journal*, 56(3), p. 348–366. <https://doi.org/10.1108/RAUSP-10-2020-0247>
- Shikalgar, A., Menon, P., & Mahajan, V. C. (2024). Towards customer-centric sustainability: how mindful advertising influences mindful consumption behaviour. *Journal of Indian Business Research*, 16(1), 119–133. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIBR-06-2023-0207>
- Silaen, E. S. K., Nugroho, J. T., Mukti, A., & Fachrie, M. (2024). Sustainable Tourism pada Destinasi Wisata Borobudur (Candi Borobudur), Kabupaten

- Magelang. *Journal of Governance and Public Administration*, 1(3), p. 220–234. <https://doi.org/10.59407/jogapa.v1i3.752>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory Methods and Research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Snodgrass, A. (1992). *The Symbolism of the Stupa*. Bangalore: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Soesanta, P. E., Putra, I. R. A. S., & Hutagalung, O. H. (2023). The development of a sustainable tourism area for Borobudur Temple as a city branding theme for Magellan regency. *Jurnal Bina Praja*, 15(1), p. 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.21787/jbp.15.2023.111-122>
- Sofianto, A. (2018). Strategi Pengembangan Kawasan Pariwisata Nasional Borobudur. *Jurnal Litbang Provinsi Jawa Tengah*, 16(1), p. 28–44. <https://doi.org/10.36762/litbangjateng.v16i1.745>
- Susilo, Y. S., & Suroso, A. (2014). Integrated Management of Borobudur World Heritage Site: A Conflict Resolution Effort. *Asia-Pacific Management and Business Application*, 3(2), p. 116–134. Retrieved from <http://apmba.ub.ac.id>
- The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*. Bodhi, B. (2000). Somerville: Wisdom Publication.
- The Suttanipāta is an ancient collection of the Buddha's Discourses together with its Commentaries*. Bodhi, B. (2017). Boston. Somerville: Wisdom Publication.
- Vashishth, M., Mishra, S., & Malviya, A. K. (2023). Sustainable Marketing and Buddhism's Middle Path: A Harmonious Approach for Ethical Consumerism. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(4), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i04.4943>
- Wang, Y., Chen, P., Shi, H., Shi, W., Trung, Q., Nang, D., & Nam, V. (2021). Travel for mindfulness through Zen retreat experience: A case study at Donghua Zen Temple. *Tourism Management*, 83(August 2020), 104211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104211>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications* (Sixth Edition, Ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.





# BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: PROTECTING ANIMALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT WITH OUR DIET

Adele Tomlin\*

## Abstract:

In this paper for the 2025 Vietnamese conference, I follow the lead of one of the most famous Vietnamese Buddhist teachers, Thich Nhat Hanh, and focus on Buddhist compassion in action and what Shakyamuni Buddha taught about compassion for all sentient beings and not eating slaughtered animals. The paper compiles previous research I have done on this subject, particularly concerning the original Buddhist *Vinaya* code for monastics on eating animals.

The first part of the paper will discuss the Buddha's teachings on this subject in both the *Theravāda/Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna* traditions. For example, how in the *Vinaya* it is forbidden for monastics to actively choose to purchase and eat animals that have been deliberately killed and are being sold for public consumption and profit. In addition, how Buddha listed butchery and hunting of animals as wrong livelihoods. Then I will discuss the *Vajrayāna* tradition and Tibetan Buddhist masters who chose to be vegetarians despite the high altitudes and lack of plant food.

The final part of the paper will consider my own experience of abandoning eating animals as a Buddhist, and the 21<sup>st</sup> century issues (not present when Buddha was alive) such as the huge environmental impact and pollution of slaughtering animals for meat en masse in terms of animals, the planet, and natural resources. Also, how in terms of Buddhist ethics, we do not only have to follow what is written down in the Buddhist Sutras, but should use our discerning intelligence and rationality to reflect on other teachings by the Buddha, such as the five precepts, and develop a sense of compassion for animals and the planet that is consistent with the Buddha's teachings on love and compassion for all beings.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist compassion, vegetarianism, Vinaya rules, ahimsa, meat industry, Tibetan Buddhism.*

---

\* Independent scholar, translator and writer - Dakini Publications.

## I. INTRODUCTION

“By eating meat we share the responsibility of climate change, the destruction of our forests, and the poisoning of our air and water. The simple act of becoming a vegetarian will make a difference in the health of our planet.”

— Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*

“We don’t eat meat because we want to reduce the suffering of living beings. Human beings suffer, but animals also suffer. So eating vegetarian food is one of the ways to lessen the suffering of living beings. Knowing this, we don’t suffer when we refrain from eating meat. We feel wonderful when we can follow a vegetarian diet because we feel that we can cultivate more compassion, more love. Even if you are not a monk or a nun, if you eat less meat it shows your concern and love for other living beings and our planet.” - Thich Nhat Hanh (Q & A 2017)

“There are many examples of Tibetan scholars and meditation masters who taught about giving up meat and the faults of eating meat, despite the fact it was very difficult to be vegetarian in Tibet.” – 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2021).

One of the fundamental tenets of Buddhist vows and ethics is to abandon any deliberate (and unnecessary) killing or harming of sentient beings or encouraging others to do so. In addition, the concept of nonviolence (*ahimsā*) is a central tenet of Buddhist, Hindu, and other spiritual beliefs. Such a principle forms the basis for compassion in action.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many Buddhists generally think they are non-violent, animal-lovers, have pets and would not dream of actively harming another sentient being deliberately. Yet, many also regularly eat murdered animals daily, preferring to turn a blind eye to the cruelty and murder of highly sentient beings (no different from their pet dog or cat), and its catastrophic effect on the environment, natural resources, land and health. Also, the Buddha taught that any monastic who eats animals for desire or health reasons, is breaching the basic *Vinaya* Rules.

This paper explores some of the Buddhist teachings and rules on eating murdered animals, via the *Vinaya* in *Theravāda/Hīnayāna* traditions and great love and compassion and *bodhicitta* in *Mahāyāna* traditions, and some of the potential reasons for this seeming hypocrisy or “blind spot”.

I only consider eating slaughtered animals<sup>1</sup> in this paper, but am well aware that a vegan diet is considered the most compassionate one of all. I conclude that it is clear that Buddha never advocated eating slaughtered animals, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Nyangshem Gyel (2018): 134. Interestingly, one the most famous Tibetan vegetarians who wrote about the faults of eating meat, Ngorchon Kunga Zangpo uses the term “slaughtered-meat” (*bsad sha*), instead of the term “meat” (*sha*) in general, which probably indicates that Ngorchon Kunga Zangpo tolerated the consumption of *shisha* (*shi sha*), “non-slaughtered meat.”

positively recommended against it. For monastics, it is outright forbidden, except when offered for food while begging for alms, or extremely sick, and it is required for survival.

## II. THE PATH OF MONASTIC DISCIPLINE (VINAYA) - EATING ANIMALS PERMITTED ONLY WHEN BEGGING FOR ALMS AND IS PURE IN THE “THREE WAYS”



There is a misconception among some Buddhists, that Buddha permitted people to eat animals due to an ancient rule allowing monastics to eat meat in certain strictly defined situations.

At the time the rule developed, it was the tradition that Buddhist monastics should go out on alms rounds (begging for food) every day and eat what donors gave them. Other than that, they should not choose which food they like better or not; or eat food that is too elaborate; or store food and so on, that was not allowed. However, it was only permitted if monastics were offered the meat while they were begging for food on their alms rounds. And even then, it had to be 100 % clear that the meat passed the three-fold purity rule that checked if it had been killed for them specifically, in one way or another, and if it had then they had to refuse it. If one asks for whom were the three ‘tests’ of purity determined? For monastics, or laypeople? It is primarily for monastics. However, there are different schools of *Vinaya*, which say even laypeople should not eat meat unless it is pure in the three ways. However, generally, in the *Vinaya* it is primarily a rule presented for monastics. Before discussing the rule and how it is interpreted in differing *Vinaya* traditions, I first consider how this rule was said to have developed. *When Buddha was served a meal of meat – a 4th Century text on the origin of the three ‘tests’ of purity, the meat rule.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *The Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara-Nikāya)*, trans. F. L. Woodward, vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1933 (AN 8. 12; 31. 2); *Vinaya Piṭaka*, ed. H. Oldenberg, vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1881 (*Kd* 6. 31; 13. 1); *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya Piṭaka)*, trans. I. B. Horner,

According to a recent teaching in 2021 by the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje,<sup>3</sup> supreme head of the Karma Kagyu lineage, in terms of historical sources for the background of the rule of three ‘tests’ of purity of meat, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century there was a Chinese master called Faxian (法顯).<sup>4</sup> He was one of the earliest masters who went to India and wrote about his travels going there [In *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* (Foguo Ji 佛國記)]. The main reason he went there was to find complete texts on the Vinaya. When Faxian returned from China to India, he brought texts on Vinaya from different schools and also a manuscript from Sri Lanka.<sup>5</sup>

There was a master called Jiping, in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, from a country called Kaspin, to the west of China, a Vinaya master called Buddhajiva (Sangye Tsho) from that region. He broke the text down into Chinese and another master, Sherab Gyenwa then translated it.<sup>6</sup> This is *Five Sections of the Vinaya*<sup>7</sup>

---

vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1951 (*Kd* 6. 31; 14. 4).

<sup>3</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje has been teaching about the importance of abandoning eating slaughtered animals since 2006. In addition, he has also spoken about the reasons he took a life-long vow not to eat meat and how eating meat gives a bad impression of Buddhism to others, see video clips here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtW2wkJCh1Y> and here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EahrhUjGl\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EahrhUjGl_o)

<sup>4</sup> According to historical sources: “Faxian (337 CE – c. 422 CE) was a Chinese Buddhist monk and translator who travelled by foot from China to India, visiting sacred Buddhist sites in Central, South and Southeast Asia between 399–412 to acquire Buddhist texts. He described his journey in his travelogue, *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* (Foguo Ji 佛國記). Other transliterations of his name include Fa-Hien and Fa-hsien. Faxian wrote a book on his travels, filled with accounts of early Buddhism, and the geography and history of numerous countries along the Silk Road as they were, at the turn of the 5th century CE. He wrote about cities like Taxila, Pataliputra, Mathura, and Kannauj in Middle India. He also wrote that inhabitants of Middle India also eat and dress like Chinese people. He declared Patliputra as a very prosperous city. He returned in 412 and settled in what is now Nanjing. In 414 he wrote (or dictated) *Foguoji* (*A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*; also known as *Faxian’s Account*). He spent the next decade, until his death, translating the Buddhist sutra he had brought with him from India.”

<sup>5</sup> It is said that Faxian obtained a Sanskrit copy of the Mahīśāsaka vinaya at Abhayagiri vihāra in Sri Lanka, c. 406 CE. The 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, Arya Kshema teachings (2021), as compiled in: Tomlin, Adele (2021) (<https://dakinitranslations.com/2021/03/15/rules-of-buddhist-conduct-vinaya-for-monastics-and-laypeople-on-eating-meat-17th-karmapa/> ). and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfvUOLgINg&t=0s>

<sup>6</sup> The Mahīśāsaka Vinaya was then translated into Chinese in 434 CE by Buddhajiva and Zhu Daosheng. This translation of the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya remains extant in the Chinese Buddhist canon as Taishō Tripiṭaka 1421. Daosheng (Chinese: 道生; pinyin: Dàoshēng; Wade–Giles: Tao Sheng; ca. 360–434), or Zhu Daosheng (Chinese: 竺道生; Wade–Giles: Chu Tao-sheng), was an eminent Six Dynasties era Chinese Buddhist scholar. He is known for advocating the concepts of sudden enlightenment and the universality of the Buddha nature.

<sup>7</sup> The Five Part Vinaya (Pañcavargika-vinaya; 五分律; Wǔfēnlǜ; Wu-fen-lü) (T. 1421), a Chinese translation of the Mahīśāsaka version.

of the *Mahīśāsaka*<sup>8</sup> Vinaya. The manuscript was then brought from Sri Lanka. It was translated by a person called Sherab Gyenma (?). The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa translated it into Tibetan from the Chinese, the *Five Sections on Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka* (sa ston sde pa'i 'dul ba lung sde lnga): During his journey to Vaishali, the *Tathāgata* Buddha visited a monastery where he expounded the *Dhamma* on the banks of Monkey Lake, a region known as Mahkattarada. This place, described as a river or a lake, was referred to as the “Monkey Pond” (*Mahākattārada*). At that time, there was a general named Lion (*Siṃha*), who is also mentioned in the Tibetan Buddhist *Vinaya* scriptures. Sometimes translated as Captain Senge or General Senge, he was a high-ranking military officer who showed great respect and devotion to the *Saṅgha*. However, at a later time, General *Siṃha* experienced great hardship, falling into poverty with little to eat. His story is preserved in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, where it is recorded that he had been a follower of a Jain teacher. Upon hearing that the *Bhagavān* Buddha had arrived in Vaishali, he was filled with joy and longed to receive the *Dhamma*. Without hesitation, he prepared his horses and chariot and set off to meet the Buddha. From a distance, he saw the *Tathāgata*, whose body radiated like a golden mountain. Overcome with reverence, he prostrated and then sat respectfully to one side.

The Buddha then delivered profound teachings on the Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariyasaccāni*). As he listened attentively, General *Siṃha* experienced a deep realization, awakening the immaculate eye of the *Dhamma* (*Dhamma-cakkhu*), perceiving reality as it truly is. Filled with gratitude, he stood up and expressed his desire to offer a meal to the Buddha and the *Saṅgha*. The Buddha accepted his invitation, bringing great joy to the general. Returning home, General *Siṃha* instructed those who regularly purchased food for him to buy only the meat of animals that had died naturally, without being slaughtered, regardless of the cost. Throughout the night, he diligently prepared a variety of elaborate and exquisite meat dishes, ensuring that his offering was made with the utmost care and purity of intention.

When everything was prepared, General *Siṃha* returned to the Buddha and respectfully informed him, “The food and seats are ready. Please let me know when you will come.” In response, the Buddha, accompanied by the *saṅgha*, proceeded to the general’s house. Upon arrival, they took their seats, and General *Siṃha* personally served the *saṅgha* with great devotion and joy, finding deep fulfillment in the act of offering (*dāna*). At that time, a group of Jain ascetics (*Nigaṇṭha*) — who had once counted General *Siṃha* among their patrons — heard about his generous offering of a grand meal, including meat, to the Buddha. Overcome by envy and resentment, they wandered through the city, waving their arms in distress and lamenting in loud voices from street to street.

---

<sup>8</sup> Mahīśāsaka (化地部; Huàdì Bù) is one of the early Buddhist schools according to some records. Its origins may go back to the dispute in the Second Buddhist council. The Dharmaguptaka sect is thought to have branched out from Mahīśāsaka sect toward the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 1st century BCE.



They proclaimed to the public that General Siṃha had abandoned his former teacher, violated his sacred commitments (*samaya*), and had even offered meat that had been deliberately slaughtered to the Buddha, who, knowing this, still accepted it. Their accusations echoed through the streets, stirring controversy among those who listened. When the *bhikkhus* heard the commotion, hesitation arose among them, and they refrained from eating the meal. Sensing their concern, General Siṃha addressed them with clarity, affirming that the meat had not come from animals killed for the offering but from those that had died naturally. Hearing this, the Buddha reassured the *bhikkhus*, saying, “Then eat as you wish.” With his words, they sat before the Buddha and partook of the meal. Before departing, the Buddha commended General Siṃha for his meritorious act, emphasizing the virtue of generosity and the profound merit of offering to the *saṅgha*. Then, he and his disciples took their leave.<sup>9</sup>



Afterward, the Buddha gathered the *saṅgha* to address the concerns that had arisen and clarified the proper conduct regarding the consumption of meat. He declared: “Bhikkhus, I permit the use of meat if it has not been seen, heard, or suspected to have been killed specifically for a monk. However, you should not knowingly partake in meat that has been intentionally slaughtered for your sake.”<sup>10</sup> With this teaching, the Buddha established a principle that would guide the *bhikkhus* in their future practice. He emphasized that when receiving alms, three conditions render meat impermissible: (1) If one has personally seen (*diṭṭha*) the animal being killed for the sake of offering, (2) If one has heard (*suta*) that the animal was slaughtered for a monk, (3) If one has reasonable suspicion (*parisaṅkā*) that the meat was obtained through intentional killing for the recipient. If none of these conditions apply, then the meat is considered allowable (*kappiya*). This teaching reflects the Buddha’s nuanced approach to ethical conduct, balancing the practical realities of receiving food as an alms-seeker with the deeper principle of non-harm (*ahiṃsā*). Rather than imposing a rigid prohibition, the Buddha guided the *bhikkhus* to cultivate discernment and ethical responsibility in their daily lives, ensuring that their sustenance did

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2021)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2021).



not directly contribute to the taking of life.

The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa explained that monastics were supposed to accept whatever food they were offered to reduce desire and attachment to food/diet. The principle regarding meat that is *pure in three ways* — not seen, heard, or suspected to have been killed specifically for a monk — arose from both ethical and practical considerations within the socio-cultural context of ancient India. This guideline reflects the Buddha's pragmatic approach to monastic discipline (*vinaya*), ensuring that *bhikkhus* did not contribute to the intentional killing of animals while also upholding their dependence on lay supporters for sustenance. Historically, India has been home to a significant vegetarian tradition, particularly among certain religious groups. The Brahmin caste, regarded as the highest in the social hierarchy, largely adhered to vegetarianism. While some scholars argue that Brahmins may have consumed meat in earlier periods, textual evidence from *Vinaya* sources suggests that, by the time of the Buddha, many Brahmins abstained from it. Given this dietary norm, it is likely that when Buddhist monastics (*bhikkhus*) went on their daily alms rounds (*piṇḍapāta*), they rarely encountered meat offerings in regions where vegetarianism was prevalent. However, the Buddha did not limit alms-seeking to Brahmin or high-caste households. The monastics were expected to receive offerings indiscriminately, accepting food from people of all social strata, including lower-caste families, where meat consumption may have been more common. In such cases, if meat was offered and met the *threefold purity* criteria, it was considered acceptable to eat. A key ethical principle underlying alms practice is that monastics must accept whatever is given, without expressing personal preference or rejecting food based on desire. Refusing an offering could be perceived as an insult to the donor, depriving them of an opportunity to cultivate *puñña* (merit). This understanding underscores the Buddha's inclusive vision — one that transcended caste distinctions and economic disparities. Unlike ascetic traditions that imposed strict dietary restrictions, the Buddha emphasized a path of moderation (*majjhima-paṭipadā*), ensuring that the *saṅgha* remained integrated within the lay community rather than isolating themselves through rigid prohibitions. Ultimately, this approach to receiving and consuming food aligns with the foundational Buddhist teaching on *detachment* (*nekkhamma*) and *non-attachment* (*anupādāna*). The purpose of alms-seeking was not to indulge in personal preferences but to cultivate humility, contentment (*santutṭhi*), and a deep understanding of the interdependent relationship between monastics and lay supporters. By maintaining this balance, the Buddha ensured that the *bhikkhus* upheld both ethical purity and social harmony, fostering a spiritual path that was both compassionate and pragmatic.<sup>11</sup>

### III. CERTAIN TYPES OF MEAT NOT ALLOWED EVEN IF OFFERED?

Does this mean that any meat offered to monastics can be eaten if it is pure in the three ways? No it does not. The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa also taught that

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2021).

in Tibet there is the *Vinayottaragrantha* ('ba gzhung bla ma) Vinaya texts of the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, which mentions there are several types of meat that monastics should not eat at all. Such as the flesh of some types of birds, including owls, reptiles, and amphibians such as toads, and the meat of carnivores such as lions, tigers, and bears. Not only were you not allowed to eat those forbidden meats, but also not consume the juices and fats of those inappropriate meats. Also, raw meat was not allowed and monastics were also not allowed to eat meat specifically killed for their sake.

If it was not a forbidden meat, then first one has to examine whether it is pure in the three ways. In the same way, if you eat any meat without caring, there is a danger that you eat impure meat. So one has to think about whether it is pure in those three ways or not.

### 3.1. Summary of the Vinaya traditions

The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa cited quotations from five texts of the different Vinaya schools, most of which he translated from the Chinese. Among them, the first three are generally for the fully ordained and novice monastics. The last two citations also say that laypeople with the five lay precepts may not eat offered meat, if it is impure in the three ways.

In terms of Chinese or Tibetan Buddhism, the main sources are from the *Sarvāstivāda* tradition. The way the eighteen *Vinaya* schools developed, and their different basis, one way is from the old texts from Sri Lanka. The other way is from the texts in the Chinese tradition. These are the main texts for the development of the eighteen different schools. Most scholars explain that the two original or root schools of the *Vinaya* are the *Theravada* and the *Mahāsāṃghika* school. From those, after they had some disagreements, different ones branched off from them. The *Sarvāstivāda* tradition developed from the *Theravada* school. The Chinese tradition also comes from *Sarvāstivāda* and *Dharmaguptaka* Vinaya tradition. Their practice of the three-fold purity is stricter than other Vinaya schools. The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa explained: In all traditions of *Vinaya*, the consumption of meat is only permissible if it is free from impurity in the three specified ways. But what does this truly imply? Whether the meat comes from a chicken, pig, or ox, if a monastic personally witnesses its slaughter, and it is done explicitly for their sake, it is considered impure (*akusala*). Likewise, if a credible person informs them that the animal was killed for their consumption, or if they harbor reasonable suspicion that it was slaughtered for them, the meat is impure and must not be accepted. These three criteria – seen (*diṭṭha*), heard (*suta*), and suspected (*parisaṅkā*) – define the ethical boundaries of accepting meat within monastic discipline. However, applying these principles in practice is not always straightforward. The *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* and *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* offer additional clarifications, stating that meat is permissible only if the householder providing it is not a butcher, the animal has died naturally, or the householder did not kill it specifically for the monastic. The fundamental rule is that a *bhikkhu* should not partake in meat that has been deliberately slaughtered on their behalf. Furthermore, it is prohibited for a layperson to purchase meat

that was explicitly killed for monastic consumption and then offer it as alms. Beyond this, the guidelines extend to the surroundings in which the food is obtained. If a householder keeps visible signs of slaughter — such as animal skins, fur, or hides in their residence — it raises ethical concerns, particularly if they have not renounced the act of killing. Even if the householder does not directly engage in slaughter, they may have commissioned a butcher to do so, which still constitutes an indirect violation of the ethical precepts. Additionally, the *Dasādhamma Vinaya* of the *Sarvāstivāda* school mentions that large-scale rituals and festivals often involved animal sacrifices and meat offerings. Monastics were prohibited from attending such events, as their mere presence could imply complicity in the act of slaughter. This restriction reflects the deeper ethical foundation of *ahiṃsā* - non-harming-which underlies Buddhist teachings on right livelihood and ethical consumption. By maintaining these principles, monastics cultivate purity of conduct (*sīla*) and ensure that their sustenance does not come at the expense of sentient beings' suffering.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2. Butchery and killing animals is listed as a wrong livelihood (*micchājīva*)

“Monks, a lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in human beings, business in meat, business in intoxicants, and business in poison...These are the five types of business that a lay follower should not engage in.” In addition, in the *Vinajja Sutta*<sup>13</sup>, the Buddha taught that killing, hunting or butchering animals is a wrong livelihood (*micchājīva*), so it is easy to understand that buying meat from such people, and supporting their work could not be considered ethical from the Buddhist perspective either. Just as it would be unethical to hire an assassin to kill someone we do not like on our behalf, so it is wrong to buy the services of those that kill animals for eating food for pleasure.

### 3.3. The *Mahāyāna* Path: *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (Chapter 8) – a handbook on why to abandon eating animals

“It is not true, *Mahāmati*, that meat is proper food and permissible for the Śrāvaka when [the animal] was not killed by himself, when he did not

<sup>12</sup> The quotation cited by Gyal (2018:134) is: “We read in the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*: “to offer somebody alcohol, poison, weapons, and slaughtered meat is evil charity.” Some might argue that monks are allowed to eat slaughtered meat under the three circumstances as the Vinaya states. However, this is an exceptional choice, not a definitive teaching of the Buddha. For instance, if a monk is sick, and without eating meat would probably die, then the monk can eat it as a medicine. Other than that, monks shouldn't be eating [meat that satisfies the conditions of] threefold purity. In the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, Kasyapa asked, “In the past, why did the Tathagata [the Buddha] permit the consumption of meat examined in the three ways?” The Buddha replied, “Kasyapa, I allowed the consumption of meat examined in the three ways as a means to gradually eliminate meat eating.” Therefore, we should understand Buddha's teaching fully.”

<sup>13</sup> *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2012 (AN 5. 177).

order others to kill it, when it was not specially meant for him.” – Shakyamuni Buddha in *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, Chapter 8. The most famous *Mahāyāna Sūtra* which details the Buddha’s teachings on eating animals, is the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, Chapter 8 (of which there are several English translations), in which Buddha is cited as saying: (1) To those who eat [meat] there are detrimental effects, to those who do not, merits; Mahāmāti, you should know that meat-eaters bring detrimental effects upon themselves; (2) Let the practitioner/yogi refrain from eating flesh as it is born of himself, as [the eating] involves transgression, as [flesh] is produced of semen and blood, and as [the killing of animals] causes terror to living beings....(3) For profit sentient beings are destroyed, for flesh money is paid out, they are both evil-doers and [the deed] matures in the hells called Raurava (screaming), etc.”

In this *Sūtra*, the Buddha cites many other reasons why Buddhist practitioners (particularly on the *Bodhisattva/ Mahāyāna*) path should not eat animals, including: (1) developing love and compassion for beings and wish to reduce any unnecessary suffering, (2) regarding all sentient beings are like our very own mothers/children, (3) its negative impact on our inner and outer health and chakras, (4) its negative impact on how we appear and smell to animals, (5) the greater likelihood of being re-born as an animal that eats animals, or is eaten by animals, or in lower existences where killing is normal.



Further, in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, understood to be the final and definitive *Mahāyāna* teachings of the Buddha given on the eve of his death, the Buddha teaches that “the eating of meat extinguishes the seed of Great Compassion,” and that all consumption of animals – even those found already dead – is prohibited. He specifically rejects the idea that monks begging and receiving meat from a donor should eat it: “[I]t should be rejected... I say that even meat, fish, game, dried hooves, and scraps of meat left over by others constitute an infraction... I teach the harm arising from meat-eating.” The Buddha also predicts in this sutra that later monks will “hold spurious writings to be the authentic dharma,” and concoct their sutras, falsely claiming that the Buddha allows meat eating.



Also, when buying meat, we are inducing others to deliberately kill sentient beings, which is considered one of the five wrong livelihoods in Buddhist teachings<sup>14</sup>. Similar to the post-traumatic stress disorders of soldiers involved in military combat, studies show that people who work in slaughterhouses, often suffer serious depression and psychological trauma due to witnessing and participating in murdering sentient beings. Some studies say meat-eaters show greater levels of aggression.

#### IV. TIBETAN BUDDHIST MASTERS ON EATING ANIMALS



It was not only the historical Shakyamuni Buddha who advocated abandoning eating animals, many great Tibetan Buddhist masters past and present, in Tibet and exile, have strongly recommended it, despite mistaken, yet commonplace perceptions that Tibetans could not be vegetarians due to the high altitude. In his recent book, *The Faults of Meat: Tibetan Buddhist Vegetarian Writing* (2019) Geoffrey Barstow collected translations of various Tibetan Buddhist masters, such as Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (1292 – 1361), Khedrup Jé (1385 – 1438), the eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorjé (1507 – 1554), Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781 – 1851) and Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö (1961 – ). Barstow writes that: “Vegetarianism was a significant aspect of Tibetan religious practice... Furthermore, these vegetarian lamas came from all the major Buddhist lineages in Tibet, from all regions, and all periods. Some were relatively minor figures, but others were among the most important masters of their day and remain well known centuries later.”

<sup>14</sup> “A lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, Business in human beings, Business in meat, Business in intoxicants, and Business in poison.” *Vanijja Sutta: Business (Wrong Livelihood) Anguttara Nikāya* 5.177.

For my recent video podcast interview with Barstow where we discussed some of these issues, see here.

In 2007, I heard the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje give an electrifying and important speech under the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgaya on vegetarianism. Citing the teachings of the Buddha and the previous Karmapas, he stated that the 8th Karmapa had taught that one could not reasonably call oneself a follower of the Karma Kagyu lineage and eat slaughtered animals, which left some meat-eating followers shocked. He also recommended that if devotees wanted him to have a long life, they should abandon eating animals. More recently, the 17th Karmapa gave several teachings on the essential Buddhist monastic rules that forbid eating meat willingly for pleasure or health, the suffering of murdered animals he witnessed as a nomadic child growing up in Tibet, the teachings of past Tibetan masters like the yogis, Milarepa and Drugpa Kunleg (1455 - 1529) on the 'wrongdoing' of killing and eating animals, the strict vegetarianism of previous Karmapas, and on the catastrophic, destructive effects on the environment and natural resources. In his book *The Heart is Noble* (2014), the 17th Karmapa explains:

When you eat meat, you ingest not only the chemical substances that animals are full of, but also the emotional and physical stress that animals experience throughout their lives and at the moment of their slaughter. That stress is also part of your meat. Some people may tell you that you must eat meat for your health, for the protein. But this is simply not true. The millions of healthy vegetarians around the world are proof of that fact. Protein sources abound in legumes and other foods that are better for our body and for the environment. It is just a matter of where we decide to get our protein. I think it is important to recognize that this is a choice we make every time we eat.

Although he also explained recently that things are improving within the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. For a compiled transcript of the 17th Karmapa's teachings on vegetarianism, see here. In sum, there were many great Tibetan Buddhist masters, past and present, before 1959, who were strict vegetarians who actively abandoned and advocated against eating animals.

Other contemporary examples of Tibetan Buddhist masters who strongly advocate against eating meat were the late Chatral Rinpoche, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche, for more on those teachings, see here.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, within the Tibetan Buddhist community, the Dalai Lamas and some Gelugpa masters, including the present-day 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (who has stated he eats animals for health reasons, as advised by his Tibetan doctor), have, unlike other main Tibetan Buddhist lineages, permitted it in certain circumstances.

---

<sup>15</sup> .. For compiled teachings and transcripts of these teachers and teachings, see: <https://dakinitranslations.com/buddhist-vegetarianism/>



Tibetan scholar, Nyangshem Gyal wrote about this difference recently in his interesting paper, *The Sectarian Formation of Tibetan Vegetarianism: Identifying the First Polemic on Meat-eating in Tibetan Literature*, which considers the fact that:

“The practice of vegetarianism among the Gelug was, indeed, rare before the twentieth century, compared with other norms in Tibetan Buddhist schools.”

However, from the perspective of the Buddha’s *Sūtra* teachings, and those of the other main Tibetan Buddhist lineages, eating murdered animals for health reasons was never deemed an acceptable reason, unless one was begging for food or starving.

In brief, the Shakyamuni Buddha and Tibetan Buddhist masters taught against eating meat long before technological inventions allowed the mass breeding and slaughtering of animals for food. These days, however, there are even more reasons not to eat meat, including one’s health (physical and psychological) and environmental reasons.

## **V. OTHER CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATIONS AND THEIR RELATION TO COMPASSION IN ACTION AS A BUDDHIST**

The Shakyamuni Buddha and Tibetan Buddhist masters taught against eating meat before technological inventions that allowed the mass breeding and slaughter of animals for food. However, if they were teaching today, such ‘advances’ and the now well-documented addiction to meat, catastrophic harm they cause the environment, wasting of natural resources, land, extinction of other species, physical and huge psychological damage to those who eat animals and work in slaughter-houses, and greater levels of aggression, would no doubt be included as part of the general Buddhist principle of non-violence, love and compassion.

There is also a false perception that one needs meat for health reasons. However, the converse is true. In Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, yogic, and Ayurveda traditions, eating meat has always been considered unhealthy (and unethical) and unnecessary for a balanced diet. In other cultures and religions, the perception of eating animals for health reasons has been different, although that perception is also changing.

## **VI. CONCLUSION: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATIONS**

In terms of my understanding as a Buddhist practitioner, despite growing up in a meat-eating culture and family, in 2006, I abandoned eating animals after the speech given by the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa in Bodh Gaya encouraging others to take a lifetime vow not to eat animals. Also I had become more interested in animal welfare and environmental conservation.

As a Philosophy postgraduate in London, I not only became interested in Asian philosophy but also the question of animal consciousness, and the philosopher, Peter Singer’s views on the sentience of animals and animal rights. In his ground-breaking work, for example, “All Animals Are Equal”, Singer compared common arguments used against the Black and Women’s Liberation

movements to those used against the Animal Liberation movement<sup>16</sup>. He accused those who argued against giving all animals equal “consideration” when it came to killing or experimenting on them, of hypocrisy and unreasonable speciesism. I also became aware of the cruelty and horror of mass factory farms breeding animals for meat, but also the inconsistency of eating murdered animals while talking about love and compassion for all beings as if they were one’s child or mother. As well as the serious environmental and health issues also associated with consuming mass-bred animals. In a recent podcast interview I conducted with Singer, he speaks about the “absurdity” of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama eating meat for “health reasons” too.

Assuming that most Buddhists were also vegetarians/ vegans too, I was surprised and saddened to discover that many were not. When I first started studying and living in India and Nepal, I saw many Buddhists from Tibet, Europe, America, China, and other countries regularly eating animals. Seeing sick-looking chickens huddled up for hours with no room to move, and clearly in mental and physical anguish. It is not hidden away like in countries where mass factories and slaughterhouses present the meat in sanitised, cellophane-wrapped packages.<sup>17</sup>

However, after giving up eating animals, I noticed that my compassion for animals increased significantly, and even seeing the flesh of animals being cooked or eaten filled me with a deep sense of sadness and compassion for the animals and those eating them. The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa also spoke about his own experience of abandoning eating animals, and how he also experiences great levels of compassion for animals by doing so. The famous Vietnamese Buddhist master, Thich Nhat Hanh also spoke about how abandoning meat consumption increases our compassion and reduces suffering for animals, humans and the planet.

In conclusion, following a spiritual tradition’s ethical guidelines and discipline can sometimes be challenging, as we have many faults and a lack of

---

<sup>16</sup> “To protest about bullfighting in Spain, the eating of dogs in South Korea, or the slaughter of baby seals in Canada while continuing to eat eggs from hens who have spent their lives crammed into cages, or veal from calves who have been deprived of their mothers, their proper diet, and the freedom to lie down with their legs extended, is like denouncing apartheid in South Africa while asking your neighbours not to sell their houses to blacks.” — Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (2009).

<sup>17</sup> Yet, I saw many ‘Buddhists’ actively buying meat from these slaughter-shops. In fact, regular customers at the shops and in restaurants were monastics. When I sometimes asked such people why they ate meat, I was met with either an uncomfortable look, or even outright hostility. Some monastic institutions even have attached restaurants in which meat is bought and cooked not only for the public, but also for themselves away from the monastic canteen. In my recent review of Tibetan artist Tenzin Gyurmey’s work *A Crime With My Mother* (2022), I became aware that some Tibetans even travel out of state to buy illegal buff (cow) meat. Yet Buddha did not teach a hierarchy of animals, they are all seen as sacred, equal and worthy of life. So there is no reason for Tibetan Buddhist to distinguish between buff, cow or dog meat.

wisdom. However, as it is clear that the Buddha did not permit or encourage eating animals, except in very limited or extreme circumstances, if we want to follow Buddha's teachings, and out compassion into action, then actions speak louder than words, and if we genuinely care for and love animals as fellow species on this planet (and as precious as our mothers), then surely we owe it to ourselves (and animals) to take to heart the fact that "meat is murder".

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

*The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya Piṭaka)*, trans. I. B. Horner, vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1951.

*The Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara-Nikāya)*, trans. F. L. Woodward, vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1933

*The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2012.

*Vinaya Piṭaka*, ed. H. Oldenberg, vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1881.

### Secondary sources

Barstow, Geoffrey. 'Food of Sinful Demons': Vegetarianism in Tibet. (Dakini Conversations: Ep.4) (August 2023).

Barstow, Geoffrey. *The Faults of Meat: Tibetan Buddhist Writings on Vegetarianism* Wisdom Publications, 2019.

Barstow, Geoffrey. *Hidden Vegetarians of Tibet*, Tricycle magazine, 2018.

Khenchen Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche, *Liberating Yaks: The Vegetarian Question in Tibet*

Nyangshem, Gyal. The Sectarian Formation of Tibetan Vegetarianism: Identifying the First Polemic on Meat-eating in Tibetan Literature. *Journal of Tibetology* (2018): 134.

Ogyen Trinley Dorje, MEAT IS MURDER: Tibetan Buddhist Vegetarianism: Ancient and Modern, compiled teachings by 17th Karmapa, 2012.

Tenzin Palmo, Jetsunma: 'I DON'T EAT MY FRIENDS': 78th birthday offering to Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, meditator, teacher and nunnery founder, on eating animals

The 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, Arya Kshema teachings(2021), as compiled in: Tomlin, Adele (2021) (<https://dakinitranslations.com/2021/03/15/rules-of-buddhist-conduct-vinaya-for-monastics-and-laypeople-on-eating-meat-17th-karmapa/> ) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfvUOLglNGs&t=0s>

The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, video clips here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtW2wkJCh1Y> and here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EahrhUjGI\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EahrhUjGI_o)

The Five Part Vinaya (Pañcavargika-vinaya; 五分律; Wǔfēnlǜ; Wu-fen-lü) (T. 1421), a Chinese translation of the Mahīśāsaka version.



# THE BODHISATTVA PATH THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF THE FOUR MEANS OF EMBRACING AND THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES IN THE FÚ ZHÌ (福智) SANGHA OF TAIWAN (CHINA)

Ven. Thich Nhu Dac

## Abstract:

Buddhism engages with the world through a wide array of skillful means (*upāya*), among which the practice of the *bodhisattva-caryā* – the conduct of a bodhisattva – guided by the Four Means of Embracing (*catur-saṅgraha-vastu*) and the Four Immeasurables (*catur-apramāṇa*), is commonly applied by monastic and lay communities across Buddhist traditions, especially within the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools. These practices aim to transform delusion into awakening (*moha* to *bodhi*), to bring the Dharma into worldly life, and to help beings recognize intrinsic values and cultivate a Pure Land on earth (*saṃsāra* as *Sukhāvatī*). The *pāramitās* (perfections) form essential components of bodhisattva practice.

Since its establishment, the Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* and the Fú Zhì (福智) Group in Taiwan have actualized these teachings in both doctrinal embodiment and practical implementation, influencing not only Taiwanese society but also communities globally. This model of engaged Buddhism contributes to peace and the advancement of human society, expressing the vast compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) of the Buddhist tradition. Their efforts support social welfare, ensure the preservation of the Right Dharma (*saddharma*), and maintain its enduring presence in the human realm. At the same time, the Fú Zhì (福智) Sangha upholds the spirit of the Six Harmonies (*ṣaḍdharma-saṃgīti*) within the monastic community, all while firmly grounding their activities in the core Buddhist teachings. The *Comprehensive Treatise* (*Guāng Lùn*) serves as a guiding text in their cultivation and daily practice.

**Keywords:** *Bodhisattva conduct, four immeasurables, four means of embracing, Fú Zhì (福智) Sangha, Guāng Lùn, compassion, development.*

## I. THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FÚ ZHÌ (福智) SANGHA IN TAIWAN

Historically, the Buddha Himself directly engaged with the laity to establish karmic connections (*yogācāra*), encouraging beings to cultivate wisdom (*prajñā*) and volition (*cetanā*) to eradicate karmic afflictions (*klesha*), thus liberating themselves from the binding cycle of cause and effect (*hetu-phala*, or *pratitya-samutpāda*). The Buddha stated that the actions that lead to liberation are those rooted in non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*).<sup>1</sup>

The Blessed One also exhorted the *bhikṣus*: “Go forth, O Bhikṣus, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans.”<sup>2</sup> The Dharma He taught serves the function of “raising what has been overthrown, revealing what is hidden, showing the way to the lost, bringing light to those in darkness so that those with eyes may see forms.”<sup>3</sup> In this manner, the Dharma was proclaimed by the Venerable Gotama through various skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*).

The Fú Zhi (福智) Sangha was established in 1991 at Fú Zhì (福智) Monastery in Nantou, Taiwan, by Venerable Master Nhật Thường. Born in 1929 in Chongming, Jiangsu Province, China, he entered monastic life in 1965 at Yuan Guang Monastery on Mt. Shitou in Miaoli, Taiwan. He was thoroughly versed in the *Tripitaka* – *Sūtra* (*sūtra*), *Vinaya* (*vinaya*), and *Abhidharma* (*abhidharma*) – and had extensive practice and realization in the meditative (*dhyāna*), Pure Land (*sukhāvatī*), disciplinary (*śīla*), tantric (*mantra*), and scholastic (*śāstra*) traditions. Eventually, he made the transmission of the *Guāng Lùn* (Comprehensive Treatise) and monastic discipline (*Vinaya*) the central focus of his teaching.

The Sangha initially began with only a few ordained members but has since grown into a dynamic community of approximately 1,500 fully ordained monks and nuns (*bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī*), with an average age of 28 – marked by youthful vitality. Additionally, over 100,000 lay disciples are engaged in study and practice across the United States, Canada, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Europe. The influence of this community has reached millions, laying a solid foundation for the global propagation of the Buddhadharma.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the supreme aspiration (*uttama-citta*) is to attain Buddhahood – referred to as *Anuttarā Samyaksaṃbodhi* – which surpasses the

<sup>1</sup> Thích Chơn Thiện. (2009). *Phật học khái luận* [General treatise on Buddhist studies]. Phương Đông Publishing House.

<sup>2</sup> Nārada Mahā Thera. (2013). *Đức Phật và Phật Pháp* [The Buddha and His teachings] (Phạm Kim Khánh, Trans.). Tổng Hợp Publishing House. (Original work published in English).

<sup>3</sup> Thích Minh Châu (Trans.). (2012). *Trung bộ kinh III: Tiểu Kinh nghiệp phân biệt* [Majjhima Nikāya III: Lesser Discourse on the Analysis of Kamma]. Tôn Giáo Publishing House.



goals of the Śrāvaka (*śrāvaka-yāna*) and Pratyekabuddha (*pratyekabuddha-yāna*) paths. This aspiration, the *bodhicitta*, unites great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) with profound wisdom (*mahāprajñā*), enabling the practitioner to liberate both self and others. Mahāyāna sūtras often affirm: “Bodhicitta is the cause, great compassion the foundation, and skillful means the culmination.” The practitioner takes *Anuttarā Samyaksambodhi* as the ultimate goal, grounds their path in *mahākaruṇā*, and utilizes appropriate methods – be it meditation (*dhyāna*), Pure Land practices (*nembutsu*), or mantra – as expedient means (*upāya*).

Wisdom is regarded as the culmination of awakening. A *bodhisattva*’s realization adapts skillfully to circumstances (*upāya-kaushalya*), responding to the interdependent nature (*liṅga-lakṣaṇa-prayoga*) of form, essence, and function in any situation. Thus, in the Buddha’s first teachings, while Dependent Origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*) was emphasized as the causal basis (*samudaya*), the First Noble Truth of suffering (*duḥkha*) was placed foremost to underscore existential reality. The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* proclaims: “If one forgets the *bodhicitta* while cultivating wholesome acts, such acts become the work of Māra.”

Throughout its formation and development, the Fú Zhì (福智) Sangha has consistently rooted itself in the fundamental teachings of the *Sūtras*, *Vinaya*, and *Śāstras*, both in its monastic discipline and in its compassionate, worldly engagement (*lokasaṅgraha*) through the bodhisattva path, aiming at the liberation of all sentient beings.

The development of the Fú Zhì (福智) Sangha has been closely tied to the pivotal leadership of three key figures: Venerable Nhật Thường, Venerable Chân Như, and Venerable Như Tịnh. Venerable Nhật Thường laid down the foundational principle: “The Saṅgha safeguards the True Dharma (*Saddharma*); the laity supports and protects the Dharma” (*upāsaka-upāsikā dharma-paritrāṇa*).<sup>4</sup> This dual structure provided both security and focus for the monastic community (*bhikṣu-saṅgha*) to pursue the path of study and cultivation while also offering lay practitioners the opportunity to actively participate in the preservation and propagation of the *Buddhadharma*.

Following the passing (*parinirvāṇa*) of Venerable Nhật Thường, Venerable Chân Như carried forward the legacy by integrating both the Chinese (Han) and Tibetan traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Under his guidance, the curriculum of the Saṅgha was enriched through the structured incorporation of the *Five Great Treatises* (*Pañca-Mahāśāstra*), which include:

1. *Pramāṇavārttika* – The Treatise on Epistemology and Logic (by Dharmakīrti)
2. *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* – The Ornament of Clear Realization
3. *Madhyamakāvatāra* – Entering the Middle Way (by Candrakīrti)
4. *Abhidharmakośa* – Treasury of Abhidharma (by Vasubandhu)

<sup>4</sup> Nārada Mahā Thera. (2013). *Đức Phật và Phật Pháp* [The Buddha and His Teachings] (Phạm Kim Khánh, Trans.). Tổng Hợp Publishing House. (Original work published in English).

### 5. Vinaya (Śīla) – The Monastic Discipline

At present, Venerable Như Tịnh serves as the abbot (*karmadāna* or *upādhyāya*) of the Fú Zhì (福智) Monastery. He continues to strengthen the Saṅgha's internal education system while simultaneously promoting international outreach. His leadership emphasizes the sustained transmission of the *Five Great Treatises*, the strict observance of monastic discipline (*śīla-vinaya*), and the harmonized advancement of both the ordained and lay communities in accordance with the bodhisattva ideal (*bodhisattva-caryā*).

## II. THE ROLE OF THE GUǼNG LÙN (COMPREHENSIVE TREATISE) IN GUIDING THE PRACTICE OF THE DHARMA AND THE BODHISATTVA PATH WITHIN THE FÚ ZHÌ (福智) ORGANIZATION AND SANGHA

The *Guǽng Lùn* (廣論, lit. “Extensive Treatise”) serves as a central doctrinal and practical compass for guiding the *Dharma* cultivation (*dharma-practice*) and *bodhisattva* conduct (*bodhisattva-caryā*) of both the Fú Zhì (福智) *Saṅgha* and its affiliated lay community. Grounded in the Mahāyāna ideal, the *bodhisattva* utilizes the *Four Means of Embracing* (*catu-saṅgraha-vastu*) – generosity (*dāna*), kind speech (*priyavacana*), beneficial conduct (*arthakriyā*), and empathetic cooperation (*samānārthatā*) – as both method and expression of engaged compassion. These principles reflect the essence of socially engaged Buddhism, which seeks the welfare of others while remaining true to the foundational values of the Buddha Dharma.

The Buddha Himself exemplified this altruistic spirit of service, expressing the vow: “Wherever sentient beings need me, I shall go; wherever the Dharma calls me, I shall not hesitate, regardless of hardship or difficulty.”<sup>5</sup> This embodies the *bodhisattva*'s unwavering resolve – born of *bodhicitta*, the mind of awakening – to benefit others while cultivating the path to Buddhahood.

The practice of *bodhisattva-caryā* is not limited to monastics (*bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇī*), but extends to lay practitioners (*upāsaka*, *upāsikā*) and all those whose hearts are expansive and guided by compassion and wisdom. Fueled by this internal power of *bodhicitta* and unwavering spiritual aspiration (*praṇidhāna*), *bodhisattvas* advance with diligence (*vīrya*) through all obstacles, employing skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*) – such as the perfection of giving (*dāna-pāramitā*) – to cultivate compassion (*karuṇā*) and serve all beings.

The *Guǽng Lùn*, as both a doctrinal text and a manual for applied practice, not only anchors the community's understanding of the path but also animates their daily engagement with the world. It articulates the Mahāyāna framework for training in wisdom (*prajñā*), ethics (*śīla*), and mental cultivation (*samādhi*), while simultaneously inspiring practitioners to integrate these into service for the collective good.

The concept of *entering the world* (*lokānugraha*) is deeply rooted in the spirit of the *bodhisattva* path (*bodhisattva-mārga*). The term *Bodhisattva* (Skt.

<sup>5</sup> Thich Tri Tinh (trans.) (2012), *Lotus Sutra*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 478.

*bodhisattva*; Ch. 菩薩; Viet. Bồ-tát or Bồ-đề-tát-đỏa), meaning “awakening being,” is also referred to as *jñānasattva* or *jñānapuruṣa* – the “awakened sentient being” (Ch. 覺有情) or “great noble being” (Ch. 大士). The *bodhisattva* is one who undertakes the path of practice with the aspiration to attain full Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings (*sarvasattvānām hitāya*).

One of the most influential systematic texts guiding the bodhisattva path is *Lamrim Chenmo* (Tib. ལམ་རིམ་ཆེན་མོ་), the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, composed by the eminent Tibetan master Tsongkhapa (Tib. རྩ་ཁ་པ་; Ch. 宗喀巴; 1357–1419). This monumental work presents a step-by-step framework for spiritual development – from an ordinary person to a fully enlightened Buddha – based on the earlier Indian root text *Bodhipathapradīpa* by Atiśa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna.

The structure of the Lamrim typically includes four major stages:

i. Preliminary foundations (*ādikarmāṇi*) – Emphasizing the importance of relying on a qualified spiritual teacher (*kalyāṇamitra*), the value of human rebirth, and the impermanence of life.

ii. Common path of the lesser vehicle – focused on refuge (*śaraṇāgamana*) and the law of *karma* and its consequences (*karma-vipāka*).

iii. Common path of the middle vehicle – centered around the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*) and dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), leading to liberation from *saṃsāra*.

iv. Superior path of the great vehicle – Cultivation of *bodhicitta*, the Six *Pāramitās* (*ṣaṭ-pāramitā*), and the *catuḥ-saṅgraha-vastu* (the Four Means of Embracing) to attain *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*, the unsurpassed awakening.

The practice of *dāna-pāramitā* (perfection of generosity) is done without attachment, as the *bodhisattva* sees through the illusion of self and other, abiding in the non-dual awareness of *śūnyatā* (emptiness). This mirrors the spirit of *Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta* (“Never Disparaging”) in the *Lotus Sūtra*, who declared to all beings: “I do not dare to despise you; you are all destined to become Buddhas.” Such practice reflects the Mahāyāna principle that “*all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature*” (*sarvasattvāḥ tathāgatagarbhāḥ*).

The *Lamrim Chenmo* provides clear doctrinal, meditative, and ethical guidance to help the practitioner realize these truths for both self-benefit (*ātmahitam*) and the benefit of others (*parahitāya*). This aligns with the Buddha’s instruction in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, where he taught that the Dharma should be proclaimed out of compassion, not for material gain: “*I shall teach the Dhamma step by step, with insight, with compassion, not for gain, and not causing harm to oneself or others*.”<sup>6</sup>

In Tibetan Buddhism, *bodhicitta* (Ch. 菩提心; Viet. Bồ-đề tâm) – the mind of awakening – is considered the heart of the Mahāyāna path. It is generated

<sup>6</sup> Thich Minh Chau (trans.) (2015), *Aṅguttara Nikaya*, Volume 1, Chapter V: XVI: The Chapter on the Wonderful Dharma, Section on the Venerable Udāyi, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 771.

through compassion (*karuṇā*) and developed through meditative stabilization (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*). In Tsongkhapa's system, *bodhicitta* is deeply tied to the realization of *śūnyatā* – the lack of intrinsic existence in all phenomena, rooted in dependent origination.

The *Lamrim* tradition, inspired by Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, was further developed in various lineages. A notable early work is *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (*Thar rgyan*) by Gampopa (Tib. sgam po pa སྐམ་པོ་པ་), which integrates Mahāmudrā meditation and emphasizes the Buddha-nature (*tathāgata-garbha*) of all beings. Tsongkhapa, however, intentionally refrains from elaborating the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine in his *Lamrim*, focusing instead on methodical scholastic exposition, ethical discipline (*śīla*), and the cultivation of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* (calm abiding and insight).

Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelugpa school (Tib. དགེ་ལུགས་པ་), brought about a profound reform in Tibetan Buddhism, reestablishing strict monastic discipline (*vinaya*), integrating both *Sūtrayāna* and *Tantrayāna* teachings, and establishing great monastic universities such as Ganden, Sera, and Drepung. His two masterworks, *Lamrim Chenmo* and the *Ngakrim Chenmo* (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Secret Mantra Path), together provide a comprehensive roadmap to enlightenment through both the exoteric and esoteric paths.

One of Tsongkhapa's key legacies is the emphasis on a fully integrated curriculum grounded in the Three Trainings (*triśikṣā*) – ethics (*śīla*), meditative absorption (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*) – and rooted in the Three Baskets (*Tripiṭaka*). His stress on doctrinal purity, debate, and progressive training made the Gelugpa school the dominant force in Tibetan Buddhist education and monastic life.

The Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* in Taiwan, drawing inspiration from both Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions, embraces Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo* as a central guiding text for both study and practice. It serves as a *compass* for their bodhisattva conduct, framing their vision of spiritual cultivation and societal engagement in alignment with the ideal of universal liberation (*sarvasattva-vimukti*).

### III. SOCIAL WELFARE ACTIVITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE FOUR MEANS OF ATTRACTION (*CATVĀRI SAṂGRAHAVASTŪNI*) AND THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES (*CATVĀRI APRAMĀṆĀNI*) OF THE FÚ ZHÌ (福智) SANGHA

The Buddha repeatedly emphasized the cultivation of the *Four Immeasurables* – loving-kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*mudītā*), and equanimity (*upekṣā*) – as essential qualities on the path of a *Bodhisattva*. These are also the core practices used by the great *Bodhisattvas* to transform sentient beings, forming the spiritual foundation for reaching Buddhahood.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Thích Chơn Thiện (2009), *A General Introduction to Buddhist Studies*, Phuong Dong

Closely connected to these immeasurables are the *Four Means of Attraction* (*saṃgraha-vastu*),<sup>8</sup> which include:

- Generosity (*dāna-saṃgraha*) – Providing material aid such as food, clothing, medicine, and shelter (*tài thí*).
- Kind speech (*priyavacana-saṃgraha*) – Offering wise and compassionate guidance through the Dharma (*pháp thí*).
- Beneficial action (*arthakriyā-saṃgraha*) – Engaging in meaningful actions for the welfare of others.
- Shared participation (*samatā-saṃgraha*) – Working alongside others in harmony to foster mutual trust and transformation.

These core teachings of both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism – also thoroughly expounded in the *Lamrim Chenmo* – have been diligently implemented by the Fú Zhì (福智) Sangha over many years, manifesting the Buddhist ideal of engaged compassion in society. The Buddha declared:

*“In former times, the Tathāgata practiced generosity, kind speech, beneficial deeds, and cooperative living without discrimination. I saw all beings equally as my family, my friends, with no separation or partiality”* (Mahāvastu).

According to Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* teachings, the practitioner aspires to perfect the six *pāramitās*. Among them, *dāna-pāramitā* (the perfection of generosity) is foundational – not merely giving, but giving without ego, discrimination, or attachment.<sup>9</sup> As the Buddha taught:

*“Wherever karma ripens, there its fruits are experienced – whether in this life, the next, or a future life.”*<sup>10</sup>

Thus, true giving purifies greed, cultivates egoless compassion, and leads to liberation (*mokṣa*). The highest form of generosity is when the giver no longer perceives the act as giving.

The *bodhisattva*, seeing the world as impermanent (*anitya*), unsatisfactory (*duḥkha*), and devoid of self (*anātman*), spontaneously embodies the *pāramitās*. As the Buddha taught:

*“Living even a single day with insight into arising and passing is better than living a hundred years without such wisdom”* (Dhammapada, v.113).

Through the Four Means of Attraction and the Four Immeasurables, the *bodhisattva* wins the hearts of others – regardless of social distance, background, or belief system. In this light:

---

Publishing House, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Nārada Mahā Thera (2013), *The Buddha and His Teaching*, translated by Phạm Kim Khánh, General Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> Thích Trí Quảng (2008), *Engaged Buddhism and Its Development*, Volume 1, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 279.

<sup>10</sup> Sa-môn Thích Tịnh Hạnh (2000), *The Great Collection 49 – The Nirvana Series III – Nos. 376 to 396, The Great Compassion Sutra – Volume V – Chapter 13: Planting the Roots of Goodness*, Linh Sơn Cultural and Educational Association (Taiwan), p. 448.



- Material giving is considered the most basic.
- Dharma giving is the most noble, as it brings wisdom.
- Fearless giving (*abhaya-dāna*) is the most profound, expressing deep compassion and patience.

The Fú Zhì (福智) Sangha in Taiwan has actualized these teachings in practical ways to uplift individuals and society:

Key Programs and Social Welfare Contributions:

- **Buddhist Education:** Establishing novice monk training classes that integrate Confucian classics with Buddhist scriptures to cultivate a new generation of compassionate and wise monastics.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Through the *Từ Tâm Organic Agricultural Fund*, the Sangha promotes organic farming. Currently, over 5,000 hectares of organic land are cultivated in Taiwan. The *Lý Nhân Company*, with 135 organic stores, ensures food safety and builds sustainable networks among farmers, retailers, and consumers.
- **Ethical Education:** Recognizing the moral decline in society, Venerable Nhật Thường founded the *Fú Zhì (福智) Educational Fund* in 1997. The fund organizes camps for educators, students, businesspeople, and youth, attracting over 300,000 participants annually.

As the Buddha said in the *Anguttara Nikāya*:

*“The noble disciple gives fearlessness to countless beings, gives non-hatred, gives non-harm... and shares in limitless merit, happiness, and peace.”<sup>11</sup>*

Since 2003, around 100 Vietnamese entrepreneurs annually have joined these efforts. With Taiwan’s “Southbound Policy” (2015), the Vietnamese presence has grown:

- 22,000 Vietnamese students
- 80,000 Vietnamese-Taiwanese marriages
- Over 100,000 migrant workers

To support this community, the **Việt Thăng Class** (越昇班) was founded on **November 26, 2017**. This program offers Mandarin classes, life skills, spiritual development, and Dharma practice. To date:

- 25 courses
- 2,000 students
- 300 Dharma supporters

The Sangha also provides *Lamrim* courses in Vietnamese for over 100 learners in 8 classes, with support from 40 benefactors – offering a spiritual anchor to those living far from home.

---

<sup>11</sup> Thích Minh Châu Việt (trans.) (1996), *Anguttara Nikaya*, Volume II, Chapter III, The Teachings, Chapter IV, The Messenger of the Gods, Chapter on Causes, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 79.



In the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha teaches:

*“In protecting others, one protects oneself – through patience, harmlessness, loving-kindness, and compassion.”*<sup>12</sup>

These teachings transcend boundaries – religious, ethnic, or cultural – fostering global peace. The Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* firmly holds that **Buddhism is the path of compassion**, and that the Four Immeasurables are the heart of Buddhist development.

#### **International Buddhist Engagement:**

- The Sangha established the **Nguyệt Quang International Buddhist Translation Institute** on Prince Edward Island, Canada. Its mission is to revive the translation of Tibetan texts into Chinese – an effort that had been dormant since the Northern Song Dynasty, nearly a millennium ago. To date, over 300 treatises have been translated, contributing to global Buddhist scholarship.

#### **Contributions to Taiwanese Buddhism:**

- The Sangha organizes *Lamrim* classes throughout Taiwan:  
Over **200 locations**  
More than **3,000 classes**  
Nearly **20,000 Dharma supporters**

This extensive network has significantly shaped contemporary Taiwanese Buddhist life.

### **IV. THE ROLE OF THE SANGHA IN DISSEMINATING THE BUDDHIST TEACHINGS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF MODERN SOCIETY AND FOSTER SUSTAINABLE PEACE FOR HUMANITY**

To address the issues facing modern society, according to Buddhist teachings, “There is no solution other than the solution proposed by the Buddha – His message of non-violence and peace, of compassion and loving-kindness, of tolerance and empathy, of truth and wisdom, of respect for all life, and of abandoning selfishness, hatred, and violence.” Therefore, “There is nothing better than embodying the spirit of the Buddha’s teachings. The essence of these teachings lies in the fact that all actions must be for the common peace and happiness of humanity, without discrimination of nation, religion, race... Only in this way can the present state of insecurity be alleviated and bring peace to the world.”<sup>13</sup>

The modern world faces numerous challenges such as war, climate change, ecological crises, and social injustice. For a long time, Buddhism has upheld a way of life that emphasizes peace, co-existence, and the protection of body, mind, and environment. The Buddhist wisdom highlighted by the Sangha of Fú

<sup>12</sup> Thích Minh Châu Việt (trans.) (1996), *Anguttara Nikaya*, Volume II, Chapter IV, The Teachings, Chapter 11, The Bhandagata, 05, Following the Current, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 190.

<sup>13</sup> Thích Minh Châu (trans.) (2012), *The Dhammapada*, Hong Đức Publishing House, p. 81.

Zhi (福智) through the *Mahāvīyūha Sūtra* emphasizes the spirit of *Bodhisattva* practice by applying the *Dharma* into everyday life through the Four Sublime States (Brahmavihāras) and the Four Principles of Embracing (Cātu-śīla). This wisdom provides deep insights to help understand the root causes of these issues and proposes practical solutions. As the core of the Buddhist tradition, the Sangha not only practices and studies but also plays a significant role in educating and serving society. Since all sentient beings depend on one another, cooperation leads to mutual prosperity, while destruction leads to mutual loss. This is the living embodiment of compassion in Buddhism.

The Sangha of Fú Zhì (福智) always encourages the practice of *ahimsa* (non-harming) – not merely refraining from causing harm to sentient beings but also actively promoting their welfare. For example, encouraging precepts such as refraining from killing, stealing, etc., represents the negative aspect (not committing evil); while cultivating *bodhicitta* and practicing the *Bodhisattva* Path represents the positive aspect (performing virtuous deeds and rescuing others). Understanding the law of *kamma* (action and its consequences): “All beings will die, their lives will end, and according to their deeds, they will go, receiving the results of good and bad actions. Evil deeds lead to hell, while good deeds lead to heavenly realms.”<sup>14</sup>

By understanding the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), the practice of *ahimsa* becomes logical and necessary, as emphasized in the *Mahāvīyūha Sūtra*. This philosophy is the core foundation for the participation of the Sangha of Fú Zhì (福智) in peace movements. Particularly, it aligns with modern theories in systems theory, ecology, and quantum physics, opening up a holistic approach to solving global problems.

In many Buddhist activities linking the years past, the Fú Zhì (福智) Sangha Group of Taiwan has consistently valued Buddhism in Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, which has been profoundly influenced by Buddhist culture and the recognition of interdependence between nations (such as economic complementarity). The group often chooses dialogue over confrontation, becoming a model for peaceful interaction.

Modern ecology emphasizes the interdependent relationship between organisms and the environment, which directly correlates with the Buddhist principle of *pratītyasamutpāda*. For example, the butterfly effect illustrates how small changes can create global impacts, and climate change is a result of the interaction between human behavior and the natural ecosystem. Every act of environmental destruction ultimately returns to affect humanity. Air pollution and water contamination not only harm the ecosystem but also directly impact human health. Therefore, the Buddhist understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* is entirely compatible with the principle of global symbiosis in modern sustainable development.

---

<sup>14</sup> Thích Minh Châu (trans.) (2015), *Anguttara Nikaya*, Volume 2, Chapter Eight: The Eightfold Path – Chapter on Generosity – IX: The Source of Merit, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 360.

The fundamental to profound teachings in the *Mahāvīyūha Sūtra* explicitly state that because all phenomena are interdependent, individual actions not only affect oneself but also affect others and society. Thus, the promotion of the precepts established by the Buddha, such as the Five Precepts and the Ten Wholesome Actions, serves as the ethical foundation for building a peaceful and stable society.<sup>15</sup> The *Sangha* and the Fú Zhì (福智) Group continue to maintain the study and practice of the Dharma in everyday life, especially in spreading the Five Precepts to all lay followers of the Group, consistently encouraging Buddhists to practice: *not killing*, which is closely related to environmental protection and ecological conservation efforts. *Not engaging in sexual misconduct* helps build harmonious and sustainable families. *Not speaking falsely* is linked to ethical communication and the development of a truthful society.

Through activities such as meditation, *Dharma* teaching, and community service, the Buddhist *Sangha* contributes to: enhancing wisdom and vision, nurturing a sense of global responsibility, spreading the culture of compassion and non-violence.<sup>16</sup> The *Dharma* still exists, and there are still monastic and lay disciples practicing “To practice is to engage, to directly and indirectly heal the ailments of the world, because ‘sentient beings are afflicted, Bodhisattvas are compassionate.’”<sup>17</sup> The societal maladies today are not only social evils but also spiritual wounds resulting from distortions in education and the search for enlightenment.

Recognizing clearly that harming others is self-harm, and exploiting nature is damaging future generations, the Buddhist ethics articulated in the *Mahāvīyūha Sūtra* play a crucial role in preventing conflict and protecting the ecological environment. The Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* of Taiwan, through the teaching of Buddhist principles summarized in the *Mahāvīyūha Sūtra*, helps individuals recognize that their actions can impact society and the environment, thereby fostering a sense of responsibility and global spirit, contributing practically to the long-term sustainable development of humanity.<sup>18</sup>

By practicing core values such as compassion, dependent origination, and non-harming, the Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* of Taiwan not only preserves the tradition of study and practice but also actively engages in social life through initiatives for peace, environmental protection, education, and interfaith dialogue. Despite facing many challenges such as secularization, excessive consumerism, and the rapid changes of modern society, the Buddhist *Sangha*

<sup>15</sup> Thích Minh Châu (trans.) (2016), *The Samyutta Nikaya* (2016), Volume 2, Chapter 3, The Connected Discourses on Mindfulness, Chapter Nālanda-IX. Sedaka or Ekantak, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 581.

<sup>16</sup> Walpola Rahula (2000), *What the Buddha Taught*, translated by Thích Nữ Trí Hải, Introduction by Hòa Thượng Thích Minh Châu, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 201.

<sup>17</sup> Thích Minh Châu (trans.) (2012), *The Dhammapada*, Hong Duc Publishing House, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Thích Trí Tịnh (trans.) (2012), *The Lotus Sutra*, The Tripitaka Master Xuānzàng (Chinese Translation), Volume 4: Chapter “The Dharma Master,” Religious Publishing House, p. 246.

of Fú Zhì (福智) remains steadfast in its mission by combining traditional wisdom with innovative methods. The integration of tradition and modernity will continue to allow the Sangha to be a beacon, lighting the way towards moral and sustainable development for humanity.

**V. THE FÚ ZHÌ (福智) SANGHA OF TAIWAN, WITH THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM, COMPASSION, AND NON-HARMING, ADVOCATES COOPERATION AND MUTUAL DEVELOPMENT FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE PEACE AMONG THE SANGHAS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN SOCIAL WELFARE**

In Taiwan, the Chinese Buddhist Humanitarian Federation promotes exchanges and solidarity between temples, organizing numerous cross-strait Buddhist events to enhance peace and reduce conflict. Many Buddhist sanghas actively participate in interfaith dialogues to foster understanding and cooperation between religions, thereby minimizing religious conflicts.

The Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* supports interfaith dialogue. Many Buddhist sanghas actively engage in interfaith dialogues to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between religions, which in turn reduces religious conflicts. For example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has engaged in dialogues with Christian and Muslim leaders and co-authored books with Bishop Desmond Tutu, such as *The Book of Joy*, which emphasizes universal values like compassion and forgiveness, creating a model for religious harmony. The Chinese Buddhist Humanitarian Federation has organized delegations of monks to meet with the Pope at the Vatican, strengthening mutual understanding and establishing interfaith cooperative relationships. Elder Master Shàng Tán Hì Dào founded the World Religious Museum (MWR) in New Taipei, Taiwan, one of the few museums focusing on “religious harmony.” The museum showcases the culture and art of major religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Shinto, etc., through permanent, special, and multimedia interactive exhibitions. Moreover, he initiated the Global Peace Forum of Religious Leaders, gathering over 30 religious leaders worldwide and signing the Global Peace Religious Declaration. He has also spoken at UNESCO, calling for love for the Earth and world peace. Due to these contributions, he was awarded the World Religious Leaders Peace Prize in 2016.

Many Buddhist *sanghas* have taken practical actions to protect the environment. For example, the Fú Zhì (福智) Buddhist Sangha, founded by Master Shàng Rì Hì, established the Fú Zhì (福智) Education Fund, the Tzu-Tung Organic Farming Fund, and the Lì Rén company. These organizations promote organic farming, reduce plastic use, encourage vegetarianism, plant trees, and have achieved significant results. *Tree planting*: Since 2010, the Tzu-Tung Fund initiated the “Planting Trees to Save the Earth” project, collaborating with the government and farmers to green barren land. As of February 2025, they have planted 1,307,141 trees in Taiwan and abroad. For example, they planted 100,000 windbreak trees on the coastal areas of Wēn Lín to combat saltwater erosion, over 1 million desert trees in Mongolia to combat desertification, and trees in wetlands in Jiā Yì to restore biodiversity

(with black-faced spoonbills nesting there). *Participation*: 124,147 people have been involved. The organization also supports farmers transitioning to organic farming, with more than 1,000 hectares of land now cultivated organically, helping to protect over 50 species of rare animals. *Reducing plastic*: Since 2016, the project “Lighting Taiwan – Lighting the Oceans” has been implemented in 454 schools with over 17,000 teachers and students participating. It collaborates with over 1,000 businesses in the “Plastic-Free Clean Oceans Alliance,” reducing hundreds of tons of plastic waste from entering the oceans annually. Beach cleaning activities such as the “BIG BLUE” campaign in 2023 are also organized.

The Tzu Chi *Sangha*, founded by Master Cheng Ying, advocates vegetarianism to reduce carbon emissions, applying the 5R principle (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Repair, Reject). The Global Vegetarian Day on November 1 encourages 1 person to eat vegetarian for a day, reducing 1.5 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>; in 2018, over 1.11 million people from nearly 200 countries participated. Over 10,000 recycling stations worldwide have been established, collecting more than 1 billion plastic bottles to make blankets for charity, reducing tens of thousands of tons of waste each year. The Fo Guang Shan Sangha, known for Humanistic Buddhism, has launched a campaign to “Protect the Environment – Preserve the Soul,” focusing on vegetarianism and recycling. The Dharma Cồ Sơn Sangha proposed “Protecting Spiritual Ecology,” which includes living simply, protecting ecology, practicing frugality in rituals, and meditation – all of which promote environmental consciousness. These activities demonstrate that the *sanghas* are actively responding to contemporary issues, spreading compassion and wisdom to protect the planet.

On the issue of Buddhist simplicity and sustainable consumption, the Buddhist *Sangha* follow the principle of “less desire and contentment” (*alpa-iccha* and *santutṭhi*)<sup>19</sup> to practice a simple lifestyle and reduce material consumption. This corresponds with the current trends of minimalism and low-carbon economics. Reducing consumption not only helps to reduce the exploitation of natural resources but also limits environmental pollution, which is a key factor in sustainable development. This impact extends beyond the individual to national policies. For example, Bhutan – a country deeply influenced by Buddhism – does not use GDP as its sole development goal but instead focuses on the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index, which includes ecological health indicators. The Bhutanese government has used Buddhist teachings to promote a lifestyle in harmony with nature and improve the internal quality of life for its people. If many countries followed the model of development based on happiness and sustainability like Bhutan, the world would undoubtedly become a better place.

**Buddhist Education and Raising Ecological Awareness:** Many Buddhist schools and meditation centers have incorporated environmental

---

<sup>19</sup> Thích Trí Quảng (2008), *Engaged Buddhism and Its Development*, Volume 1, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 285.



protection education into their curricula, contributing to ecological awareness within communities. The Fú Zhì (福智) Buddhist Academy aims to heal the body, mind, and environment. Its curriculum focuses on nurturing the mind of compassion, loving both humanity and nature. The school is certified as a Gold-Level Green Building according to international LEED standards, reflecting its commitment to environmental friendliness. The Dharma Cỗ Sơn *Sangha* spreads the concept of “spiritual ecological protection” through various forms such as Dharma sessions and Buddhist activities, helping to enhance spiritual life quality while protecting nature. In the West, many scholars are engaged in the “Buddhist and Science Dialogue” project, applying systems thinking to education. Secondary schools are integrating “Ecology and Dependent Origination” courses to help students understand food chains, material life cycles, and carbon footprints, contributing to early environmental consciousness.

These efforts demonstrate that Buddhist education not only helps people develop their inner selves but also plays an essential role in fostering sustainable awareness and spreading a green lifestyle across society.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Looking toward the future, the Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* aspires to collaborate with the global Buddhist community, following the *Dharma* propagation spirit of the great master Tsongkhapa. The goal is to continue contributing to Buddhist education, purifying society, and fostering environmental sustainability, all in the pursuit of creating a peaceful and harmonious world. The future development direction for the Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* and Fú Zhì (福智) Group in Taiwan includes the following aspects:

**6.1. Digitalization and the establishment of a global Buddhist network:** Leveraging social media and digital platforms to disseminate Buddhist wisdom, raise awareness of environmental protection, and promote peace. Applications for mindfulness meditation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can support practitioners and connect the global community. The *Sangha* should also contribute to the development of AI ethics, guided by the principle of dependent origination (*Paticca-samuppada*), to avoid discrimination and division.

**6.2. Strengthening interfaith and intercultural cooperation:** The *Sangha* can collaborate with different religious communities, academic circles, and environmental organizations to jointly pursue sustainable development.

**6.3. Developing a model of practice adapted to modern society:** While maintaining the traditional ascetic life of the *Sangha*, lay practitioners should be trained to engage in social, environmental, and community-building activities, fostering compassion and collective well-being.

**6.4. Integrating Buddhist teachings with science:** Monks and nuns should acquire scientific knowledge to promote dialogue between Buddhism and fields such as psychology and neuroscience, helping to improve the mental health of the community.



**6.5. Engaging in policy planning:** The *Sangha* should cooperate with governments to establish environmental policies grounded in the principle of dependent origination. At the same time, it should contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**6.6. Upholding the precepts:** At the most fundamental level, the preservation of the precepts is seen as the greatest contribution to society. The practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom is the root from which good fruits are borne. All skillful means serve as methods; without a solid foundation, their benefits to the world would not endure.

**6.7. Global Buddhist collaboration:** In the future, the Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* and the Fú Zhì (福智) Group in Taiwan are committed to cooperating with the global Buddhist community to share experiences and initiatives, contributing to the advancement of Buddhist wisdom and creating a peaceful, harmonious, and sustainable world for all sentient beings.

By embracing these directions, the Fú Zhì (福智) *Sangha* aims to continue its mission of wisdom and compassion, engaging with the modern world while remaining steadfast in its ancient practices, ensuring a positive and lasting impact on society and the environment.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Thich Minh Chau (trans.) (2012), *Dhammapada*, Hong Duc Publishing House.
- Thich Minh Chau (trans.) (2012), *Dhammapada*, Hong Duc Publishing House.
- Thich Minh Chau (trans.) (2012), *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha III, The Shorter Discourse on Differentiated Karma*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.
- Thich Minh Chau (trans.), (1991), *Samyutta Nikaya*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.
- Thich Minh Chau (trans.), (2015), *Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. 1, Chapter V: XVI: The Chapter on the Marvelous Dharma, The Section on Udāyi*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.
- Thich Minh Chau (trans.), (2015), *Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. 2, Chapter 8: The Eightfold Path – The Chapter on Generosity – IX: The Source of Merit*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.
- Thich Minh Chau (trans.), (2016), *Samyutta Nikaya (2016), Vol. 2, Chapter 3, The Contemplation on the Mind, The Section on Nālanda- IX. Sedaka or Ekantak*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.
- Thich Minh Chau Viet (trans.) (1996), *Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. II, Chapter III: The Dhamma, Section IV: The Messenger of the Gods, Section on Causes*,

Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.

Thich Minh Chau Viet (trans.) (1996), *Anguttara Nikaya*, Vol. II, Chapter IV: The Dhamma, Section 11: Bhandagata, Section 05: The Stream of Truth, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.

Thich Tri Tinh (trans.) (2012), *Lotus Sutra*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi.

Thich Tri Tinh (trans.), (2012), *Lotus Sutra, Translation of the Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva (Chinese Translation)*, Volume 4: Chapter “The Dharma Teacher” Tenth, Religious Publishing House.

Venerable Thich Tinh Hanh (2000), *Da Tập 49 – The Nirvana Sutra III – Numbers 376 to 396, The Great Compassion Sutra – Volume V – Chapter 13: Cultivating Good Roots*, Linh Son Cultural and Educational Association (Taiwan).

### **Secondary sources**

Fo Guang Ta-tz'u-tien Editorial Board. (1988). *Fo Guang Ta-tz'u-tien (The Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism)*. Fo Guang Publishing House.

Mahā Thera, N. (2013). *The Buddha and his Dhamma* (P. K. Khanh, Trans.). General Publishing House.

Rahula, W. (2000). *What the Buddha taught* (T. N. T. Hai, Trans.; M. V. T. M. Chau, Introduction). Religious Publishing House.

Thich Chon Thien. (2009). *An introduction to Buddhist studies*. Phuong Dong Publishing House.

Thich Tri Quang. (2008). *Buddhism in the world and its development* (Vol. 1). Religious Publishing House.

Unknown author. (1986). *Das Lexikon der östlichen Weisheitslehren*. Bern.

Le, N. (interview) (2010, August 20–22). I want to make a practical contribution to the world. *Lao Dong Newspaper*, No. 32.

# MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION FOR A COMPASSIONATE AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE





# MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION FOR A COMPASSIONATE AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE AND FOSTERING UNITY FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

Ven. Lopen Gem Dorji\*

## **Abstract:**

This study delves into the transformative role of mindfulness in education as a foundational means to cultivate a compassionate, sustainable future while fostering global unity and harmony. Grounded in Buddhist principles, it elucidates how mindfulness - beyond its contemporary applications - nurtures emotional intelligence, ethical discernment, and ecological consciousness. By fostering an awareness that transcends self-interest, mindfulness catalyzes empathy, moral integrity, and a deep sense of interconnectedness with all sentient beings. Furthermore, the study explores the imperative of global unity in confronting pressing challenges such as climate change, systemic social inequities, and the erosion of ethical governance. It posits that only through a collective commitment to compassionate diplomacy, radical inclusivity, and non-violence can humanity hope to navigate the complexities of an interdependent world. In this light, the principles of interbeing - central to Buddhist thought - offer a compelling paradigm for reimagining international relations, emphasizing mutual respect, deep listening, and the resolution of conflict through understanding rather than coercion. A critical examination of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) framework is presented as an alternative model of development that seamlessly integrates material progress with spiritual and psychological well-being. Unlike conventional economic paradigms that prioritize GDP growth at the expense of social and ecological harmony, the GNH approach underscores the intrinsic value of mindfulness, ethical governance, and environmental stewardship in shaping a just and balanced society. This study underscores how Bhutan's model provides a valuable blueprint for rethinking global development metrics in alignment

---

\* Advisor, Central Monk Body of Bhutan.

with the holistic well-being of both individuals and the planet. Ultimately, this research advocates for a paradigm shift in education - one that transcends rote learning and instrumentalist knowledge in favor of an education that cultivates inner wisdom, ethical responsibility, and a profound sense of global kinship. Mindful education, rooted in the principles of awareness and compassion, is positioned as a powerful instrument for nurturing future generations of leaders equipped to address the existential crises of the modern age. By embracing a global ethic of mindfulness and cooperation, humanity can move toward a more harmonious, sustainable, and enlightened world.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, mindfulness, sustainable future, global harmony.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Mindfulness and emotional intelligence

Mindfulness-based educational practices serve as a transformative vehicle for the cultivation of emotional intelligence, a concept defined by Daniel Goleman as the capacity to recognize, understand, and regulate one's own emotions while skillfully navigating interpersonal relationships.<sup>1</sup> Emotional intelligence is not merely a psychological construct but an essential faculty for ethical living, social harmony, and psychological well-being. Within Buddhist thought, mindfulness (*sati*) functions as the cornerstone of emotional cultivation, fostering a heightened awareness of internal mental states and their ethical ramifications.

A profound exposition of mindfulness in this context is found in the *Satipatṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), wherein the Buddha instructs practitioners to engage in systematic contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), thoughts (*cittānupassanā*), and mental objects (*dhammānupassanā*)—a practice aimed at developing clarity, insight, and equanimity.<sup>2</sup> By refining one's attentional faculties and deepening introspective awareness, this discipline enables practitioners to transcend reactive tendencies, cultivating instead a measured and discerning approach to emotional and cognitive stimuli. Within an educational setting, this translates to the fostering of self-awareness and emotional regulation, equipping students with the resilience to respond to challenges thoughtfully rather than impulsively.

Beyond individual self-mastery, mindfulness in education fosters *sampajañña* – clear comprehension of one's actions and their ethical implications. This quality is indispensable in an increasingly interconnected world, where emotional intelligence is a prerequisite not only for personal success but also for meaningful contributions to collective well-being. By nurturing mindfulness, students develop a greater capacity for empathy, deep listening, and constructive engagement with diverse perspectives, thereby mitigating conflict and fostering more harmonious relationships.

<sup>1</sup> Goleman (1995), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145.



Empirical research underscores the transformative impact of mindfulness-based interventions in education. Studies indicate that students who engage in mindfulness training exhibit improved attentional control, reduced anxiety, and enhanced social interactions.<sup>3</sup> These findings align with Buddhist psychological insights, which posit that a mind cultivated in mindfulness attains a state of *upekkhā* (equanimity), allowing for greater stability amidst emotional turbulence. In contrast to contemporary educational paradigms that prioritize rote learning and cognitive achievement, a mindfulness-centered approach nurtures a more holistic development of the student - one that integrates intellectual, emotional, and ethical dimensions of growth.

By embedding mindfulness into curricula, educators can provide students with the cognitive and emotional tools necessary to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving social and academic landscape with greater poise and adaptability. In doing so, education moves beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, becoming a vehicle for profound self-transformation and social responsibility. Such an approach not only aligns with the Buddhist vision of education as a path to wisdom (*prajñā*), ethical integrity (*śīla*), and mental discipline (*samādhi*) but also offers a powerful antidote to the psychological fragmentation and ethical uncertainty that characterize contemporary society. Ultimately, by cultivating mindfulness in education, we nurture a generation of individuals who are not only intellectually competent but also deeply attuned to the well-being of themselves, others, and the world at large.

## 1.2. Ethical behavior and compassionate action

Buddhist ethics, as systematically outlined in the Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya Atṭhaṅgika Magga), provide a profound ethical foundation for education. The principles of right conduct (*sammā kammanta*), right speech (*sammā vācā*), and right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*) emphasize moral integrity, responsible action, and a compassionate approach to life—values that align seamlessly with contemporary educational imperatives of honesty, empathy, and social responsibility.<sup>4</sup> From a Buddhist perspective, education is not merely a means of acquiring intellectual knowledge but a process of moral cultivation, wherein students develop discernment, ethical awareness, and an intrinsic commitment to non-harming (*ahiṃsā*).

A mindful education, deeply rooted in these ethical precepts, goes beyond conventional moral instruction by fostering direct experiential insight into ethical behavior. Through the cultivation of mindfulness (*sati*), students become increasingly aware of their thoughts, speech, and actions, enabling them to act with greater wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). The practice of mindful reflection encourages self-regulation, moral responsibility, and a sense of interconnectedness, allowing students to engage with the world in a manner that is both ethically and socially constructive.

<sup>3</sup> Jennings et al. (2019), p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Bodhi (2000), p. 84.

### 1.3. The transformative power of *mettā bhāvanā* in education

A particularly effective practice in this regard is “*mettā bhāvanā*” (loving-kindness meditation), a contemplative discipline that nurtures unconditional benevolence toward oneself and others. Within Buddhist psychology, *mettā* functions as a powerful antidote to destructive emotions such as anger, resentment, and hostility, replacing them with empathy, patience, and goodwill.<sup>5</sup> Research has demonstrated that students who regularly engage in *mettā* meditation exhibit significantly lower levels of aggression, greater emotional resilience, and enhanced prosocial behavior - traits that contribute to more harmonious and compassionate learning environments.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, mindfulness-based interventions in schools have been linked to a measurable reduction in bullying, conflict, and exclusionary behavior. By fostering deep emotional awareness and ethical sensitivity, mindfulness enables students to transcend ego-driven reactions, allowing them to approach interpersonal challenges with understanding and kindness rather than defensiveness or hostility. In this sense, mindfulness in education functions not merely as a personal well-being strategy but as a socially transformative practice, shaping individuals who are both morally discerning and actively engaged in the well-being of others.

### 1.4. Mindfulness as a path to a compassionate and sustainable future

By embedding mindfulness within the educational framework, institutions can nurture individuals who are not only intellectually proficient but also ethically grounded and socially conscious. A Buddhist-informed approach to education - centered on mindful awareness, ethical reflection, and compassionate engagement - has the potential to cultivate a generation of leaders and citizens who embody integrity, altruism, and a deep sense of global responsibility. This integrative model of education, drawing from Buddhist ethical wisdom, provides a pathway toward a more harmonious, equitable, and sustainable future - one in which individuals not only excel in academic pursuits but also contribute meaningfully to the collective flourishing of humanity and the planet at large.

### 1.5. Environmental consciousness and sustainable living

The Buddhist concept of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) underscores the interconnected nature of all life forms, emphasizing that human actions have direct consequences on the environment.<sup>7</sup> The *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* warns that moral decline leads to environmental degradation and societal unrest, illustrating that ethical conduct directly impacts the balance of nature and human society.<sup>8</sup> This *sutta* serves as a foundational text for understanding the Buddhist perspective on environmental ethics, linking

<sup>5</sup> Salzberg (1995), p. 57.

<sup>6</sup> Weare (2014), p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> Harvey (2013), p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> DN 26, (trans) Walshe (1995), p. 397.

human greed and negligence to ecological collapse.

Incorporating mindfulness into education fosters ecological awareness, encouraging students to adopt sustainable lifestyles. Schools that implement mindfulness-based environmental programs, such as nature meditation and eco-conscious decision-making, report increased student engagement in conservation efforts.<sup>9</sup> These programs teach students to view nature as a living entity interconnected with their existence, reinforcing the Buddhist teaching of *mettā* (loving-kindness) toward all sentient beings. The *Dhammapada* 129 reminds us that just as all beings fear suffering and desire happiness, humans must extend their compassion to nature and its ecosystems.<sup>10</sup> Bhutan provides an exemplary case of mindful environmental governance, where Buddhist principles are integrated into policy-making. The country's constitutional mandate requires that at least 60% of the land remains under forest cover, reflecting the Buddhist values of conservation and long-term sustainability.<sup>11</sup> This model highlights how mindfulness, when ingrained in education and governance, fosters a deep respect for nature and responsibility toward future generations. Furthermore, the Buddhist precept of *non-harming* (*ahiṃsā*) extends beyond interpersonal ethics to environmental stewardship. The *Jataka tales* frequently depict the Buddha in past lives as a compassionate protector of wildlife, emphasizing that harming nature disrupts the balance of life.<sup>12</sup> These narratives can be integrated into education to instill an ethical responsibility for environmental conservation among young learners.

### 1.6. Fostering unity and global harmony

Mindfulness promotes inclusivity and global harmony by cultivating awareness of shared humanity. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva states, "As long as space endures, and as long as sentient beings remain, may I too remain to dispel the suffering of the world."<sup>13</sup> This selfless ideal underpins Buddhist-inspired diplomacy and educational policies aimed at fostering peace and cooperation. The cultivation of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness) in educational settings ensures that future generations internalize values of empathy and collective well-being.

The *Sigālovāda Sutta* provides ethical guidelines for harmonious social interactions, advocating for mutual respect, generosity, and non-violence in human relationships.<sup>14</sup> By incorporating these teachings into curricula, education can serve as a vehicle for fostering unity and reducing global conflicts. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) model reflects this philosophy, integrating mindfulness with governance to promote collective

<sup>9</sup> Rabois (2016), p. 121.

<sup>10</sup> Buddhārakkhita (1985), p. 56

<sup>11</sup> Ura et al. (2012), p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> Cowell (1895) p. 203.

<sup>13</sup> Śāntideva (2006) p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> Walshe, 1995, p. 461.

well-being.<sup>15</sup> Unlike conventional economic models, GNH prioritizes holistic development, measuring success through psychological well-being, cultural preservation, and ecological conservation. This model demonstrates that mindfulness-based policies can create equitable and peaceful societies. At an international level, Buddhist diplomacy has historically played a role in fostering peace. The *Dhamma Vijaya* (conquest by righteousness) policy of Emperor Ashoka exemplifies how mindfulness and non-violence can guide global interactions.<sup>16</sup> Modern applications of this principle can be seen in interfaith dialogues and global sustainability efforts, where mindfulness-based negotiations lead to cooperative solutions. Mindfulness-based education aligns with Buddhist principles to cultivate emotional intelligence, ethical behavior, environmental awareness, and global unity. Through mindfulness, students develop resilience, compassion, and responsibility - traits essential for navigating the challenges of the 21st century. The Buddhist teachings on interdependence and ethical responsibility highlight the importance of sustainable living, while mindfulness-based diplomacy offers a framework for fostering global harmony. As education evolves to meet modern needs, integrating mindfulness offers a sustainable and ethical framework for fostering a more compassionate and interconnected world.

## II. MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION FOR COMPASSION AND SUSTAINABILITY

### 2.1. The role of mindfulness in emotional intelligence

Mindfulness cultivates emotional intelligence by enabling individuals to regulate emotions, develop self-awareness, and enhance interpersonal relationships. Schools integrating mindfulness practices have reported lower levels of bullying and improved student relationships, as learners become more compassionate and aware of others' feelings. For instance, schools in the United States, Europe, and Asia have demonstrated that students engaged in mindfulness programs exhibit increased empathy and reduced anxiety, contributing to more inclusive and supportive learning environments.<sup>17</sup> In an increasingly digital world, mindfulness can also address issues such as cyberbullying and misinformation. Teaching mindful communication encourages students to pause and reflect before responding online, promoting a culture of respect and understanding in virtual interactions.<sup>18</sup> Mindfulness cultivates emotional intelligence by enabling individuals to regulate emotions, develop self-awareness, and enhance interpersonal relationships. Schools integrating mindfulness practices have reported lower levels of bullying and improved student relationships, as learners become more compassionate and aware of others' feelings. For instance, schools in the United States, Europe, and Asia have demonstrated that students engaged in mindfulness programs exhibit

---

<sup>15</sup> Ura et al. (2012), p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> Thapar (1997), p. 132.

<sup>17</sup> Jennings et al. (2019), p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> Weare (2014), p. 45.

increased empathy and reduced anxiety, contributing to more inclusive and supportive learning environments.<sup>19</sup> In Buddhist teachings, mindfulness (*sati*) is central to the cultivation of emotional intelligence as it enhances self-awareness and emotional regulation. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* underscores the importance of mindfulness of emotions (*vedanānupassanā*), thoughts (*cittānupassanā*), and mental states (*dhammānupassanā*) in developing clarity and emotional balance.<sup>20</sup> These foundational practices allow individuals to observe emotions without attachment or aversion, thereby reducing impulsive reactions and fostering equanimity. Mindfulness-based education aligns with the Buddhist ethical framework, particularly *sīla* (moral discipline), which advocates for compassionate interactions and the practice of right speech (*sammā vācā*). Right speech, as outlined in the *Noble Eightfold Path*, emphasizes truthful, beneficial, and harmonious communication.<sup>21</sup> By incorporating mindfulness training, students learn to engage in thoughtful dialogue, reducing conflicts and misunderstandings in both physical and digital spaces. In an increasingly digital world, mindfulness can also address issues such as cyberbullying and misinformation. Teaching mindful communication encourages students to pause and reflect before responding online, promoting a culture of respect and understanding in virtual interactions.<sup>22</sup> Digital mindfulness, a modern extension of traditional mindfulness practices, fosters responsible engagement with social media, preventing impulsive reactions that could escalate conflicts.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, scientific research supports the effectiveness of mindfulness in emotional intelligence. Studies show that mindfulness meditation enhances activity in the prefrontal cortex, which is associated with emotion regulation and executive functioning.<sup>24</sup> Schools implementing mindfulness programs have reported that students develop increased self-regulation skills, reducing aggressive behavior and fostering positive social interactions.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva encourages the cultivation of patience (*kṣānti*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) as essential qualities of emotional intelligence.<sup>26</sup> His teachings advocate for the intentional development of these traits to create harmonious and compassionate societies, reinforcing the long-term benefits of mindfulness-based education. Mindfulness fosters emotional intelligence by enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and compassionate communication. By integrating mindfulness into education, students develop the ability to navigate interpersonal relationships with wisdom and empathy. The Buddhist emphasis on mindfulness as a tool for cultivating patience and right speech further strengthens its role in emotional development. As

<sup>19</sup> Jennings et al. (2019), p. 72.

<sup>20</sup> MN 10, (trans.) Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145.

<sup>21</sup> Bodhi (2000), p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> Weare (2014), p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> Harvey (2013), p. 87.

<sup>24</sup> Davidson & Begley (2012), p. 114.

<sup>25</sup> Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor (2010), p. 140.

<sup>26</sup> Śāntideva (2006), p. 92.



technology continues to shape modern interactions, digital mindfulness provides an ethical framework for responsible communication. Therefore, the inclusion of mindfulness-based education is not only beneficial for students but essential for cultivating a society that values compassion, ethical behavior, and sustainable relationships.

## **2.1. Fostering unity for global harmony: A Buddhist perspective**

### **2.1.1. Compassion as a unifying force**

Buddhist philosophy upholds compassion (*karuṇā*) as a foundational principle for transcending national, racial, and cultural divides. The cultivation of empathy and altruistic concern for others serves as a bridge between diverse communities, fostering global cooperation and sustainable peace. Compassion, as emphasized in the teachings of the Buddha, is not merely a passive emotional response but an active commitment to alleviating suffering (*dukkha*) and promoting the well-being of all sentient beings.<sup>27</sup> This principle finds expression in modern diplomacy, particularly in the Gross National Happiness (GNH)-oriented foreign policies of Bhutan, which prioritize mutual respect, shared prosperity, and collective well-being over zero-sum competition.<sup>28</sup> The *Bodhisattva* ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism epitomizes this universal compassion, where beings like Avalokiteshvara embody an unwavering commitment to easing the suffering of others, irrespective of social, political, or geographical distinctions.<sup>29</sup> Contemporary applications of Buddhist compassion in governance can be observed in initiatives that emphasize humanitarian aid, refugee support, and global public health efforts. For instance, the principles of compassionate diplomacy align with Buddhist ethics in international relations, advocating for dialogue over aggression, understanding over prejudice, and reconciliation over retaliation.<sup>30</sup>

### **2.1.2. Inclusivity and respect for diversity**

The Buddhist principle of non-discrimination (*aviparita*) calls for an inclusive social framework that recognizes the inherent dignity and potential of all individuals. This ethos aligns with contemporary efforts to promote inclusive governance and equitable representation. In the *Aggañña Sutta*, the Buddha critiques caste-based hierarchies, advocating instead for a meritocratic and ethical leadership model where rulers serve the common good rather than personal gain.<sup>31</sup> Such teachings provide a moral foundation for modern policies that emphasize the participation of marginalized and historically oppressed groups in decision-making processes. The intersection between Buddhist ethics and contemporary global initiatives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is particularly evident in efforts to eradicate

<sup>27</sup> Dalai Lama (1999), p. 87.

<sup>28</sup> Heruka, (1995), p. 301.

<sup>29</sup> Lopez, (2008), p. 133.

<sup>30</sup> Thurman, (2006), p. 205.

<sup>31</sup> DN 27, Walshe (1987), p. 409.



poverty, address health disparities, and combat environmental degradation through collective action.<sup>32</sup> These principles also resonate with the concept of *dāna* (generosity), which underscores social responsibility and resource-sharing as means of reducing systemic inequality.<sup>33</sup> Buddhist monastic traditions, which function as centers of community welfare and education in many parts of Asia, illustrate how spiritual leadership can contribute to inclusive and participatory governance models.

Furthermore, in pluralistic societies, Buddhist thought supports interfaith dialogue and mutual respect as mechanisms for preventing sectarian violence and fostering social harmony.<sup>34</sup> Countries such as Sri Lanka and Thailand have leveraged Buddhist councils and mediation frameworks to bridge interethnic and interreligious tensions, demonstrating the practical application of Buddhist inclusivity in statecraft and communal peace-building.<sup>35</sup>

### III. PEACEFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT MODELS

The Buddhist commitment to non-violence (*ahimsā*) is an essential principle for conflict resolution and sustainable governance. Historical exemplars such as Emperor Ashoka, who renounced warfare following the Kalinga conflict and implemented policies rooted in Buddhist ethics, illustrate how non-violence can be institutionalized in governance.<sup>36</sup> Ashoka's rock edicts emphasize moral leadership, religious tolerance, and the welfare of all beings, embodying a vision of statecraft that prioritizes ethical responsibility over territorial expansion.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet under Guru Padmasambhava demonstrates how peaceful means of cultural integration and dialogue can be more enduring than coercion.<sup>38</sup> His non-violent propagation of *Dharma*, which synthesized indigenous Bon traditions with Buddhist teachings, underscores the capacity of Buddhist frameworks to accommodate and harmonize diverse cultural elements without erasing local identities. In the modern era, Buddhist non-violent resistance movements, such as those led by Mahatma Gandhi (though he was primarily Hindu, he was deeply influenced by Jain and Buddhist *ahimsā*) and Thich Nhat Hanh, provide compelling examples of how moral force can counteract oppression and injustice.<sup>39</sup> The *Engaged Buddhism* movement, which integrates meditative insight with social activism, further demonstrates how Buddhist teachings can be mobilized to address contemporary global challenges, from climate change

---

<sup>32</sup> UN (2015).

<sup>33</sup> Harvey (2013), p. 214.

<sup>34</sup> Gethin (1998), p. 276.

<sup>35</sup> Queen & King (1996), p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> Strong (1983), p. 145.

<sup>37</sup> Dhendrup (2001), p. 157.

<sup>38</sup> Snellgrove (1987), p. 286.

<sup>39</sup> King (2009), p. 78.

to human rights violations.<sup>40</sup>

### **3.1. Buddhist economic and environmental ethics: toward a sustainable and compassionate future**

Alternative models of development inspired by Buddhist principles present viable pathways toward a more sustainable, equitable, and ethically grounded global economy. The Buddhist critique of consumerism and material excess, as articulated in E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful*, advocates for an economics of sufficiency - a paradigm that prioritizes well-being over unchecked economic growth.<sup>41</sup> This vision resonates profoundly with contemporary sustainability movements, which seek to redefine prosperity beyond GDP-centric metrics. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness model exemplifies this approach by integrating spiritual, environmental, and social well-being into national policy, challenging conventional economic frameworks that equate growth with progress.<sup>42</sup> At its core, Buddhist economic ethics call for a fundamental reorientation of values - one that shifts from acquisitiveness to contentment, from competition to cooperation, and exploitation to stewardship. This perspective does not reject material progress outright but insists that economic activity be harmonized with ethical responsibility and ecological balance. Buddhist teachings on right livelihood emphasize that economic pursuits should uphold human dignity, social justice, and environmental integrity, offering a compelling ethical foundation for sustainable economic policies in the modern world.

### **3.2. Interdependence and environmental responsibility**

From an ecological standpoint, Buddhist ethics offer a profound vision of environmental responsibility rooted in the doctrine of interdependence. This principle underscores that all forms of life are deeply interconnected, challenging the anthropocentric worldviews that have contributed to environmental degradation and climate crises. The Jataka tales, which recount the Buddha's past lives, are replete with narratives that affirm the sanctity of nature, depicting forests, rivers, and animals as integral to moral and spiritual life.<sup>43</sup> These stories serve as ethical allegories, reminding humanity of its duty to protect and coexist harmoniously with the natural world. Contemporary Buddhist movements have revived and applied these ethical precepts in innovative ways. In Thailand, for example, monks have ordained trees as sacred beings, wrapping them in saffron robes to prevent deforestation and encourage environmental conservation.<sup>44</sup> This practice not only preserves biodiversity but also reframes ecological protection as a moral and spiritual imperative, reinforcing the idea that environmental degradation is not merely an economic issue but an ethical failing.

---

<sup>40</sup> Jones (2003), p. 244.

<sup>41</sup> Schumacher (1973), p. 56.

<sup>42</sup> Ura et al. (2012), p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Appleton (2010), p. 189.

<sup>44</sup> Darlington (2012), p. 88.

### 3.3. Buddhism as a guiding framework for global harmony

As the world grapples with increasing ecological crises, social inequalities, and geopolitical fragmentation, Buddhist thought offers a deeply relevant ethical framework for fostering global harmony, inclusivity, and sustainable development. The Buddhist commitment to compassion, non-violence, and ethical governance provides both a moral compass and a practical methodology for addressing contemporary global challenges. The application of Buddhist principles in governance, diplomacy, and ecological conservation demonstrates their enduring relevance in shaping ethical leadership. Historical precedents - from Emperor Ashoka's policies of non-violence to contemporary Buddhist-inspired social movements - attest to the capacity of these teachings to unite diverse communities in the pursuit of justice and sustainability. In a world increasingly defined by interdependence, Buddhist wisdom reminds us that genuine peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of wisdom, ethical conduct, and compassionate action.

As globalization accelerates, societies must reimagine economic and environmental policies through a lens that prioritizes well-being, sustainability, and ethical responsibility. By embracing mindfulness, ethical stewardship, and a commitment to non-harming, humanity can transition from exploitative paradigms to a holistic and harmonious model of co-existence. In doing so, Buddhist ethics provide not only a vision for a sustainable future but also a practical guide for navigating the complexities of modern civilization with wisdom and compassion.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Mindfulness, when systematically integrated into education and global diplomacy, serves as a transformative force, guiding societies toward a future characterized by compassion, sustainability, and harmony. In an era defined by unprecedented challenges - ranging from climate change to social fragmentation - mindfulness offers not only an inner refuge but also a practical methodology for cultivating wisdom, ethical responsibility, and global cooperation. By embedding mindfulness-based practices within educational curricula, societies can nurture a generation of individuals who are not only emotionally intelligent but also environmentally conscious and ethically grounded. The Buddhist emphasis on unity through compassion, inclusivity, and non-violence provides both a philosophical foundation and a practical approach to addressing the complexities of globalization. In contrast to conventional models of education that prioritize cognitive achievement and economic utility, a mindfulness-centered education fosters self-awareness, moral discernment, and a deep sense of interconnectedness - qualities essential for ethical leadership in the 21st century. The Gross National Happiness framework of Bhutan exemplifies the potential of holistic development in fostering peace, well-being, and social harmony. Unlike conventional economic models that measure progress primarily through GDP growth, Bhutan's approach integrates spiritual, psychological, and environmental well-being, offering a more comprehensive vision of human flourishing. The GNH framework reflects Buddhist

principles of mindfulness, interdependence, and compassion, demonstrating how governance rooted in ethical values can contribute to both individual fulfillment and collective prosperity. As humanity navigates the tensions of modern existence, these Buddhist principles serve as a moral compass, guiding individuals, communities, and nations toward greater ethical awareness and social cohesion. By embracing mindful governance, policymakers can cultivate a deeper sense of accountability, fairness, and long-term sustainability, ensuring that economic and technological advancements do not come at the expense of social justice or ecological integrity. Practicing mindfulness at both the individual and collective levels fosters a profound transformation - one that extends beyond personal well-being to strengthen global cooperation and peacebuilding efforts. The conscious cultivation of wisdom, ethical conduct, and compassionate action equip individuals and institutions with the moral clarity necessary to engage in constructive dialogue, conflict resolution, and sustainable policymaking. A world guided by mindfulness and ethical discernment acknowledges interdependence as a fundamental reality - recognizing that the well-being of one is inextricably linked to the well-being of all. In such a paradigm, global unity is not a distant ideal but a practical necessity, fostering inclusive decision-making, environmental stewardship, and cross-cultural understanding. By embracing mindfulness as a foundational principle in education, governance, and international relations, we can work toward a sustainable and inclusive future - one in which cooperation triumphs over division, compassion over indifference, and wisdom over short-sightedness. In this vision, unity is not merely an aspiration but the very foundation of global harmony.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Āṅguttara Nikāya*. (trans.) Bhikkhu Bodhi. In *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications. 2012.
- Dhammapada*: (trans.) Buddhārakkhita, A, *The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. 1985
- Dīgha Nikāya*, (trans.) Walshe, M, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publications. 1987 & 1995
- Jataka Stories in Theravada Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisattva Path*. (trans.) Appleton, N. Routledge. 2010.
- Majjhima Nikāya*: (trans.) Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Wisdom Publications. 1995 & 2005.
- Sutta Nipāta 1.8, Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, (trans.) Buddhārakkhita, A. "Metta: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love, 1994." *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 17, 2025], available at <https://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/buddharakkhita/wheel365.html>.

*The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering.* (trans.) Bodhi, B. Buddhist Publication Society, 2000. p. 84.

### **Secondary sources**

Dalai Lama. (1999). *Ethics for the New Millennium*. Riverhead Books. p.87.

Darlington, S. (2012). *The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand*. SUNY Press. p.88.

Dhendrup, J. T. (2001). *Dampai Choeki Gyentrii Drayang*. Bhutan Dharma Press, p. 157.

Dhendrup, K. (2001). *Buddhism and Governance: A Historical Perspective*. Wisdom Publications.

Gampopa Sonam Rinchen. *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Snow Lion Publications, 1998, p. 203.

Gampopa, S. R. (1998). *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Snow Lion Publications, p. 124.

Gethin, R. (1998). *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press. p.276.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. Bantam Books, p. 32.

Harvey, P. (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge University Press. p. 56,87 & 214.

Heruka, P. (1995). *Bhutan and the Pursuit of Happiness*. Mandala Publications. p. 301.

Jennings, P. A., et al. (2019). *The Mindful School*. Cambridge University Press. p. 72.

Jones, K. (2003). *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action*. Wisdom Publications. p. 244.

King, S. B. (2009). *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. University of Hawaii Press. p.78.

Lopez, D. S. (2008). *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed*. University of Chicago Press. p.133.

Queen, C., & King, S. B. (1996). *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. SUNY Press. p.199.

Rabois, I. (2016). *Compassionate Critical Thinking*. Rowman & Littlefield. p. 121.

Salzberg, S. (1995). *Loving-Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Shambhala Publications, p. 57.

Śāntideva. (2006). *The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*. Shambhala Publications, p. 147.

Schumacher, E. F. (1973). *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. Harper & Row. p.56.

Snellgrove, D. (1987). *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*. Shambhala Publications. p. 286.

Strong, J. (1983). *The Legend of King Asoka*. Princeton University Press. p.145.

Thurman, R. (2006). *Why the Dalai Lama Matters*. Atria Books. p.205.

Tsangnyon Heruka. *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. Shambhala Publications, 1995, p. 301.

Tshewang, Y. L. *Sheja Seljed (The Light of Knowledge)*. Royal University of Bhutan Press, 2006, p. 42.

United Nations. (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. UN Publications. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

Ura, K., et al. (2012). *A Short Guide to Gross National Happiness Index*. Centre for Bhutan Studies, p. 64.

Weare, K. (2014). *Mindfulness in Education*. Routledge. p. 102.



# APPLICATION OF MINDFULNESS AT MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INDIA

Bhikkhuni Dr. Nhu Nguyet\*

## Abstract:

Educating monks and nuns is the most important work of the Buddhist *Saṅgha*,” stated the Most Venerable Thích Trí Quảng, Vice-Supreme Patriarch of the Witnessing Council of the Vietnam Buddhist *Saṅgha* and President of the Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City. Education has always been a fundamental part of the Vesak Conference agenda since its inception. In 2025, alongside the main theme Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development, the conference includes five sub-themes, one of which is Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future. The Organizing Committee carefully selected these themes to address major contemporary Buddhist issues. As a Buddhist nun, the author recognizes the profound yet often overlooked contributions of Vietnamese nuns throughout history and in modern times. Many Vietnamese nuns have actively applied mindfulness in education to foster compassion and sustainability, yet their efforts remain largely undocumented. The author believes that these contributions should be recorded and shared to inspire future generations in preserving and advancing Buddhist education. With this in mind, the author has chosen the topic: Application of Mindfulness at Mahāpajāpatī Primary Schools in India.”

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness, education, Buddhism, India, Vietnam.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As emphasized by the Most Venerable Thích Trí Quảng, the prosperity of Buddhism largely depends on the quality of its monks and nuns. No matter how grand a temple may be, it holds little significance if there are no monks and nuns

---

\* Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Hoa Đàm Journal and its official website; Director of the Vietnam Buddhist Women Research Center under the Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute.

to practice and guide lay Buddhists in accordance with the Buddha's Dharma. Without proper training, study, and practice, the development of Buddhism would face significant challenges. Therefore, the education of Buddhist monks and nuns has always been a primary concern for past generations and remains one of the most crucial responsibilities of any Buddhist organization, regardless of historical circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

As an integral pillar of the Vietnamese Buddhist *Saṅgha*, Vietnamese nuns have long stood alongside their monastic counterparts in preserving the Dharma and advancing education. From ancient times to the present day, they have played an indispensable role in safeguarding and transmitting Buddhist teachings, ensuring the tradition's vitality and continuity across generations. The history of Vietnamese Buddhism is filled with accounts of remarkable nuns whose contributions have left an indelible mark on both the spiritual and intellectual landscape of the tradition. Eminent figures such as the Most Venerable Diệu Nhân, Diệu Không, Diệu Ngọc, Diệu Tịnh, Như Thanh, Huỳnh Liên, and Giác Hải exemplify the unwavering commitment of Buddhist women to the Dharma. However, their influence extends beyond the historical records; countless venerable nuns, whose dedication has remained unrecognized due to their quiet monastic lives, have nonetheless played a crucial role in shaping Vietnamese Buddhism. Education has always been a fundamental aspect of monastic life for successive generations of Vietnamese Buddhist nuns. Throughout history, they have founded schools, organized tutoring classes, translated Buddhist scriptures, and nurtured the intellectual and moral development of both monastics and lay practitioners. Yet, despite their immense contributions, the historical narrative has often overlooked these tireless efforts. These women, devoted to both academic and spiritual enrichment, have profoundly shaped the monastic and educational landscape of Vietnamese Buddhism.

In contemporary times, Vietnamese Buddhist nuns continue to uphold this noble legacy, sustaining the largest Buddhist nuns' order among Buddhist-majority nations while demonstrating remarkable intellectual and spiritual capacities. Their contributions extend beyond monastery walls into diverse spheres of social engagement – including Dharma propagation, humanitarian activities, environmental conservation, and, most notably, education. Today, Vietnamese Buddhist nuns actively participate in educational initiatives across all levels, from early childhood education to university instruction. Their involvement in both secular and Buddhist education highlights their evolving role as scholars, teachers, and community leaders, bridging the traditional wisdom of the monastic path with the dynamic demands of modern society. A recent significant development underscoring this commitment to education was the seminar titled “Nuns and Pre-School Education: Current Situation

---

<sup>1</sup> HT. Thích Trí Quảng, *Giáo dục Tăng Ni là Phật sự quan trọng hàng đầu của Giáo hội* [Educating monks and nuns is the most important Buddhist work of the *Saṅgha*]. *Phật giáo Online*. 15/07/2022. <https://phatgiao.org.vn/giao-duc-tang-ni-la-phat-su-quan-trong-hang-dau-cua-giao-hoi-d52369.html> Accessed on January 10, 2025.

and Solutions,” held in November 2024 by the Centre for Buddhist Women’s Studies at Thanh Tâm Nunnery, Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City. The discussions reaffirmed the critical role of Buddhist nuns in education, particularly in shaping the moral and intellectual foundations of early childhood development. The seminar emphasized that early childhood education is not merely a pedagogical concern but a fundamental factor influencing individual well-being, family stability, national development, and the future of Buddhism itself. Through their relentless dedication, Vietnamese Buddhist nuns embody the compassionate and wisdom-driven ethos of the Buddhist path, demonstrating that their contributions to education are not merely acts of service but a profound expression of the Bodhisattva ideal in contemporary society. Their work affirms the enduring relevance of Buddhist education in cultivating a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally and spiritually enriched - an aspiration central to building a sustainable and compassionate future for humanity.

It is noteworthy that the educational work of Buddhist nuns is not confined to Vietnam but has also expanded internationally. Over the past two decades, Vietnamese nuns have had opportunities to study and conduct research abroad, and many have actively supported Buddhist communities in other countries. Some Vietnamese Buddhist nuns have established temples and opened schools in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, making significant contributions to the global integration of Vietnamese Buddhism. A notable example is Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh, who founded a nunnery and established schools for underprivileged children in India, exemplifying the far-reaching impact of Vietnamese Buddhist nuns in education and humanitarian efforts beyond national borders.

This paper examines the application of mindfulness in Buddhist education as a means to cultivate compassion and sustainability, focusing on the case of Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh and her establishment of Mahāpajāpatī Nunnery and Primary Schools in Vaishali and Bodhgaya, Bihar, India. Through this case study, the discussion underscores how mindfulness-based education fosters ethical awareness, social responsibility, and holistic development, highlighting the enduring relevance of Buddhist educational principles in contemporary society.

## II. WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

The term “Mindfulness” is a translation of the Pāli word “*Sati*”, referring to the practice of maintaining awareness in the present moment. Mindfulness is a fundamental practice in Buddhism, emphasizing the ability to reflect on oneself, one’s life philosophy, and the profound significance of each passing second and minute.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, mindfulness means being fully attuned to reality and aware of what is happening around us.<sup>3</sup> From a Buddhist

<sup>2</sup> The Middle Length Sayings (*Majjhima-Nikaya*), Vol. III, *The final fifty discourses* (*Uparipannasa*), Translated from the Pali by I. B. Horner, The Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn (Nguyễn Duy Nhiên translated), *Chánh niệm là gì?* [*What is Mindful-*

perspective, ordinary awareness is often constrained by habitual, unconscious patterns of thought and action. Meditation serves as a tool to awaken individuals from this conditioned state, allowing them to live more fully and harness the full potential of both their conscious and subconscious minds. In Buddhism, mindfulness is regarded as the heart of meditation. At its core, mindfulness is a simple yet powerful concept - the true strength of mindfulness lies in its consistent practice and application. It awakens us to the reality that life exists only in the present moment. When we are not fully present, we not only miss out on life's most precious experiences but also overlook the rich opportunities for personal growth and transformation.

Therefore, mindfulness is the art of living consciously. One does not need to be a Buddhist or a yogi to practice mindfulness. Buddhism teaches us to return to ourselves, rather than striving to become something other than who we truly are. It encourages us to reconnect with our innate nature and allow it to manifest freely, without obstruction. This requires us to awaken and perceive things as they truly are. The word "*Buddha*" means "awakened one" - someone who has realized their true nature. Thus, mindfulness is a transformative practice that enables deeper self-awareness through self-reflection, self-examination, and conscious action. At its core, mindfulness must be grounded in loving-kindness, understanding, and nurturing, serving as a guiding principle for a more awakened and compassionate way of living.

Mindfulness is more than just a concept for researchers and academicians - it has become a growing lifestyle trend in today's world. One of the key reasons for its popularity is its simplicity. It is accessible, cost-effective, and can be practiced by anyone, anywhere. Beyond personal well-being, mindfulness holds great potential in education, as it can be seamlessly integrated into curricula to enhance learning outcomes. Schools that incorporate mindfulness in education can help students develop self-awareness, cultivate empathy, learn to calm and focus their minds, communicate more mindfully, and apply these skills in their daily lives.

### III. VIETNAMESE MAHĀPAJĀPATĪ NUNNERY IN VAISHALI

*Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery and *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools, founded by Venerable Khiết Minh, exemplify the application of mindfulness in Buddhist education by Vietnamese nuns in India.

The Vietnamese *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery in Vaishali, Bihar, began construction on October 20, 2004, and was inaugurated on March 15, 2008. The journey of Venerable Khiết Minh in initiating and completing the Nunnery serves as a poignant reminder of the path taken by Mahāpajāpatī, the revered founder of the Buddhist nuns' order, in joining the *Saṅgha* more than 2,500 years ago.

At the end of 2003, archaeologists discovered relics in Vaishali, Bihar,

marking the site where the Buddha ordained *Mahāpajāpatī* and 500 *Sākiya* nuns. During a visit to these sacred relics, Venerable Khiết Minh was inspired to establish a nunnery and a *thūpa* to honor *Mahāpajāpatī* and the revered nuns at this significant location. In early 2004, she traveled to India to acquire land for the project. Initially, she intended to purchase a modest 1,000m<sup>2</sup> plot to erect a commemorative stele engraved with images of *Mahāpajāpatī*, the holy nuns, and the Eightfold Path in multiple languages. However, unexpected favorable conditions enabled her to acquire 8,000m<sup>2</sup> of land in Vaishali, allowing her to fulfill her greater vision of building a full-scale nunnery. On October 20, 2004, the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery was held, witnessed by venerable monks and nuns from Vietnam.

After nearly four years of construction, the *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery was completed, and its inauguration ceremony was solemnly held on March 15, 2008,<sup>4</sup> in Vaishali. The event was attended by esteemed monks and nuns from Vietnam and other countries engaged in Buddhist studies and activities in India. Also present were representatives from the Vietnamese Embassy in India, officials from the Bihar State Government and Vaishali district, as well as professors and students from various Indian universities, all gathering to commemorate this significant occasion.

At the Nunnery, construction of the *thūpa* dedicated to the Holy Patriarch *Mahāpajāpatī* and other nuns began after the foundation stone laying ceremony in January 2005 and was completed in 2013. The inauguration ceremony took place on October 23, 2013. This *thūpa* is the largest in the world dedicated to Patriarch *Mahāpajāpatī* by the Vietnamese Buddhist community. It also houses the most Buddha statues and features Buddhist scriptures engraved in multiple languages. In 2012, even before the *thūpa* was fully completed, a retreat was organized for more than 50 nuns from Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India. After the retreat, venerable nuns from Vietnam and Sri Lanka held an ordination ceremony for Bhikkhunis and Sramanerika nuns. This was a sacred moment, as it took place at the very site where the Buddha granted women the right to ordain as nuns more than 2,500 years ago. The ceremony revived the image of Buddhist nuns practicing purity while formally receiving the Dharma precepts. Another significant event for both Vietnamese and international Buddhist nuns occurred at the Vietnamese *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery in Vaishali in January 2013. That year, the Vietnamese Buddhist nuns hosted the 13th *Sākyadhita* International Buddhist Women's Conference under the theme "Buddhism in Everyday Life." The conference attracted hundreds of speakers and participants from 32 countries and territories, further strengthening the global dialogue on Buddhist women's roles in contemporary society.

### **3.1. Mahāpajāpatī Schools founded by the Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh in India**

After completing the construction of the *thūpa* and the *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery in Vaishali, the Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh recognized the

<sup>4</sup> February 8 in the Vietnamese lunar calendar, the death anniversary of *Mahāpajāpatī*.



hardships faced by rural communities in the district, particularly the challenges preventing many children from accessing education. In response, she and the nuns at the *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery established three *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools in Bihar: in Vaishali in 2013, in Bodhgaya in 2016, and Kolhua in 2019. Currently, these schools educate over 2,300 students from kindergarten to grade 8, supported by a team of 55 teachers. The curriculum follows the regular academic program of the Indian Government.<sup>5</sup> Students receive free tuition, along with clothing, books, and school supplies. Maintaining these schools for over a decade, despite the significant financial demands, stands as a remarkable testament to the dedication and perseverance of the Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh and the Vietnamese nuns at the *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery.

The *Mahāpajāpatī* School in Vaishali commenced its first semester on October 6, 2013. Initially, the school enrolled students of all ages from kindergarten to grade 3, organizing 11 classes with a total of 350 students. By 2020, the student population had grown to approximately 1,000, distributed across five nursery classes, five lower kindergarten classes, five upper kindergarten classes, three grade 1 classes, two grade 2 classes, one grade 3 class, and one grade 5 class.<sup>6</sup>

In 2015, the Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh decided to establish the second *Mahāpajāpatī* School in Bodhgaya after recognizing that many impoverished children in the area, like those in Vaishali and other rural regions of India, lacked access to education. By March 2016, the *Mahāpajāpatī* School in Bodhgaya officially commenced operations with 450 students distributed across 11 classes, guided by 11 teachers under the direction of the Venerable Bhikkhuni Bodhi, a Burmese nun.<sup>7</sup>

The third *Mahāpajāpatī* School was established in April 2019 in Kolhua village, Vaishali, with approximately 600 students and 16 teachers.<sup>8</sup> Kolhua, a village in the ancient sacred city of Vaishali<sup>9</sup>, is historically significant as the site where a local monkey chieftain offered a bowl of honey to the Buddha.<sup>10</sup> This event is regarded as one of the eight most important events in the Buddha's life. Vaishali is also where the Buddha spent several rainy seasons, ordained the first

<sup>5</sup> Võ Văn Tường, *Chùa Kiều Đàm Di Việt Nam tại Vaishali (Tỳ Xá Ly), Ấn Độ* [Vietnamese *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery in Vaishali]. <https://daophatngaynay.com/vn/phatgiao-vn/danh-lam/31298-chua-kiieu-dam-di-viet-nam-vaishali-ty-xa-ly-an-do.html> Accessed on October 25, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> TS.NS. Liễu Pháp (2020). “Trường Tiểu học Kiều Đàm Di Việt Nam giữa lòng Ấn Độ” [*Mahāpajāpatī* Primary School in India]. In the book titled: *Nữ giới Phật giáo với Báo chí* [Buddhist Women and Journalism], Nxb. Khoa học xã hội, p. 356.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 356 - 357.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>9</sup> *Kinh Tương Ưng*, Chương VII, Phẩm Càpàla [*Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Chapter VII, Capala Section].

<sup>10</sup> *Chú giải Kinh Pháp Cú Quyển I – Phẩm Song Đối: Các Tỳ khưu ở Kosambi* [Commentary on the Dhammapada, Volume I – Parallel Chapter: The Bhikkhus of Kosambi]. <https://theravada.vn/chu-giai-kinh-phap-cu-quyen-i-pham-song-doi-cac-ty-khuu-o-kosambi/> Accessed on January 15, 2025.



nuns, announced his impending nirvana, and converted the renowned court dancer Ambapālī into a Buddhist nun.<sup>11</sup> Recent archaeological excavations have uncovered the remains of Kutagarshala, a swastika-shaped monastery, a water tank, several prayer *thūpas*, and small shrines, in addition to the main *thūpa* and the Ashoka Pillar that had been discovered earlier<sup>12</sup>.

### 3.2. Applying mindfulness in the Mahāpajāpatī Schools in India

While establishing the *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools, Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh vowed to provide children from impoverished backgrounds with access to education, enabling them to learn to read and write as a means of cultivating wisdom. However, her deeper aspiration was to create opportunities for these children to practice mindfulness and to receive the teachings of the Tathāgata on peace, happiness, and enlightenment.

Every morning, before classes begin, students spend 20 minutes chanting, practicing mindfulness, and answering questions about Buddhist teachings. This is followed by a 10-minute meditation session, after which they recite the Three Refuges and Five Precepts before officially starting classes at 8:30 AM. On days with good weather, these activities take place in the schoolyard; otherwise, they are held inside the classroom. Over time, this practice has become a habit, and students engage in meditation and chanting with a sense of self-awareness and joy. In recent years, in addition to regular school hours, the Schools have expanded the mindfulness practice schedule by introducing Sunday morning sessions. On Sundays, students from different grade levels - first grade, grades 1–2, grades 3–5, and grades 6–8 - take turns practicing mindfulness of breathing meditation, either at the Schools or at the *Mahāpajāpatī* Vipassana Meditation Center at the *Mahāpajāpatī* Nunnery in Vaishali. Each session accommodates approximately 150–200 students, who receive direct guidance from assistant teachers of Zen Master Koenka-ji. The practice session starts at 8:00 AM and ends at 10:30 AM. Throughout the session, students are continuously reminded to maintain mindfulness:

From 8:00 to 8:30, students listen to a Dharma Talk from Zen Master Goenkaji. From 8:30 to 9:00, Goenkaji's assistant teacher provides explanations and answers questions. From 9:00 to 9:30, there is a break with snacks. From 9:30 to 10:00, students engage in listening to stories of the Buddha's previous lives, parables, or watching video clips about the benefits of meditation. From 10:00 to 10:20, they practice sitting meditation and mindfulness of breathing under the guidance of Zen Master Goenkaji. From 10:20 to 10:30, monks and nuns offer encouragement and reminders. At 10:30, students receive their lunch portions, marking the end of the session.

<sup>11</sup> K. R. Norman (Translated), *The Elders' Verses - II*, Therigatha, Pāli Text Society, Oxford, 1995, p. 28-29.

<sup>12</sup> *Thūpa* at Archeological remains of Vaishali, Kolhua in Bihar, India. [https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:thūpa\\_at\\_Archeological\\_remains\\_of\\_Vaishali\\_Kolhua\\_in\\_Bihar\\_India\\_02.jpg](https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:thūpa_at_Archeological_remains_of_Vaishali_Kolhua_in_Bihar_India_02.jpg) Accessed on January 15, 2025.

With an appropriate duration and quality of practice, each session yields remarkable results. The children's spiritual well-being has visibly improved - they become more peaceful, joyful, and refreshed each day, benefiting from the mindfulness meditation practice and the dedicated care of their teachers.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.3. Assessments

The charity schools founded by the Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh in India have helped many underprivileged children change their destinies. Rooted in mindfulness and loving-kindness, the Venerable Bhikkhuni felt deep compassion upon witnessing local children who neither attended school nor recognized its value, as their only means of survival was begging. She aspired to raise awareness among the poor in India, encouraging them to rethink education and the future of their children. Her charity schools have provided many children with opportunities for a better life.<sup>14</sup> Notably, these schools not only follow the government curriculum but also incorporate Buddhist mindfulness practices. Perhaps because of this, the quality of students at *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools is considered higher than that of government schools. Many children, after completing primary education at these schools, transition to government institutions and are assessed at an academic level equivalent to that of 6th or 7th graders.<sup>15</sup>

Education is arguably the best, if not the only, way to restore the essence of Buddhism after centuries of decline for various reasons. A remarkable feature of the Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh's *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools is that every day before classes begin, students recite their vow to take refuge in the Three Jewels, uphold the Five Precepts, practice meditation, and chant the Buddha's name. The integration of mindfulness in education at these schools is further reflected in their unique approach - unlike government-established institutions, *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools not only teach compulsory subjects such as literacy and numeracy but also cultivate in students the habit of living a meaningful and mindful life in the present moment. Each morning, all students sincerely recite the Buddha's name and the Dharma teachings with their hands clasped in a lotus shape at their chest, pledging to uphold the Five Precepts - the fundamental principles for a happy life: no killing, no stealing, no lying, no greed, and no use of intoxicants. Furthermore, *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools instill values of generosity and compassion, encouraging students to share even the smallest things, like a piece of cake or candy, with one another. The schools also inspire students to study diligently, empowering them to transform their lives and build a brighter future.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> TS. NS. Liễu Pháp (2020). "Trường Tiểu học Kiều Đàm Di Việt Nam giữa lòng Ấn Độ" [*Mahāpajāpatī Primary School in India*]. In the book titled *Nữ giới Phật giáo với Báo chí* [*Buddhist Women and Journalism*], Nxb. Khoa học xã hội, p. 355.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *Trường Tiểu Học Mahaprajapati ở Vaishali, Ấn Độ* [*Mahaprajapati Primary School in Vaishali, India*]. <https://mahaprajapatitrust.com/truong-tieu-hoc-mahaprajapati-o-vaishaly->

The *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools have brought the light of wisdom to illuminate the minds and lives of underprivileged children in the region. These children are given a new chance at life, nurtured by the wisdom of the Buddha. This is the most profound achievement of integrating Buddhist Mindfulness into education - a compassionate and sustainable future that Vietnamese nuns have helped cultivate in India. "We do not build society, but we build good character. That is the responsibility of a Buddhist disciple." "We do not expect anything in return from the students; we only hope to have the affinity to bring goodness to society through educational work in Vaishali, where the Buddha granted women entry into the *Saṅgha*, allowing them to experience enlightenment in the present moment, as well as to express our gratitude to the Holy Patriarch and the Holy Nuns - the pioneers who renounced their worldly ties, chose a life of purity and celibacy, and dedicated themselves to the path of liberation under the protection of the *Saṅgha*".<sup>17</sup> The author of this paper believes that the Holy Nuns were not individuals who abandoned their families, but rather those who chose to embrace the entire world as their family, seeing all of humanity as siblings united in one universal kinship.

The application of Mindfulness in education at *Mahāpajāpatī* Schools in India demonstrates that practicing Mindfulness is neither too difficult nor limited to those with special conditions or monastics. Instead, it can be embraced by anyone, including poor and young students in the rural, illiterate regions of India. The results of Mindfulness practice at these schools show that with sincere dedication, one can attain tangible benefits, ultimately enhancing both the quality of teaching and learning.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In recent years, the ministries of education in several developed nations, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, have actively integrated mindfulness meditation into schools, teacher training programs, and even correctional institutions. This initiative has yielded remarkable results, significantly improving the quality of learning, teaching, and personal transformation among students, educators, and incarcerated individuals alike. The success of these programs underscores a growing recognition that economic advancement alone is insufficient in addressing the complexities of an increasingly globalized world. Instead, there is a rising awareness that sustainable progress requires the cultivation of a global ethic - one that nurtures moral and emotional intelligence alongside intellectual and economic development.

As the twenty-first century unfolds, nations are beginning to recognize a fundamental truth: interdependence is just as vital as independence. No country exists in isolation, and the well-being of one nation inevitably influences the prosperity of others. This interconnected reality necessitates a shift in perspective - one that moves beyond a purely nationalistic outlook

---

bihar-an-do-i29. Accessed on January 15, 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

toward a more holistic, globally conscious approach to progress. A nation's development can no longer be viewed in isolation, as the ripple effects of social, economic, and ethical transformations extend far beyond its borders. Investing in a system that nurtures emotional intelligence and ethical leadership - alongside advancements in science, technology, and economic innovation - ensures the sustainable and balanced evolution of societies. Within this context, mindfulness in education emerges as a profound and indispensable tool for cultivating a "compassionate and sustainable future," as emphasized in the theme of this year's Vesak Conference. More than just a pedagogical technique, mindfulness fosters wisdom, resilience, and a deep sense of interconnectedness among individuals and communities. By integrating Buddhist mindfulness principles into education, we not only refine cognitive abilities but also cultivate empathy, ethical discernment, and a collective responsibility toward humanity. A remarkable figure exemplifying the success of this approach is Venerable Bhikkhuni Khiết Minh, a distinguished Vietnamese Buddhist nun whose dedicated efforts in integrating mindfulness into education have yielded outstanding results. Her contributions extend beyond Buddhist education, playing a pivotal role in strengthening cultural and spiritual ties between Vietnam and India. Through her work, she embodies the Buddhist ideal of compassionate engagement, demonstrating that the path of wisdom and mindfulness transcends geographical boundaries. Her contributions are not only significant to the development of Vietnamese Buddhism but also serve to deepen the friendship between Vietnam and India, fostering a spirit of compassionate unity - one that upholds the belief that "the entire world is one family", regardless of national borders.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- K. R. Norman (Translated), *The Elders' Verses - II, Therigatha*, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1995, tr. 28-29.
- Kinh Tương Ưng, Chương VII, Phẩm Càpàla [Saṃyutta Nikāya, Chapter VII, Capala Section].
- Uparipannasa (Majjhima-Nikaya). The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol.III, The final fifty discourses Translated from the Pali by I.B. Horner, The Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1999.

### Secondary sources

- Bé tập chánh niệm [Children practice mindfulness].
- Chú giải Kinh Pháp Cú Quyển I – Phẩm Song Đối: Các Tỳ khưu ở Kosambi [Commentary on the Dhammapada, Volume I – Parallel Chapter: The Bhikkhus of Kosambi].
- HT. Thích Trí Quảng, Giáo dục Tăng Ni là Phật sự quan trọng hàng đầu của Giáo hội [Educating monks and nuns is the most important Buddhist work of the Saṅgha]. Phật giáo Online.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (Nguyễn Duy Nhiên translated), Chánh niệm là gì? [What is Mindfulness], Thư viện Hoa Sen [Hoa Sen Library].

Thūpa at Archeological remains of Vaishali, Kolhwa in Bihar, India.

Trường Tiểu học Mahaprajapati ở Vaishali, Ấn Độ [Mahaprajapati Primary School in Vaishali, India].

TS.NS. Liễu Pháp (2020). “Trường Tiểu học Kiều Đàm Di Việt Nam giữa lòng Ấn Độ” [Mahāpajāpatī Primary School in India]. In the book titled *Nữ giới Phật giáo với Báo chí* [Buddhist Women and Journalism], Nxb. Khoa học xã hội, p. 356.

Vô Văn Tường, Chùa Kiều Đàm Di Việt Nam tại Vaishali (Tỳ Xá Ly), Ấn Độ [Vietnamese Mahāpajāpatī Nunnery in Vaishali].





# EMPOWERING STUDENTS WITH COMPASSIONATE ACTION FOR GLOBAL PEACE: INTEGRATING BUDDHIST MEDITATION RETREATS AND MINDFUL LIVING EDUCATION TO ENHANCE MINDFULNESS EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPASSION THROUGH BUDDHIST EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Burmansah\*

## **Abstract:**

This study examines the integration of Buddhist meditation retreats and mindful living education as tools to enhance students' mindfulness effectiveness and foster compassionate action for global peace. Focusing on the transformative potential of Buddhist educational development in Indonesia, it aims to instill values of mindfulness and compassion as crucial responses to global challenges. By merging traditional Buddhist practices with contemporary educational strategies, the research highlights the benefits of meditation retreats in providing a structured environment for self-reflection, emotional regulation, and ethical growth. These retreats are further complemented by mindful living education, which integrates mindfulness into daily routines, encouraging sustainable habits and interpersonal compassion. The study employs a mixed-method approach, beginning with qualitative case studies and literature reviews to construct a conceptual framework, followed by quantitative analysis through surveys. Data were collected through observations, interviews, documentation, and questionnaires targeting Buddhist junior and senior high school students in Palembang City, Indonesia. The research involved a population of 170

---

\* Jinarakkhita Buddhist College, Lampung, Indonesia.

participants, with a sample of 120 students determined using the *Slovin* formula. Findings demonstrate that participation in these programs significantly enhances students' mindfulness effectiveness, empathy, and ability to engage in compassionate action, thereby contributing to a culture of peace locally and globally. Integrating Buddhist principles into education promotes spiritual development and provides practical tools to address modern social issues through compassion and mindfulness. The study underscores the importance of a holistic educational framework that combines spiritual practices with actionable peace-building strategies. Its findings have significant implications for academic policies, religious studies, and global peace initiatives, advocating for the broader application of such integrative approaches in various cultural and educational settings.

**Keywords:** Buddhist education; meditation retreats; mindful living; compassionate action; global peace; mindfulness in education.

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, a nation renowned for its rich cultural diversity and deep-rooted spiritual traditions, stands at the crossroads of transformation in education. As the largest archipelago in the world, Indonesia faces challenges that demand innovative and holistic solutions.<sup>1</sup> The complexities of its socio-economic landscape and increasing globalization present unique opportunities to reimagine education as a tool for academic and professional success and for fostering peace, compassion, and mindfulness among its youth.<sup>2</sup> Education, a cornerstone of national development, holds immense potential to cultivate values that transcend cultural and religious boundaries. In Indonesia, where Buddhism coexists harmoniously with other major religions, Buddhist educational principles offer a robust framework for addressing students' spiritual and emotional needs while preparing them to contribute meaningfully to global peace.<sup>3</sup>

As a diverse and pluralistic nation, Indonesia thrives on mutual respect, harmony, and ethical living principles. As one of the country's recognized religions, Buddhism significantly contributes to this social fabric by emphasizing compassion, mindfulness, and moral responsibility. The teachings of the Buddha provide a framework for fostering peace, justice, and coexistence, aligning with Indonesia's values of tolerance and unity. One of the core Buddhist teachings that supports social harmony is universal goodwill. The *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8) states, "Wishing: In gladness and safety, may all beings be at ease."<sup>4</sup> This doctrine encourages individuals to cultivate

<sup>1</sup> Brooks et al., 2020, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Timur Tresnanti et al. (2024), p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> Ager et al. (2015), p. 211.

<sup>4</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1995). *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8). *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], Available at [www.accesstosight.org](http://www.accesstosight.org).

loving-kindness (*mettā*), fostering empathy and reducing societal divisions. Through compassion, individuals and communities can transcend personal differences and work towards collective well-being. Ethical responsibilities are fundamental in maintaining social cohesion. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31) teaches, “A householder ministers to his friends by gifts, kindly words, and looking after their welfare.”<sup>5</sup> These values of generosity, kind speech, and social responsibility reinforce strong interpersonal relationships, reducing social conflicts and promoting trust. Similarly, ethical governance plays a vital role in ensuring justice and peace. The *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* (DN 26) emphasizes righteous leadership, “A king who rules in righteousness ensures peace and justice.”<sup>6</sup> When governance is rooted in ethical principles, it fosters stability, equality, and public welfare, aligning with Indonesia’s commitment to good governance and national unity.

Mindfulness as a guiding principle in ethical conduct is highlighted in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2), “A monk, with his mind purified, directs it to ethical conduct.”<sup>7</sup> The cultivation of mindfulness (*sati*) enhances self-awareness and emotional regulation, reducing impulsivity and promoting ethical decision-making. In a multicultural society like Indonesia, mindfulness can serve as a tool for interfaith dialogue and understanding, allowing individuals to engage with others respectfully and empathetically. The establishment of moral codes to maintain societal order is further reinforced in the *Aggañña Sutta* (DN 27), which states, “As people gathered, they established moral codes to create peace.”<sup>8</sup> This principle aligns with the necessity of legal and ethical systems in a modern nation-state, ensuring social justice and equitable treatment of all citizens. Furthermore, non-violence (*ahimsā*) is a cornerstone of Buddhist teachings, encapsulated in the *Dhammapada* (Dhp 183), “Not doing any evil, cultivating the good – this is the teaching of the Buddhas.”<sup>9</sup> These Buddhist teachings promote ethical behavior, inclusivity, and inner peace, essential for societal unity. As one of Indonesia’s recognized religions, Buddhism shapes a harmonious and tolerant society. Applying these principles supports lasting peace, social justice, and harmony, preserving religious and cultural heritage while fostering global peace and coexistence. Individuals contribute to a more peaceful and just society by upholding non-violence and moral integrity.

In conclusion, Buddhist teachings are crucial in shaping a harmonious and inclusive Indonesia. The principles of compassion, ethical conduct, mindfulness, and non-violence foster unity in diversity, social justice, and lasting peace. By integrating these values into daily life and governance, Indonesia can preserve its cultural heritage while promoting coexistence at both national and global levels. Strengthening the application of these

<sup>5</sup> *Sigālovāda Sutta*, DN 31; Walshe (1995), p. 463.

<sup>6</sup> *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*, DN 26; Walshe (1995), p. 395.

<sup>7</sup> *Samaññaphala Sutta*, DN 2, Walshe (1995), p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> *Aggañña Sutta*, DN 27; Walshe (1995), p. 417.

<sup>9</sup> *Dhp* 183; Buddhārakkhita (1985), p. 48.

teachings within education, policymaking, and community initiatives can further enhance societal resilience and collective well-being.

The Buddhist community in Indonesia, around 2 million people, constitutes about 0.71% of the nation’s 282 million population. Despite being a minority, Buddhists have significantly contributed to Indonesia’s cultural, social, and educational development.<sup>10</sup> Based on data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, mapping the population data of the Buddhist community in 2024 is as follows.

Table 1. Buddhist Population Data in Indonesia

Indonesia	Mid-Year Population (Thousand People)		
	2022	2023	2024
Indonesia	277,75	280,73	282,48
Indonesian Buddhist Population	2,02	2,01	2,00
Percentage	0,73%	0,72%	0,71%

Source: Data Centre of Indonesian Population 2024. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

As a nation with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, Indonesia embraces *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Buddhism has provided spiritual guidance and moral education, supporting Indonesia’s efforts to promote tolerance and coexistence.<sup>11</sup> By fostering mindfulness and compassion, Buddhism strengthens character and nurtures societal harmony. A key contribution of Buddhism to Indonesian education is its focus on spiritual development. Buddhist institutions, such as monasteries and meditation centers, offer opportunities for self-reflection and cultivating virtues like empathy, patience, and altruism.<sup>12</sup> Buddhism emphasizes mindfulness (*sati*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) as essential personal and societal well-being qualities. In the *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 27), the Buddha teaches, “Therefore, monks, first establish yourselves in virtue, then teach the Dhamma. Establish yourselves first in moral discipline, then teach the Dhamma.”<sup>13</sup> This principle aligns with the role of Buddhist education in Indonesia, where monasteries and meditation centers foster individuals to develop inner stability by cultivating mindfulness through meditation and moral discipline before sharing wisdom with others. The emphasis on patience (*khanti*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*) strengthens personal character and nurtures social

<sup>10</sup> Widaningsih (2017) p. 112.  
<sup>11</sup> Leinbach (1994), p. 78.  
<sup>12</sup> Lesmana et al. (2021), p. 215.  
<sup>13</sup> *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta*, MN. 27; PTS: Mi 175; Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu & Bodhi, Bhikkhu (1995), p. 265 - 270.

harmony. Buddhist institutions in Indonesia integrate these teachings through meditation retreats, monastic training, and social service programs, ensuring that education is deeply rooted in ethical and spiritual values. This approach reflects the Buddha's guidance that one must first embody the virtues they wish to impart, fostering a collective commitment to harmony and compassion. These qualities are crucial in navigating today's interconnected world. Meditation retreats and mindfulness training, often included in education, help students and communities build emotional resilience and deepen their sense of shared humanity.<sup>14</sup>

Buddhism's ethical framework promotes global ethics through teachings such as the five precepts (*pañca sīla*) and the principle of interdependence (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), guiding individuals toward responsible actions for society and the environment. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* states, "A noble disciple, wise and virtuous, does not harm living beings, speaks truthfully, and acts with kindness toward all."<sup>15</sup> By integrating these values into education, Buddhist institutions in Indonesia prepare future generations to tackle global issues like climate change, inequality, and conflict resolution.<sup>16</sup> Buddhist teachings align with global goals of peace and sustainability, making Buddhism a key partner in fostering harmony. Buddhist education promotes peace through interreligious dialogue and cooperation. In Indonesia, Buddhist leaders actively engage in initiatives to strengthen understanding among faiths, enhancing social cohesion and positioning the nation as a model for peaceful coexistence.<sup>17</sup>

In education development, mindfulness enriches teaching and integrates its essence into daily life. Developing mindfulness offers significant benefits for students, serving as a foundation for learning. Brown and Ryan (2003) state, "Mindfulness enhances attention and awareness, facilitating learning and personal growth."<sup>18</sup> This practice fosters an atmosphere of harmony and growth within academic communities. Mindfulness (*sati*) is a central concept in Buddhism, often defined as clear awareness and continuous presence of mind. It plays a fundamental role in meditation and ethical living. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) describes mindfulness as follows, "A monk remains focused on the body in and of itself – ardent, alert, and mindful – putting away worldly greed and distress."<sup>19</sup> This teaching emphasizes mindfulness as present-moment awareness cultivated through meditation and reflection. Similarly, the *Mahāsatiipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22) expands on mindfulness practice, stating, "This is the only way for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and distress, for the attainment of the true path, and for the realization of Nibbāna: that is, the four foundations of

<sup>14</sup> Steckler & Waddock (2017), p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> *Sigālovāda Sutta*, DN 31 - PTS: D iii 188, Walshe, Maurice (1987), p. 461 - 465.

<sup>16</sup> IBC-RDB (2005), p. 92.

<sup>17</sup> Widaningsih (2017) p. 156.

<sup>18</sup> Brown and Ryan (2003), pp. 822 - 848.

<sup>19</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10 - PTS: M i 55; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), pp. 145 - 150.

mindfulness.”<sup>20</sup> It underscores mindfulness as essential for liberation, focusing on body, feelings, mind, and mental objects to develop wisdom.

Mindfulness in education enhances focus and clarity for educators and students, fostering concentration and creativity. This practice strengthens relationships during learning, providing students with a non-judgmental space to explore. Educators, in turn, approach student diversity with understanding and compassion. Rapiadi et al. (2023) found that “Mindfulness affects interest in learning by 89.6%,” highlighting its significant impact on student engagement.<sup>21</sup> In a rapidly evolving world characterized by social complexities, emotional turbulence, and a relentless pace of life, fostering compassion among students has become a critical aspect of education. Compassion, foundational to moral behavior, is a cultivated skill that encourages individuals to understand and alleviate others’ suffering. The *Karuṇā Sutta* emphasizes, “One who is compassionate and free from hatred brings peace to themselves and others.”<sup>22</sup> Integrating mindfulness into education nurtures compassion and self-awareness in students. Burmansah et al. (2020) found that “Mindfulness practices bring the ability to develop compassion and attention without judgment in Buddhist education institutions.”<sup>23</sup> Rooted in Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness has become a universal practice in education, psychology, healthcare, and leadership. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* has defined mindfulness as a condition to remain focused and be aware of the body and mind. As present-moment awareness, mindfulness allows individuals to observe their thoughts and emotions without judgment. Buddhist education is a moral endeavor to understand interconnectedness, with compassion arising from awareness of others’ suffering and motivation to alleviate it. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* highlights this ethical responsibility: “Just as a mother protects her only child, so too should one cultivate boundless compassion for all beings.”<sup>24</sup> This dual focus on mindfulness and compassion fosters self-aware, socially responsible students, creating harmony within communities and educational institutions.

In 2023, Indonesia’s Religious Harmony Index reached 76.02%, the highest in five years. South Sumatra, with a significant Buddhist heritage dating back to the Sriwijaya kingdom, has maintained a high harmony index. Between 2015 and 2024, the region reported no religious conflicts, though 13 terrorism incidents involving nine perpetrators occurred; notably, these were unrelated to religious disputes. It underscores South Sumatra’s peaceful coexistence among diverse religious and cultural communities. Urban and rural areas exhibit minimal hate speech, with residents living harmoniously despite differences in religion, belief, culture, and customs.

<sup>20</sup> *Mahāsātipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22- PTS: D ii 290, Walshe (1987), pp. 335 - 340.

<sup>21</sup> Rapiadi et al. (2023), 17 (6), p. 4261.

<sup>22</sup> *Sutta Nipāta* 1.8 (*Karuṇā Sutta*) – PTS: SN 145, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997, *Karuṇā Sutta: The Sutta on Compassion*. Access to Insight, available at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org).

<sup>23</sup> Burmansah, I., et al. (2020), p. 210 - 228.

<sup>24</sup> *Sigālovāda Sutta*, DN 31 – PTS: D iii 188, Walshe (1987), p. 461 - 465.



Table 2. Buddhist Population Data in South Sumatra Province

South Sumatra Province	Mid Year Population (People)	
	2023	2024
South Sumatra Province	8,743,522	8,837,301
Buddhist Population	67,517	67,583
Percentage	0.77%	0.76%
Palembang City Population	1,706,371	1,718,440
Buddhist Population in Palembang City	52,269	52,269
Percentage	3.06%	3.04%

Source: Data Centre of Indonesian Population 2024. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia

In South Sumatra, Buddhists number 67,583, comprising 0.76% of the province’s 8,743,522 residents. Palembang city accounts for 77.34% of this Buddhist population, totaling 52,269 individuals. The Ministry of Religious Affairs also records data on junior and senior high school students in Palembang.

Table 3. Buddhist Students Population Data in Palembang City - 2024

Students’ Population	Male	Female	Total
Junior High School	1230	1079	2309
Percentage	53.27%	46.73%	
Senior High School	1195	1133	2328
Percentage	51.33%	48.67%	

Source: Data Centre of Indonesian Population 2024. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

In 2024, Palembang’s Buddhist population reached 52,269, making up 3.04% of the city’s total. Among them, 4,637 were junior and senior high school students, accounting for 8.87% of Buddhists. It highlights Indonesia’s commitment to interfaith harmony and holistic education. Integrating Buddhist practices into schools fosters mindfulness, compassion, and ethical responsibility, which are essential for addressing global issues like environmental degradation and social inequality. Rakhmani and Siregar (2016) emphasize that mindfulness nurtures self-awareness and empathy in students.<sup>25</sup> Burmansah et al. (2020) found that mindfulness fosters compassion

<sup>25</sup> Rakhmani and Siregar (2016), p. 45.

and inclusivity in diverse educational settings, shaping future compassionate global citizens.<sup>26</sup> Palembang's Buddhist community represents 3.04% of the population, emphasizing interfaith harmony and education. Mindfulness fosters compassion, ethical responsibility, and holistic learning, addressing global challenges through transformative Buddhist education.

Indonesia faces economic disparities, cultural tensions, and environmental threats to its rich biodiversity. Addressing these issues requires leaders who balance rational decision-making with emotional intelligence and moral courage. The World Bank (2018) emphasizes the need for leadership that combines analytical skills with empathy to tackle complex problems. Buddhist teachings advocate cultivating compassion as an active commitment to alleviate others' suffering.<sup>27</sup> In education, fostering compassion equips students to engage constructively with societal challenges, transforming their knowledge into meaningful community contributions. Cooper and James (2005) highlight that integrating empathy in teaching enhances students' social responsibility and ethical development.<sup>28</sup> Traditional education systems in Indonesia and worldwide have often prioritized cognitive and technical skills over emotional and moral development, leading to issues like student burnout and disengagement. To address these shortcomings, educators are increasingly adopting holistic approaches that integrate cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning.<sup>29</sup> Mindfulness and compassion, key elements of holistic education, align closely with Buddhist principles. Mindfulness, the practice of cultivating present-moment awareness, helps students develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and resilience. Conversely, compassion encourages students to extend kindness and understanding to themselves and others, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and social responsibility. Integrating these practices into education can better prepare students to navigate complex interpersonal and societal challenges.<sup>30</sup>

Integrating mindfulness and compassion into Indonesian education aligns with cultural values like *gotong royong* (cooperation) and social harmony. These principles reflect Buddhist teachings on interdependence and ethical conduct.<sup>31</sup> Embedding mindfulness in schools fosters holistic development, empowering students to build a just, peaceful society. Indonesia's Buddhist influence dates back centuries, with Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist temple, symbolizing this heritage. Though Buddhism is a minority religion today, its

---

<sup>26</sup> Burmansah et al. (2020), p. 51 - 65.

<sup>27</sup> The World Bank, *Overview: The World Bank in Indonesia, Having maintained political stability, Indonesia is one of Asia Pacific's most vibrant democracies and is emerging as a confident middle-income country*, accessed on [January 10, 2025], available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/indonesia/overview>

<sup>28</sup> Cooper and James (2005), p. 61 - 72.

<sup>29</sup> Mahirda & Wahyuni (2017), p. 123 - 135.

<sup>30</sup> Bell (2013), p. 290 - 303.

<sup>31</sup> Burmansah et al. (2023), p. 75 - 106.

teachings continue to shape Indonesia's cultural and spiritual landscape.<sup>32</sup> Integrating Buddhist principles into Indonesian education supports character development while preserving the nation's rich traditions. Buddhist institutions have long emphasized mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom, which were once taught mainly in monastic settings but are now adapted for secular education. By incorporating these practices into schools, Indonesia can address modern challenges effectively. Meditation retreats and mindful living provide students with tools to develop awareness and empathy.<sup>33</sup> These approaches are not exclusive to religion but can be applied in diverse educational settings, making them accessible to all students. This model blends spiritual values with modern education, offering a holistic approach to learning.

Meditation retreats allow students to develop mindfulness and self-reflection in a peaceful and supportive setting. Stepping away from daily distractions helps them focus on inner awareness.<sup>34</sup> By knowing the explanation of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* refers to developing mindfulness with ourselves in daily life; through mindfulness practice, students learn to manage emotions and make ethical decisions. The *Dhammapada* reinforces "the wise, meditative, and steadfast, who strive with strong effort, reach Nibbāna, the supreme peace."<sup>35</sup> Through meditation retreats, students learn to observe their minds without judgment, cultivating clarity and compassion.<sup>36</sup> This practice aligns with Buddhist teachings on self-discipline (*sīla*), mental cultivation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), forming the foundation of ethical and mindful living.<sup>37</sup> Meditation retreats teach those three fundamental aspects essential for moral and mindful living. In Indonesia, Buddhist education includes meditation retreats with guided sessions, silent reflection, and Buddhist teachings. Schools incorporating these retreats equip students with resilience, clarity, and compassion skills, preparing them for life's challenges.<sup>38</sup>

Meditation retreats offer students more than personal well-being; they foster empathy and a sense of interconnectedness, inspiring, compassionate actions toward social and environmental issues. Shapiro et al. (2011) found that mindfulness enhances emotional regulation and empathy, increasing prosocial behavior. Integrating mindfulness into daily life, known as mindful living, involves intentional awareness in communication, decision-making, and relationships.<sup>39</sup> In Indonesia, this aligns with cultural practices emphasizing harmony and respect for nature. For instance, mindful eating encourages individuals to be aware of physical and emotional sensations

<sup>32</sup> Kowal (2019), p. 5 - 19.

<sup>33</sup> Burmansah et al. (2022), p. 6587 - 6602.

<sup>34</sup> Thai Plum Village (2011), p.4.

<sup>35</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse 23 - PTS: *Dhp* 23., Buddharakkhita, Acharya (1985), p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN, Walshe (1987), p. 335 - 340.

<sup>37</sup> Nyanaponika Thera (1996), p. 197.

<sup>38</sup> Laidlaw & Mair (2019), p. 328 - 358.

<sup>39</sup> Shapiro et al. (2011), p. 1. 493 - 528.

during meals, promoting gratitude and sustainable behaviors. Framson et al. (2009) developed the Mindful Eating Questionnaire to assess this awareness, highlighting its role in fostering a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness of all life.<sup>40</sup> Service-learning projects help integrate mindfulness into education by allowing students to apply mindfulness in real-life situations, such as volunteering in communities or participating in environmental initiatives. These experiences deepen students' mindfulness practice while benefiting others. Mindfulness and compassion work together – mindfulness fosters self-awareness and emotional balance, while compassionate actions strengthen mindfulness through meaningful actions.<sup>41</sup> In Indonesia, this approach empowers students to address social challenges. Mindfulness-based conflict resolution programs can help them handle interpersonal issues with empathy, while compassion-focused workshops encourage support for marginalized communities.<sup>42</sup> Combining mindfulness and compassion in education, Indonesian schools can nurture future leaders with emotional intelligence and ethical awareness. These qualities are vital for fostering global peace and addressing today's challenges. Integrating mindfulness and compassionate action in schools equips students with the skills to build a more just and harmonious society.

Developing mindfulness requires systematic training, and meditation is a key practice for cultivating awareness. Buddhist meditation retreats offer structured training in mindfulness, providing students with practical tools for daily life.<sup>43</sup> In education, these retreats integrate mindfulness into learning, shaping students' emotions and ethics. Traditional Buddhist meditation follows structured methods, but not all students relate to these approaches. Many schools adopt meditation retreats to be more accessible by incorporating mindful living education in collaboration with educational institutions.<sup>44</sup> The art of mindfulness in education makes meditation more student-friendly, integrating mindfulness seamlessly into school life. In today's interconnected world, fostering compassionate and mindful individuals is crucial. Yet, conventional education often neglects emotional and ethical learning.<sup>45</sup> The *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta* highlights the four foundations of mindfulness – body, feelings, mind, and mental objects – as essential for wisdom and emotional regulation.<sup>46</sup> This practice enhances students' attention and emotional balance. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* emphasizes mindfulness of breathing as a direct path to mental clarity, "When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated,

---

<sup>40</sup> Framson et al. (2009), p. 1439 – 1444.

<sup>41</sup> Dychtwald (1981), p. 39 – 56.

<sup>42</sup> Sudarman et al. (2016), p. 14 – 20.

<sup>43</sup> Salcido-Cibrián et al. (2019), p. 212 - 225.

<sup>44</sup> Baindur (2020), p. 156 - 172.

<sup>45</sup> Chanthong (2016), p. 88 - 105.

<sup>46</sup> *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN, Walshe (1987), p. 335 - 340.

it is of great fruit and great benefit.”<sup>47</sup> Short meditation sessions in schools can improve students’ focus and emotional intelligence. Compassion (*karuṇā*) is also central to education. The *Karuṇā Sutta* states, “A person who is compassionate does not harm others but seeks to bring welfare and happiness to all beings.”<sup>48</sup> Schools can nurture mindfulness through meditation, ethical reflection, and kindness. Buddhist teachings promote awareness, compassion, and emotional resilience, helping students grow into caring individuals. By integrating mindfulness into education, students develop focus, empathy, and ethical values, preparing them to contribute positively to society and build a more compassionate world.

Modern societies face complex challenges such as social inequality, environmental crises, and rising mental health issues. Addressing these problems requires emotionally intelligent and ethically responsible future leaders. However, traditional education prioritizes academic and technical skills while neglecting emotional and moral development. It has resulted in students excelling academically but struggling with empathy, resilience, and relationships. To bridge this gap, education must integrate compassion as a fundamental value.<sup>49</sup> Compassion is a skill that develops with practice. Buddhist meditation retreats and mindfulness education foster self-awareness, empathy, and interconnectedness, aligning with the Buddha’s teachings on ethical living and social harmony. In the *Karaniya Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8), the Buddha emphasizes boundless loving-kindness, “Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings.”<sup>50</sup> This principle highlights the importance of mindful compassion in personal and societal relationships. Through meditation and ethical training, students cultivate responsibility toward others. By integrating mindfulness into education, students address societal issues with care and cooperation. The *Satipatthana Sutta* (MN 10) underscores mindfulness (*sati*) as a path to insight and ethical clarity, “Here, a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.”<sup>51</sup> Retreats provide a focused environment for reflection, reinforcing emotional resilience and compassion. The *Cula-Malunkiyovada Sutta* (MN 63) stresses the need to step away from distractions and focus on what leads to wisdom, “It is not proper for one who is seeking the goal to engage in what does not lead to awakening.”<sup>52</sup> Retreats support students in their moral and emotional growth by nurturing

<sup>47</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118.16; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 941 - 945.

<sup>48</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1997). *Karuṇā Sutta: The Sutta on Compassion*. Access to Insight, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org).

<sup>49</sup> Ayres (2000), p. 45 - 62.

<sup>50</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1995). *Karaniya Metta Sutta* (Sn 1.8). Access to Insight, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org).

<sup>51</sup> *Satipatthana Sutta*, MN 10; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145 - 150.

<sup>52</sup> *Cula-Malunkiyovada Sutta*, MN 63; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 523.

wisdom and ethical awareness. This foundation equips them to contribute positively to society through mindfulness and empathy. The *Sigalovada Sutta* (DN 31) illustrates the benefits of ethical living, “By practicing compassion, generosity, and virtue, one earns the respect of others and fosters harmony.”<sup>53</sup> By embodying these teachings, students gain the moral resilience to make meaningful contributions to the world.

Buddhist meditation retreats emphasize discipline, mindfulness, and ethical behavior, fostering compassion. Participants observe noble silence, practice mindful breathing, and engage in contemplative exercises that cultivate empathy and understanding.<sup>54</sup> These practices enhance well-being and promote a sense of shared humanity. Integrating elements of meditation retreats can help students develop mindfulness and compassion in education. Schools and universities can offer mindfulness workshops, day-long retreats, or extended programs incorporating meditation.<sup>55</sup> Such initiatives foster self-awareness, emotional regulation, and compassionate engagement. Mindful living education extends mindfulness beyond meditation into daily life. Rooted in Buddhist philosophy, it integrates mindfulness into communication, decision-making, and relationships. This holistic approach encourages students to embody compassion in actions, thoughts, and intentions.<sup>56</sup> Mindful living education emphasizes ethical conduct, rooted in Buddhist precepts of non-harming, truthfulness, and generosity. Students develop a strong moral foundation that shapes their behavior and decision-making by integrating these principles into education. The *Dhammapada* highlights the transformative power of ethical conduct, “By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another.”<sup>57</sup> Mindful living also emphasizes interdependence, encouraging students to recognize their impact on others and the environment. This awareness fosters responsibility and motivates them to contribute positively to society.<sup>58</sup>

Practical applications in schools and universities include mindful communication exercises, community service projects, and discussions on ethical dilemmas. The *Satipatthana Sutta* (MN 10) describes mindfulness (*sati*) as a practice for insight and moral clarity, “A bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.”<sup>59</sup> Through mindful living, students develop emotional resilience and wisdom to navigate life’s challenges. The *Cula-Malunkya Sutta* (MN 63) stresses the importance of focusing on

<sup>53</sup> *Sigalovada Sutta*, DN 31; Walshe (1987), p. 461.

<sup>54</sup> Goodman (2013), p. 553 – 571; Petchsawang & McLean (2017), p. 216 - 244.

<sup>55</sup> Eby et al. (2019), p. 156 - 178.

<sup>56</sup> Whitesman & Mash (2016), p. 1 - 9.

<sup>57</sup> *Dhammapada* 165; Buddhārakkhita, Acharya (1985), p. 165.

<sup>58</sup> Rupprecht et al. (2019), p. 1 - 15.

<sup>59</sup> *Satipatthana Sutta*, MN 10; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145 - 150.



what leads to wisdom, “It is not proper for one who is seeking the goal to engage in what does not lead to awakening.”<sup>60</sup> From a Buddhist educational perspective, integrating mindfulness and compassion into learning represents a paradigm shift toward holistic education. The Buddha’s teachings emphasize wisdom (*prajna*), ethical conduct (*sila*), and mental discipline (*samadhi*) as essential pillars of personal and social development. The *Brahmajala Sutta* (DN 1) supports this balanced approach, “The Tathagata is accomplished in wisdom and conduct, the Well-Gone One, the Knower of the Worlds, the Incomparable Leader of persons to be tamed.”<sup>61</sup> This triadic framework fosters cognitive, emotional, and ethical growth, creating a foundation for mindful and compassionate social engagement.<sup>62</sup>

In the modern context, Buddhist education development seeks to adapt its core principles to contemporary challenges while maintaining their integrity. This involves designing programs integrating traditional Buddhist practices with innovative teaching methods, ensuring accessibility and relevance.<sup>63</sup> Meditation retreats are effective models for embedding mindfulness and compassion into education, enhancing emotional well-being and social connectedness. Providing students with a supportive learning environment that fosters self-awareness, empathy, and ethical reasoning is crucial. This includes incorporating mindfulness into curricula, training educators in mindfulness-based methods, and offering opportunities for compassionate action. Collaboration between educational institutions and Buddhist organizations can enrich resources for implementing mindfulness programs.<sup>64</sup>

Research supports the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in cultivating compassion and emotional well-being. Studies have shown that mindfulness meditation enhances brain activity in regions associated with empathy and emotional regulation, such as the insula and anterior cingulate cortex. Moreover, interventions incorporating loving-kindness and compassion meditation have been found to increase prosocial behavior and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. These findings highlight the potential of mindfulness practices to transform students’ attitudes and behaviors, equipping them with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of modern society.<sup>65</sup> Cultivating students’ compassionate action in society requires a transformative approach to education that emphasizes mindfulness and compassion as core values. The Buddhist practices of meditation retreats and mindful living education offer a robust framework for developing these qualities, providing students with the tools to lead meaningful and ethical lives.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Cula-Malunkyovada Sutta*, MN 63; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 523.

<sup>61</sup> *Brahmajala Sutta*, DN 1, Walshe (1987), p. 67.

<sup>62</sup> Nhat Hanh (2012), p. 114.

<sup>63</sup> Nhat Hanh (2003), p. 215.

<sup>64</sup> Whitesman & Mash (2016), p. 143.

<sup>65</sup> Kim et al. (2021), p. 409 - 437.

<sup>66</sup> Jain et al. (2007), p. 11 - 12.

The Buddhist community in Palembang plays an essential role in advancing educational initiatives that foster mindfulness and compassion. According to 2024 data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Palembang has a Buddhist population of 52,269, with 4,637 junior and senior high school students, constituting 8.87% of the city's Buddhist demographic. These statistics highlight the growing need for educational frameworks that preserve Buddhist values and equip students with the necessary skills to contribute positively to society. This research argues that Buddhist education significantly enhances students' mindfulness and compassion through meditation retreats and mindful living programs. By systematically integrating these practices into formal education, students develop emotional resilience, empathy, and ethical decision-making skills – essential in modern society. The research seeks to fill gaps in Indonesia's education system by demonstrating how Buddhist teachings complement mainstream educational approaches, fostering a balance between academic excellence and moral development. Furthermore, this study asserts that Buddhist education can potentially cultivate future leaders who prioritize compassion and mindfulness in their personal and professional lives. A mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, will be employed to assess the effectiveness of these educational interventions. By reinforcing these principles, Buddhist education can build a more inclusive, harmonious, and peaceful society, ultimately inspiring students to take compassionate actions that promote global peace.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research designs

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative insights from a case study and literature review with quantitative data collected through a survey method.<sup>67</sup> This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how Buddhist meditation retreats and mindful living education empower students to engage in compassionate action for global peace. By combining theoretical perspectives with empirical findings, the study ensures a holistic analysis<sup>68</sup>. The respondents in this study consisted of students aged 11-17 who participated in a mindfulness retreat for teenagers in Palembang. The research population totaled 170 students, from which a sample of 120 participants was determined using the Slovin formula. All respondents shared similar characteristics, including gender-neutral selection, equal retreat durations, and comparable Buddhist religious backgrounds. These students were active members of Buddhist monasteries in Palembang, possessing foundational knowledge of Buddhist teachings. For qualitative analysis, a pattern-matching approach was employed for a single-case study, following Robert K. Yin's methodology.<sup>69</sup> Quantitative data analysis applied path analysis techniques with multiple regression

<sup>67</sup> Kroll & Neri (2009), p. 1 - 6.

<sup>68</sup> Doyle et al. (2009), p. 175 - 185.

<sup>69</sup> Yin (2009), p. 54 - 60.

analysis for hypothesis testing.<sup>70</sup>

## 2.2. Data collection & Data analysis

A structured questionnaire was designed based on insights from the literature review. It includes closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather diverse perspectives.<sup>71</sup> The study uses purposive sampling, selecting participants with experience in Buddhist meditation retreats or mindful living education. The target sample size is 120 to ensure statistical reliability. The survey is distributed online for broader accessibility, with clear instructions and confidentiality assurances. A pilot test with 30 participants helps refine the questionnaire. Qualitative analysis identifies themes from the literature review, focusing on Buddhist education principles promoting mindfulness and compassion. It also examines challenges and strategies for integrating meditation into education and its global impact on peacebuilding. Quantitative data is analyzed using statistical software to identify trends and relationships in Buddhist meditation and mindful living education. The findings contribute to understanding its broader educational and social benefits.

## 2.3. Justification for mixed-methods approach

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods allows for comprehensively exploring the research topic. Qualitative Analysis provides a deep understanding of the theoretical framework and practical implementations of Buddhist educational practices. Quantitative Analysis offers measurable evidence of the impact on mindfulness and compassion, ensuring empirical rigor. This methodology ensures that the study captures both the richness of Buddhist philosophical insights and the tangible outcomes of their application in educational settings.<sup>72</sup>

# III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 3.1. Impact of Buddhist meditation retreats

Meditation retreats create a focused environment where students develop mindfulness and compassion. Survey results show improved self-awareness, emotional resilience, and empathy, leading to more compassionate actions. Using case studies and a literature review, a qualitative approach helps understand the impact of Buddhist meditation retreats. By analyzing individual experiences and scholarly work, this approach reveals how retreats enhance mindfulness, emotional well-being, and compassion. A case study explores a week-long Buddhist meditation retreat attended by students. The retreat included daily meditation, mindfulness teachings, reflective journaling, and group discussions on Buddhist principles like loving-kindness (*metta*) and interconnectedness, fostering personal and social growth.

---

<sup>70</sup> Dua et al. (2021), pp 1 - 17.

<sup>71</sup> Yin (2009), pp. 20 - 24.

<sup>72</sup> Creswell (2007), pp. 53 - 84.

### 3.1.1. Observed transformations

(1) Improved emotional regulation: Students experienced greater emotional awareness and calmness. Mindful breathing and body scans helped them manage stress. One participant shared, “Meditation helped me pause before reacting impulsively.” Reflective journaling provided clarity, enabling students to process emotions constructively.

(2) Enhanced compassion and empathy: *Mettā bhāvanā* meditation fostered kindness toward oneself and others. Group Dharma discussions encouraged understanding and mutual support. One student noted, “*I now see my peers with more warmth and patience.*” Mindful games strengthen a sense of community.

(3) Increased focus and mindfulness: Mindful walking and eating cultivated presence and appreciation. One student remarked, “*I realized how much I rush through life.*” Stick exercises helped channel energy, enhancing concentration. Many reported improved academic focus post-retreat.

The retreat fostered mindfulness, compassion, and emotional resilience, helping students integrate these practices into daily life.

Buddhist meditation retreats play a crucial role in enhancing emotional resilience. Hölzel et al. (2011) found that meditation strengthens self-awareness and reduces stress by altering neural pathways linked to emotional regulation.<sup>73</sup> It aligns with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), where the Buddha states, “A bhikkhu dwells contemplating feelings as feelings... ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having subdued longing and dejection toward the world.”<sup>74</sup> A case study revealed that students developed improved stress management skills, reflecting this sutta’s emphasis on mindful awareness. Buddhist retreats also cultivate compassion through *mettā bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation). Fredrickson et al. (2008) found that such practices increase positive emotions and prosocial behavior.<sup>75</sup> The *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8) echoes this, stating, “Wishing: In gladness and safety, may all beings be at ease.”<sup>76</sup> Case study participants reported heightened empathy and stronger community bonds after the retreat. Meditation also enhances cognitive function. Kabat-Zinn (2005) highlights mindfulness as a tool for improving focus and reducing distractions.<sup>77</sup> The *Mahā-Saccaka Sutta* (MN 36) describes the Buddha’s deep concentration, leading to wisdom, “I directed my mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the taints.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly, students in the case study reported increased attentiveness in academic tasks.

<sup>73</sup> Hölzel, B. K., et al. (2011), p. 36 - 43.

<sup>74</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145.

<sup>75</sup> Fredrickson, B. L., et al. (2008), p. 1045 - 1062.

<sup>76</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1995). *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta* (Sn 1.8). *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], Available at [www.accesstosight.org](http://www.accesstosight.org).

<sup>77</sup> Kabat-Zinn (2005), p. 56.

<sup>78</sup> *Mahā-Saccaka Sutta*, MN 36; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 349 - 354.

### 3.1.2. Key themes and insights

(i) Transformational Environment – The retreat setting provides a unique environment free from daily stressors, allowing students to immerse themselves fully in mindfulness practices.

(ii) Practical Applications – Retreats equip students with tools like meditation and reflection, which they can apply to various aspects of their lives, from academics to personal relationships.

(iii) Community Building – The shared experience of a retreat fosters connections and collective growth, reinforcing the importance of compassion and mutual understanding.

Buddhist meditation retreats profoundly impact students, enhancing their mindfulness, emotional regulation, and compassion. The combination of case study observations and literature findings underscores the retreats' transformative potential. Schools and Buddhist institutions should consider incorporating such programs to promote holistic development and emotional well-being among students.

### 3.2. Role of mindful living education

Mindful living education cultivates sustainable habits aligned with Buddhist principles. Through mindful breathing, reflective journaling, and active listening, students enhance their ability to engage mindfully in daily interactions, fostering harmony in their communities. A qualitative approach, utilizing case study methods and literature analysis, reveals the transformative impact of mindful living education on emotional, social, and cognitive development. This approach combines individual case studies with research to demonstrate how mindfulness fosters self-awareness, emotional regulation, and compassion. The case study is a week-long mindful living education program implemented during a mindfulness retreat. The program incorporated practices such as morning mindfulness sessions, end-of-day reflective journaling, guided discussions on emotional awareness, and workshops on gratitude and kindness. Students were encouraged to apply mindfulness principles beyond the retreat, integrating them into their home lives and social interactions, extending mindfulness into everyday experiences.

#### 3.2.1. Observed transformations

(i) Improved Emotional Regulation: Facilitators observed that students became more adept at recognizing and managing emotions. Reflective journaling helped them process feelings constructively, reducing frustration and emotional outbursts. Guided discussions let students articulate their emotions clearly, fostering openness and mutual understanding among peers.

(ii) Enhanced Academic Focus: Daily mindfulness improved students' attention and stress management. Facilitators noted reduced distractions and increased lesson engagement. Consequently, students showed better academic performance and a more focused mindset.

(iii) Development of Compassion: Gratitude and kindness workshops enhanced empathy and strengthened friendships. Students reported fewer



conflicts, while facilitators observed greater collaboration and compassion, reinforcing social bonds.

These outcomes highlight the transformative potential of integrating mindfulness practices into education.

Research demonstrates that consistent mindfulness practice significantly enhances emotional regulation and mental clarity. Kabat-Zinn emphasizes integrating mindfulness into daily life to cultivate long-term benefits, “mindfulness is the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”<sup>79</sup> This aligns with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), which highlights mindfulness as a foundation for self-awareness and emotional balance, “here, a monk dwells contemplating the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful.”<sup>80</sup> In the case study, students’ daily mindfulness practices, such as reflective journaling and mindful sitting, helped them process emotions constructively, fostering sustained emotional and cognitive growth. Mindful living education nurtures compassion by encouraging students to reflect on their actions and empathize. Saway et al. (2018) found that mindfulness education strengthens self-compassion, enabling students to extend empathy to peers.<sup>81</sup> This resonates with the *Karahneya Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8), where the Buddha advises, “Just as a mother would protect her only child... one should cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings.”<sup>82</sup> The case study supports this: Students demonstrated increased kindness and stronger relationships through gratitude and kindness workshops. Additionally, mindfulness improves focus and academic performance. Zenner et al. (2014) found that mindfulness programs enhance attention and reduce test anxiety. Similarly, students in the case study reported feeling calmer and more focused during assessments.<sup>83</sup> It aligns with the *Dhammapada*, “mindfulness is the path to the Deathless... The mindful do not die.”<sup>84</sup>

### 3.2.2. Key themes and insights

(i) Holistic Development: Mindful living education addresses student growth’s emotional, social, and cognitive aspects. Integrating mindfulness into daily routines equips students with tools to navigate challenges inside and outside the classroom.

(ii) Practical Applications: Students learn to apply mindfulness principles in real-world settings, from managing stress during exams to resolving conflicts with peers. These practical applications ensure the program’s relevance and long-term impact.

<sup>79</sup> Kabat-Zinn (1986), p. 145.

<sup>80</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145.

<sup>81</sup> Saway et al. (2018), p. 23.

<sup>82</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1995). *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta* (Sn 1.8). *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org).

<sup>83</sup> Zenner et al. (2014), p. 603.

<sup>84</sup> *Dhp* 21, Buddhārakkhita, Acharya (1985), p. 21.



(iii) **Cultural Shift:** The program fosters a supportive and compassionate school culture. Facilitators and students reported feeling a greater sense of community and shared purpose.

The art of mindful living education profoundly impacts students, enhancing their emotional regulation, academic focus, and interpersonal skills. Combining case study observations and literature findings underscores the value of integrating mindfulness principles into everyday education. By fostering self-awareness, compassion, and resilience, mindful living education prepares students for the complexities of modern life. Schools and educational institutions should consider adopting such programs to promote holistic growth and emotional well-being among their students.

### **3.3. Student mindfulness effectiveness of compassion**

A qualitative case study and literature analysis explore how mindfulness enhances students' compassion. This approach reveals how mindfulness fosters emotional regulation, empathy, and compassionate behavior by examining real-life cases and scholarly work. The study focuses on a weekly mindfulness retreat for students aged 11 – 16, led by Buddhist monks and lay practitioners. The program included daily mindfulness exercises, retreat sessions on emotional awareness, role-playing compassionate responses, and reflective journaling. Researchers observed participants and conducted interviews, providing valuable insights into mindfulness's transformative impact on students' personal growth and relationships. This research highlights the role of mindfulness in cultivating compassion in educational settings.

#### **3.3.1. Observed outcomes**

(i) **Enhanced Emotional Regulation:** Students reported improved stress management, feeling calmer and more in control, particularly in high-pressure situations like exams or social conflicts. Mindful breathing and movement exercises helped them manage anxiety and prevent emotional outbursts. Many students found that mindfulness encouraged them to pause before reacting, reducing impulsive behaviors and promoting thoughtful responses. Through guided practices such as Dharma discussions and journaling, students became more aware of their emotions and learned to process them constructively.

(ii) **Development of Empathy and Compassion:** Mindfulness activities fostered greater empathy as students engaged in role-playing and Dharma talks, helping them understand their peers' emotions and perspectives. Group discussions and mindful games strengthened interpersonal bonds, increasing trust and openness. Many students also noticed a shift in their communication style, replacing reactive responses with more patient and compassionate dialogues.

(iii) **Positive Behavioral Changes:** Facilitators observed decreased bullying incidents and increased prosocial behaviors. Students became more mindful of their words and actions, preferring peaceful conflict resolution. Many demonstrated kindness through small gestures, such as offering emotional support, assisting peers, and sharing during mindful eating sessions.

The mindfulness retreat significantly enhanced students' emotional regulation, empathy, and positive behaviors. They developed greater self-awareness, emotional control, and compassion through mindful practices, fostering healthier relationships and reducing conflicts. These findings highlight mindfulness as a transformative tool for personal growth and emotional resilience and promoting a compassionate school environment.

Mindfulness enhances students' ability to be present and aware, fostering compassion. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) teaches that mindfulness (*sati*) leads to wisdom (*paññā*), which is essential for compassion.<sup>85</sup> Kabat-Zinn (2005) emphasizes that mindfulness creates space for emotional processing and awareness of others' needs, aligning with the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22), which highlights non-reactivity through feeling awareness (*vedanānupassanā*).<sup>86</sup> Neff (2003) asserts that mindfulness nurtures self-compassion, enhancing empathy.<sup>87</sup> The *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54) supports this, explaining how loving-kindness (*mettā*) toward oneself extends to others, reducing ill will (*vyāpāda*).<sup>88</sup> Students practicing journaling and mindfulness reported greater empathy, reflecting *Visuddhimagga's* (IX.8 - 10) view on self-kindness leading to altruism.<sup>89</sup> Fredrickson et al. (2008) link loving-kindness meditation to prosocial behavior, paralleling the *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN 21), which teaches mindful endurance.<sup>90</sup> Role-playing compassionate acts reinforced ethical conduct (*sīla*), as encouraged in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31).<sup>91</sup>

### 3.3.2. Key themes and insights

(i) Holistic development: Mindfulness practices enhance students' emotional, social, and moral development, preparing them to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics with compassion.

(ii) Practical skills: Reflective journaling and role-playing equip students with actionable tools to practice compassion in real-world situations.

(iii) School culture transformation: By integrating mindfulness into school programs, institutions can foster a culture of empathy and kindness, reducing negative behaviors such as bullying.

The case study and literature findings underscore mindfulness's significant impact on students' compassion effectiveness. Mindfulness practices, such as emotional awareness exercises and reflective journaling, enhance self-regulation, empathy, and prosocial behaviors. Schools and educators should prioritize incorporating mindfulness programs into curricula to

<sup>85</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10); Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145 - 150.

<sup>86</sup> Kabat-Zinn (2005), p. 78 - 81.

<sup>87</sup> Neff, K. (2003), p. 85 - 101.

<sup>88</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1997). *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54). *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org).

<sup>89</sup> *Visuddhimagga's* (IX. 8 - 10), Buddhaghosa, Bhadantācariya (1991), p. 300 - 305.

<sup>90</sup> Fredrickson et al. (2008), p. 1045 - 1062.

<sup>91</sup> *Sigālovāda Sutta*, DN 31, Walshe (1987), pp. 461 - 465.

foster a supportive and compassionate learning environment. By cultivating mindfulness, students are better equipped to build meaningful relationships and contribute positively to their communities.

### **3.4. Empowering students for global peace**

Through the integration of mindfulness and compassion, students develop a sense of interconnectedness and global responsibility. Survey responses highlight increased participation in community service and advocacy for social justice among those exposed to Buddhist educational practices. Empowering students to contribute to global peace involves fostering critical thinking, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and proactive engagement with global challenges. A qualitative approach utilizing case study methods and literature analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how education can empower students as peacebuilders. By examining real-life cases and synthesizing insights from academic literature, this approach highlights the transformative potential of targeted educational interventions in shaping globally conscious and compassionate individuals during the retreat. The case study focuses on a retreat implemented by students and designed to cultivate awareness and responsibility among students regarding global peace issues. The program was integrated into the school curriculum over one academic year, involving students aged 11 – 16. The program included: (1) workshops on conflict resolution: interactive sessions teaching negotiation, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving; (2) cultural exchange projects: partnering with schools in other countries to foster cross-cultural understanding; (3) community service activities: local projects addressing social justice issues to connect global peace concepts with practical action; and (4) mindfulness practices: daily meditation sessions to develop emotional regulation and empathy.

#### **3.4.1. Observed outcomes**

(i) Increased cultural sensitivity: Students participating in cultural exchange projects developed an appreciation for diverse perspectives. They reported greater empathy toward individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Dialogues with international peers challenged stereotypes and encouraged students to think critically about global inequalities.

(ii) Improved conflict resolution skills: workshops on conflict resolution equipped students with tools to address disagreements constructively. Teachers observed fewer conflicts in the classroom as students applied active listening and problem-solving skills in their interactions. Role-playing exercises allowed students to practice resolving real-world scenarios, enhancing their confidence in mediating disputes.

(iii) Stronger sense of social responsibility: Participation in community service activities deepened students' understanding of how local issues connect to global peace. Projects such as volunteering at shelters or organizing awareness campaigns fostered a sense of agency and responsibility. Students reported feeling empowered to advocate for change in their communities and beyond.

(iv) Enhanced emotional regulation: Mindfulness practices helped students manage stress and engage empathetically with others. Reflective journaling after meditation sessions enabled them to process emotions and cultivate self-awareness, key components of peacebuilding.

Research affirms that education shapes students as global peacebuilders. UNESCO highlights that peace education fosters tolerance, empathy, and cooperation, essential for resolving international conflicts. UNESCO states that “peace education should equip learners with the skills to manage conflicts peacefully and cultivate a culture of understanding.”<sup>92</sup> This aligns with Buddhist teachings, particularly in the *Mettā Sutta* (SN 1.8), where the Buddha emphasizes the cultivation of boundless loving-kindness (*mettā*) toward all beings as a foundation for peace, “just as a mother would protect with her life, her son, her only son, so one should develop an unbounded mind toward all beings.”<sup>93</sup> The case study reflects these principles, showing how structured programs nurture such values in students. Cross-cultural experiences reduce prejudice and enhance global understanding, consistent with Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis, which asserts that meaningful interactions with diverse groups decrease bias and foster empathy.<sup>94</sup> The *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31) also promotes respect and understanding across cultures. The Buddha advises Sigāla to honor people from all backgrounds, stating, “A noble disciple regards all directions as worthy of respect, treating others with kindness and fairness, leading to harmony in society.”<sup>95</sup> Mindfulness plays a crucial role in emotional resilience and empathy. Kabat-Zinn (1986) argues that mindfulness strengthens self-regulation and compassion, preparing individuals to engage with global issues thoughtfully, “mindfulness practice enhances emotional intelligence, fostering greater self-awareness and empathy.”<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) describes mindfulness (*sati*) as the foundation for self-awareness and emotional balance, “a practitioner dwells contemplating the body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities, developing clear comprehension and equanimity.”<sup>97</sup> In the case study, students who engaged in mindfulness practices demonstrated increased emotional regulation and social awareness, reinforcing these Buddhist principles.

### 3.4.2. Key themes and insights

(i) Holistic development: Empowering students for global peace requires addressing the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of learning. Programs integrating conflict resolution, cultural understanding, and mindfulness achieve this balance.

<sup>92</sup> UNESCO (2024), p. 15.

<sup>93</sup> Bhikkhu Sujato (trans), (2018), *Mettā Sutta, Sn 1.8. Sutta Central*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn1.8>.

<sup>94</sup> Allport (1954), 3. p. 281 - 290.

<sup>95</sup> Sigālovāda Sutta, DN 31, Walshe (1987), p. 461.

<sup>96</sup> Kabat-Zinn (1986), p. 148.

<sup>97</sup> Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, MN 10; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), 6. p. 145 - 150.

(ii) Local-to-global connections: Linking local issues to global challenges helps students understand their role in fostering peace. Community service projects ground abstract concepts in actionable steps, instilling a sense of agency.

(iii) Sustainability and engagement: Peace education programs must be sustained and embedded into the curriculum for lasting impact. Engaging students through interactive and reflective methods ensures meaningful participation.

The case study and literature analysis demonstrate that empowering students for global peace is achievable through targeted educational interventions. Programs that combine cultural exchange, conflict resolution training, mindfulness practices, and community service equip students with the skills and mindset needed to act as compassionate global citizens. Schools and educators should prioritize such initiatives, ensuring that students are prepared to address the complexities of a globalized world with empathy and responsibility. Education can contribute to a more harmonious and equitable future by nurturing a generation of peacebuilders.

### 3.5. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its potential, adopting Buddhist-inspired education faces challenges such as resistance due to cultural or religious biases, limited resources, and varying levels of engagement among students.

## IV. THE IMPACT OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION RETREAT AND THE ART OF MINDFUL LIVING EDUCATION ON STUDENTS MINDFULNESS EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPASSION

The findings of this study indicate a significant influence of mindfulness retreats and mindful living education on the mindfulness effectiveness of compassion among students. The data analysis reveals that these interventions enhance students' ability to regulate emotions, develop empathy, and engage in compassionate behaviors. This section discusses the implications of these results, drawing connections between the observed outcomes and existing literature and highlighting the broader impact on educational practices and societal harmony. According to the findings of this research, the result data is as follows.

**Table 4.** Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Unstandardized Residual	.077	120	.074	.986	120	.270
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Source: Research Data

It can be seen in the table that the value of Sig. for Standardized residual is = 0.270. Then, the value of Sig > can be used to conclude that the variable data comes from a normally distributed population. Autocorrelation can be detected using Durbin Watson by looking at the Model Summary table, the output of SPSS V.20 for Windows.

**Table 5.** Autocorrelation Test Results

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.860 <sup>a</sup>	.739	.735	4.56406	1.851
a. Predictors: (Constant), The Art of Mindful Living Education, Buddhist Retreat Meditation					
b. Dependent Variable: Mindfulness Effectiveness of Compassion					

*Source: Research Data*

The autocorrelation assumption is violated if the Durbin-Watson numbers are < 1 and > 3. While the results of data processing shown in Table 2 above show that the Durbin-Watson number of 1,851 was obtained, it can be interpreted that there is no positive or negative autocorrelation in the regression model, so the autocorrelation assumption is fulfilled. The finding out whether or not there is multicollinearity between independent variables can be seen in Table 3, as follows.

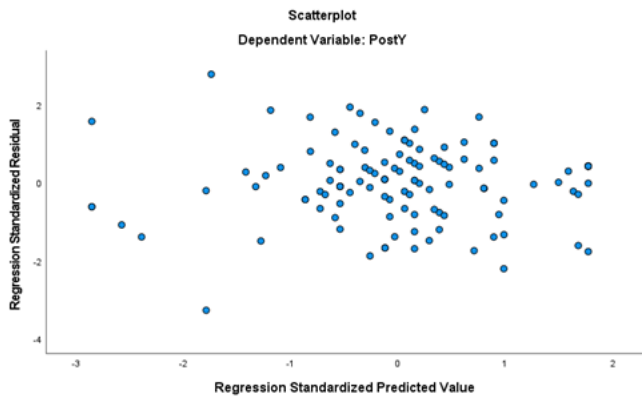
**Table 6.** Multicollinearity test results with TOL and VIF methods

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			
Model	Tolerance	Collinearity Statistics	
		VIF	
1	(Constant)		
	Buddhist Retreat Meditation	.554	1.804
	The Art of Mindful Living Education	.554	1.804
a. Dependent Variable: Mindfulness Effectiveness of Compassion			

*Source: Research Data*

The model is considered free from multicollinearity if the VIF value is <10 or the tolerance value is closer to 1. From Table 3, it can be seen that the calculation of the value of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) shows that there is no independent variable that has a VIF value of more than 10; besides that, there is also no Tolerance value that < 0.10 so it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity. The data processing results for heteroscedasticity tests can be seen from the scatterplot graph below.





**Figure 1.** Scatterplot Chart (Source: SPSS Processing)

From the scatterplot graph above, it can be seen that the points spread randomly and are scattered both above and below the number 0 on the Y-axis. It can be concluded that there is no heteroscedasticity between independent variables in the regression model. Multiple regression analysis determines whether variable (Y) can be caused by variable (X). The formula used is  $Y = a + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2$ . To make calculations easier, researchers use SPSS 26 software. Here is the work using SPSS.

**Table 7.** Regression Coefficients

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model B		Unstandard- ized Coeffi- cients		Stan- dard- ized Co- effi- cients	t	Sig. <i>Tol- er- ance</i>	Collinearity Statistics	
		<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>				VIF	
1	(Constant)	9.973	4.259		2.341	.021		
	Buddhist Retreat Med- itation	.353	.064	.352	5.555	.000	.554	1.804
	The Art of Mindful Liv- ing Educa- tion	.528	.057	.584	9.214	.000	.554	1.804

a. Dependent Variable: Mindfulness Effectiveness of Compassion

Source: Research Data

Table 8. Test F Statistics

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6917.986	2	3458.993	166.053	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2437.181	117	20.831		
	Total	9355.167	119			
a. Dependent Variable: Mindfulness Effectiveness of Compassion						
b. Predictors: (Constant), The Art of Mindful Living Education, Buddhist Retreat Meditation						

Source: Research Data

Based on the coefficients table above, it can be seen that the constant value is 9.973, the value of b1 is 0.353, and b2 is 0.528. The value can be substituted with the double regression equation as follows.

$$Y = 9.973 + 0.353 X_1 + 0.528 X_2$$

From the regression equation above, it can be seen that:

V. THE STRUCTURED INTERVENTIONS OF MINDFULNESS EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPASSION BY BUDDHIST RETREAT MEDITATION AND THE ART OF MINDFUL LIVING EDUCATION

The constant value of 9.973 in the regression equation represents the baseline level of mindfulness effectiveness in fostering compassion when Buddhist retreat meditation and the art of mindful living education are absent. It suggests that mindfulness and compassion naturally exist to some extent due to innate qualities, cultural influences, or previous contemplative experiences. Angus and Andrew (2012) state, “Mindfulness and compassion are not merely the result of structured training but can arise naturally in individuals who have been exposed to positive environmental influences, cultural norms, or past meditative experiences.”<sup>98</sup> This observation aligns with the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22), where the Buddha explains, “Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating feelings as feelings... ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.”<sup>99</sup> This emphasizes that mindfulness (*sati*) is an inherent faculty that can be nurtured through systematic practice. Similarly, the *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54) states, “Just as a mother would protect

<sup>98</sup> Angus and Andrew (2012), p. 112.

<sup>99</sup> *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22, Walshe (1995), p. 335.

her only child with her life, so one should cultivate an unlimited heart with loving-kindness toward all beings.”<sup>100</sup> It highlights that loving-kindness (*mettā*) can emerge naturally but requires intentional cultivation for more profound development.

The constant value reinforces that mindfulness and compassion are not solely products of structured programs but can arise from positive peer interactions and ethical education. It aligns with the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31), where the Buddha advises, “A wise person protects friendships, respects elders, and maintains ethical conduct, thereby cultivating compassion naturally.”<sup>101</sup> Despite this inherent presence, structured interventions significantly amplify mindfulness and compassion. Hawley et al. (2014) highlight that Buddhist retreat meditation and the art of mindful living education enhance these qualities, making them more sustainable.<sup>102</sup> The *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 27) reinforces this point, stating, “Just as an elephant’s footprint encompasses all other footprints, right mindfulness encompasses all wholesome states.”<sup>103</sup> It indicates that mindfulness is a foundation for all ethical and compassionate behavior. Likewise, the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* (MN 19) states, “When a person frequently thinks thoughts of non-harming, their mind becomes inclined toward compassion, making it easier to sustain such qualities.”<sup>104</sup> Additionally, mindfulness and compassion flourish in supportive environments, as evidenced in the *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN 21), where the Buddha teaches, “Even if bandits were to sever one’s limbs, one should maintain a mind of loving-kindness, free from hatred.”<sup>105</sup> This illustrates that mindfulness fosters non-reactivity and compassion even in adversity. Therefore, while mindfulness and compassion may naturally exist, structured interventions act as catalysts, reinforcing and deepening their practice.

## VI. BUDDHIST RETREAT MEDITATION WILL AFFECT MINDFULNESS EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPASSION

The coefficient value of 0.353 indicates that for every unit increase in participation or engagement in Buddhist retreat meditation, the mindfulness effectiveness of compassion increases by 0.353 times. This finding highlights the measurable impact of retreat-based meditation practices on fostering mindfulness and compassion among students. Buddhist retreats offer an immersive environment where participants deeply engage with mindfulness practices, enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation. Burmansah et al. (2019) state, “Retreat settings provide an ideal context for sustained meditation, allowing individuals to cultivate compassion through prolonged

<sup>100</sup> *Mettā Sutta*, SN 46.54, in Bodhi (2000), p. 1592.

<sup>101</sup> *Sigālovāda Sutta*, DN 31, Walshe (1995), p. 461.

<sup>102</sup> Hawley et al. (2014), pp. 1-9.

<sup>103</sup> *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta*, MN 27; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), pp. 250 - 255.

<sup>104</sup> *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*, MN 19, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), pp. 115 - 118.

<sup>105</sup> *Kakacūpama Sutta*, MN 21, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), pp. 210 - 215.

introspection and interpersonal interactions.”<sup>106</sup> This aligns with the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22), where the Buddha instructs, “Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as body... ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.”<sup>107</sup> The structured retreat setting provides the optimal conditions for deepening mindfulness (*sati*) and fostering compassion (*karuṇā*), allowing practitioners to cultivate an internal state conducive to ethical and prosocial behavior.

Retreats frequently integrate group meditation and discussions, fostering a sense of shared purpose and empathy. This collective experience is consistent with the *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN 21), where the Buddha emphasizes patience and non-reactivity even in difficult situations, teaching that “even if bandits were to sever one’s limbs, one should maintain a mind of loving-kindness, free from hatred.”<sup>108</sup> The communal retreat experience strengthens emotional resilience, encouraging participants to respond to others with greater compassion and equanimity. Moreover, retreats incorporate Buddhist teachings such as *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion), which inspire students to act more compassionately in daily life. The *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54) states, “Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, so one should cultivate an unlimited heart with loving-kindness toward all beings.”<sup>109</sup> Central to many retreat programs, this practice enhances participants’ ability to extend compassion beyond structured meditation sessions. Donald et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of integrating retreat-based mindfulness programs in educational institutions, stating, “Schools that incorporate mindfulness retreats witness increased emotional resilience and greater interpersonal empathy among students.”<sup>110</sup> Given the documented benefits, institutions could integrate retreat-style programs into curricula to provide students with opportunities for intensive mindfulness practice. The findings suggest that retreats not only enhance self-awareness but also address pressing issues such as bullying, stress, and peer conflicts. However, the relatively minor coefficient value compared to the art of mindful living education (0.528) suggests that while retreats are impactful, their benefits may be more concentrated within the retreat duration. The *Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 27) reinforces the need for continuous practice, stating, “Just as an elephant’s footprint encompasses all other footprints, right mindfulness encompasses all wholesome states.”<sup>111</sup> This suggests that while retreats provide deep but temporary immersion, complimentary daily mindfulness practices are necessary for sustained impact.

<sup>106</sup> Burmansah et al. (2019), p. 87.

<sup>107</sup> *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22, Walshe (1995), p. 335 - 340.

<sup>108</sup> *Kakacūpama Sutta*, MN 21; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), 3. p. 210 - 215.

<sup>109</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1997). *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54). *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at [www.accesstosight.org](http://www.accesstosight.org).

<sup>110</sup> Donald et al. (2016), p. 214.

<sup>111</sup> *Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta*, MN 27; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), 6. p. 250 - 255.

## VII. THE ART OF MINDFUL LIVING EDUCATION WILL AFFECT MINDFULNESS EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPASSION

The coefficient value of 0.528 indicates that for every unit increase in mindful living education, mindfulness effectiveness in fostering compassion increases by 0.528 times. Unlike Buddhist retreat meditation, which provides short-term immersion, mindful living education integrates mindfulness into daily life, reinforcing self-awareness and empathy over time.<sup>112</sup> This aligns with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), where the Buddha states, “a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as body... ardent, fully aware, and mindful.”<sup>113</sup> This emphasizes mindfulness as a daily practice rather than a temporary experience. Students develop essential emotional and social skills by incorporating mindful journaling, breathing exercises, and reflection. The *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* (MN 19) supports this, stating, “When a person frequently thinks thoughts of non-harming, their mind becomes inclined toward compassion.”<sup>114</sup> It reinforces how consistent mindfulness practice strengthens compassionate behavior.

Mindful living education has a more lasting impact than Buddhist retreat meditation (0.353), suggesting its effectiveness in fostering continuous compassion. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31) supports this, stating, “A wise person protects friendships, respects elders, and maintains ethical conduct, thereby cultivating compassion naturally.”<sup>115</sup> Students who regularly engage in mindfulness practices internalize these values, improving their interactions and decision-making. This educational approach enhances emotional regulation and cognitive development. Ager et al. (2015) note, “schools that integrate mindfulness-based education report improvements in emotional regulation, academic performance, and reduced interpersonal conflicts.”<sup>116</sup> Institutions should embed mindfulness into daily routines, such as starting the day with meditation or integrating mindfulness into subjects. The *Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta* (MN 27) reinforces this, stating, “Just as an elephant’s footprint encompasses all other footprints, right mindfulness encompasses all wholesome states.”<sup>117</sup> Suggesting that structured mindfulness training benefits all aspects of life. To maximize its impact, educators should receive mindfulness training to guide students effectively. Steckler and Waddock (2017) state, “Mindfulness training for educators enhances their ability to model and teach mindfulness effectively, creating a ripple effect in student engagement and emotional intelligence.”<sup>118</sup> Although mindful living education is more impactful, Buddhist retreats provide valuable immersion. The *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22) states, “With mindfulness and clear

<sup>112</sup> Nelson (2018), p. 190 – 210.

<sup>113</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145 - 150.

<sup>114</sup> *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*, MN 19; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), pp. 115 - 118

<sup>115</sup> *Sigālovāda Sutta*, DN 31, Walshe (1987), p. 461 - 465.

<sup>116</sup> Ager et al. (2015), p. 67.

<sup>117</sup> *Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta*, MN 27; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 250 - 255.

<sup>118</sup> Steckler and Waddock (2017), p. 132.

comprehension, one overcomes suffering.”<sup>119</sup> It highlights the importance of both short-term retreats and long-term mindfulness education.

Both interventions enhance mindfulness effectiveness in compassion but in different ways. Buddhist retreat meditation (0.353) offers short-term benefits through intensive practice, while mindful living education (0.528) provides long-term internalization. Combining both approaches creates a comprehensive framework for holistic student development. These findings have significant implications for educators and policymakers. Combining retreats with daily mindful education maximizes the benefits of mindfulness and compassion training. Guay (2022) asserts, “Mindfulness education enhances emotional resilience and prepares students to engage meaningfully with global issues.”<sup>120</sup> The *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54) supports this fundamental thought, stating, “One should cultivate an unlimited heart with loving-kindness toward all beings.”<sup>121</sup> It reinforces mindfulness’s role in fostering social harmony. The constant value of 9.973 establishes a baseline for mindfulness and compassion, while the coefficients for Buddhist retreat meditation (0.353) and mindful living education (0.528) highlight their complementary effects. A balanced approach incorporating both ensures the development of compassionate, emotionally resilient individuals who contribute to a harmonious society. Schools should adopt mindfulness practices to improve emotional well-being, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. Tables 1 and 2 above also show the partial influence of variable Buddhist retreat meditation and the art of mindful living education on variable mindfulness effectiveness of compassion. It can be explained by comparing the value of Sig. against it.

### **7.1. There is a significant influence between Buddhist retreat meditation and mindfulness effectiveness of compassion.**

The analysis confirms a significant relationship between Buddhist Retreat Meditation and Mindfulness Effectiveness of Compassion, with a significance value of 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ). This validates the hypothesis that participating in Buddhist retreats enhances students’ mindfulness and compassion. Buddhist retreats provide immersive experiences where participants engage in meditation, reflective silence, and discussions on Buddhist teachings. These practices improve emotional regulation, self-awareness, and empathy, key components of compassion. Students develop emotional resilience by observing thoughts and emotions without judgment, allowing them to respond calmly and thoughtfully.<sup>122</sup> This aligns with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), where the Buddha states, “a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as body... ardent, fully aware, and mindful.”<sup>123</sup>

<sup>119</sup> *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22, Walshe (1995), p. 335 - 340.

<sup>120</sup> Guay (2022), p. 45.

<sup>121</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1997). *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54). Access to Insight, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org).

<sup>122</sup> Gunawan & Bintari (2021), pp. 51 - 64.

<sup>123</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145 - 150.



Retreats also emphasize *mettā* (loving-kindness meditation), encouraging goodwill towards oneself and others, which fosters empathy and prosocial behaviors. The *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54) supports this, stating, “one should cultivate an unlimited heart with loving-kindness toward all beings.”<sup>124</sup> Students who engage in these practices report improved relationships, reduced aggression, and a stronger sense of community.<sup>125</sup> Beyond personal benefits, retreats promote a sense of interconnectedness and social responsibility, inspiring students to act compassionately in their communities.<sup>126</sup> However, challenges exist in expanding these programs, including financial constraints and logistical needs.<sup>127</sup> Schools should integrate retreats with ongoing mindfulness programs, such as weekly meditation sessions, to sustain their impact. In conclusion, Buddhist Retreat Meditation significantly enhances mindfulness and compassion, offering long-term benefits for students’ personal growth and social interactions. Educational institutions should prioritize retreat-based mindfulness programs, ensuring accessibility and continuity for lasting impact.

## **7.2. There is a significant influence between the art of mindful living education and mindfulness effectiveness of compassion.**

The regression coefficient of 0.353 indicates that every unit increase in Buddhist Retreat Meditation participation leads to a 0.353-unit increase in mindfulness effectiveness of compassion. This confirms a positive relationship between retreat engagement and students’ development of mindfulness and compassion.<sup>128</sup> Buddhist retreats provide structured environments for mindfulness practices such as loving-kindness meditation, reflective silence, and group discussions.<sup>129</sup> These activities enhance emotional regulation, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness, which are key to compassion. The *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54) supports this, stating, “One should cultivate an unlimited heart with loving-kindness toward all beings.”<sup>130</sup>

The proportional increase suggests that repeated retreat participation leads to sustained growth in mindfulness and compassion. Students who attend regularly gain deeper emotional intelligence, conflict resolution skills, and improved interpersonal relationships. This aligns with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), which emphasizes continuous mindfulness as a means of personal and social well-being.<sup>131</sup> However, while retreats provide an initial

<sup>124</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1997). *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54). Access to Insight, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org).

<sup>125</sup> Williford et al. (2013), p. 162 - 187.

<sup>126</sup> Chan (2002), p. 69 - 75

<sup>127</sup> Laidlaw & Mair (2019), p. 200 - 215.

<sup>128</sup> Elaine & Martin (2016), pp. 78 - 92.

<sup>129</sup> Giovannoni (2017), pp. 200 - 220.

<sup>130</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1997). *Mettā Sutta* (SN 46.54). Access to Insight, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org).

<sup>131</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145 - 150.

boost, their impact is most substantial during and shortly after participation. Complementary practices like ongoing mindful living education help sustain these benefits over time.<sup>132</sup> Schools should integrate retreats with follow-up practices such as weekly mindfulness sessions or peer-led meditation groups to reinforce these effects. Logistical challenges such as cost and accessibility can limit retreat participation. Institutions should offer scholarships and flexible scheduling to ensure broader student access.<sup>133</sup> Beyond education, retreat-based mindfulness can benefit other fields, including healthcare and workplace training, by fostering emotional resilience and compassionate leadership.<sup>134</sup> The regression coefficient confirms that Buddhist Retreat Meditation is valuable for cultivating compassion. Educational institutions should prioritize integrating retreats into curricula, recognizing their role in developing emotionally intelligent and socially responsible individuals. By ensuring accessibility and continuity, these programs can contribute to a more compassionate society.

### **7.3. The Buddhist retreat meditation and the art of mindful living education significantly affect the mindfulness effectiveness of compassion.**

The regression coefficient of 0.528 indicates that for every unit increase in mindful living education, mindfulness effectiveness of compassion rises by 0.528 units. This demonstrates a strong and lasting impact, highlighting the role of integrating mindfulness into daily life.<sup>135</sup> Unlike Buddhist retreat meditation (0.353), which provides short-term benefits, mindful living education fosters continuous growth by embedding mindfulness into daily routines. Activities like journaling, mindful breathing, and gratitude exercises help students develop emotional regulation and empathy, making compassion a natural response in various situations.<sup>136</sup> The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) reinforces this, “a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as body... ardent, fully aware, and mindful.”<sup>137</sup> This education model equips students with practical tools for managing stress, resolving conflicts, and improving relationships. As they internalize mindfulness, they become more adept at understanding others’ perspectives and engaging in prosocial behaviors like active listening and teamwork.<sup>138</sup> Schools should integrate mindfulness into curricula through dedicated courses, extracurricular clubs, and classroom practices. Educators play a key role in modeling mindfulness. Training teachers ensure effective program delivery and maximize student impact.<sup>139</sup> Institutions should invest in mindfulness resources and adapt programs to diverse cultural

<sup>132</sup> Petchsawang & McLean (2017), p. 220 – 240.

<sup>133</sup> Black et al. (2014), p. 110 – 125.

<sup>134</sup> Choate & Doyle (1980), p. 45 – 62.

<sup>135</sup> Andersen (2019), p. 28.

<sup>136</sup> Mandal & Lip (2022), p. 78 – 95.

<sup>137</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10; Ñānamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145 - 150.

<sup>138</sup> Clark et al. (2014), p. 150 – 175.

<sup>139</sup> Theresa (2006), p. 120 – 135.

contexts to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.<sup>140</sup> The higher coefficient value underscores mindful living education's long-term effectiveness in cultivating compassionate individuals. Combined with retreat experiences, it creates a comprehensive framework for emotional and social well-being. Educational institutions should prioritize these programs to nurture emotionally intelligent and socially responsible citizens.

## VIII. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Integrating Buddhist meditation retreats and mindful living education empowers students with mindfulness and compassion, preparing them to take meaningful actions for global peace. By fostering self-awareness, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness, these practices contribute to personal growth and societal harmony. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating Buddhist-inspired education into broader educational frameworks. The research limitations are that the study focuses primarily on Buddhist practices, which may not be universally applicable across all cultural and religious contexts. The survey sample still gives a picture of though representative, may not capture the diversity of all educational settings. The study measures immediate impacts but does not track long-term behavioral changes. The research recommendation from these results guides more inclusive implementation, meaning mindfulness practices should be culturally and religiously inclusive, ensuring accessibility for all students. Moreover, it should be able to provide educators with training in mindfulness and compassion practices to guide students effectively. For the following, researchers can conduct future research to assess the long-term impact of Buddhist educational practices on student behavior and societal harmony. The research result can advocate for mindfulness-based programs as part of national education policies to promote holistic development. This study serves as a foundation for exploring the transformative power of Buddhist-inspired education and offers a roadmap for fostering compassionate global citizens.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Ager, K., Albrecht, N. J., & Cohen, M. (2015). Mindfulness in Schools: Improving Student Well-being and Academic Performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 107(3), pp. 768 - 779.
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice: Unabridged* (K. Clark, Ed.; 25th Anniversary). Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. [https://faculty.washington.edu/caporaso/courses/203/readings/allport\\_Nature\\_of\\_prejudice.pdf](https://faculty.washington.edu/caporaso/courses/203/readings/allport_Nature_of_prejudice.pdf)
- Andersen, D. (2019). *Mindfulness Meditation: Another Context for the Necessary and Sufficient Conditions*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167819852812>

---

<sup>140</sup> Umbreit (1997), p. 200 – 220.

- Angus, J. & Andrew, L. (2012). The Natural Emergence of Mindfulness and Compassion. *Journal of Contemplative Studies*, 4(2), pp. 112-128.
- Angus, M., & Andrew, G. (2012). Exploring Compassion: A meta-analysis of the association between self-compassion and psychopathology. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32(6), 545-552. <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/64162/1/64162.pdf>
- Ayres, D. M. (2000). *Tradition, Modernity, and the Development of Education in Cambodia*. <https://doi.org/10.1086/447629>
- Baindur, M. (2020). Philosophical Education in Traditional and Buddhist Schools of Thought in South Asia. In *Handbook of Education Systems in South Asia* (pp. 1-29). Springer Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3309-5\\_8-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3309-5_8-1)
- Bell, G. (2013). Practice makes perfect: How mindfulness can change coaching for the better: An interview with Liz Hall, author of Mindful Coaching. *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 27(4), 28-30. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-05-2013-0025>
- Black, A. L., Busch, G., & Woodrow, C. (2014). Being and becoming a mindful educator: Contemplative practices for teaching, leadership, and wellbeing. In *Health and Well-being in the ...*. researchgate.net. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alison-ali-Black/publication/260188990\\_Being\\_and\\_Becoming\\_a\\_Mindful\\_Educator\\_Contemplative\\_Practices\\_for\\_Teaching\\_Leadership\\_and\\_Wellbeing/links/53f9086b0cf24ddb7db6668/Being-and-Becoming-a-Mindful-Educator-Contemplat](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alison-ali-Black/publication/260188990_Being_and_Becoming_a_Mindful_Educator_Contemplative_Practices_for_Teaching_Leadership_and_Wellbeing/links/53f9086b0cf24ddb7db6668/Being-and-Becoming-a-Mindful-Educator-Contemplat)
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2005). In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Brooks, M. C., Brooks, J. S., Mutohar, A., & Taufiq, I. (2020). Principals as socio-religious curators: progressive and conservative approaches in Islamic schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(6), 677-695. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-01-2020-0004>
- Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), pp. 822-848.
- Buddhaghosa, Bhadantācariya (1991). *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, pp. 300-305.
- Buddharakkhita, Acharya (trans.) (1985). *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Burmansah, B., Rugaiyah, R., Mukhtar, M., Nabilah, S., Ripki, A. J. H. A. J. H., & Fatayan, A. (2020). Mindful leadership: The ability of the leader to develop compassion and attention without judgment - A case study of the leader of Buddhist Higher Education Institute. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 9(1), 51-65. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.9.1.51>
- Burmansah, B., Sutawan, K., Pembangunan, H. R. P., & Ramadhan, A. (2022). A Mindful Leader: Mindfulness Strengthens the Leadership Ability of the

- Leaders in Higher Education Institute. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14(4), 6587–6602. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v14i4.2734>
- Burmansah, I., et al. (2019). The Role of Meditation Retreats in Cultivating Compassion: A Qualitative Analysis. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 36(2), pp. 180-195.
- Burmansah, I., et al. (2020). Mindfulness and Compassion in Buddhist Education Institutions: A Qualitative Study. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 37(2), pp. 210-228.
- Burmansah, Suryanadi, J., & Kundana, D. (2023). Buddhist Education Development: A View from the Spirit of Buddhayāna Movement in Indonesia and the Advocating of Master Yin Shun's Teaching on Humanistic Buddhism. *The 21st International Symposium on the Theory and Practice of the Teachings of Dharma Master Yin Shun — Transmission and Inheritance of Taiwanese Buddhism*, 75–106. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373195881\\_Buddhist\\_Education\\_Development\\_A\\_View\\_from\\_the\\_Spirit\\_of\\_Buddhayana\\_Movement\\_in\\_Indonesia\\_and\\_the\\_Advocating\\_of\\_Master\\_Yin\\_Shun's\\_Teaching\\_on\\_Humanistic\\_Buddhism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373195881_Buddhist_Education_Development_A_View_from_the_Spirit_of_Buddhayana_Movement_in_Indonesia_and_the_Advocating_of_Master_Yin_Shun's_Teaching_on_Humanistic_Buddhism)
- Chan, D. (2002). *Development of the Clinical Learning Environment Inventory: using the theoretical framework of learning environment studies to assess nursing students' perceptions of the hospital as a learning environment*. <https://doi.org/10.3928/0148-4834-20020201-06>
- Chanthong, S. (2016). *Learning centers in Buddhist temples: The development of community service management in Western Thailand*.
- Choate, D. C., & Doyle, B. B. (1980). Students volunteer patients for a clinical interviewing course. In *Academic Medicine* (Vol. 55, Issue 3, p. 217). Ovid Technologies (Wolters Kluwer Health). <https://doi.org/10.1097/00001888-198003000-00020>
- Clark, C. M., Nguyen, D. T., & Barbosa-Leiker, C. (2014). Student Perceptions of Stress, Coping, Relationships, and Academic Civility. In *Nurse Educator* (Vol. 39, Issue 4, pp. 170–174). Ovid Technologies (Wolters Kluwer Health). <https://doi.org/10.1097/nne.0000000000000049>
- Cooper, D., & James, S. P. (2005). *Buddhism, virtue, and environment*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315261195>
- Cresswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. In *Muqarnas* (3rd ed., Vol. 8). Sage Publication Inc.
- Dhammapada, Ed. S. Sumaṅgala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K. R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.
- Dīgha Nikāya, Ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.
- Donald, J. N., Atkins, P. W. B., Parker, P. D., Christie, A. M., & Ryan, R. M. (2016). Daily stress and the benefits of mindfulness: Examining the daily and longitudinal relations between present-moment awareness and stress



- responses. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2016.09.002>
- Donald, J., et al. (2016). The Impact of Mindfulness Retreats in Educational Settings: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 9(1), pp. 89-104.
- Doyle, L., Brady, A. M., & Byrne, G. (2009). An overview of mixed methods research. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 14(2), 175-185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987108093962>
- Du, Y., Du, J., Liu, X., & Yuan, Z. (2021). Multiple-to-multiple path analysis model. *PLoS ONE*, 16(3 March), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247722>
- Dychtwald, K. (1981). Humanistic Services for the Elderly. In *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (Vol. 21, Issue 1, pp. 39-56). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002216788102100105>
- Eby, L. T., Allen, T. D., Conley, K. M., Williamson, R. L., Henderson, T. G., & Mancini, V. S. (2019). Mindfulness-based training interventions for employees: A qualitative review of the literature. *Human Resource Management Review*, 29(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.03.004>
- Elaine, B., & Martin, H. (2016). A proposal to support student therapists to develop compassion for self and others through Compassionate Mind Training. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 50, 111-118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2016.06.005>
- Framson, C., Alan R., K., Jeannette, S., Alyson J., L., Steve, Z., & Denise, B. (2010). Development and Validation of the Mindful Eating Questionnaire. *NIH-PA Author Manuscript*, 109(8), 1439-1444. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2009.05.006>.Development
- Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). Open Hearts Build Lives: Positive Emotions, Induced Through Loving-Kindness Meditation, Build Consequential Personal Resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(5), 1045-1062. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013262>
- Giovannoni, J. (2017). Perspectives : Compassion for others begins with loving-kindness toward self. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 22(1-2), 173-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987116685635>
- Goodman, C. (2013). Buddhist Meditation. In *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* (pp. 553-571). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118324004.ch36>
- Guay, M. (2022). Mindfulness Education and Its Role in Emotional Resilience and Global Engagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(2), pp. 305-320.
- Gunawan, A., & Bintari, D. R. (2021). Psychological Well-Being, Stress, and Emotion Regulation in First-Year College Students during COVID-19. In *JPPP - Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengukuran Psikologi* (Vol. 10, Issue 1, pp. 51-64). Universitas Negeri Jakarta. <https://doi.org/10.21009/jppp.101.07>



- Hawley, J., et al. (2014). Meditation Retreats and the Art of Mindful Living Education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 8(3), pp. 233-245.
- Hölzel, B. K., Lazar, S. W., Gard, T., Schuman-Olivier, Z., Vago, D. R., & Ott, U. (2011). How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action from a Conceptual and Neural Perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(6), pp. 537-559.
- IBC-RDB. (2005). *Buddhism Development in Indonesia*. Dian Darma Publishing.
- Jain, S., Shapiro, S. L., Swanick, S., Roesch, S. C., Mills, P. J., Bell, I., & Schwartz, G. E. R. (2007). A Randomized Controlled Trial of Mindfulness Meditation Versus Relaxation Training: Effects on Distress, Positive States of Mind, Rumination, and Distraction. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 33(1), 11–21. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324796abm3301\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324796abm3301_2).
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1986). Mindfulness Meditation for everyday life. In *Renewable-Resource Materials*. Piatkus Books. <http://www.chadpearce.com/Home/BOOKS/97291641-Mindfulness-Meditation-for-Everyday-Life-Kabat-Zinn-Jon.pdf>
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1986). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Its Effect on Emotional Regulation. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 26(3), pp. 75-92.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*. New York: Hyperion.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Full catastrophe living: using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Bantam Dell.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever You Go There You Are*. Hachette Books.
- Kim, S., Crooks, C. V., Bax, K., & Shokoohi, M. (2021). Impact of Trauma-Informed Training and Mindfulness-Based Social-Emotional Learning Program on Teacher Attitudes and Burnout: A Mixed-Methods Study. *School Mental Health*, 13(1), 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-020-09406-6>
- Kroll, T., & Neri, M. (2009). Designs for Mixed Methods Research. *Mixed Methods Research for Nursing and the Health Sciences*, 31–49. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444316490.ch3>
- Laidlaw, J., & Mair, J. (2019). Imperfect Accomplishment: The Fo Guang Shan Short-Term Monastic Retreat and Ethical Pedagogy in Humanistic Buddhism. In *Cultural Anthropology* (Vol. 34, Issue 3). American Anthropological Association. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca34.3.02>
- Leinbach, T. R. (1994). Indonesia: A Country Study. In W. J. Frederick & R. L. Worden (Eds.), *Journal of Asian Studies* (5th ed., Vol. 53, Issue 3, pp. 996–997). Library of Congress. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2059805>
- Lesmana, W., Marta, R. F., & Girivirya, S. (2021). The Practice of Humanistic Buddhism for the Indonesia's National Integrity. In *Jurnal Riset Komunikasi* (Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 179–197). AspiKom Wilayah Riau. <https://doi.org/10.38194/jurkom.v4i2.303>

- Mahirda, K., & Wahyuni, H. (2017). Returning to general and vocational high schools in Indonesia. *Review of Economic and Business Studies*, 9(2), 9–28. <https://doi.org/10.1515/rebs-2016-0031>
- Majjhima Nikāya, Ed.V.Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.
- Mandal, E., & Lip, M. (2022). Mindfulness, relationship quality, and conflict resolution strategies used by partners in close relationships. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, 10(2), 135–146. <https://doi.org/10.5114/cipp.2021.111981>
- Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu & Bodhi, Bhikkhu (1995). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Neff, K. (2003). Self-Compassion: An Alternative Conceptualization of a Healthy Attitude Toward Oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), pp. 85-101.
- Nelson, B. (2018). *Mindful Living: Integrating Mindfulness into Education and Daily Life*. New York: Routledge.
- Nelson, G. (2018). Lecturer Unlocks Three Keys to Mindful Leadership. *The Business Journal Daily*. <https://businessjournaldaily.com/lecturer-shares-three-keys-mindful-leadership/>
- Nhat Hanh, T. (2003). *Creating True Peace: ending violence in yourself, your family, your community, and the world*. Free Press.
- Nhat Hanh, T. (2012). *Awakening of the Heart: Essential Buddhist Sutras and Commentaries* (R. Neumann, Ed.). Parallax Press.
- Nyanaponika Thera (1996). *Abhidhamma Studies: Buddhist Explorations of Consciousness and Time*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 197.
- Petchsawang, P., & McLean, G. N. (2017). Workplace spirituality, mindfulness meditation, and work engagement. *Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2017.1291360>
- Rakhmani, I., & Siregar, F. (2016). *Reforming Research in Indonesia: policies and practice Reforming Research in Indonesia: Policies and Practices* (92; Global Development Network Working Paper Series). <http://cipg.or.id/>
- Rapiadi, I., et al. (2023). The Role of Mindfulness in Enhancing Student Engagement in Learning Processes. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 12(1), pp. 56-75.
- Rupperecht, S., Falke, P., Kohls, N., Tamdjidi, C., Wittmann, M., & Kersemaekers, W. (2019). Mindful leader development: how leaders experience the effects of mindfulness training on leader capabilities. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(May), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01081>
- Salcido-Cibrián, L. J., Ramos, N. S., Jiménez, Ó., & Blanca, M. J. (2019). Mindfulness to regulate emotions: The Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence Program (PINEP) and its adaptation to a virtual learning

- platform. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 36(March), 176–180. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2019.07.003>
- Saway, L., et al. (2018). The Role of Mindfulness in Enhancing Self-Compassion Among Students. *Mindfulness Journal*, 9(4), pp. 678-690.
- Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., Thoresen, C., & Plante, T. G. (2011). The moderation of Mindfulness-based stress reduction effects by trait mindfulness: Results from a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 67(3), 267–277. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20761>
- Steckler, A., & Waddock, S. (2017). Mindfulness Training for Educators: Impact on Teaching and Student Engagement. *Educational Review*, 69(4), pp. 425-440.
- Steckler, E. L., & Waddock, S. (2017). *Self-Sustaining Practices of Successful Social Change Agents: A Retreats Framework for Supporting Transformational Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41463-017-0031-9>
- Sudarman, E., Sawitri, N. N., & Budiono, G. L. (2016). Development of Education in Indonesia: an Effort To Strengthening Innovation Systems and International Competitiveness. *Revista Stiintifica*, 3(3), 14–20. <http://info.trilogi.ac.id/repository/assets/uploads/MM/df328-5.-development-of-education-in-indonesia.pdf>
- Thai Plum Village. (2011). *Practice from the Heart* (4th ed.). White Elephant Press.
- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1995). *Mettā Sutta (Sn 1.8)*. *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], is available at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org).
- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1997). *Karuṇā Sutta: The Sutta on Compassion*. *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], Available at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org).
- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1997). *Mettā Sutta (SN 46.54)*. *Access to Insight*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], is available at [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org).
- The World Bank. (2018). *Overview: The World Bank In Indonesia, Having maintained political stability, Indonesia is one of Asia Pacific's most vibrant democracies and is emerging as a confident middle-income country*. The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/indonesia/overview>
- Theresa, D.-I. Y. (2006). The way to peace: a Buddhist perspective. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11(1), 91–112.
- Timur Tresnanti, D., Kurniadi, A., Ayu Puspito, D., & Widodo, P. (2024). Indonesian Education Policy and Management in Resolving Social Disaster. In *International Journal Of Humanities Education And Social Sciences (IJHESS) E-ISSN* (Vol. 4, Issue 1). <https://ijhess.com/index.php/ijhess/>
- Umbreit, M. (1997). *Humanistic mediation: A transformative journey of peacemaking*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/CRQ.3900140305>
- UNESCO. (2024). *Peace Education in the 21st Century An Essential Strategy for Building Lasting Peace*. <http://www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbysa-en>

- Walshe, M. (1987). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Whitesman, S., & Mash, R. (2016). Examining the effects of a mindfulness-based distance learning professional training module on personal and professional functioning: a qualitative study. *BMC Medical Education*, 16(287), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-016-0810-2>
- Widaningsih, Y. S. (2017). *Nationalism In The Indonesian Multicultural Community*. 1 (1), 221–225.
- Williford, A. P., Whittaker, J. V., Vitiello, V. E., & Downer, J. (2013). *Children's Engagement Within the Preschool Classroom and Their Development of Self-Regulation*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2011.628270>
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: design and methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., & Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5(603). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603>

# SEEDS OF CONSCIOUSNESS: CULTIVATING COMPASSIONATE EDUCATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Georgia Cristian Borges\*

## Abstract:

This paper examines the application of mindfulness in education, rooted in Buddhist teachings, as a means to foster unity, inclusion, and human dignity. Drawing on the works of Bhikkhu Bodhi, David Loy, Gil Fronsdal, Ajahn Sumedho, and Thich Nhat Hanh, the study explores how mindfulness can contribute to global peace and sustainable development, particularly within educational settings. Mindfulness is presented not only as a tool for stress management among educators but also as a method for nurturing socio-emotional skills in students, ultimately aiming to cultivate a more compassionate and sustainable future. The paper highlights the transformative potential of mindfulness in addressing contemporary educational challenges, such as teacher burnout, student stress, and the need for emotional resilience. By integrating mindfulness practices into the curriculum, schools can become spaces where values like empathy, cooperation, and ethical responsibility are cultivated, preparing students to face the complexities of the 21st century with wisdom and compassion.

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness; education; Buddhism; sustainable development; human dignity.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education faces complex and multifaceted challenges, ranging from educators' occupational stress to the need to develop students' socio-emotional skills. In an increasingly fast-paced and fragmented world, the school is not just a space for transmitting knowledge but also an environment where values, attitudes, and behaviors that shape the future of society are formed. In this context, the practice of mindfulness emerges as a powerful tool to promote a more compassionate, inclusive, and sustainable educational environment.

---

\* Vice President of the Nalanda Buddhist Studies Center – Brazil.

Inspired by Buddhist teachings, mindfulness offers an approach that goes beyond mere stress management. It proposes a profound transformation in how educators and students relate to themselves, to others, and the world around them. Bhikkhu Bodhi, in *The Noble Eightfold Path*, highlights that mindfulness is one of the pillars of the Buddhist path to liberation from suffering, being essential for the development of a clear and compassionate mind.<sup>1</sup> David Loy, in *Ecodharma*, expands this view, connecting the practice of mindfulness to the ecological crisis and the need for an integrative vision that promotes sustainability.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, in a scenario marked by social polarization and environmental crises, education needs to transcend traditional models and embrace practices that strengthen interdependence and collective responsibility. This paper explores how mindfulness, combined with Buddhist principles of unity and inclusion, can contribute to human dignity, world peace, and sustainable development. Focusing on the subtheme “Seeds of Awareness: Cultivating Compassionate Education for a Sustainable Future,” we aim to demonstrate that mindfulness practice is not just an individual well-being tool but also a catalyst for social and environmental transformation.

## II. DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1. The reality of contemporary education: global challenges

The 2018 National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) establishes that schools in Brazil should form citizens capable of facing the challenges of the 21st century, developing skills such as empathy, cooperation, autonomy, and resilience. However, the reality of classrooms is often far from this ideal. Educators face excessive workloads, overcrowded classrooms, lack of institutional support, and, in many cases, verbal and physical violence from students. These factors create a hostile environment that hinders the development of truly transformative education.

This reality is not exclusive to Brazil. Globally, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has emphasized the need for education that promotes the holistic development of individuals, preparing them for the challenges of the 21st century.<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), part of the UN 2030 Agenda, aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Among its targets is the development of socio-emotional skills such as empathy, resilience, and cooperation, which are essential for forming global citizens.

However, as in Brazil, many countries face significant challenges in achieving these goals. UNESCO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

---

<sup>1</sup> Bodhi, (1994): 76 - 100.

<sup>2</sup> Loy, (2018): 66 - 99.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>.



Development (OECD)<sup>4</sup> reports highlight that teachers in various parts of the world deal with precarious working conditions, including low salaries, lack of pedagogical resources, and violent school environments. A 2022 UNESCO study revealed that 75% of teachers in low- and middle-income countries report a lack of institutional support, while 60% face discipline and violence issues in the classroom.

## **2.2. Educators' stress: A global phenomenon**

Occupational stress among educators is a global phenomenon with significant impacts on the physical and mental health of these professionals. Recent data show that teachers in various countries face challenging working conditions that contribute to high levels of stress and burnout. According to a 2020 OECD report, about 50% of teachers in OECD member countries report feeling stressed at work, with particularly high levels in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States.

In Brazil, the situation is no different. A study was conducted by the São Paulo State Teachers' Union (APEOESP).<sup>5</sup> In 2022 it was revealed that 70% of public school teachers in São Paulo state suffer from high stress levels. Key factors include work overload, with 60% of teachers working more than 40 hours a week, and lack of institutional support, mentioned by 55% of respondents. Additionally, 40% of teachers reported experiencing verbal or physical violence from students or parents, further aggravating occupational stress.

Globally, a 2022 International Labor Organization (ILO) study highlighted that 65% of teachers worldwide face high emotional demands in their work, including dealing with student indiscipline, lack of institutional support, and pressure for academic results<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, 40% of educators reported suffering verbal or physical violence from students or parents, significantly contributing to occupational stress.

Burnout Syndrome, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, is particularly prevalent among educators. A 2021 World Health Organization (WHO) global study revealed that 30% of teachers worldwide exhibit symptoms of Burnout, with higher rates in regions with more precarious working conditions, such as Latin America and parts of Africa.<sup>7</sup> In Brazil, a study by the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) in 2021 showed that 35% of primary education teachers exhibit signs of Burnout, especially those working in areas of greater

---

<sup>4</sup> OECD. (2018). accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/talis-2018-results-volume-i\\_1d0bc92a-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/talis-2018-results-volume-i_1d0bc92a-en.html).

<sup>5</sup> APEOESP (2022): accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <http://www.apoeesp.org.br/noticias/noticias/pesquisa-aponta-que-depressao-e-maior-caoa-de-afastamento-de-professores/>.

<sup>6</sup> ILO (2022): accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-what-you-need-know>.

<sup>7</sup> WHO (2021): accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-what-you-need-know>.

social vulnerability.<sup>8</sup>

In the European context, a 2023 European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) survey revealed that 70% of teachers in the European Union work more than 40 hours a week, often without adequate compensation.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, 60% of educators reported that work-related stress negatively affected their mental health, leading to issues such as anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders.

These global and national data underscore the urgent need for interventions to improve educators' working conditions and promote their well-being. Mindfulness practice emerges as a viable alternative to restore emotional balance and promote a healthier and more productive learning environment. As highlighted by Ajahn Sumedho in *The Four Noble Truths*, mindfulness allows us to recognize and understand suffering, creating space for transformation.<sup>10</sup> By cultivating mindfulness, educators can develop emotional resilience, learning to cope with the pressures of the school environment more balanced and healthily.

### 2.3. Mindfulness as an alternative: Compassion at the heart of the practice

Mindfulness practice has its roots in the Buddhist tradition but was adapted to the secular context by Jon Kabat-Zinn, creator of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. The word "*sati*," derived from Pali, is often translated as "mindfulness" or "full attention." However, its meaning goes beyond mere attention to the present moment. "*Sati*" also implies memory, the ability to recall and apply ethical and spiritual teachings in all life situations. This dual dimension of "*sati*", attention and memory, is essential for genuinely committed mindfulness practice aligned with Buddhist values.<sup>11</sup>

In the educational context, mindfulness practice is not limited to relaxation techniques or stress reduction. It should be integrated with the seven attitudes of mindfulness proposed by Jon Kabat-Zinn: non-judgment, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. When cultivated, these attitudes create a more compassionate and inclusive learning environment.<sup>12</sup>

Compassion ("*karuṇā*") is a central attitude in mindfulness practice. In Buddhism, compassion is understood as the desire to alleviate others' suffering. In the school environment, this translates into a more empathetic and welcoming approach, where educators and students support each other. Compassion practice can be incorporated through exercises such as loving-

<sup>8</sup> UFMG (2021): accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://www.medicina.ufmg.br/fatores-psicossociais-e-insatisfacao-com-o-trabalho-estao-relacionados-ao-adoecimento-de-professores-afirma-estudo/>.

<sup>9</sup> ETUCE (2023): accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: [https://www.csee-etu.org/images/attachments/Report\\_WRS\\_EN.pdf](https://www.csee-etu.org/images/attachments/Report_WRS_EN.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Sumedho, (2004): 79 - 97.

<sup>11</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu. (1994): 79 - 83.

<sup>12</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990): 72.

kindness meditation (“*mettā bhāvanā*”), which encourages practitioners to develop feelings of love and compassion for themselves and others.<sup>13</sup>

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and pioneer in globalizing mindfulness, teaches that: “True compassion is born from understanding that we are all interconnected”.<sup>14</sup> For him, mindfulness is not just about being present but also acting with kindness and empathy, recognizing that one person’s suffering is everyone’s suffering.

In the school environment, this translates into a more empathetic and welcoming approach, where educators and students support each other. Compassion practice can be incorporated through exercises such as loving-kindness meditation (“*mettā bhāvanā*”), which encourages practitioners to develop feelings of love and compassion for themselves and others. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes that: “Compassion is an energy that can transform suffering into peace”, an idea that aligns perfectly with this paper’s goal of promoting healthier and more sustainable educational environments.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, mindfulness can be applied more committedly through structured programs like CARE for Teachers (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education), which combines mindfulness practices with the development of emotional and social skills. These programs not only reduce educators’ stress but also improve the quality of classroom interactions, promoting a more harmonious and productive environment.<sup>16</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh complements this view by stating that: “Education should nurture not only the mind, but also the heart” reinforcing the need for practices that integrate compassion and mindfulness into everyday school life.<sup>17</sup>

The emphasis on compassion is not accidental. As highlighted by Thich Nhat Hanh: “Without compassion, mindfulness is incomplete.”<sup>18</sup> The goal of this paper, which is promoting education that cultivates human dignity, world peace, and sustainable development, can only be achieved if mindfulness is practiced as an act of collective care. By teaching students and educators to recognize their interdependence with the world around them, compassion becomes the seed for a more just and inclusive society.

## 2.4. The essence of peace in Buddhist education

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, personified qualities of compassion and dialogue so important in modern education. He expressed this not just in moments of silent contemplation but in every gesture, word, and interaction. This approach suggests that true education, from a Buddhist perspective, is not limited to transmitting theoretical knowledge but aims to cultivate a balanced

<sup>13</sup> Fronsdal, Gil, (2012): 88 - 90.

<sup>14</sup> Hanh, (2014): 23 - 30.

<sup>15</sup> Hanh, (2014): 6.

<sup>16</sup> Jennings, *et al.* (2017): 1010 - 1028.

<sup>17</sup> Hanh, (2003): 135 - 174.

<sup>18</sup> Hanh, (2025): 113 - 115.

mind capable of responding to external chaos with serenity and clarity.

Imagine, for example, two monks, immersed in a heated discussion about the interpretation of a sutra, approached by the Buddha. Instead of imposing an authoritative solution, he guides them through compassionate dialogue, allowing both to recognize the partial validity of their perspectives. This image illustrates one of the pillars of Buddhist education: developing wisdom through active listening and overcoming ego, promoting a broader and inclusive understanding.

One of the foundational texts of Buddhism, the Dhammapada, encapsulates this vision in one of its most famous verses: “Hatred will never cease by hatred. Only by love will it be dispelled. This is an eternal law”.<sup>19</sup> This teaching is not just a moral exhortation but an educational directive emphasizing inner transformation as a prerequisite for external harmony. A traditional story exemplifies this practice: a monk, initially consumed by anger after his water pot was broken by a colleague, decides to dedicate himself to *mettā* (loving-kindness) meditation. After days of practice, his irritation gives way to a profound understanding of impermanence and interdependence, demonstrating how Buddhist education uses contemplative methods to reorient destructive emotions.

This approach reflects a pedagogical process we might compare to preparing a garden: the mind, like the soil, must work to remove obstacles, which are attachments, aversions, and illusions before seeds of virtues like patience, compassion, and wisdom can flourish. Contemporary studies on mindfulness, inspired by Buddhist practices, support this idea, indicating that regular meditation reduces stress levels and increases emotional resilience.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Buddhist education proposes a continuous cultivation of being, whose fruits benefit both the individual and the community.

The ability to promote peace in conflict situations is another central aspect of Buddhist education, as demonstrated in a historical episode where the Buddha intervenes in a dispute between two kingdoms over control of a river. With a simple question “What is more valuable: water or human lives?” He provokes reflection that disarms hostility and leads to reconciliation. This intervention reveals that education, in the Buddhist view, is not only introspective but also practical, providing tools to deal with ethical and social dilemmas.

In contemporary times, this example remains relevant. In a world marked by political polarizations, economic inequalities, and environmental crises, the Buddha’s question echoes as an invitation to reflective pause. Recent research on conflict resolution points out that approaches based on empathy and dialogue, aligned with Buddhist principles, are more effective than impulsive or coercive responses.<sup>21</sup> Thus, education inspired by this philosophy offers a

<sup>19</sup> Dhammapada, (2014): v. 5, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Kabat-Zinn, (1990): 244 - 245.

<sup>21</sup> Galtung, (1996): accessed on February 19, 2025, available at: <https://us.sagepub.com/>

model to face modern challenges, encouraging individuals to respond with wisdom instead of reacting on impulse.

Contrary to the perception that Buddhist peace implies passivity, the Buddha teaches that it is an active force, demanding courage and commitment. A notable example is a monk who, witnessing injustices in his community, chooses to confront them with compassionate firmness, seeking collective solutions instead of remaining silent in the face of suffering. This case underscores that Buddhist education is not confined to the individual sphere but prepares practitioners to act in the world with integrity and altruism.

In essence, the Buddha showed us that peace is not just the absence of conflict it is the presence of understanding, compassion, and wisdom. In educational practice, this translates into training that balances introspection and action, encouraging individuals to be agents of change in their spheres of influence.

The Buddha presents peace as a state of mental clarity that reflects understanding, compassion, and wisdom. Just as a calm lake perfectly mirrors the sky, a mind trained in Buddhist discipline projects harmony onto its surroundings. This educational ideal suggests that world transformation begins with individual transformation - a process that unfolds in every conscious thought, chosen word, and deliberate action.

Faced with the challenges of the 21st century, marked by global conflicts and social fragmentation, the Buddha's teachings offer a timeless model. Education, from this perspective, becomes a path of self-discovery and collective responsibility, whose impacts reverberate beyond the individual, reaching society as a whole. As the Buddha himself demonstrated, changing the world is, above all, an act of cultivating peace within oneself.

## **2.5. The relevance of Buddhist peace practices in the educational environment**

Buddhist peace practices such as mindfulness, compassion (*karuṇā*), and ethics (*sīla*) have transcended their traditional religious contexts to become valuable tools in secular environments, especially in education. These practices, originally conceived as paths to spiritual liberation, today find practical application in schools and universities worldwide, contributing to student well-being, conflict reduction, and the formation of ethical consciousness. In the educational context, they offer a model to cultivate not only academic skills but also socio-emotional competencies essential for building a more peaceful and sustainable society.

Mindfulness practice, rooted in the Buddha's teachings, has been widely integrated into the educational environment as a strategy to improve academic performance and students' emotional balance. Programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, show that mindfulness training reduces anxiety and enhances concentration, crucial skills in the context of increasing academic pressures. In Brazil, initiatives in

public schools have introduced simple exercises of conscious breathing before evaluative activities, helping students manage stress and maintain focus.

This impact goes beyond the individual. As the Dhammapada teaches: “The undisciplined mind brings suffering; the well-trained mind brings happiness.”<sup>22</sup> A student who learns to observe thoughts and emotions without reacting impulsively develops emotional resilience and a greater ability to handle interpersonal challenges. Recent studies show that mindfulness programs in schools can reduce aggressive behaviors and improve school climate, evidencing their potential as a pedagogical tool for forming conscious and peaceful citizens.<sup>23</sup>

Compassion, one of the pillars of Buddhist practice, offers a powerful approach to conflict resolution in the educational environment. In schools, where disputes among students or tensions between teachers and students are common, applying principles like the *brahmavihāras* (loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity) can transform conflictual interactions into learning opportunities. For example, techniques of compassionate dialogue, inspired by non-violent communication and Buddhist practices, have been used to mediate misunderstandings, promoting empathy and mutual understanding.

An illustrative case comes from the Theravāda tradition in Sri Lanka, where monks used these principles to facilitate reconciliation in communities affected by civil conflicts. In the school context, this model can be adapted to create listening spaces, such as restorative circles, where students are encouraged to express their perspectives and seek collective solutions. This practice not only resolves disputes but also educates young people about the importance of building relationships based on understanding, a crucial value for global peace.

Buddhist ethics (*sīla*), based on precepts such as not harming, speaking truthfully, and acting with integrity, can serve as a foundation for a school culture that promotes harmony and responsibility. In an educational environment, these principles guide students to adopt behaviors that respect diversity and minimize tensions, such as bullying or social exclusion. Schools in Norway, for example, have implemented integration programs based on ethical dialogue and non-violence, indirectly inspired by Buddhist values, to welcome refugee students and reduce prejudices.

The Dhammapada states: “Victory breeds hatred; the defeated live in pain. Only by relinquishing conflict does one find true happiness.”<sup>24</sup> By incorporating Buddhist ethics into the curriculum, through reflective activities or norms of coexistence, educational institutions can form individuals who value cooperation over destructive competition, contributing to lasting peace both inside and outside the classroom.

---

<sup>22</sup> Dhammapada, (2014): v. 35, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Felver *et al.*, (2016): 1 - 21.

<sup>24</sup> Dhammapada, (2014): v. 201, p. 77.



The Buddhist perspective also offers a unique contribution to environmental education, an urgent theme in the contemporary context. The 14th Dalai Lama observes that “our destiny depends greatly on nature” and warns against the illusion that technology can control the environment (Collected Statements on the Environment).<sup>25</sup> In the school environment, this vision can be translated into practices that awaken ecological awareness in students, connecting the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*) of all living beings to the planet’s preservation.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, emphasizes the need for a “collective awakening” to the illusions that perpetuate the environmental crisis, such as rampant consumerism. Schools can integrate this philosophy through interdisciplinary projects that combine mindfulness, ethics, and science, encouraging students to reflect on the impact of their choices. Alarming data from ecological and environmental sciences can be used in classes to discuss how the lack of awareness, a central theme in Buddhism, exacerbates global issues, reinforcing the relevance of education as a tool for transformation.

## **2.6. Disconnection and the end of conflict in education: Applying Buddhist principles in the school environment**

Integrating Buddhist principles into the educational environment can bring significant benefits to students’ personal development and the construction of a culture of peace in educational institutions. One of the central teachings of Buddhism that can be applied in education is detachment. Attachment to rigid conceptions, possessions, and identities is one of the main causes of interpersonal conflicts and emotional difficulties. By promoting the practice of detachment, schools can foster a more harmonious and conducive learning environment.

Attachment can be understood as the tendency to fixate on beliefs, ideas, and identities inflexibly. In the educational context, this can manifest in various ways, such as resistance to new pedagogical approaches, difficulty accepting feedback, and rivalry between students or teachers. When a student is excessively attached to the idea of always being the best in class, for example, they may develop anxiety, exacerbated competitiveness, and aversion to failure, hindering their academic and emotional growth.

Similarly, teachers who cling to traditional methodologies without openness to innovation may find challenges in adapting to new educational needs. The same occurs when school management maintains rigid structures that do not favor the active participation of the school community in building a more collaborative environment.

## **2.7. Detachment as a tool for flexibility and harmony**

The practice of detachment does not mean giving up responsibilities or losing interest in learning but rather cultivating a flexible and open attitude.

---

<sup>25</sup> 14th Dalai Lama, (2017): 26 - 27.

When students and teachers learn not to cling rigidly to their opinions, they become more receptive to dialogue and intellectual growth. Promoting critical thinking and active listening in schools can be an effective way to apply this principle. As Thich Nhat Hanh explains: "When we let go of our attachments, we create space for understanding and compassion to grow".<sup>26</sup> This perspective aligns with the Buddhist teaching that detachment is not about indifference but about freeing the mind from rigid patterns of thought.

Furthermore, detachment can contribute to the development of students' emotional intelligence. By learning not to identify rigidly with their achievements or failures, students develop resilience and self-confidence. This learning can be encouraged through practices such as meditation, which helps cultivate awareness and emotional self-regulation. In *The Art of Communicating*, Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes that: "Detachment allows us to see things as they are, without being clouded by our desires or fears"<sup>27</sup> This clarity of mind is essential for fostering emotional balance and adaptability in the face of challenges.

Embracing detachment also fosters an environment of continuous improvement and innovation within the school community. When educators and students are not attached to the fear of making mistakes, they become more willing to experiment with new teaching methods and learning strategies. This openness to change can lead to the development of more effective and engaging educational practices. Moreover, by letting go of rigid expectations, individuals can adapt more readily to the diverse needs and abilities of their peers, creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. Encouraging this mindset through collaborative projects, reflective activities, and mindfulness exercises can help cultivate a culture of growth and adaptability in schools.

Detachment also allows for greater empathy and understanding among students and teachers. When individuals are not overly attached to their perspectives, they can more easily understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others. This empathy fosters a sense of community and mutual respect, which is essential for creating a positive learning environment. Through activities such as group discussions, peer reviews, and collaborative problem-solving, schools can promote an atmosphere where diverse opinions are valued and constructive dialogue is encouraged.

Additionally, the practice of detachment can help reduce stress and anxiety in both students and teachers. When individuals are not fixated on specific outcomes or achievements, they can approach their tasks with a sense of calm and equanimity. This mindset can be particularly beneficial in high-pressure situations, such as exams or project deadlines, where the fear of failure can often be overwhelming. By practicing detachment, students and teachers can maintain a balanced perspective, focusing on the process of learning rather than the end result. Techniques such as mindful breathing, guided meditation,

---

<sup>26</sup> Hanh, (2014): 23.

<sup>27</sup> Hanh, (2014): 27.

and reflective journaling can support this practice, helping individuals to stay centered and composed even in challenging circumstances.

Moreover, detachment can enhance creativity and problem-solving skills. When students and teachers are not bound by preconceived notions or rigid thinking patterns, they can approach problems with a fresh and open mind. This creative thinking can lead to innovative solutions and new ways of understanding complex issues. Schools can encourage this creative mindset by incorporating activities that promote out-of-the-box thinking, such as brainstorming sessions, design thinking workshops, and arts-based projects. By fostering an environment where creativity is valued and nurtured, schools can help students and teachers develop the skills needed to navigate an ever-changing world.

Incorporating detachment into the educational framework also supports the development of ethical and responsible behavior. When individuals are not driven by ego or personal gain, they are more likely to act in ways that consider the well-being of others and the broader community. This ethical perspective aligns with the principles of social-emotional learning, which emphasize the importance of empathy, cooperation, and responsible decision-making. Schools can integrate these principles into their curricula through service-learning projects, ethical debates, and character education programs. By teaching students to prioritize collective well-being over individual success, schools can contribute to the formation of compassionate and socially responsible citizens.

Furthermore, detachment can enhance the overall well-being and mental health of the school community. The practice encourages individuals to let go of negative emotions, such as anger, jealousy, and resentment, which can be detrimental to their mental and emotional health. By cultivating a mindset of detachment, students and teachers can develop greater emotional resilience and a more positive outlook on life. Activities that promote self-awareness, such as mindfulness practices, gratitude exercises, and positive affirmations, can support this development, helping individuals to build a strong foundation for emotional well-being.

Ultimately, the practice of detachment in education is not about abandoning goals or aspirations, but about approaching them with a balanced and flexible mindset. It encourages individuals to be open to new experiences, to learn from their mistakes, and to grow in the face of challenges. By fostering this attitude of detachment, schools can create a supportive and dynamic learning environment where students and teachers thrive.

## **2.8. Reducing ego and promoting cooperation in the school environment**

Another fundamental aspect of detachment is reducing ego and competitive desires. The school environment often encourages the pursuit of recognition and status, which can lead to individualistic attitudes and unnecessary rivalries. Instead, education can be structured to value collaboration and empathy. Group work, community service activities, and mindfulness practices in school are strategies that help students see the value of cooperation over unbridled competition.

Detachment from the ego can also be encouraged among faculty. Teachers who recognize the importance of continuous learning and sharing experiences with colleagues find it easier to adapt their methodologies and better meet their students' needs. Similarly, school administrators who avoid attachment to power and rigid hierarchy tend to build more democratic and inclusive environments.

In the Majjhima Nikāya 9, The Buddha explains the nature of attachment and how to overcome it: "What is attachment, what is the origin of attachment, what is the cessation of attachment, and what is the path leading to the cessation of attachment? There are four kinds of attachment: attachment to sensual pleasures, attachment to opinions, attachment to rules and observances, and attachment to the doctrine of self. With the arising of craving, there is the arising of attachment. With the cessation of craving, there is the cessation of attachment. The path leading to the cessation of attachment is simply this Noble Eightfold Path."<sup>28</sup>

In the educational environment, this perspective can be translated into adopting practices that cultivate the right view and mindfulness, promoting learning based on emotional balance and the pursuit of knowledge without obsession or fear of failure. Implementing social-emotional education programs that incorporate principles of mindfulness and self-compassion can be a concrete way to apply these teachings in schools.

Incorporating the principles of detachment into the educational context can transform the way students and teachers interact and learn. By reducing the rigidity of the ego and cultivating a more open and flexible attitude, it is possible to promote more peaceful, collaborative school environments conducive to students' holistic growth. Practices such as meditation, critical reflection, and promoting cooperation can help build an educational culture based on mutual respect and the pursuit of collective well-being. In this way, detachment becomes not just a tool for individual development but an essential pillar for building a more harmonious and compassionate society.

### **2.9. Innovative approaches to integrating mindfulness in education**

The integration of mindfulness into the school curriculum has proven to be a powerful tool for promoting not only individual well-being but also the development of socio-emotional skills, creativity, and collective awareness. Below, we explore various innovative approaches that combine mindfulness practice with active and interdisciplinary methodologies, highlighting concrete examples of how these practices have been applied in different educational contexts around the world.

Project-based learning (PBL), for example, is an active methodology that encourages students to solve real-world problems, developing skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. Mindfulness can be integrated into this approach to help students maintain focus and calm

---

<sup>28</sup> MN (1995): 935 - 9. (BODHI, Bhikkhu (1995). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*).

during the problem-solving process. In schools in Finland, mindfulness has been combined with interdisciplinary projects addressing global issues such as climate change and social justice. Before brainstorming sessions, students participate in brief mindfulness exercises to center their attention and reduce anxiety. This practice not only improves concentration but also cultivates empathy and collective responsibility, preparing students to be agents of change in their communities.<sup>29</sup> This approach reflects Thich Nhat Hanh's vision that education should nurture not only the mind but also the heart, promoting a deep understanding of the interdependence between humans and the environment.<sup>30</sup>

Another innovative approach is the combination of mindfulness with Design Thinking, a human-centered methodology that seeks creative solutions to complex problems. In schools in the United States, Design Thinking has been combined with mindfulness practices to promote innovation and empathy among students. During the "empathy" phase, students practice mindfulness to deeply connect with the needs and experiences of the people for whom they are designing solutions. For example, in a project aimed at creating more inclusive public spaces, students practice guided meditation to reflect on the barriers faced by people with reduced mobility. This approach not only increases students' sensitivity to social issues but also enhances their ability to generate more humane and effective solutions.<sup>31</sup>

Arts education also benefits from the integration of mindfulness, especially when it comes to exploring creativity and emotional expression. In schools in Canada, mindfulness has been integrated into visual arts and music classes to help students explore their creativity more consciously. Before starting to paint or play an instrument, students participate in a brief mindfulness session to connect with the present moment and their emotions. This practice not only improves the quality of artistic works but also helps students deal with frustration and anxiety that may arise during the creative process.<sup>32</sup>

In physical education, mindfulness can be innovatively integrated to help students develop a more conscious connection with their bodies and improve their physical performance. In schools in Australia, mindfulness has been incorporated into physical education classes to help students develop greater body awareness and cope with competitive pressure. Before sports practices, students participate in mindfulness exercises focused on breathing and body awareness. This practice not only enhances physical performance but also reduces stress and anxiety related to competition.<sup>33</sup>

With the increasing use of technology in education, mindfulness can be a valuable tool to help students manage information overload and develop

---

<sup>29</sup> Kabat-Zinn, (1990): 568.

<sup>30</sup> Hanh, (2014): 23 - 30.

<sup>31</sup> Felver *et al.*, (2020): 1 - 21.

<sup>32</sup> Hanh, (2014): 10 - 13.

<sup>33</sup> Jennings *et al.*, (2017): 1010 - 1028.

a healthier relationship with digital tools. In schools in South Korea, mindfulness has been integrated into the digital education curriculum to help students manage screen time and develop a more conscious relationship with technology. Before starting online activities, students participate in a brief mindfulness session to disconnect from distractions and focus on tasks. This approach not only improves focus and productivity but also helps students develop healthier digital habits.<sup>34</sup>

Peace education is another field where mindfulness can be particularly impactful, helping students develop conflict resolution skills and cultivate a culture of non-violence. In schools in South Africa, mindfulness has been integrated into peace education programs to help students deal with conflicts more constructively. In communities affected by violence, students participate in dialogue circles where mindfulness is used to promote active listening and empathy. Before starting discussions, students practice mindfulness to connect with their emotions and prepare to listen to others' perspectives with respect and compassion. This approach not only reduces aggression but also promotes reconciliation and the building of healthier relationships.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, mindfulness can be a powerful tool for promoting environmental awareness and sustainability, helping students develop a deeper connection with nature. In schools in New Zealand, mindfulness has been integrated into environmental education to help students develop greater ecological awareness. During outdoor activities such as nature walks, students practice mindfulness to connect with the natural environment and reflect on their relationship with the planet. This practice not only increases appreciation for nature but also inspires students to adopt more sustainable behaviors, such as reducing consumption and recycling.<sup>36</sup>

These examples illustrate how mindfulness can be innovatively integrated into different areas of the school curriculum, promoting not only individual well-being but also the development of socio-emotional skills, creativity, and collective awareness. By adopting these practices, schools can become spaces of transformation, where students are prepared to face the challenges of the 21st century with wisdom, compassion, and resilience.

## **2.10. Development of individuals for a compassionate and sustainable future**

The practice of mindfulness not only benefits educators but also has a profound impact on the development of students throughout their lives. By cultivating socio-emotional skills such as empathy, resilience, and self-control, mindfulness prepares young people to face the challenges of the 21st century in a balanced and compassionate manner.

---

<sup>34</sup> Loy, (2018): 66 - 85.

<sup>35</sup> Galtung, (1996), accessed on February 19, 2025, available at: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/node/43595/download.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Hanh, (2014): 27.



“True peace is only possible when there is understanding and compassion. Peace begins with each of us, in our mind and our heart.”<sup>37</sup> This quote reinforces the idea that world peace begins with individual transformation, which is at the core of Buddha’s teachings.

These skills are essential for the development of a more just and sustainable society. As highlighted by David Loy, mindfulness helps us perceive our interconnectedness with the world, inspiring more responsible and sustainable actions. In the educational context, this means teaching students to value diversity, promote inclusion, and act ethically and responsibly.

Additionally, it contributes to the development of a culture of peace. By learning to handle conflicts nonviolently and to cultivate compassion, students are prepared to be agents of change in their communities, promoting social justice and harmony.

### III. DISCUSSION

#### **Mindfulness as a tool for educational transformation and building a culture of peace**

The practice of mindfulness, rooted in Buddhist teachings, offers a transformative approach to education, directly aligning with the conference theme: Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development. While the article already explores the application of mindfulness in stress management and the development of socio-emotional skills, it is possible to deepen the discussion on how this practice can serve as a catalyst for building a culture of peace and sustainability in the educational environment, based on Buddhist scriptures and original references.

The connection between mindfulness and Buddhist ethics (*sīla*) is fundamental for promoting values such as non-violence, honesty, and compassion in the school environment. The Dhammapada, one of the most important texts in the Buddhist canon, states: “The mind is the precursor to all states. The mind is the chief; everything is made by the mind. If someone speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows them, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox.”<sup>38</sup> This passage highlights the importance of cultivating a balanced and ethical mind, not only for individual well-being but also for collective harmony. By incorporating mindfulness practices that emphasize ethical reflection, schools can help students develop a deeper moral awareness, preparing them to act with integrity and responsibility in their personal and community lives. In the Majjhima Nikāya, the Buddha teaches that the correct

---

<sup>37</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. The quote is attributed to Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet, and peace activist. However, this specific quote is not directly linked to a particular published work by Thich Nhat Hanh, such as a book or article. It is often cited in speeches, lectures, and writings inspired by his teachings, but there is no exact reference to a specific page or book where this phrase appears verbatim.

<sup>38</sup> Dhammapada, (2014): v. 1 - 2: 5.

practice of mindfulness (*sammā sati*) is one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path, essential for the development of wisdom and ethical conduct.<sup>39</sup> This connection between mindfulness and ethics can be applied in the school environment through activities that encourage students to reflect on their actions and their consequences, promoting a culture of responsibility and mutual respect.

The relationship between mindfulness and environmental education can be explored based on Buddhist teachings on interdependence and compassion for all beings. In the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha teaches that all phenomena are interconnected: "When this exists, that exists; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not exist; with the cessation of this, that ceases"<sup>40</sup>. This view of interdependence can be applied to teaching sustainability, helping students understand that their actions have a direct impact on the environment. David Loy, in *Ecodharma*, connects this idea to the ecological crisis, arguing that human disconnection from nature is one of the root causes of environmental degradation.<sup>41</sup> Outdoor mindfulness practices, such as guided meditations in natural settings, can help students develop a sense of interdependence with the natural world, inspiring more sustainable and responsible actions. This approach aligns with the Buddha's teachings on the importance of caring for all living beings, as expressed in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*: "Just as a mother protects her only child with her life, cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings."<sup>42</sup>

The application of mindfulness in conflict resolution can be expanded based on examples from Buddhist scriptures. In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha mediates a conflict between the monks of Kosambi, teaching that harmony can only be achieved through compassionate dialogue and the renunciation of ego.<sup>43</sup> This story can be adapted to the school environment, where students are encouraged to reflect on the value of cooperation over competition and conflict. Practices such as restorative circles, which combine mindfulness and compassionate dialogue, can be implemented to resolve conflicts among students, promoting a culture of peace and mutual understanding. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha teaches: "Hatred never ceases by hatred; hatred ceases by love. This is an eternal law."<sup>44</sup> This passage reinforces the importance of addressing conflicts with compassion and non-violence, principles that can

---

<sup>39</sup> MN (1995): 935 – 117. (BODHI, Bhikkhu (1995). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*).

<sup>40</sup> SN (2000): 927 - 12.61. (BODHI, Bhikkhu. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*).

<sup>41</sup> Loy, (2018): 66-99.

<sup>42</sup> SN (2000): 12. - 1.8. (BODHI, Bhikkhu. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*).

<sup>43</sup> MN (1995): 410 – 48. (BODHI, Bhikkhu. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*).

<sup>44</sup> Dhammapada (2014): 10 – 15.

be integrated into the school curriculum through mindfulness practices and loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*).

Mindfulness practice, when integrated with a social justice perspective, can help combat prejudice and inequality. In *Sigālovāda Sutta*, the Buddha teaches that true compassion arises from the understanding that all beings deserve respect and dignity.<sup>45</sup> In the school context, this can translate into practices that encourage students to reflect on their own identities and privileges, promoting greater awareness of social inequalities and the importance of inclusion. Thich Nhat Hanh, in *The Art of Communicating*, emphasizes that true compassion arises from the understanding that we are all interconnected.<sup>46</sup> Mindfulness programs that incorporate discussions on social justice can help create a more equitable school environment, where all students feel valued and respected.

The role of mindfulness in shaping educators as agents of social transformation can be explored based on the Buddha's teachings on compassionate leadership. In the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*, the Buddha teaches that a leader must govern with justice and compassion, placing the well-being of others above their interests.<sup>47</sup> When educators cultivate mindfulness and compassion, they become role models for students, inspiring them to act with wisdom and empathy in their own lives. Ajahn Sumedho, in *The Four Noble Truths*, highlights that mindfulness practice allows us to recognize and understand suffering, creating space for transformation.<sup>48</sup> This approach can be applied in the school environment, where educators are encouraged to practice mindfulness not only for self-care but also to develop compassionate leadership skills.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The practice of mindfulness, inspired by Buddhist teachings, offers a powerful approach to addressing the challenges of contemporary education. By promoting the well-being of educators and developing students' socio-emotional skills, mindfulness contributes to unity and inclusion, essential elements for human dignity and sustainable development. As highlighted by Bhikkhu Bodhi, David Loy, Gil Fronsdal, and Ajahn Sumedho, mindfulness is not only a path to world peace but also a tool for building a more compassionate and sustainable future.

Integrating this practice into the educational environment allows for the creation of schools that go beyond the transmission of knowledge, becoming spaces where values such as compassion, respect, and responsibility are cultivated. These schools will be environments where human dignity is

---

<sup>45</sup> DN (1995): 461 – 31. (WALSHE, Maurice. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*).

<sup>46</sup> Hanh (2014): 23 - 30.

<sup>47</sup> DN (1995): 395 – 26 (WALSHE, Maurice. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*).

<sup>48</sup> Sumedho, (2004): 66 - 67.

respected and valued, and where students are prepared to face the challenges of the 21st century with wisdom and resilience.

Mindfulness is not limited to being an individual well-being tool; it also acts as a catalyst for social and environmental transformation. By adopting this practice, educators and students can contribute to building a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world, where peace and human dignity are fundamental pillars. Education, when aligned with the principles of mindfulness and compassion, becomes a powerful vehicle for personal and collective transformation, preparing individuals to act with empathy and responsibility in their communities and the world.

This work aligns directly with the goal of Vesak 2025, whose theme is "Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development," and with the panel's subtheme: "Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future." The practice of mindfulness in education reflects the core values of Vesak by promoting unity, inclusivity, and human dignity through an educational approach that integrates Buddhist wisdom and contemporary practices. By cultivating awareness and compassion, we are planting the seeds for a more harmonious and balanced future, where the interdependence between all beings and the environment is recognized and honored.

Therefore, mindfulness in education not only benefits individuals but also has the potential to transform societies, promoting a culture of peace, sustainability, and mutual respect. By adopting these practices, we are contributing to the realization of the ideals proposed by Vesak 2025, building a future where education is an instrument of global transformation, guided by compassion and Buddhist wisdom.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- 14th Dalai Lama. (2017). *Collected Statements on The Environment*. Publisher. Accessed On March 6, 2025, Available At: <https://Tibetpolicy.Net/Wp-Content/Uploads/2018/12/Dalailama-On-Environment-1987-2017.Pdf>
- Apeoesp (2022). *Research on the health and working conditions of teachers in the state of São Paulo*, accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <http://www.apeoesp.org.br/noticias/noticias/pesquisa-aponta-que-depressao-e-maior-cao-de-afastamento-de-professores/>. São Paulo: APEOESP.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu (1994). *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. [Ebook], accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: [https://www.bps.lk/olib/bp/bp105s\\_Bodhi\\_Noble-Eightfold-Path.pdf](https://www.bps.lk/olib/bp/bp105s_Bodhi_Noble-Eightfold-Path.pdf). Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Dhammapada: A Buddhist doctrine in verses*. Translation by José Carlos Vieira de Carvalho. 1st ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2014.
- European Trade Union Committee For Education (Etuce) (2023). *Survey on*

- Teachers' Working Conditions and Well-being in Europe*, accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: [https://www.csee-etu.org/images/attachments/Report\\_WRS\\_EN.pdf](https://www.csee-etu.org/images/attachments/Report_WRS_EN.pdf). ETUCE.
- Federal University Of Minas Gerais (Ufmg) (2021). *Study on Burnout Syndrome Among Basic Education Teachers in Brazil*, accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://www.medicina.ufmg.br/fatores-psicossociais-e-insatisfacao-com-o-trabalho-estao-relacionados-ao-adocimento-de-professores-afirma-estudo/>. Belo Horizonte: UFMG.
- Felver, J. C. et al. (2016). *Mindfulness in schools: A systematic review of outcome research*, accessed on February 19, 2025, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2016.05.001>. *Journal of School Psychology*, Amsterdam, v. 57, p. 1-21.
- Fronsdal, Gil (2012). *The Issue at Hand: Essays on Buddhist Mindfulness Practice* (pp. 88-90), [Ebook], accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/iah/IssueAtHand4thEd.pdf>. California: Insight Meditation Center.
- Galtung, Johan (1996). *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, accessed on February 19, 2025, available at: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/node/43595/download.pdf>. London: Sage Publications.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat (2003). *The Art of Mindful Living* (pp. 135-174), [Ebook] accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://pt.everand.com/read/348571036/The-Art-of-Living-Peace-and-Freedom-in-the-Here-and-Now>.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat (2014). *The Art of Communicating*. [Ebook], accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://pt.everand.com/read/348571036/The-Art-of-Living-Peace-and-Freedom-in-the-Here-and-Now>. New York: HarperOne.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat (2025). *Peace is every step: The path of mindfulness in everyday life*, accessed on February 19, 2025, available at: <https://pt.everand.com/book/437947067/Peace-is-every-step-The-path-of-mindfulness>.
- International Labor Organization (ILO) (2022). *Global Report on Teachers' Working Conditions*, accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-what-you-need-know>. Geneva: ILO.
- Jennings, P. A. et al. (2017). *Impacts of the CARE for Teachers Program on Teachers' Social and Emotional Competence and Classroom Interactions*. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, v. 109, n. 7, p. 1010-1028.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* Delta, [Ebook], accessed on February 20, 2025, available at: <https://ird.mcu.ac.th/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Full-Catastrophe-Living-PDFDrive-.pdf>
- Loy, David (2018). *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis* (pp. 66-99), [Ebook], accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://pt.everand.com/read/396763922/Ecodharma-Buddhist-Teachings-for-the-Ecological->

Crisis. Boulder: Shambhala Publications.

Organization For Economic Cooperation And Development (OECD) (2018). *TALIS 2018 Results: Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*, accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/talis-2018-results-volume-i\\_1d0bc92a-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/talis-2018-results-volume-i_1d0bc92a-en.html). Paris: OECD.

Sumedho, Ajahn (2004). *The Four Noble Truths*, [Ebook], accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://amaravati.org/dhamma-books/the-four-noble-truths/>. Hemel Hempstead: Amaravati Publications.

*The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. BODHI, Bhikkhu. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.

*The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. WALSHE, Maurice Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995.

*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. BODHI, Bhikkhu. Wisdom Publications.

UNESCO (2017). *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*, accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>. Paris: UNESCO.

World Health Organization (WHO) (2021). *Mental Health and Work: Global Perspectives on Teacher Burnout*, accessed on March 4, 2025, available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-what-you-need-know>. Geneva: WHO.



# SATI MEDITATION (MINDFULNESS) IN EDUCATION

Most Ven. Prof. Dhammadipa Ila (Lee Tackhoan)\*

## Abstract:

*Sati* meditation (Mindfulness) in education has gained increasing attention as a transformative approach to fostering emotional intelligence, resilience, and ethical awareness in students. In an age where technological progress often outpaces moral development, there is a growing need to recenter education on the cultivation of inner awareness, compassion, and ethical responsibility. The integration of mindfulness into the classroom is not merely a tool for stress reduction but a profound method of shaping character and encouraging deep self-reflection. Through mindfulness, students learn to observe their thoughts and emotions without judgment, allowing space for wiser responses and a greater sense of empathy for others. Teachers also benefit by developing equanimity and a deeper connection to their students. This alignment of inner development with academic learning fosters an environment where both intellectual and spiritual growth are nurtured. Drawing from early Buddhist teachings, particularly the *Satipatthana Sutta*, this paper examines how the core principles of mindfulness can be applied in modern educational contexts. It further explores how such practices, when supported by institutional commitment and cultural sensitivity, can contribute meaningfully to the broader goals of sustainable development and peacebuilding. In this way, *Sati* becomes not only a personal discipline but also a collective vehicle for social transformation.

**Key words:** *Sati meditation in education, emotional and ethical development, mindfulness-based educational practice, holistic and sustainable learning.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and socio-environmental challenges, the need for holistic education has never been more pressing. While traditional education often emphasizes intellectual development and academic achievement, it tends to overlook the inner landscape of learners

---

\* President, International Meditation Center, South Korea.

- their emotional well-being, ethical formation, and spiritual maturity. This imbalance not only affects students' capacity for compassionate engagement but also limits the broader purpose of education as a path to personal and societal transformation. Sati Meditation, rooted in early Buddhist contemplative traditions, offers a timeless yet highly relevant methodology for integrating the cultivation of wisdom, morality, and mental discipline. Far beyond a technique for stress reduction, mindfulness is a way of being that invites the practitioner to engage life with clarity, presence, and ethical sensitivity.

When applied in educational settings, mindfulness nurtures attentiveness, deep listening, and emotional regulation - skills that are increasingly vital in a world overwhelmed by distraction, division, and psychological distress. Students trained in mindful awareness are better equipped to understand their emotions, relate compassionately with peers, and respond to difficulties with equanimity rather than reactivity. For educators, Sati provides the foundation for teaching not just content but presence - cultivating a classroom environment that is safe, inclusive, and attuned to the needs of the whole person.

Moreover, mindfulness in education contributes to ecological awareness by reawakening our sense of interconnectedness with all living beings. When students experience the present moment deeply and non-judgmentally, they begin to perceive the subtle interdependence of life and the ethical responsibility that arises from it. In this way, the practice of Sati becomes a transformative force that aligns with the goals of sustainable development, peacebuilding, and the cultivation of global citizenship.

Therefore, to incorporate Sati Meditation into modern education is not simply to adopt a new method but to reorient our understanding of what it means to learn, to teach, and to live meaningfully in the world.

## II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SATI MEDITATION (MINDFULNESS) IN EDUCATION

*Sati* meditation (Mindfulness) is commonly defined as the practice of maintaining a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Originating from Buddhist traditions, it has been carefully transmitted through centuries of meditative practice and ethical training, emphasizing the cultivation of clarity, equanimity, and insight. In recent decades, this ancient practice has found renewed application in secular educational contexts through structured programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). These programs adapt key principles of mindfulness while making them accessible to diverse learning communities, regardless of religious background.<sup>1</sup>

Empirical research in neuroscience and psychology has increasingly affirmed the value of Sati as a transformative mental discipline. Studies indicate

---

<sup>1</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.

that regular mindfulness practice enhances attentional control,<sup>2</sup> strengthens emotional regulation, and fosters greater empathy and prosocial behavior. These benefits are not only individual but relational, contributing to healthier classroom dynamics and more compassionate school cultures. Furthermore, mindfulness has been shown to influence brain regions associated with executive function, emotional resilience, and self-awareness, offering a bridge between contemplative traditions and modern cognitive science. As such, the integration of Sati into education represents a confluence of ancient wisdom and contemporary evidence-based practice, offering meaningful support for the well-being and ethical development of both students and educators.<sup>3</sup>

### **Sati meditation**

*Sati* meditation (Mindfulness), an essential practice in traditional Buddhist mindfulness, focuses on cultivating present-moment awareness through breath observation and contemplation. By practicing *Sati* meditation, individuals enhance their ability to stay mindful, develop deeper self-awareness, and cultivate compassion. Integrating *Sati* meditation into education can support students in managing stress, improving concentration, and fostering ethical decision-making.

“This is the only way, monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for reaching the right path, for the attainment of Nibbana, namely, the four foundations of mindfulness. What are the four?”<sup>4</sup>

“Here, O bhikkhus, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or an empty place, sits down, bends in his legs crosswise on his lap, keeps his body erect, and arouses mindfulness in the object of meditation, namely, the breath which is in front of him.”<sup>5</sup>

## **III. BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS**

### **3.1. Emotional and psychological well-being - case study**

*Sati* meditation (Mindfulness) has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression among both students and educators. When practiced regularly, mindfulness enhances emotional regulation, improves self-awareness, and fosters a supportive and harmonious learning atmosphere.<sup>6</sup> One noteworthy example of such implementation can be observed at Visitacion Valley Middle School in San Francisco, United States. In 2007, the school introduced a program known as Quiet Time, which incorporates sessions of silent sitting

<sup>2</sup> Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). *The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-being*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84 (4), 822 – 848.

<sup>3</sup> Hölzel, B. K. et al. (2011). *How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action From a Conceptual and Neural Perspective*. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

<sup>4</sup> MN.10. *Satipatthana sutta*.

<sup>5</sup> MN.10. *Satipatthana sutta*.

<sup>6</sup> Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). *Mechanisms of Mindfulness*. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*.

or Transcendental Meditation for fifteen minutes twice a day. Although participation was optional, the long-term impact has been substantial.

Since the introduction of the program, the school has witnessed a remarkable transformation. Truancy rates have dropped from over 15 percent to just 7 percent, in contrast to the state average, which has continued to rise to approximately 30 percent. Likewise, suspension rates were cut by more than half, from 13 percent to 6 percent, now significantly lower than the state average. In addition to behavioral improvements, the program has contributed to greater emotional stability among students and improved faculty retention, suggesting that mindfulness practices can benefit the entire school community.

This case demonstrates that when mindfulness is integrated not as an isolated technique but as part of the daily rhythm of school life, it can lead to profound shifts—not only in student conduct and academic engagement but also in the emotional climate and relational well-being of the institution as a whole.

*Example episode 1*

Visitacion Valley Middle School San Francisco USA  
That school started a mindfulness meditation in 2007  
The meditation program name is “Quiet Time.”  
Since then, they’ve cut their TRUANCY RATE by more than half to 7%  
While the state’s truancy rate has climbed to 30%  
Before Quiet Time, their suspension rates were equal to the state’s at 13%,  
Now, their rate has dropped to 6%, half that of the state.

**3.2. A quiet transformation**

Visitacion Valley Middle School first introduced Quiet Time (QT), a stress-reduction program that includes Transcendental Meditation as an optional activity, in the spring of 2007. The program consists of two periods, 15 minutes each in the morning and afternoon, when students may choose to sit quietly or meditate. This promotes deep relaxation and a sense of well-being and allows students to clear their minds. These sessions also help students prepare themselves for positive academic and social interactions, which has led to a significant reduction in suspensions and trancies. In addition, the approach improves faculty retention.



### 3.3. Academic Performance

Studies suggest that mindfulness improves concentration, memory retention, and problem-solving skills, thereby enhancing academic achievement. Students who practice mindfulness demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility and creativity. These cognitive benefits arise from the cultivation of present-moment awareness, which strengthens the ability to sustain attention and observe thoughts without immediate reaction. When students are less overwhelmed by distractions and internal emotional turmoil, they are more capable of engaging deeply with learning tasks and processing complex information.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, mindfulness encourages metacognitive awareness - the capacity to observe one's thinking processes - which supports critical inquiry and adaptive learning strategies. As a result, students become more reflective, better able to shift perspectives, and more open to novel approaches in both individual and collaborative settings. These qualities not only contribute to improved academic outcomes but also foster a lifelong orientation toward curiosity, patience, and discernment - essential attributes in navigating the challenges of an increasingly complex world. Thus, mindfulness in education is not only about inner peace but also about sharpening the mind in service of wisdom.

#### *Example episode 2*

In a study conducted on 6th grade students, a research team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States reported that students who practiced mindfulness meditation had higher test scores and experienced less stress and negative emotions. The study revealed that students who engaged in regular mindfulness sessions demonstrated improved focus during academic tasks, as well as a greater ability to regulate emotional responses to academic pressure. This indicates that mindfulness practice strengthens both cognitive performance and emotional resilience, two dimensions essential to meaningful learning.

Beyond test scores, the MIT study highlighted a notable reduction in behavioral disruptions and emotional reactivity, suggesting that mindfulness helps students cultivate a more grounded and reflective inner state. With heightened awareness of their thoughts and emotions, students were better able to navigate social dynamics, handle conflicts more calmly, and approach academic challenges with a greater sense of calm and clarity. Such outcomes point toward the broader implications of Sati meditation - not merely as a tool for academic enhancement but as a way of nurturing inner balance and ethical maturity in young learners.

This case exemplifies how modern scientific research continues to affirm the timeless relevance of ancient contemplative practices.

---

<sup>7</sup> Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lawlor, M. S. (2010). *The Effects of a Mindfulness-Based Education Program on Pre- and Early Adolescents' Well-Being and Social and Emotional Competence*.

When integrated thoughtfully into educational environments, Sati can harmonize intellectual achievement with emotional well-being, allowing education to fulfill its higher purpose of cultivating wise and compassionate human beings.

### **3.4. Social and Ethical Development**

Mindfulness cultivates empathy and compassion, essential qualities for social harmony and ethical decision-making. Through the practice of observing one's thoughts and emotions with non-judgmental awareness, individuals gradually begin to recognize the shared nature of human experience - its joys and struggles, hopes and vulnerabilities. By promoting self-awareness and perspective-taking, students develop a deeper understanding of others' emotions and experiences. This awareness goes beyond cognitive recognition; it fosters a heartfelt sensitivity to the presence and needs of others, planting the seeds of genuine compassion.<sup>8</sup>

Within the context of education, these qualities are indispensable. When learners are trained not only to think critically but also to feel deeply and act ethically, they become agents of positive change in their communities. Mindfulness enables students to respond rather than react, to listen attentively, and to engage in dialogue with openness and care. As emotional intelligence grows, so too does the capacity for ethical discernment and socially responsible behavior. Thus, the cultivation of mindfulness does not end at personal well-being - it extends into the relational space, building the foundation for peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and a more compassionate society.<sup>9</sup>

## **IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF SATI MEDITATION (MINDFULNESS) IN EDUCATION**

### **4.1. Sati meditation (mindfulness) practices for students**

Educators can incorporate mindfulness techniques such as breathing exercises, body scans, and mindful listening into daily classroom activities. These simple practices, when introduced with gentleness and consistency, can help students anchor their attention, settle their emotions, and engage more fully with the learning process. Short mindfulness sessions before or after lessons serve as a threshold, guiding students to transition from distraction or emotional turbulence into a focused and receptive state of mind. These moments of quiet presence are not merely pauses in activity - they are opportunities to cultivate stillness, clarity, and respectful awareness of the learning space.<sup>10</sup>

In establishing such a meditative environment, it is essential to uphold certain principles that honor both the spirit of Sati and the practical dynamics of

---

<sup>8</sup> Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (2004). *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning*.

<sup>9</sup> Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

<sup>10</sup> Burke, C. A. (2010). *Mindfulness-Based Approaches with Children and Adolescents: A Preliminary Review of Current Research in an Emergent Field*.



the classroom. The only basic skill required for meditation is that each student be physically healthy and mentally prepared to sit in stillness. Importantly, educators should avoid unnecessary interruptions during the practice. For instance, using bells or external cues to mark the beginning and end of sessions may disturb the natural flow of inward attention. Instead, allowing silence to open and close each practice encourages students to develop internal sensitivity to time and space - learning to begin and end with mindfulness itself.

Through these subtle yet powerful means, mindfulness is not imposed but invited. It enters the classroom not as a technique to be mastered but as a shared atmosphere of care, presence, and mutual respect - transforming the ordinary routine of school into a sacred space of inner cultivation.

i. When ring bell rings, close your eyes, straighten your back and neck, concentrate, and carefully observe your breathing in and out.

ii. Just concentrate your breathing in and out.

iii. If thoughts arise, notice them, name them, note them clearly, and focus on your breathing.

iv. If an interruption occurs, do not pay attention to the interruption, but notice the interruption, name it, notice it accurately, and focus on your breathing.

v. When you realize that you need to stop meditating, take a deep breath and focus on your breathing.

vi. Now, through this meditation, I bless myself and all beings connected to me with happiness and peace. I send a heart of compassion in my heart.

#### **4.2. Teacher training and development**

For mindfulness to be effectively implemented in education, teachers must be trained in mindfulness techniques. Professional development programs can equip educators with the skills to integrate mindfulness into their teaching methods and personal lives. This training is not merely about acquiring new tools but also about nurturing a personal transformation that radiates into the classroom. When educators practice mindfulness themselves, they naturally embody calmness, patience, and clarity - qualities that inspire students far more deeply than words alone. The presence of a mindful teacher creates an atmosphere of safety and receptivity where students feel truly seen and supported.

Training programs must be designed not only to offer techniques but to cultivate sustained inner practice. This includes guided meditation, reflective dialogue, ethical contemplation, and space for teachers to process their challenges. In doing so, educators begin to transform teaching from a task into a spiritual vocation - an offering of wisdom and compassion to the next generation.

Moreover, mindfulness-based professional development fosters resilience among educators. In a world where teachers face increasing pressures, from performance expectations to emotional exhaustion, mindfulness offers a way to

remain grounded, balanced, and centered in purpose. With proper institutional support and continued mentorship, such training becomes a foundation upon which schools can build a truly compassionate and transformative learning environment.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.3. Curriculum integration

Mindfulness can be incorporated into existing subjects such as literature, science, and ethics. Activities like reflective journaling, nature walks, and mindful discussions encourage students to connect mindfulness principles with their daily lives. In literature classes, for example, students may be invited to read and contemplate poetic passages in silence, reflect on the inner world of characters, or journal their emotional responses - thus deepening both empathy and literary understanding. In science, mindfulness may arise through the attentive observation of natural phenomena, such as watching cloud movement, studying plant growth, or tuning into the rhythm of breath as a biological function. Such practices not only nurture scientific curiosity but also awaken a sense of wonder and interconnection with life.<sup>12</sup>

In ethics, mindfulness allows students to pause before forming opinions or judgments, fostering thoughtful dialogue and respect for diverse perspectives. Through mindful discussions, learners cultivate the ability to listen deeply, respond consciously, and approach moral questions with clarity and compassion. Rather than treating mindfulness as a separate subject, weaving it gently into academic content helps students recognize that inner awareness is not detached from the outer world - it is the foundation through which knowledge becomes meaningful and ethically grounded. In this way, mindfulness becomes both a method of learning and a path of living.<sup>13</sup>

### V. MINDFULNESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

A compassionate and sustainable future requires individuals who are aware of their actions' impact on society and the environment. Mindfulness fosters ecological awareness by helping students develop a deeper connection with nature and promoting sustainable decision-making. Through mindful observation and reflection, students come to experience nature not merely as an object of study but as an extension of their being - interconnected, delicate, and worthy of reverence. This intimate awareness cultivates gratitude, restraint, and a sense of ethical responsibility toward all forms of life.<sup>14</sup>

Schools that implement mindfulness-based environmental education report increased student engagement in sustainability initiatives. Students are more inclined to participate in activities such as school gardening, recycling

---

<sup>11</sup> Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). *The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes*.

<sup>12</sup> Lillard, A. S. (2011). *Mindfulness Practices in Education: Montessori's Approach*.

<sup>13</sup> Langer, E. J. (1989). *Mindfulness*.

<sup>14</sup> Siegel, D. J. (2007). *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being*.

programs, energy conservation, and environmental advocacy - not out of obligation, but from a place of inner understanding. When learners are taught to observe the stillness of a tree, the rhythm of rainfall, or the breath of wind with presence and appreciation, they begin to recognize the sacredness of the natural world.

Such experiences awaken what Buddhist teachings describe as non-harming (*ahiṃsā*) and interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), leading to choices that are mindful, compassionate, and sustainable. In this way, mindfulness becomes not only a personal practice but also a collective path toward planetary healing.

## VI. CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Despite its benefits, integrating mindfulness into education faces challenges such as time constraints, lack of trained instructors, and skepticism about its effectiveness. In many educational systems, rigid curricula and test-driven agendas leave little room for contemplative practices. Educators may feel ill-equipped or unsupported in facilitating mindfulness, while parents and administrators may question its relevance or scientific validity. This skepticism often arises not from opposition but from unfamiliarity - a gap that must be addressed with patience, clarity, and evidence.

Addressing these challenges requires institutional support, policy changes, and empirical research to further validate mindfulness-based interventions in education. Schools must be guided not only by data but by vision: a recognition that education is not merely the transmission of information but the cultivation of the whole human being. Investing in professional development, embedding mindfulness gradually within existing subjects, and creating safe, non-dogmatic approaches to practice are key steps forward. Furthermore, collaboration between educators, researchers, and spiritual communities can ensure that the heart of mindfulness is preserved while adapting to contemporary needs.

Overcoming resistance, therefore, is not an obstacle - it is part of the path. Like meditation itself, it calls for steadiness, discernment, and compassionate perseverance. Only then can the transformative potential of Sati unfold fully in the field of education.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Mindfulness in education offers a promising pathway to cultivating compassionate, resilient, and ethically responsible individuals. By fostering emotional intelligence, academic excellence, and ecological awareness, mindfulness contributes to a sustainable and harmonious future. As educators and policymakers embrace mindfulness, the next generation will be better equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world with wisdom and compassion. Beyond its immediate academic and psychological benefits, the deeper essence of Sati meditation lies in awakening the human spirit to its interconnection with all life. When practiced with sincerity and continuity, mindfulness nurtures the seeds of kindness, patience, and ethical discernment - qualities that are essential not only for personal development but for the flourishing of humanity at large.

In the face of rising mental health concerns, environmental degradation, and increasing social fragmentation, the practice of mindfulness serves as both anchor and compass. It grounds learners in the present moment while directing them toward choices rooted in understanding and non-harming. As seen in schools that have implemented mindfulness-based programs, such as Visitacion Valley Middle School, and through empirical studies, including those conducted by MIT, the results are tangible: reductions in stress, truancy, and conflict and improvements in focus, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. These outcomes demonstrate that mindfulness is not merely a theoretical ideal - it is a practical, evidence-based tool that harmonizes with ancient wisdom.

Moreover, Sati meditation opens space within the educational process for self-inquiry and inner peace. It reminds both students and educators that true learning is not confined to books and tests but arises from silent observation, deep listening, and ethical engagement with life. When schools become sanctuaries of mindfulness, the atmosphere shifts: anxiety gives way to calm, aggression yields to empathy, and competition is balanced by cooperation. In such an environment, education ceases to be transactional - it becomes transformational.<sup>15</sup>

As this paper has shown, the successful integration of mindfulness into education requires not only methodological adaptation but also cultural sensitivity, institutional commitment, and continuous reflection. It is not enough to introduce techniques; what is needed is a whole-school ethos that values stillness, presence, and compassionate action. Teachers must be supported through training and community, curricula must be flexible and inclusive, and policies must be visionary and holistic.

In closing, let us remember that education rooted in mindfulness is an education of the heart. It is a sacred endeavor that prepares not only future professionals but also future peacemakers, environmental stewards, and wise leaders. In this vision, the classroom becomes a mandala of transformation, where each breath and moment of awareness contributes to the collective evolution of humanity. Let us walk this path together - with mindfulness as our light and compassion as our guide.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>15</sup> Hyland, T. (2011). *Mindfulness and Learning: Celebrating the Affective Dimension of Education*.

## REFERENCES

- Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). *The Benefits of Being Present: Mindfulness and Its Role in Psychological Well-being*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), 822–848.
- Burke, C. A. (2010). *Mindfulness-Based Approaches with Children and Adolescents: A Preliminary Review of Current Research in an Emergent Field*.
- Davidson, R. J., & Lutz, A. (2008). *Buddha's Brain: Neuroplasticity and Meditation*.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.
- Hölzel, B. K. et al. (2011). *How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action From a Conceptual and Neural Perspective*. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.
- Hyland, T. (2011). *Mindfulness and Learning: Celebrating the Affective Dimension of Education*.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). *The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence about Student and Classroom Outcomes*.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.
- Lillard, A. S. (2011). *Mindfulness Practices in Education: Montessori's*
- Ritchhart, R., & Perkins, D. (2008). *Making Thinking Visible*.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lawlor, M. S. (2010). *The Effects of a Mindfulness-Based Education Program on Pre- and Early Adolescents' Well-Being and Social and Emotional Competence*.
- Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). *Mechanisms of Mindfulness*. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*.
- Siegel, D. J. (2007). *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being*.
- Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (2004). *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning*.
- Langer, E. J. (1989). *Mindfulness*.





# CREATING A MINDFUL CAMPUS FOR GLOBAL HARMONY: CULTIVATING MINDFUL HABITS FROM THE CLASSROOM TO EVERYDAY LIFE FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS

Wistina Seneru<sup>\*</sup>

## **Abstract:**

This research investigates the transformative potential of mindfulness in fostering a harmonious campus environment and promoting global harmony. The research synthesizes existing academic and professional works on mindfulness in education, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships through a comprehensive literature study. The study highlights the role of mindfulness in enhancing emotional intelligence, reducing stress, and improving classroom dynamics for both students and educators. The findings reveal that mindfulness practices significantly improve focus, empathy, and interpersonal connections when integrated into educational settings. Students benefit from better academic engagement and emotional resilience, while educators experience reduced burnout and improved teaching efficacy. However, the research also identifies challenges, such as individual variability in engagement and the difficulty of scaling mindfulness initiatives across institutions. Recommendations include incorporating mindfulness into curricula through structured programs, training educators to embody mindfulness, and fostering institutional support to cultivate a culture of awareness and empathy. By addressing these challenges and scaling effective practices, campuses can serve as models for creating mindful and harmonious communities and contributing to global well-being.

**Keywords:** mindfulness, global harmony, campus well-being, emotional intelligence, education reform.

---

<sup>\*</sup> Buddhist Communication Science Department, Jinarakkhita Buddhist College of Lampung, Indonesia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, the need for harmony across diverse cultural, social, and ideological boundaries is more pressing than ever. Educational institutions play a vital role in shaping values that support global harmony. One effective approach is integrating mindfulness into academic and social life. Mindfulness - focusing on the present moment with non-judgment - enhances emotional intelligence, resilience, and interpersonal understanding, which are key to fostering a harmonious campus culture. In today's fast-paced, interconnected world, schools face the growing challenge of supporting learners not only academically but also emotionally and socially amid rising stress and mental health concerns. Research indicates that approximately 30% of students experience elevated stress levels, which can impair academic performance, disrupt learning, and have lasting consequences on mental health and personal development.<sup>1</sup> In the *Satipatthana Sutta* (MN.10), the Buddha teaches the importance of mindfulness in various aspects of life, including learning and interacting with others. Mindfulness aids individuals in maintaining focus on the present moment, which is crucial in the context of education.<sup>2</sup>

Besides, mindfulness - maintaining non-judgmental awareness of the present moment - has emerged as a transformative approach to addressing these challenges. Rooted in Buddhist teachings, mindfulness (Pāli: *sati*) is a core aspect of the *Satipatthāna Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 10), where the Buddha instructs practitioners to cultivate continuous awareness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects.<sup>3</sup> Increasingly adopted by educational institutions worldwide, mindfulness has been shown to improve classroom dynamics, strengthen relationships between educators and students, and enhance teaching strategies.<sup>4</sup> By fostering focus, emotional resilience, and empathy, mindfulness offers a practical and impactful solution for creating more supportive and effective learning environments. Effective mindfulness education begins with educators, who must first embody and practice mindfulness in their own lives to teach it effectively. The *Dhammapada* (verse 25) emphasizes that "the wise shape themselves" through disciplined effort and awareness, highlighting the importance of self-cultivation before guiding others.<sup>5</sup> Educators can model mindfulness by cultivating self-awareness, generating a positive ripple effect within the classroom. Students become better equipped to manage academic, social, and digital pressures in healthier and more constructive ways when guided with such intentionality.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fuertes & Wayland, 2015, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> MN 10, *Satipatthana Sutta*, trans. Bhikkhu Soma (1999), "The Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness," Access to Insight, n.d., accessed on [February 17, 2025], available at <https://www.accesstinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.soma.html>

<sup>3</sup> *Satipatthāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> Kabat-Zinn (1990), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Dhammapada* (verse 25) Buddhārakkhita, 1985, p. 22.

Research consistently highlights that mindfulness practices reduce stress and anxiety while improving students' focus, emotional resilience, and overall learning capacity. This aligns with the *Vijjā Sutta* (AN 2.3), where the Buddha describes mindfulness as a form of actual knowledge that leads to wisdom and clarity.<sup>6</sup> The modern application of these ancient teachings demonstrates their relevance in cultivating an education system that nurtures cognitive and emotional well-being. A systematic review highlights that implementing mindfulness in education benefits learners and educators by enhancing emotional well-being and reducing stress in the school environment.<sup>7</sup> Mindfulness is strongly associated with increased resilience in learners, leading to improved academic performance. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of mindfulness as a holistic competency in education for sustainable development, demonstrating that mindfulness raises students' awareness of sustainability issues and enhances their capacity for empathy and academic success.<sup>8</sup> Creating a mindful campus involves incorporating mindfulness practices into the daily routines of both learners and educators. This approach fosters an environment that supports mental health and cultivates self-awareness, empathy, and compassion within the educational community.<sup>9</sup> Developing mindful habits from the classroom to everyday life is crucial, as it equips learners and educators with the skills necessary to navigate modern challenges effectively while contributing to global harmony.<sup>10</sup>

The implementation of mindfulness in educational institutions can be achieved through various methods, such as incorporating daily mindfulness sessions, teaching emotional awareness and empathy, and utilizing technology to support these practices. For instance, a short meditation or breathing exercise can be conducted at the beginning or end of the school day to help learners start or conclude their day with a sense of calm.<sup>11 12</sup> Additionally, it is crucial to involve the entire school community—from educators to parents – in this process to ensure the benefits of mindfulness are experienced holistically.<sup>13</sup> By fostering these habits, educators and students enhance their well-being and contribute to a more harmonious world. This article explores the benefits of mindfulness and its implementation strategies, aiming to highlight the transformational potential of creating a mindful campus to address the demands of contemporary life. In Buddhist teachings, mindfulness (*sati*) is emphasized as a foundational practice for wisdom and well-being. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Majjhima Nikāya 10) describes mindfulness as the

<sup>6</sup> *Vijjā Sutta*, AN 2.3, Bodhi (2012), p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> Tripon, C., Gonța, I., & Bulgac, A., 2023, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Monsillion, J., Zebdi, R., & Romo-Desprez, L., 2023, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Gardner, P., & Grose, J., 2015, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers, H., & Maytan, M., 2019, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Albrecht, N. J., Albrecht, P. M., & Cohen, M., (2012), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Tripon, C., Gonța, I., & Bulgac, A., 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Monsillion, J., Zebdi, R., & Romo-Desprez, L., 2023, p. 27.

direct path to purification and liberation, encouraging individuals to develop awareness in all aspects of life.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* underscores the importance of sustained attention and self-awareness in cultivating a stable and insightful mind.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, educational institutions must adopt mindfulness practices as part of their curricula to nurture a more resilient and competitive generation. The *Dīgha Nikāya* highlights that a well-trained mind leads to wisdom and excellence, aligning to foster emotionally intelligent and focused learners.<sup>16</sup> The *Lotus Sūtra* also advocates for the practice of mindfulness as a means to develop inner strength and compassion, essential qualities for personal and academic success.<sup>17</sup> By integrating mindfulness into education, institutions can create an environment that supports cognitive development and emotional resilience, helping students navigate the complexities of modern life more effectively.

This research examines how nurturing mindful habits among students and educators can foster a harmonious campus environment aligned with global well-being. It highlights mindfulness as a practical tool to enhance focus, emotional resilience, and interpersonal relationships in education. By integrating mindfulness into daily routines and classroom settings, individuals develop deeper awareness and compassion. While current literature supports its benefits, the study identifies a need for strategies to scale and sustain mindfulness practices campus-wide. It aims to bridge this gap by exploring effective implementation models and affirming the role of mindful campuses in shaping empathetic, inclusive, and globally conscious communities.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Mindfulness in Education

Mindfulness, often translated as “awareness” or “presence,” is a practice that emphasizes focused attention on the present moment with curiosity and without judgment. Kabat-Zinn (1990) defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”<sup>18</sup> This definition highlights the importance of active and intentional awareness in daily experiences. In Buddhism, mindfulness, known as *sati* in Pāli, is a fundamental aspect of the teachings, emphasizing the necessity of being fully present. It is not merely a technique but an inherent consciousness that can be cultivated through practice. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) instructs practitioners to develop continuous awareness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects as the path to liberation. Practitioners are encouraged to observe their thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with focused awareness, a central theme in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, which

<sup>14</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, 2012, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya*, Walshe, 1995, p. 157.

<sup>17</sup> *Lotus Sūtra*, Hurvitz, 2009, p. 225

<sup>18</sup> Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 4.

describes mindfulness as the foundation of insight and wisdom (*Vipassanā*).<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Brown and Ryan (2003) describe mindfulness as an inherent state of consciousness, suggesting that it is not merely a technique but also a natural mental state accessible to everyone.<sup>20</sup> This perspective aligns with the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, which states that mindfulness is an intrinsic quality of the mind that, when developed, leads to deep wisdom and awakening.<sup>21</sup>

Mindfulness involves being fully aware of one's internal experiences – encompassing the body, mind, heart, and soul – while maintaining awareness of the external world, including people, nature, the environment, and unfolding events. This practice fosters a holistic self-awareness and connection to the surrounding environment. The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* describes mindfulness as perceiving reality without attachment, promoting harmony between the inner self and the external world.<sup>22</sup> By cultivating this comprehensive awareness, mindfulness encourages individuals to engage more deeply and intentionally with their experiences, promoting inner clarity and balance with the external world. Haemin Sunnim highlights the significance of living in the present moment by stating that the most comfortable and secure home for happiness is the “Present Moment.”<sup>23</sup> This perspective emphasizes that true happiness resides in being fully aware of the present rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. This definition underscores the critical role of being present as a key strategy for managing stress and enhancing overall well-being. Together, these viewpoints illustrate the diverse understandings of mindfulness, drawing from both Eastern traditions and Western thought. They consistently emphasize the central importance of present-moment awareness as a foundation for psychological well-being and a means to navigate modern life's challenges effectively.

The origins of mindfulness can be traced back to Buddhism, which emphasizes practicing mindfulness in everyday life experiences. The term “mindfulness” derives from the Pali word *sati*, which encompasses awareness, attention, and remembrance.<sup>24</sup> In Buddhism, *sati* is one of the eightfold paths to enlightenment, collectively known as the Middle Path. Mindfulness in Buddhism centers on cultivating awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations and understanding how these factors influence an individual's experience. Through meditation and reflection, individuals learn to observe their thoughts and feelings without becoming entangled in emotional reactions, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* outlines the development of mindfulness by observing four key areas: the body, feelings, the mind, and objects of

<sup>19</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), Ñāṇamoli, & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>20</sup> Brown and Ryan, 2003, p. 823.

<sup>21</sup> *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, Yamamoto, 2007, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> Cleary, 1993, p. 215

<sup>23</sup> Sunim, 2017, p. 24

<sup>24</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J., 2003, p. 145

thought.<sup>25</sup> This comprehensive approach encourages practitioners to cultivate a balanced and holistic awareness, promoting clarity and insight that can lead to personal transformation and greater harmony with the surrounding world.

Mindfulness practice in Buddhism aims not only to reduce thoughts but also to achieve enlightenment and wisdom. In this case, mindfulness serves as a tool for understanding the nature of thoughts and emotions and how they can influence behavior and life experiences. By developing deeper awareness, individuals can learn to respond to situations more thoughtfully and not get caught up in a detrimental mindset. Mindfulness originated in the Buddhist tradition but has been secularized and integrated into various fields, including psychology and education. The *Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22) highlights how mindfulness develops clarity and wisdom, which are essential in both monastic and lay life.<sup>26</sup> Mindfulness involves deliberate attention to the present moment with curiosity and without judgment. Over the past few decades, mindfulness has been adapted and applied in the modern world, especially mental health. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva states that mindfulness is a powerful tool for managing afflictive emotions, preventing the mind from being dominated by negative thoughts.<sup>27</sup>

Mindfulness practices can help individuals manage stress, improve emotional well-being, and enhance focus and attention. This adaptation has given birth to various programs and interventions designed to strengthen social-emotional and cognitive skills, particularly among learners. The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* explains that mindfulness leads to mental stability and compassionate engagement with others, making it an essential practice for fostering emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationships.<sup>28</sup> Mindfulness, with deep cultural roots in the Buddhist tradition, has evolved into a relevant and beneficial practice in modern times. Diverse definitions of mindfulness suggest that the practice is not only about meditation techniques but also includes a deeper awareness of oneself and the environment. With its increasingly widespread application in mental health, mindfulness offers an effective tool for improving an individual's psychological well-being and quality of life. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118) explains how breathing meditation can develop mindfulness and concentration, guiding individuals to tranquility and insight.<sup>29</sup>

Mindfulness enables individuals to connect more deeply with themselves, manage stress, and enhance overall well-being. Amid the complexities of modern life, it offers a grounded path to present-moment awareness and inner peace. The *Visuddhimagga*, a foundational Theravāda text, outlines structured methods for cultivating mindfulness through concentration and

<sup>25</sup> Bodhi (trans), 2012, p. 147

<sup>26</sup> Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta, DN 22, Walshe, 1995, p. 335

<sup>27</sup> Bodhicaryāvatāra, Crosby & Skilton, 1995, p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, Thurman, 1976, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> Ānāpānasati Sutta, MN 118, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 941.



insight meditation, fostering mental clarity and emotional stability.<sup>30</sup> Through mindfulness, individuals develop the ability to respond with greater awareness, reduce impulsivity, and foster healthier relationships, contributing to a more balanced and harmonious life. However, mindfulness is not a quick remedy; it requires consistent practice, patience, and cultural sensitivity. Its integration must honor the tradition's roots while adapting to contemporary contexts. In education, mindfulness has proven effective in helping learners regulate emotions, enhance focus, and reduce aggression. School-based programs typically incorporate breathing exercises, meditation, and reflective practices, creating supportive environments that nurture students' holistic growth.

In education, mindfulness is applied in learning, where individuals are invited to be fully present in the present moment without judgment. In education, mindfulness has been adapted for secular use, allowing its application in various settings, from primary schools to universities.<sup>31</sup> Along with the increasing attention to mental health and well-being among learners and educators, mindfulness has emerged as an effective tool to address the challenges faced in educational settings. Mindfulness practices can improve classroom management, relationships between educators and learners, and teaching strategies.<sup>32</sup> Thus, mindfulness is a tool to improve academic outcomes and a holistic approach that supports students' personal development. Many recent studies have shown that mindfulness can significantly benefit students' psychosocial well-being, mental health, social and emotional skills, cognition, and academic achievement.<sup>33</sup> For example, learners who engage in mindfulness tend to experience increased concentration and reduced stress, contributing to a more positive and productive classroom atmosphere. Educators who apply mindfulness in teaching report improvements in job satisfaction and reduced stress, which can improve the quality of teaching.<sup>34</sup> Mindfulness can be applied through various methods, including meditation, breathing exercises, and self-reflection. Students can develop a better sense of presence and awareness by integrating these practices into classroom activities. This not only helps learners in overcoming academic challenges but also in building better relationships with peers and educators.

Several key theories and concepts underlie the application of mindfulness in education. One of them is the concept of self-regulation, which refers to the ability of individuals to manage their emotions, behaviors, and attention. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva states that mindfulness acts as a safeguard against impulsive reactions, allowing individuals to cultivate self-discipline and emotional balance.<sup>35</sup> Mindfulness serves as a tool to improve self-regulation,

---

<sup>30</sup> Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>31</sup> Kim, D. J., 2022, p. 145.

<sup>32</sup> Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Katherine Weare & Felicia Huppert, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Bodhicaryāvatāra, Crosby & Skilton, 1995, p. 78.

allowing learners to better cope with academic and social challenges. In addition, the theory of social-emotional learning (SEL) is also relevant, as mindfulness is considered an essential component in developing students' social and emotional skills. The *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* emphasizes the role of mindfulness in cultivating kindness and empathy, key attributes in social-emotional development.<sup>36</sup> By integrating mindfulness into the curriculum, educational institutions can help learners develop the skills necessary to interact with others and manage individual emotions positively. To teach mindfulness effectively, educators must internalize the practice in their own lives. The *Visuddhimagga* explains that actual mindfulness training requires direct experience and consistent practice, highlighting that teachers who embody mindfulness principles set a living example for students.<sup>37</sup> Educators must be living examples of mindfulness principles so learners can see and feel the benefits firsthand. Thus, mindfulness teaching is not only about the techniques taught but also about the attitudes and behaviors exemplified by the educator.

## 2.2. Benefits for students

Mindfulness has been shown to provide a variety of significant benefits for learners, especially in mental health and academic performance. In recent years, research has shown that mindfulness interventions can reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression among university students.<sup>38, 39</sup> With students' increasing academic and social pressures, it is important to understand how mindfulness practices can contribute to student well-being. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) emphasizes mindfulness (*sati*) as a direct path to developing awareness and equanimity, which is crucial in managing stress and emotional challenges.<sup>40</sup> One of the main benefits of mindfulness practices is their ability to reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression. The *Mahāsatiipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22) further elaborates that mindfulness training strengthens mental stability, allowing individuals to remain undisturbed by external pressures.<sup>41</sup>

Anxiety often arises due to high academic demands, such as exams, assignments, and peer competition. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118) explains how breath-focused meditation helps calm the mind, reducing agitation and promoting sustained concentration, which is particularly beneficial for students facing academic stress.<sup>42</sup> The *Dhammapada* (verse 208) also highlights that a mindful individual remains unshaken despite challenges, illustrating how mindfulness fosters resilience and inner peace.<sup>43</sup> By applying mindfulness

<sup>36</sup> *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*, Gómez, 1996, p. 134.

<sup>37</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>38</sup> Vorontsova-Wenger et al., 2022, p. 142.

<sup>39</sup> Luberto et al., 2020, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>41</sup> *Mahāsatiipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22, Walshe, 1995, p. 337.

<sup>42</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 943.

<sup>43</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse 208, Buddhārakkhita, 1985, p. 82.

techniques, learners can develop the ability to detach from negative thoughts and excessive worries, creating a more balanced and peaceful mental space. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) describes mindfulness as an essential factor in mental purification, emphasizing its role in transforming negative mental states into clarity and stability.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 46.53) underscores that mindfulness alleviates distress and strengthens wisdom, enabling individuals to navigate difficulties with insight and composure.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Found that mindfulness practices can help students cope with depression.<sup>46</sup> In stressful situations, many learners experience feelings of hopelessness and loss of motivation. Mindfulness programs provide tools for students to recognize and manage emotions to respond to challenging situations more adaptively. By increasing self-awareness, learners can better understand emotional triggers and develop strategies to deal with them. In addition to reducing stress, mindfulness positively correlates with student engagement. It was found that students who had higher levels of mindfulness tended to be more involved in learning activities.<sup>47</sup> This involvement includes active participation in class discussions, collaboration with classmates, and involvement in extracurricular activities. By improving mindfulness, students can focus and engage more in learning, improving academic outcomes.

Mindfulness also serves as a partial mediator between perceived stress and the psychological well-being of learners. Saraswati et al. Suggests that mindfulness practices can help learners reduce the stress experienced, contributing to improved mental well-being.<sup>48</sup> By reducing stress, learners can better maintain mental health, essential for academic success and daily life. Recent studies also explore the potential of mindfulness techniques in improving students' inhibitor control, which is crucial for maintaining focus during lectures. Sumbaga notes that learners often face challenges maintaining their attention by switching from online to in-person learning.<sup>49</sup> Mindfulness techniques can help students manage attention better and reduce distractions so they can focus more on the material being taught.

Mindfulness-based art Therapy (MBAT) also shows promise in reducing depressive symptoms and increasing mindfulness awareness among university students. Saputra et al.. show that MBAT helps students express themselves creatively and provides tools to overcome negative feelings and improve mental well-being.<sup>50</sup> By combining art and mindfulness, learners can find new ways to interact with emotions and reduce stress. Previous research also shows that mindfulness and self-control significantly reduce stress levels in Indonesian

<sup>44</sup> Cūḷavedalla Sutta, MN 44, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 392.

<sup>45</sup> Samyutta Nikāya, SN 46.53, Bodhi, 2000, p. 1613.

<sup>46</sup> Luberto, C. M., et al., 2020, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Hidayah, 2022, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Saraswati et al., 2023, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Sumbaga, 2024, p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Saputra et al., 2023, p. 4.

learners. Benardi et al. state that students who had good self-control skills and practiced mindfulness experienced a more significant stress reduction than those who did not.<sup>51</sup> This suggests that the development of self-control skills along with mindfulness practices can provide more significant benefits in managing academic stress.

Mindfulness is not only beneficial for mental health, but it can also improve cognitive function. Research shows that mindfulness practices can improve attention and concentration. Staying focused on the task in an academic environment often full of distractions is crucial. Students who practice mindfulness tend to be more able to ignore external distractions and maintain their attention on the material being studied. In addition, mindfulness also contributes to improved memory. Students can better remember the information they have learned by training the mind to stay present and focused. Kathayat notes that this memory improvement benefits exams and develops long-term skills necessary for a learner's future career.<sup>52</sup> Thus, mindfulness practices can be an effective tool to support more in-depth and sustainable learning. One of the most desirable outcomes of mindfulness practice is improved academic performance. Research shows that learners who engage in mindfulness programs often perform better on exams and assignments. Vorontsova-Wenger et al. noted that learners who participated in mindfulness interventions experienced stress reduction and increased motivation and engagement in learning.<sup>53</sup> By reducing anxiety and improving focus, learners can better absorb and apply information in academics.

This improvement in academic performance can also be seen in collaboration and social interaction. Students who practice mindfulness tend to be better able to work with their fellow students, thanks to improved emotional regulation and communication skills. This creates a more positive and supportive learning environment where learners can help each other and learn from each other. In a situation full of uncertainty, the ability to stay calm and focus on things that can be controlled is essential. Students trained in mindfulness can be better at facing challenges that arise, both in academics and in students' personal lives. Mindfulness also helps learners to develop a positive attitude towards new experiences. By increasing awareness of the present moment, learners can learn to appreciate the learning process, not just the result. This can reduce perceived pressure and improve learners' satisfaction with the educational experience. Self-regulation is an essential aspect of academic success and life in general. Mindfulness programs in schools have shown the potential to improve students' self-regulation skills. Roeser et al. noted that learners who engage in mindfulness practices tend to manage impulses and emotions better, contributing to better decision-making.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Benardi et al., 2024, p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Kathayat, 2024, p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> Vorontsova-Wenger et al., 2022, p. 153.

<sup>54</sup> Roeser et al., 2023, p. 243.

Students can better overcome challenges inside and outside the classroom by developing these skills.

### 2.3. Benefits for educators

Mindfulness, or mindfulness, is a practice that involves deliberate and non-judgmental attention to the current experience. In education, mindfulness has been shown to provide various benefits for educators, which can improve the quality of teaching and the student learning experience. According to Sides, Membership in professional organizations and reflective practices can expand knowledge, build community, and develop leadership, all of which contribute to educators' personal and professional growth.<sup>55</sup> By applying mindfulness, educators can manage the stress that often arises due to high job demands, thereby improving mental health. Educators often face high pressure from job demands and interactions with students and parents. Prolonged stress can negatively impact an educator's mental and physical health.<sup>56</sup> Mindfulness practices can help educators better manage stress. By practicing mindfulness and awareness, educators can learn to respond to stressful situations more calmly and measurably. Research shows that mindfulness techniques, such as meditation and breathing exercises, can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.<sup>57</sup> In the *Dhammapada* (Verse 1), the Buddha teaches, "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts". This indicates that individuals can reduce stress and anxiety by managing thoughts and emotions through mindfulness.<sup>58</sup> Thus, educators who practice mindfulness not only feel the benefits personally but can also create a more positive learning environment for students.

In addition to reducing stress, mindfulness also contributes to improved emotional well-being. Educators who practice mindfulness tend to have lower levels of anxiety and depression. Educators can more easily cope with the emotional challenges in a dynamic work environment. By improving emotional well-being, educators can create a more positive learning atmosphere for students, increasing students' motivation and academic achievement. The practice of mindfulness also helps educators to improve focus and concentration. By training the mind to stay in the moment, educators can reduce distractions and increase productivity in planning and executing teaching. Mindfulness can improve cognitive abilities, including attention and working memory.<sup>59</sup> More focused educators can deliver material and interact with students more effectively. This is very important in creating meaningful and relevant learning experiences for students. Mindfulness also plays a vital role in

---

<sup>55</sup> Sides, 2024, p. 268.

<sup>56</sup> Machost & Stains, 2023, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Hay et al., 2024, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Dhammapada 1, "Mind," trans. Bhikkhu Buddhārakkhita (1996). "The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha," Access to Insight, n.d., accessed on [February 17, 2025], available at <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.01.budd.html>

<sup>59</sup> Sides, 2024, p. 268.



developing educators' social skills. Educators can better understand learners' feelings and needs by increasing empathy and creating more substantial and supporting classroom relationships. Educators who practice mindfulness tend to be more sensitive to students' emotions, which allows students to provide better support.<sup>60</sup> Higher empathy can help educators overcome conflicts and create a more harmonious learning environment. Educators can create a more supportive and collaborative learning atmosphere by building positive relationships with learners.

Educators who practice mindfulness also tend to be better at communicating. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) highlights mindfulness (*sati*) to cultivate attentiveness and clarity, essential in active listening and constructive responses.<sup>61</sup> Educators can listen more actively and respond constructively, which is crucial in creating a positive learning environment. The *Saṅgīti Sutta* (DN 33) emphasizes that mindful speech (*sammā vācā*) fosters harmonious relationships, enabling educators to build better connections with coworkers, students, and parents.<sup>62</sup> By improving communication skills, educators can build better relationships with coworkers and parents of learners, which in turn can support the overall development of learners. The *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN 21) describes how mindfulness helps individuals maintain patience and equanimity in conversations, reducing conflicts and misunderstandings in the learning environment.<sup>63</sup> Mindfulness can also stimulate the creativity of educators. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118) explains that mindfulness of breathing enhances focus and cognitive flexibility, which are essential for creative thinking.<sup>64</sup> By reducing stress and improving focus, educators can be more open to new ideas and innovative approaches to teaching. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) discusses how mindfulness strengthens cognitive clarity and problem-solving abilities, enabling educators to develop creative and adaptive teaching methods.<sup>65</sup> Mindfulness practices can improve creative thinking and problem-solving skills. The *Bala Sutta* (AN 5.14) describes mindfulness as enhancing mental agility and wisdom, which is essential for innovative thinking and adaptability in education.<sup>66</sup> More creative educators can create a more engaging and relevant learning experience for learners. The *Parihāna Sutta* (AN 4.37) warns that a lack of mindfulness leads to intellectual stagnation, whereas mindfulness nurtures mental sharpness and continuous learning.<sup>67</sup>

Educators can increase student motivation and help achieve learning goals by creating an engaging learning atmosphere. The *Vijjā Sutta* (AN 2.3) asserts

<sup>60</sup> Hay et al., 2024, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>62</sup> *Saṅgīti Sutta*, DN 33, Walshe, 1995, p. 493.

<sup>63</sup> *Kakacūpama Sutta*, MN 21, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 225.

<sup>64</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 943.

<sup>65</sup> *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, MN 44, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 392.

<sup>66</sup> *Bala Sutta*, AN 5.14, Bodhi, 2012, p. 175.

<sup>67</sup> *Parihāna Sutta*, AN 4.37, Bodhi, 2012, p. 537.



that mindfulness is a foundation for wisdom and knowledge, reinforcing the idea that a mindful approach to teaching fosters student engagement and more profound understanding.<sup>68</sup> Educators who practice mindfulness can create a more engaging and interactive learning experience. By becoming more aware of classroom dynamics, educators can adjust teaching methods to meet the needs of students more effectively. High student involvement in teaching and learning can improve learning outcomes and student motivation.<sup>69</sup> Educators who create an engaging learning atmosphere tend to be more successful in achieving learning goals. With all the benefits already mentioned, it is no surprise that mindfulness improves the overall teaching quality. Implementing mindfulness practices in education can be done through training and workshops held by schools. This training can include basic techniques, such as meditation, breathing, and other mindfulness exercises. This training provides knowledge about mindfulness and allows educators to practice and share experiences.<sup>70</sup> Educators can integrate mindfulness practices into their daily routines with the proper support. In addition, mindfulness can also be incorporated into the curriculum. For example, mindfulness sessions can be scheduled regularly in classroom activities to help students and educators practice mindfulness.

Support from school management is essential for the success of mindfulness practice. Educational institutions must create an environment that supports and encourages educators to participate in this practice. The management of academic institutions can provide resources, such as time and space, for mindfulness practices and promote collaboration between educators in applying mindfulness techniques.<sup>71</sup> With the proper support, mindfulness practices can become an integral part of the culture of an educational institution. Overall, mindfulness offers educators a range of significant benefits, from improved mental health to increased teaching effectiveness. By adopting mindfulness practices, educators can enhance personal well-being and create a more positive and supportive learning environment for learners. Therefore, educational institutions and educational institutions need to consider the integration of mindfulness into professional development programs. With proper support, mindfulness practices can help educators be more effective and competitive in facing educational challenges in this modern era.

#### **2.4. Impact on Campus culture**

Campus culture is an essential element that affects the experience and development of students. Various factors, such as respect, creativity, and support, have contributed positively to student satisfaction.<sup>72</sup> In this case, integrating mindfulness into campus life can be an effective strategy for building a more open, respectful, and inclusive culture. Mindfulness, or mindfulness, is

---

<sup>68</sup> *Vijjā Sutta*, AN 2.3, Bodhi, 2012, p. 229.

<sup>69</sup> Hay et al., 2024, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Hay et al., 2024, p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> Sides, 2024, p. 271.

<sup>72</sup> Alsulami et al., 2022, p. 3.

a practice that involves deliberate attention to the present experience without judgment. The application of mindfulness can reduce conflict and bullying, as well as increase collaboration among students.<sup>73</sup> Mindfulness has been adopted in various fields, including education. This concept involves several key elements: awareness, non-judgment, and connectedness. Mindfulness can be practiced in multiple ways, such as meditation, breathing exercises, and self-reflection. Applying mindfulness on campus can help students manage stress, improve concentration, and build better relationships with others.

Integrating mindfulness into campus life fosters greater respect and empathy among students. Through mindful practice, learners become more attuned to others' perspectives, leading to reduced conflict and enhanced cooperation. When students feel seen and understood, they are more likely to contribute positively to the campus community. Mindfulness also plays a key role in reducing bullying by cultivating self-awareness and emotional regulation. Studies indicate that mindfulness-based environments can significantly lower incidents of aggression, promoting a safer and more inclusive educational atmosphere.<sup>74</sup> Mindful campus cultures promote collaboration by fostering mutual respect and psychological safety among students. When learners feel supported and valued, they engage more openly in academic teamwork, strengthening both learning outcomes and essential life skills. Moreover, mindfulness supports students' mental well-being by reducing stress and enhancing resilience, allowing for greater focus and academic engagement. Improved mental health correlates with higher student satisfaction, retention, and overall academic success.<sup>75</sup>

To integrate mindfulness into campus culture, several steps can be taken. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) emphasizes that mindfulness (*sati*) should be systematically cultivated and taught to ensure its effectiveness in everyday life.<sup>76</sup> First, training for lecturers and staff is essential. Campus lecturers and staff must be trained in mindfulness practices to apply them in teaching and student interaction. The *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22) highlights that mindfulness should be consistently practiced and integrated into one's routine to develop wisdom and clarity.<sup>77</sup> This training can include mindfulness techniques used in the classroom and ways to create an environment that supports this practice. Second, campuses can offer mindfulness programs explicitly designed for students. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118) provides a framework for breath-based mindfulness training, which can be adapted into campus programs for stress reduction and emotional regulation.<sup>78</sup> The program can include meditation sessions, workshops on stress management,

<sup>73</sup> Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> Alfaraug et al., 2023, p. 71.

<sup>76</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>77</sup> *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22, Walshe, 1995, p. 337.

<sup>78</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 943.

and self-reflection activities. By providing students access to mindfulness, campuses can help develop skills beneficial for academic and personal life. The *Visuddhimagga*, a renowned Theravāda commentary, explains that mindfulness training strengthens concentration (*samādhi*) and insight (*vipassanā*), enhancing cognitive and emotional intelligence.<sup>79</sup> Community activities, such as mindfulness retreats or discussion groups, can promote mindfulness on campus. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* describes how collective mindfulness practices foster interconnectedness and ethical conduct, reinforcing the importance of social engagement in mindfulness training.<sup>80</sup> This activity allows students to practice mindfulness and builds strong social relationships. Additionally, campus policies that support mindfulness practices can help create a more inclusive culture. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) underscores that structured mindfulness training helps individuals cultivate equanimity and resilience, which can be reflected in campus policies that promote well-being.<sup>81</sup> For example, campuses can adopt policies encouraging meditation or reflection breaks and providing quiet spaces for mindfulness practices.

Although the benefits of mindfulness are apparent, some challenges need to be overcome in its implementation on campus. One of them is a lack of awareness and understanding. Many learners and staff may not understand mindfulness and its benefits enough. The *Bala Sutta* (AN 5.14) states that wisdom (*paññā*) and mindfulness must be cultivated together, suggesting that education about mindfulness should be an integral part of its implementation.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, it is essential to conduct awareness campaigns that explain the concepts and practices of mindfulness. Additionally, the stigma against mental health in some cultures can prevent learners from seeking help or engaging in mindfulness practices. The *Parihāna Sutta* (AN 4.37) warns that neglecting mindfulness leads to mental decline, reinforcing the need for supportive environments that encourage mindfulness without stigma.<sup>83</sup> Campuses need to work to reduce this stigma and create an environment that supports mental health. The *Vijjā Sutta* (AN 2.3) asserts that knowledge arises from mindfulness, emphasizing the importance of integrating these practices into educational institutions for holistic development.<sup>84</sup> Finally, implementing mindfulness programs requires resources, both in the form of time and funds. Campuses need to commit to providing the resources necessary to support these practices. Integrating mindfulness into campus life has great potential to shape a more open, respectful, and inclusive culture. By increasing respect, reducing bullying, encouraging collaboration, and improving mental well-being, mindfulness can contribute to a more positive learner experience.

<sup>79</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>80</sup> *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, Cleary, 1993, p. 215.

<sup>81</sup> *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, MN 44, Ñānamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 392.

<sup>82</sup> *Bala Sutta*, AN 5.14, Bodhi, 2012, p. 175.

<sup>83</sup> *Parihāna Sutta*, AN 4.37, Bodhi, 2012, p. 537.

<sup>84</sup> *Vijjā Sutta*, AN 2.3, Bodhi, 2012, p. 229.

Despite the challenges in its implementation, with the commitment of all parties on campus, mindfulness can be an integral part of the campus culture that holistically supports students' development. Therefore, educational institutions need to consider the application of mindfulness as a strategy to improve campus culture and support student welfare.

### 2.5. Mindfulness and global harmony

Mindfulness, or mindfulness, has become an increasingly discussed topic in mental health and self-development. This practice is not only beneficial for individuals, but it also has the potential to create harmony in the relationship between humans and society as a whole. Developing empathy and compassion through mindfulness can solve an increasingly complex global world where conflicts and misunderstandings often arise. The practice of mindfulness can improve psychological and social well-being, as well as strengthen interpersonal relationships.<sup>85</sup> Mindfulness is a state of consciousness that arises when a person notices the current experience non-judgmentally. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, one of the pioneers of mindfulness, this practice involves deliberate attention to the present experience, be it thoughts, feelings, or physical sensations. By practicing mindfulness, individuals can learn to be more present in the present moment, increasing their understanding of themselves and others. Mindfulness also involves accepting experiences that arise without trying to change or reject them.<sup>86</sup>

Mindfulness can increase emotional awareness, the first step in developing empathy. By becoming more aware of their own emotions, individuals can more easily recognize and understand the feelings of others. This aligns with research showing that individuals who practice mindfulness tend to have higher levels of empathy. The *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22) further elaborates that mindfulness cultivates emotional balance, preventing excessive attachment to emotions while enhancing sensitivity to others.<sup>87</sup> This emotional awareness allows individuals to respond better to the needs and feelings of others, creating more harmonious relationships. The *Mettā Sutta* (SN 1.8) describes how mindfulness, combined with loving-kindness (*mettā*), leads to more profound compassion and positive social interactions.<sup>88</sup> One of the mechanisms underlying increased empathy through mindfulness is the reduction of empathic distress. Empathic distress is a feeling of anxiety or depression that arises when a person feels the suffering of others. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) explains that mindfulness helps individuals observe these emotions without getting overwhelmed, allowing for a more balanced and compassionate response.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Schwind et al., 2024, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Robinson dan Eid, 2017, p. 42.

<sup>87</sup> *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22, Walshe, 1995, p. 337.

<sup>88</sup> *Mettā Sutta*, SN 1.8, Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 25.

<sup>89</sup> *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, MN 44, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 392.

By reducing empathic distress, individuals can focus more on positive actions that help others rather than becoming trapped in negative emotions that hinder action. The *Visuddhimagga*, a *Theravāda* commentary, describes how mindfulness stabilizes the mind, enabling one to respond with wisdom and care rather than reactive emotional distress.<sup>90</sup> In addition to reducing empathic distress, mindfulness increases acceptance of oneself and others. This acceptance is essential in developing compassion, as individuals who accept themselves tend to be more able to accept others, including their differences and shortcomings. The *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* (SN 1.8) supports this view, stating that mindfulness and loving-kindness create a mindset of acceptance and universal goodwill.<sup>91</sup> This can create a more harmonious and mutually supportive environment. Research shows that individuals who practice mindfulness have higher acceptance rates, contributing to increased empathy and compassion. The *Saṅgīti Sutta* (DN 33) notes that mindfulness leads to skillful communication and ethical behavior, both essential for fostering understanding and social harmony.<sup>92</sup> Mindfulness practices can help individuals build healthier and more harmonious relationships. By increasing empathy and compassion, individuals can communicate more effectively and understand the perspectives of others. This is especially important in interpersonal relationships, where conflicts often arise due to a lack of understanding. The *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN 21) explains that mindfulness allows individuals to remain composed and respond with patience and wisdom, reducing unnecessary conflicts.<sup>93</sup>

Individuals who practice mindfulness tend to have better communication skills, contributing to more positive relationships.<sup>94</sup> Mindfulness can also improve social connectedness. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* describes mindfulness as a path to recognizing interconnectedness, reinforcing a sense of belonging, and reducing social isolation.<sup>95</sup> When individuals practice being more present and engaged with others, they tend to feel more connected to the community. This can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are common problems in modern society. The *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 46.53) states that mindfulness nurtures a deep sense of interdependence, strengthening relationships and social bonds.<sup>96</sup>

Individuals can create a stronger support network by improving social connectedness, which is essential for mental well-being. The *Vijjā Sutta* (AN 2.3) highlights that mindfulness is a foundation for wisdom and community harmony, making it a vital practice for strengthening social bonds. Sources were

<sup>90</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>91</sup> *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*, SN 1.8, Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 28.

<sup>92</sup> *Saṅgīti Sutta*, DN 33, Walshe, 1995, p. 493.

<sup>93</sup> *Kakacūpama Sutta*, MN 21, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 225.

<sup>94</sup> Wrench et al., 2025, p. 118.

<sup>95</sup> *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, Cleary, 1993, p. 256.

<sup>96</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, SN 46.53, Bodhi, 2000, p. 1613.



drawn from academic databases, with priority given to recent publications to ensure contemporary relevance, while also incorporating foundational works in the field. The review concentrated on mindfulness applications in education, particularly its impact on stress reduction, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and broader contributions to societal well-being. Studies lacking empirical grounding or unrelated to educational contexts were excluded. The selected literature was critically examined to extract key themes, challenges, and implementation strategies, offering practical insights for integrating mindfulness into educational environments.<sup>97</sup> Mindfulness can also encourage international cooperation. When individuals from different cultural backgrounds practice mindfulness, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of differences and similarities. This can create space for constructive dialogue and collaboration in the face of global issues. Mindfulness can promote intercultural tolerance and understanding, essential in creating practical international cooperation.<sup>98</sup> Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a critical educational approach that aims to develop important skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

According to Zilva SEL focuses on academic achievement, students' emotional well-being, and social competence.<sup>99</sup> SEL improves students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and social skills by creating a more supportive learning environment.<sup>100</sup> One of the key benefits of SEL is the development of emotional skills that assist learners in managing emotions, building positive relationships, and making ethical decisions. Emphasize that these skills are essential in everyday life, both in and off-campus environments.<sup>101</sup> Research shows that SEL interventions are associated with improved test scores, attendance, social skills, and reduced disruptive behavior.<sup>102</sup> By integrating SEL into the curriculum, learners can be more focused and motivated in learning, improving academic outcomes. Although the benefits of SEL are clear, its implementation on campus often faces various challenges. One of the main challenges is the limited resources, both in terms of finance and personnel, which can hinder the effective implementation of the SEL program.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the readiness and training of lecturers in teaching SEL are also essential factors. Without an adequate understanding of SEL principles, lecturers may have difficulty implementing effective classroom strategies. Measuring the outcomes of SEL programs is also a challenge, as many schools struggle to determine the right indicators of success to assess

---

<sup>97</sup> Thiermann & Sheate, 2021, p. 132.

<sup>98</sup> Silveira et al., 2023, p. 16.

<sup>99</sup> Zilva, 2023, p. 24.

<sup>100</sup> Khongsankham et al., 2024, p. 17.

<sup>101</sup> Billy & Garríguez, 2021, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> Zilva, 2023, p. 24.

<sup>103</sup> Khongsankham et al., 2024, p. 12.



the impact of SEL interventions. To overcome these challenges, several innovations and solutions can be implemented. The use of digital tools and personalized learning can help overcome resource limitations. Online learning platforms can provide interactive and engaging SEL materials for learners.<sup>104</sup>

One approach that can strengthen SEL is to integrate mindfulness into education. Mindfulness, or mindfulness, is a practice that helps individuals to focus on the present moment and better manage stress and emotions. Mindfulness can support the development of skills such as empathy, responsible decision-making, and building healthy relationships.<sup>105</sup> Practicing mindfulness can help students focus and concentrate more on learning and reduce mental disorders that often hinder the understanding of lecture material. Mindfulness practices can also help learners manage stress and anxiety, which are usually barriers to academic performance. With breathing and meditation techniques, learners can learn to calm the mind. Additionally, through mindfulness practices, learners can learn to understand better and feel the emotions of others, which are essential components of social and emotional skills.<sup>106</sup> Thus, integrating mindfulness in education is not only beneficial for the individual development of students but can also create a more positive and productive learning environment. To incorporate mindfulness into the curriculum, several steps can be taken. First, training educators on mindfulness techniques and how to teach them to students is very important. Second, holding regular mindfulness sessions in class, such as short meditation or breathing exercises before starting a lesson, can help students to be more mentally prepared. Third, offering mindfulness-focused extracurricular activities, such as yoga or meditation groups, gives learners more opportunities to practice and internalize these skills.

## 2.6. Methodology

This research employs a literature study approach to explore the role of mindfulness in fostering harmonious campus environments and contributing to global harmony. Sources were drawn from academic databases, prioritizing recent publications while including foundational studies. The review focused on the application of mindfulness in education, its effects on stress reduction, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships, as well as broader societal implications. Irrelevant or non-empirical works were excluded. Selected literature was analyzed to identify key themes, challenges, and strategies, providing actionable insights for implementing mindfulness in educational settings.

## III. DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Implementing mindfulness practices

Implementing mindfulness practices in educational settings offers a

---

<sup>104</sup> Khongsankham et al., 2024, p. 26.

<sup>105</sup> Durlak et al., 2011, p. 408.

<sup>106</sup> Durlak et al., 2011, p. 408.

promising solution to address the challenges students and educators face. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) underscores that mindfulness (*sati*) is essential for cultivating self-regulation and emotional stability, foundational qualities for learning and discipline.<sup>107</sup> Modern research aligns with these ancient teachings, demonstrating that mindfulness-based programs (MBPs) improve students' self-regulation and emotional resilience.<sup>108</sup> These programs aim to enhance emotional well-being and promote positive behaviors among learners. The *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22) further elaborates that mindfulness fosters wisdom and clear comprehension, allowing students to develop a balanced mind that supports both academic and personal growth.<sup>109</sup> However, transitioning traditional mindfulness practices – rooted in deep cultural and philosophical traditions – into modern educational frameworks requires careful adaptation. The *Visuddhimagga*, a renowned Theravāda commentary, explains that systematic mindfulness training strengthens concentration (*samādhi*) and insight (*vipassanā*), critical cognitive and emotional development components.<sup>110</sup> Supporting this view, Meiklejohn et al. (2012) found that implementing mindfulness in schools significantly improves students' ability to self-regulate their emotions and behavior, reducing disruptive tendencies in the classroom (p. 325).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the *Dhammapada* (verse 282) states, "When one sees with wisdom, one abandons suffering," reinforcing how mindfulness enables students to manage emotions effectively and cultivate positive habits.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, mindfulness enhances concentration, which directly contributes to improved academic performance. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118) details how breath meditation fosters sustained attention and mental clarity, which are crucial for effective learning and problem-solving.<sup>112</sup> Research by Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, and Walach (2014) confirms that mindfulness interventions improve students' attention span, working memory, and overall academic performance.<sup>113</sup> Mindfulness creates a more positive and supportive school environment by managing anxiety and fostering emotional resilience. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) explains that when adequately cultivated, mindfulness leads to inner peace and reduces reactivity, allowing students to navigate academic pressures more effectively.<sup>114</sup> To ensure effective implementation, it is crucial to develop standardized MBPs tailored to the needs of diverse educational institutions. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* describes how mindfulness fosters interconnectedness and ethical awareness,

<sup>107</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>108</sup> Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 147.

<sup>109</sup> *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22, Walshe, 1995, p. 337.

<sup>110</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>111</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse 282, Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 98.

<sup>112</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 943.

<sup>113</sup> Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, and Walach, 2014, p. 1230.

<sup>114</sup> *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, MN 44, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 392.

suggesting that schools should incorporate mindfulness to promote social harmony and collective growth.<sup>115</sup> Research by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) supports this, showing that school mindfulness-based interventions increase social-emotional competence, better classroom behavior, and higher levels of empathy among students.<sup>116</sup> Comprehensive training for educators and staff is essential, equipping them with the technical and cultural understanding of mindfulness. The *Saṅgīti Sutta* (DN 33) emphasizes that structured training in mindfulness strengthens ethical conduct and wisdom, ensuring educators can model and effectively teach these principles.<sup>117</sup>

Regular evaluations and longitudinal research should assess the long-term impacts of these programs on student behavior, academic outcomes, and overall well-being. The *Vijjā Sutta* (AN 2.3) highlights that mindfulness is the foundation of actual knowledge, reinforcing the need for continuous assessment and refinement of mindfulness-based educational interventions.<sup>118</sup> Supporting this, Waters et al. (2015) found that schools with long-term mindfulness programs reported sustained improvements in student mental health, academic achievement, and teacher well-being.<sup>119</sup>

### 3.2. Bringing practices into the classroom

Incorporating mindfulness into classroom activities can yield significant benefits for students and educators alike. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) emphasizes that mindfulness (*sati*) should be cultivated daily to enhance concentration and emotional stability, which are crucial in learning environments.<sup>120</sup> Simple techniques such as mindful breathing or meditation sessions at the beginning or end of lessons can help students manage stress and improve focus. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118) explains how breath meditation (*ānāpānasati*) develops deep concentration and mindfulness, fostering mental clarity and reducing anxiety, which is particularly beneficial for students.<sup>121</sup> Research by Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, and Walach (2014) confirms that classroom mindfulness-based interventions decrease stress and improve academic performance.<sup>122</sup> Short meditation exercises have been shown to reduce anxiety and prepare students for learning. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) describes how mindfulness enables practitioners to observe thoughts and emotions with equanimity, helping students regulate stress during high-pressure situations such as exams.<sup>123</sup> Supporting this, a study by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) found that students who engaged in mindfulness-based

<sup>115</sup> Cleary, 1993, p. 256.

<sup>116</sup> Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 19.

<sup>117</sup> *Saṅgīti Sutta*, DN 33, Walshe, 1995, p. 493.

<sup>118</sup> *Vijjā Sutta*, AN 2.3, Bodhi, 2012, p. 229.

<sup>119</sup> Waters et al., 2015, p. 245.

<sup>120</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>121</sup> *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 943.

<sup>122</sup> Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, and Walach, 2014, p. 1230.

<sup>123</sup> *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, MN 44, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 392.

learning had improved self-regulation and reduced academic anxiety.<sup>124</sup> The *Visuddhimagga*, a key *Theravāda* commentary, explains that breath awareness is the foundation of concentration and mental stability, equipping learners with tools to manage stress effectively.<sup>125</sup> Additionally, the *Dhammapada* (verse 282) reinforces this idea, stating, “When one sees with wisdom, one abandons suffering,” suggesting that mindfulness enhances self-awareness and cognitive performance.<sup>126</sup>

Mindfulness also fosters emotional regulation, enabling students to observe thoughts and feelings without judgment. The *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 46.53) emphasizes that mindfulness helps individuals maintain emotional balance, reducing impulsivity and promoting thoughtful responses in social and academic settings.<sup>127</sup> Learners who participated in mindfulness programs reported lower stress levels and a better ability to focus on academic tasks. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) found that mindfulness-trained students demonstrated improved emotional resilience and reduced disruptive behaviors in the classroom.<sup>128</sup> Mindful listening practice is another technique that can be applied in the classroom to improve social interaction and understanding between students. The *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN 21) describes the importance of patience and mindful speech in fostering respectful communication and conflict resolution.<sup>129</sup> Encouraging students to listen actively during discussions can create a more inclusive and collaborative learning environment. This exercise involves paying close attention to the speaker, helping students better understand their classmates’ perspectives and contribute more effectively to classroom dialogue. The *Saṅgīti Sutta* (DN 33) highlights that mindful speech and attentive listening contribute to ethical and harmonious communication, which is essential for productive learning environments.<sup>130</sup> Research supports this approach, with studies demonstrating that students trained in mindful listening exhibit stronger interpersonal skills and greater empathy in classroom discussions.<sup>131</sup>

Incorporating mindfulness techniques - such as breath meditation and mindful listening - into classroom activities enhances students’ emotional well-being, focus, and academic engagement. Supported by both Buddhist teachings and contemporary research, mindfulness is shown to improve cognitive function, reduce stress, and strengthen social interaction. In educational settings, it fosters better self-regulation, executive functioning, and classroom behavior for both learners and educators.<sup>132</sup> Mindfulness integration

<sup>124</sup> Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 19.

<sup>125</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>126</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse 282, Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 98.

<sup>127</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, SN 46.53, Bodhi, 2000, p. 1613.

<sup>128</sup> Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 325.

<sup>129</sup> *Kakacūpama Sutta*, MN 21, Ñānamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 225.

<sup>130</sup> *Saṅgīti Sutta*, DN 33, Walshe, 1995, p. 493.

<sup>131</sup> Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 21.

<sup>132</sup> Parker et al., 2014, p. 13.

is very effective for learners, mainly when applied in the long term, and involves active participation from educators.<sup>133</sup> As such, educational institutions must integrate mindfulness into the curriculum to support learners facing emotional and behavioral challenges. For educators, mindfulness training can yield various benefits, including reduced burnout, increased empathy, and improved classroom management and interaction with learners. Educators also benefit from mindfulness training, experiencing reduced burnout and improved classroom management. By integrating mindfulness into their daily routines, educators create a positive ripple effect in the learning environment, promoting emotional resilience among students.<sup>134</sup> This emphasizes the importance of in-depth training and ongoing support for educators.

Integrating mindfulness into the curriculum enriches students' learning experiences across disciplines. In literature, it encourages deeper reflection on themes of self-awareness and emotion, helping students empathize with characters' thoughts and actions. In physical education, mindful breathing enhances kinesthetic awareness and performance. These practices not only improve academic and physical skills but also foster focus, emotional intelligence, and student engagement.<sup>135</sup> This way, mindfulness is a separate practice and an integral part of the learning process. This integration can be done in various ways, such as incorporating mindfulness sessions into lessons, holding special workshops, or developing a mindfulness-focused study program. In this way, learners not only learn about the concept of mindfulness but also how to apply it in daily life. This can help students overcome their challenges inside and outside the classroom. Mindfulness programs integrated into the curriculum can improve self-regulation skills and reduce anxiety among learners.<sup>136</sup> The application of mindfulness in education provides short-term benefits and can have a long-term impact on student development. Learners who engage in mindfulness practice regularly tend to have better social skills, higher emotional regulation abilities, and better academic performance.<sup>137</sup> By developing these skills, students can be better prepared to face future challenges inside and outside the school environment. Integrating mindfulness into education can help create a more positive school culture. When learners and educators are equally committed to mindfulness practices, this can build better relationships and create a more supportive learning environment. This can reduce negative behavior and increase student satisfaction with the learning experience.<sup>138</sup>

### 3.3. Beyond the classroom

The influence of mindfulness extends beyond academics, shaping students' daily lives and fostering a deeper sense of well-being. Mindfulness clubs

---

<sup>133</sup> López-Hernández, 2016, p. 135.

<sup>134</sup> Albrecht et al., 2012, p. 7.

<sup>135</sup> Mulhearn et al., 2017, p. 46.

<sup>136</sup> Bostic et al., 2015, pp. 245 - 259.

<sup>137</sup> Mulhearn et al., 2017, p. 44.

<sup>138</sup> Hartel et al., 2017, p. 113.



and tranquil campus spaces provide supportive environments for reflection, peer connection, and personal growth. These initiatives promote mental health awareness while also cultivating leadership through community-based activities. Quiet spaces offer much-needed respite from academic pressures and reinforce a culture of self-care. Moreover, mindfulness nurtures empathy, global awareness, and social responsibility, preparing students to respond thoughtfully to complex global challenges. In doing so, it supports the development of compassionate, resilient, and engaged global citizens.<sup>139</sup>

Another significant initiative is offering training and workshops for educators on mindfulness techniques and their integration into teaching practices. These programs help educators create more positive classroom environments and support student engagement. They also provide tools for self-care, reducing burnout, and enhancing professional well-being. Research shows such training improves classroom management and supports educators' emotional resilience.<sup>140</sup> The creation of tranquil campus spaces is a vital aspect of promoting mindfulness in educational settings. These areas offer students and staff a quiet retreat for reflection, meditation, and emotional restoration. Designed with calming elements like soft seating, natural décor, and greenery, they serve as reminders of the importance of mental well-being. By providing such environments, institutions support a culture of mindfulness and encourage regular self-care, contributing to the overall wellness of the campus community.<sup>141</sup>

### **3.4. Benefits of a mindful campus: For students**

Campuses that embrace mindfulness principles can profoundly enhance students' academic experiences and overall well-being. Mindfulness, defined as full awareness of the present moment without judgment, has gained increasing importance in higher education. Its practices have been shown to boost academic performance, emotional resilience, and social skills. One of the primary benefits of incorporating mindfulness into educational settings is improving academic performance. Students who engage in mindfulness tend to develop stronger focus and concentration skills, leading to more effective learning outcomes. By practicing mindfulness, students learn to manage external and internal distractions, allowing them to concentrate more fully on academic tasks and perform at their best. Integrating mindful activities in the classroom can reduce perceived stress and improve the ability to focus and absorb information.<sup>142</sup> Students involved in mindful classroom activities have increased their ability to absorb and understand information. Academic stress is a common problem among college students. Mindfulness can help reduce this stress by providing tools for managing emotions and improving mental well-being. Mindfulness-based interventions can reduce the anxiety and stress

<sup>139</sup> Mulhearn et al., 2017, p. 44.

<sup>140</sup> Roeser et al., 2012, p. 133.

<sup>141</sup> Miralles-Armenteros et al., 2021, p. 8.

<sup>142</sup> Schwind et al., 2023, p. 5.



felt by college students, which can enhance students' academic performance.<sup>143</sup>

In higher education, students frequently encounter significant pressures from academic demands and personal challenges. Mindfulness practices can play a vital role in helping students build greater emotional resilience. Mindfulness provides students with valuable tools to manage stress and anxiety effectively. Through regular practice, they learn to recognize and accept their emotions without judgment, reducing the likelihood of becoming trapped in cycles of rumination. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) highlights that mindfulness (*sati*) enables individuals to observe their thoughts and emotions without attachment, reducing mental distress and promoting emotional balance.<sup>144</sup> Research supports this, showing that mindfulness interventions significantly decrease anxiety and rumination, allowing students to focus on academic and personal growth.<sup>145</sup> Additionally, mindfulness training has been shown to alter brain structures related to emotional regulation and attention, reinforcing its long-term benefits for student well-being.<sup>146</sup> By increasing self-awareness and managing emotions, students can build better resilience. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) explains that mindfulness fosters an understanding of emotions and mental states, enabling individuals to regulate their responses effectively.<sup>147</sup> The *Visuddhimagga*, a key *Theravāda* commentary, elaborates that mindfulness strengthens concentration (*samādhi*) and insight (*vipassanā*), essential for maintaining emotional stability in challenging situations.<sup>148</sup> Research confirms this, as studies indicate mindfulness-based interventions significantly enhance students' emotional regulation, stress tolerance, and cognitive flexibility.<sup>149</sup> Additionally, mindfulness training improves students' ability to manage emotions, reducing academic stress and improving performance.<sup>150</sup>

This resilience allows students to bounce back from failures and face challenges more confidently. The *Dhammapada* (verse 25) states, "The wise shape themselves through steady effort, mindfulness, and self-discipline," illustrating how mindfulness contributes to resilience by fostering inner strength and adaptability.<sup>151</sup> Research has shown that students who practice mindfulness regularly develop greater resilience and adaptability in academic settings.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 46.53) emphasizes that mindfulness nourishes mental and cognitive faculties, allowing students to

<sup>143</sup> Lynch et al., 2018, p. 2.

<sup>144</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>145</sup> Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 540.

<sup>146</sup> Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015, p. 213.

<sup>147</sup> *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, MN 44, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 392.

<sup>148</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>149</sup> Chiesa, Serretti, & Jakobsen, 2013, p. 602.

<sup>150</sup> Shapiro et al., 2008, p. 593.

<sup>151</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse 25, Buddhārakkhita, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>152</sup> Keye & Pidgeon, 2013, p. 34.

recover from setbacks with a clearer perspective and renewed motivation.<sup>153</sup> Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) found that students engaging in mindfulness training report greater academic engagement, improved focus, and increased motivation.<sup>154</sup> Students with good emotional resilience tend to have better academic performance and a more positive campus experience. A longitudinal study found that students who consistently practiced mindfulness over a semester showed improved academic outcomes, reduced stress, and increased well-being.<sup>155</sup> This finding aligns with the *Vijjā Sutta* (AN 2.3), which highlights mindfulness as the foundation for wisdom and learning, reinforcing its role in academic success.<sup>156</sup> Additionally, mindfulness fosters a sense of belonging and connectedness within the academic community, reducing social isolation and improving peer relationships.<sup>157</sup>

Mindfulness also enhances students' ability to understand and connect with others. The practice encourages individuals to be fully present and listen attentively, improving their empathy and interpersonal communication capacity. The *Mettā Sutta* (SN 1.8) describes how mindfulness, combined with loving-kindness (*mettā*), cultivates more profound compassion and social harmony.<sup>158</sup> Research supports this, showing that individuals who engage in mindfulness practices report higher levels of empathy and emotional intelligence.<sup>159</sup> This increased self-awareness and emotional sensitivity allows students to navigate social relationships more effectively. Moreover, studies indicate mindfulness helps students improve their communication skills, fostering more precise expression, active listening, and constructive conflict resolution.<sup>160</sup> By improving students' capacity for empathy and self-awareness, mindfulness helps create healthier and more collaborative academic environments. Students who regularly engage in mindfulness practices tend to communicate more effectively, form stronger relationships, and experience greater academic and emotional well-being. Given its benefits, integrating mindfulness into educational settings can be a valuable tool for fostering academic success and personal growth.

### 3.5. Benefits of a mindful campus: For educators

Burnout is a condition of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, particularly in demanding professions such as education. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) emphasizes mindfulness (*sati*) to cultivate awareness and equanimity, allowing individuals to manage stress

<sup>153</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, SN 46.53, Bodhi, 2000, p. 1613.

<sup>154</sup> Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 19.

<sup>155</sup> Bamber & Schneider, 2016, p. 211.

<sup>156</sup> *Vijjā Sutta*, AN 2.3, Bodhi, 2012, p. 229.

<sup>157</sup> Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 832.

<sup>158</sup> *Vijjā Sutta*, AN 2.3, Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 25.

<sup>159</sup> Siegel, 2010, p. 162.

<sup>160</sup> Barnes et al., 2007, p. 453.

without becoming overwhelmed.<sup>161</sup> Mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to reduce stress levels and enhance job satisfaction among educators significantly. Research indicates that these interventions help teachers develop better emotional regulation and self-awareness, which are essential for coping with workplace demands. Additionally, studies suggest that mindfulness practices reshape brain structures associated with stress management, leading to long-term improvements in emotional resilience. Beyond stress reduction, mindfulness also enhances overall well-being. The *Visuddhimagga*, a key Theravāda commentary, explains that mindfulness strengthens concentration (*samādhi*) and insight (*vipassanā*), both crucial for maintaining emotional stability in high-pressure environments.<sup>162</sup> Educators who engage in mindfulness training report lower levels of emotional exhaustion and a greater sense of personal accomplishment. The *Dhammapada* (verse 25) reinforces this by stating, “The wise shape themselves through steady effort, mindfulness, and self-discipline,” illustrating how mindfulness fosters resilience and prevents burnout.<sup>163</sup> This is supported by research demonstrating that mindfulness-based programs significantly lower burnout rates among educators by improving their ability to manage stress and maintain a balanced work-life approach. Mindfulness also improves teaching efficacy, which refers to an educator’s belief in influencing student learning. The *Saṅgīti Sutta* (DN 33) highlights that mindfulness strengthens wisdom and ethical conduct, which are essential for effective teaching and student engagement.<sup>164</sup> Studies show that mindfulness programs enhance educators’ ability to manage classrooms, engage students, and create a more positive learning environment. The *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44) describes mindfulness as a tool for emotional regulation, allowing educators to respond to challenges with patience and composure.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, research indicates that mindfulness teachers develop better relationships with students, leading to stronger classroom interactions and improved student outcomes.

Emotional regulation and self-compassion are also critical components of educator well-being. The *Mettā Sutta* (DN 1.8) describes how mindfulness, combined with loving-kindness (*mettā*), cultivates emotional resilience and a compassionate approach toward oneself and others.<sup>166</sup> Studies confirm that mindfulness enhances educators’ ability to regulate emotions and develop self-compassion, reducing anxiety and preventing burnout. The *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 46.53) supports this by stating that mindfulness nourishes mental faculties, reducing reactivity and fostering resilience.<sup>167</sup> Educators with high

<sup>161</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>162</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>163</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse 25, Buddhārakkhita, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>164</sup> *Saṅgīti Sutta*, DN 33, Walshe, 1995, p. 493.

<sup>165</sup> *The Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, MN 44, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 392.

<sup>166</sup> *Mettā Sutta*, DN 1.8, Buddhārakkhita, 1985, p. 25.

<sup>167</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, SN 46.53, Bodhi, 2000, p. 1613.

levels of self-compassion are better equipped to handle setbacks and maintain a positive mindset. Educators can improve their mental well-being, teaching effectiveness, and overall job satisfaction by integrating mindfulness into daily routines. Both Buddhist discourses and modern research affirm that mindfulness reduces burnout, strengthens emotional resilience, and enhances professional fulfillment. Given its benefits, incorporating mindfulness-based programs into educational settings is a valuable strategy for supporting teachers and students alike.

### 3.5. Benefits of a mindful Campus: For Campus culture

Integrating mindfulness in higher education has significantly improved the campus atmosphere by fostering awareness, empathy, and emotional resilience. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10) emphasizes mindfulness (*sati*) to develop present-moment awareness and cultivate deeper understanding, leading to more harmonious interpersonal relationships.<sup>168</sup> Research supports this, showing that mindfulness enhances students' psychological well-being, reducing stress and anxiety while promoting social engagement.<sup>169</sup> When students engage in mindfulness exercises, such as meditation and reflective journaling, they better understand their emotions and those of their peers, leading to more supportive and compassionate interactions. This aligns with the *Mettā Sutta* (SN 1.8), which describes how mindfulness, combined with loving-kindness (*mettā*), fosters empathy and reduces interpersonal conflicts.<sup>170</sup> Mindfulness-based interventions contribute to a positive campus culture by improving student retention and academic success. The *Dhammapada* (verse 25) states, "The wise shape themselves through steady effort, mindfulness, and self-discipline," reinforcing that mindfulness strengthens self-awareness and emotional regulation, both essential for maintaining academic motivation.<sup>171</sup> When students learn to manage stress through mindfulness, they interact more positively with peers, creating an environment of collaboration and mutual support. Research shows that mindfulness fosters a strong, resilient student community capable of facing academic and social challenges together.<sup>172</sup> The *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 46.53) also supports this, stating that mindfulness enhances clarity and emotional stability, making students more engaged and proactive in their academic and social environments.<sup>173</sup>

Implementing mindfulness programs in educational settings has been linked to reduced bullying and interpersonal conflict. The *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN 21) highlights that mindfulness fosters patience and thoughtful responses, reducing impulsive reactions that often lead to conflicts.<sup>174</sup> Studies

<sup>168</sup> *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>169</sup> Khrantsova & Glascock, 2010, p. 312.

<sup>170</sup> *Mettā Sutta*, SN 1.8, Buddhārakkhita, 1985, p. 25.

<sup>171</sup> Buddhārakkhita, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>172</sup> Holyoke et al., 2022, p. 98.

<sup>173</sup> *Samyutta Nikāya*, SN 46.53, Bodhi, 2000, p. 1613.

<sup>174</sup> *Kakacūpama Sutta*, Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 225.

confirm that mindfulness helps students pause and reflect before reacting, which leads to more constructive conflict-resolution strategies and minimizes aggressive behavior.<sup>175</sup> Additionally, mindfulness creates a safe space for students to express themselves without fear of judgment or retaliation. By encouraging non-reactivity and self-regulation, mindfulness fosters a culture where students are more likely to intervene in bullying situations and support their peers. The *Visuddhimagga*, a key Theravāda commentary, further explains that mindfulness strengthens ethical conduct and social harmony by reducing negative emotions such as anger and resentment.<sup>176</sup> Mindfulness also plays a critical role in increasing global awareness and encouraging responsible citizenship. The *Vijjā Sutta* (AN 2.3) states that mindfulness is the foundation of wisdom and ethical action, reinforcing its importance in shaping socially conscious individuals.<sup>177</sup> Research has shown that mindfulness can increase students' awareness of social justice, environmental sustainability, and cultural diversity by encouraging critical thinking and ethical engagement.<sup>178</sup> By integrating mindfulness into curricula, educators create learning experiences that challenge students to consider multiple perspectives and engage in meaningful dialogue on complex issues.

Mindfulness practices in higher education transform campus culture by fostering collaboration, reducing conflict, and preparing students for thoughtful engagement with global issues. Buddhist teachings and modern research highlight its benefits in creating a more inclusive, supportive, and engaged academic environment. Given its positive impact on student well-being and social consciousness, mindfulness should be integral to educational strategies promoting holistic development and success.

### 3.6. Challenges and solutions

A key challenge in cultivating a mindful campus is resistance to change, often rooted in skepticism about mindfulness and its relevance. This skepticism may stem from limited understanding and the influence of institutional cultural norms. However, research affirms that mindfulness practices in higher education – such as classroom meditation – can significantly reduce stress and anxiety, enhance attention and self-awareness, and promote overall mental and emotional well-being for both students and educators.<sup>179 180</sup> Student groups have successfully promoted mindfulness and contemplative pedagogy on campus, demonstrating that these practices can be accepted and integrated into academic life with the proper support. In addition, a mindfulness-focused community of practice has been formed to support campus residents.<sup>181</sup> This

<sup>175</sup> Nguyenvoges & Lyons, 2017, p. 187.

<sup>176</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa, 2010, p. 271.

<sup>177</sup> *Vijjā Sutta*, AN 2.3, Bodhi, 2012, p. 229.

<sup>178</sup> Nguyenvoges & Lyons, 2017, p. 193.

<sup>179</sup> Fuertes & Wayland, 2015, p. 6.

<sup>180</sup> Miralles-Armenteros et al., 2021, p. 6.

<sup>181</sup> Gardner & Grose, 2015, p. 41.



indicates that by establishing a support network, resistance can be minimized, and participation can be enhanced.

In addition to funding issues, time is also an important factor. Students and staff often have busy schedules with classes, assignments, and extracurricular activities. This makes it challenging to find time to participate in mindfulness practices. To address this issue, universities must find ways to integrate mindfulness practices into existing curricula so that they do not require significant additional time.<sup>182</sup> The high cost of training and material procurement is often a barrier for universities to start these programs. In addition, the low attendance rate at university-sponsored mindfulness activities is a concern for administrators.<sup>183</sup> This suggests that despite efforts to introduce mindfulness, many college students are not engaged, which can reduce the program's effectiveness.

Beyond funding constraints, time availability poses a major challenge. Students and staff often navigate packed schedules filled with classes, assignments, and extracurricular commitments, leaving little room for additional activities. To overcome this, universities should integrate mindfulness practices into existing curricula and routines, ensuring accessibility without requiring significant extra time or effort.<sup>184</sup> Other obstacles include competing strategic priorities, lack of staff support, and limited resources.<sup>185</sup> In many cases, other programs considered more urgent or important can distract attention and resources from mindfulness initiatives. In addition, for students with ADHD, low attention and impulsivity can be an additional challenge to mindfulness interventions.<sup>186</sup>

Cultural sensitivity is another challenge that must be faced in creating a mindful campus. Mindfulness practices should be designed to be inclusive and respectful of the diverse cultural backgrounds of students and staff. This includes acknowledging and appreciating different cultural perspectives on mindfulness and ensuring that the practice does not inadvertently alienate or exclude certain groups.<sup>187</sup> Integrating mindfulness practices in an educational environment can increase cultural sensitivity and create a more inclusive learning environment. A mindful teaching approach supports students and educators throughout the learning process, encouraging awareness, acceptance, empathy, and attendance when working with diverse students.<sup>188</sup> Mindfulness practices can also help business students and managers make better decisions in complex environments, contributing to increased cultural sensitivity and personal growth.<sup>189</sup> To foster a truly mindful campus, institutions must

---

<sup>182</sup> Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 112.

<sup>183</sup> Crane, 2020, p. 6.

<sup>184</sup> Lesley & Linso, 2025, p. 29.

<sup>185</sup> Nguyen et al., 2022, p. 113.

<sup>186</sup> Murrell et al., 2015, p. 314.

<sup>187</sup> Gardner and Grose, 2015, p. 43.

<sup>188</sup> Dougherty et al. 2020, p. 43 – 54.

<sup>189</sup> Randerson & Pillai, 2020, p. 16.



address key challenges such as resistance to change, limited resources, cultural considerations, and the lack of trained personnel. Recognizing these barriers enables universities to develop more effective and compassionate strategies. With a collaborative and inclusive approach, campuses can evolve into environments that not only support academic excellence but also nurture the mental and emotional well-being of all members.

### 3.8. Solutions

Education and awareness are essential foundations for integrating mindfulness into educational settings. Providing clear information about its benefits, supported by scientific evidence, helps build understanding and acceptance. Organizing workshops and seminars for educators, students, and parents introduces practical techniques and core principles. Such initiatives highlight how mindfulness can reduce stress, enhance focus, and support mental well-being, creating a more supportive and informed learning community.<sup>190</sup> Creating accessible educational materials - such as brochures, videos, and articles - plays a key role in promoting mindfulness. Distributing these resources across digital and physical platforms within the academic environment can enhance visibility and engagement. Campus-wide awareness campaigns further help to build understanding and inspire active participation. As awareness grows, both educators and students are more likely to embrace mindfulness as part of their daily routines.

A practical approach to introducing mindfulness into the educational curriculum. This approach allows learners and educators to adapt to new practices without feeling overwhelmed, and students become familiar with basic practices. The program can be expanded by adding more complex techniques, such as more in-depth breathing exercises or reflection after learning activities. It is important to introduce practices gradually to ensure better understanding and engagement.<sup>191</sup> With a gradual approach, learners can internalize mindfulness as part of a routine, which can ultimately improve their well-being and academic performance.

Inclusive practices are vital to ensure all learners can meaningfully engage with mindfulness programs. This requires adapting activities to reflect students' cultural backgrounds, values, and needs. Culturally responsive approaches - such as integrating local traditions into mindfulness techniques - enhance relevance and participation. Programs that honor cultural diversity are not only more engaging but also more effective in achieving emotional and educational outcomes.<sup>192</sup> Ensuring accessibility for all learners, including those with special needs, is essential in mindfulness programs. This involves offering materials in multiple formats and adapting techniques to accommodate diverse abilities. Engaging parents and the wider community can further reinforce support systems for learners. Through inclusive design and collaborative involvement,

---

<sup>190</sup> Sisk, 2017, p. 1.

<sup>191</sup> Paolini, 2015, p. 24.

<sup>192</sup> Lau, 2009, p. 172.

educational institutions can foster a mindful environment where every student is empowered to participate fully.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Creating a mindful campus is a transformative approach that enhances personal well-being while contributing to global harmony. By cultivating mindfulness among students and educators, institutions can foster environments that support academic excellence, emotional resilience, and social responsibility. Mindfulness integration improves concentration, reduces stress, and strengthens interpersonal skills - an essential foundation in a world where learners increasingly face mental health challenges. Embedding these practices into curricula and campus culture not only prepares students for academic success but also equips them with life skills to contribute meaningfully to society. Though challenges such as cultural adaptation and resistance to change exist, they can be addressed through inclusive planning, training, and community engagement. As global interdependence deepens, the educational sector holds a critical role in nurturing awareness, compassion, and ethical living. A campus rooted in mindfulness prepares students to become not only capable professionals but also socially and environmentally conscious citizens. Thus, the journey toward a mindful campus is more than a program - it is a strategic, values-driven commitment to shaping a more peaceful and sustainable future through collective educational effort.

\*\*\*

#### REFERENCES

- Bamber, M. D., & Schneider, J. K. (2016). Mindfulness-based programs for student well-being: A systematic review. *Mindfulness*, 7(2).
- Bodhi, B. (2000). *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications.
- Bodhi, B. (2012). *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications.
- Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), 822–848.
- Buddhaghosa. (2010). *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Buddhist Publication Society.
- Crane, R. S. (2017). Implementing Mindfulness in the Mainstream: Making the Path by Walking It. *Mindfulness*, 8(3), 585–594.
- Crosby, K., & Skilton, A. (1995). *Śāntideva: The Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Oxford University Press.
- Dave, D. J., et al. (2020). Impact of Mindfulness Training on the Well-Being of Educators. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 26(7), 645–651.

- Hölzel, B. K., et al. (2011). How does mindfulness meditation work? Mechanisms of action from a conceptual and neural perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(6), 537–559.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.
- Luberto, C. M., et al. (2018). A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of mindfulness-based interventions on cortisol. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 101, 44–55.
- Meiklejohn, J., et al. (2012). Integrating mindfulness training into K–12 education: Fostering the resilience of teachers and students. *Mindfulness*, 3(4), 291–307.
- Roeser, R. W., Skinner, E., Beers, J., & Jennings, P. A. (2012). Mindfulness training and teachers' professional development. *Mindfulness*, 3(3), 211–221.
- Schonert-Reichl, K. A., et al. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a mindfulness-based school program. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(1), 52–66.
- Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., & Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools – a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 603.



# THE NEED FOR BUDDHIST VALUES IN WESTERN SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON CENTRAL EUROPE AND EDUCATION

Prof. PhDr. Milada Polišínská, CSc\*

## Abstract:

The paper is introduced by a brief overview of the origins and development of knowledge on Buddhism and its practice in Central Europe and especially in Czechia, and including the values dominating Central European and Czech society nowadays. Then, the paper concentrates on its key focus, which is education and the young generation in general from the perspective of today's crisis, uncertainty about how to solve it, and the apparent and alarming inability to solve the current situation. The conclusion of the paper suggests that it would be necessary to draw much more systematically from Buddhism because Buddhism contains values and shows a path that is missing in today's Western/ Central European society and which is the only path leading out of the dead end in which Western/ Central European society find itself today.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism; education; four noble truths; noble eightfold path; central europe; czechia; poland; hungary; communism; lotus center in prague; dharma gate buddhist college; end of western civilization; venerable dhammadipa.*

\*\*\*

## I. BEGINNINGS OF BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL EUROPE

The first encounters of Central Europeans with Buddhism date back to the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> The frequency of contacts increased in the 17th century and the Enlightenment period. However, it was knowledge mediated through travelers, priests, and other Europeans who visited Asia and had been exposed to the Buddhist environment, or it was knowledge and experience acquired from colonial powers in Western Europe, France, and Great Britain.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Prvním Středoevropanem, který uváděl, že je Čech, byl Odorik z Pordenone, který navštívil který navštívil Tibet a Čínu v letech 1325 - 1330. Liščák (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Lípa (2019): 31 - 67.

Knowledge and practice of Buddhism began to open its way to Central Europe in the 1920s. In the academic sphere, Departments of Indology or Oriental Studies were inaugurated at Central European universities, where outstanding scholars taught and who were not only academics but also important disseminators of Buddhist knowledge in academia and among a wider public. It was for example Vincenc Lesný in Prague,<sup>3</sup> and Otakar Pertold, the first professor of religious studies in Prague, who, according to the testimony of many of his contemporaries, was a Buddhist and managed to survive the domination of the totalitarian regimes of Nazism.<sup>4</sup>

Buddhism spread in Czechia more than this brief insight can offer. Personal trips to South and Southeast Asia for spiritual purposes increased, and a pleiade of European spiritual thinkers came to Prague, although not exclusively Buddhists, but often esotericists or mystics, yet significantly influenced by Buddhism, such as Paul Brunton or the theosophist Rudolf Steiner. A significant figure in Czech mysticism who cannot be left out of the list was Karel Weinfurter, from whom many Czech practitioners of Eastern philosophy and yoga drew their inspiration.<sup>5</sup> František Drtikol, who is today known mainly as an art deco photographer, is considered the founder of Czech Buddhism. He translated a number of Buddhist texts into Czech.<sup>6</sup> We could mention many more names in this context.

## II. TOTALITARIAN REGIMES AND SPIRITUALITY

The development of Buddhism and spiritual movements in general in Central Europe was tragically interrupted for decades by the Nazi occupation of some countries and satellitization of others from 1939 to 1945.

Religious education in schools was banned, families who openly professed faith were persecuted, and their children were used as a tool to force their parents to abandon their faith, monastic orders were dissolved and banned, and churches were pushed to the very margins of society. However, the situation was not the same in all Central European countries. The worst was in today's Czech Republic, then Czechoslovakia. In Poland and in Hungary,<sup>7</sup> the approach of communist authorities towards the church was at some periods slightly milder. I would very much like to explain the reasons for this

---

<sup>3</sup> Vincenc Lesný (1882 - 1953), from 1924 Professor of Indology at Charles University in Prague, 1937-1939 Dean of Philosophical Faculty (in 1939 the Czech universities were closed by the Nazi occupational regime). From 1945 Lesný was Director of Oriental Institute in Prague. He established Indické sdružení [Indian Association], was co-founder of the journal *New Orient* and in 1952 became one of first members of Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.

<sup>4</sup> Polišenská (1989): 79 - 99.

<sup>5</sup> Sanitrák (2006): continuously throughout the entire volume up to page 325.

<sup>6</sup> Lípa, Jan. *Fráňa Drtikol. Životopis*, accessed on [February 20, 2025], available at: [http://arahat.unas.cz/cs/fd\\_cv\\_cs.php](http://arahat.unas.cz/cs/fd_cv_cs.php)

<sup>7</sup> After the suppression of the Hungarian uprising against the communist dictatorship by the Soviet army in 1956, a somewhat milder communist regime was established, which was nicknamed Goulash Communism.



development in more detail, but that would take us too far from our topic, which focuses on Buddhism.

### III. PRACTICING BUDDHISM UNDER THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN CENTRAL EUROPE

There were small groups in Czechia that were dedicated to Buddhist meditation. Therefore, the Buddhist meditation groups were usually connected with the practice of yoga, but yoga did not have an easy situation either. The few yoga groups that existed were hiding under the guise of physiotherapy and rehabilitation in hospitals and medical centers.<sup>8</sup> However, these more-than-modest conditions and many hardships gave rise to several exceptionally experienced, profound, and wise personalities. The Buddhist foundation developed exceptionally among them and bore its fruits, from which the rest of us eagerly drew in the 1990s and early 21st century.<sup>9</sup>

Anyone who remembers these yogic-Buddhist, or rather Buddhist with a small portion of yoga activities, cannot forget them. The meetings took place in remote places and rather primitive conditions of abandoned or unmaintained rural cottages, with only a small group of people in attendance. Maintaining a vegetarian diet required considerable ingenuity due to the lack of vegetarian ingredients and even the limited supply of vegetables and fruits. Buddhist texts were smuggled across the border and secretly translated and distributed, and there were only a few people who made it to Indian ashrams during a brief liberal period of the so-called Prague Spring of 1968<sup>10</sup>. But many eyewitnesses say that it was these conditions of modesty and renunciation that opened to the practitioners a Buddhist path.

A special case is Poland, which is a country with a very strong Catholic tradition. The position of the Catholic church increased, especially after the Pole Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II. The Catholic faith helped Poland to face difficult historical periods in the 20th century, Nazism<sup>11</sup> and its dominant position made the space for Buddhism relatively smaller. Despite its prevailingly Catholic orientation, Eastern spirituality, particularly Buddhism, developed in Poland, benefiting from relatively more favorable conditions in the country, at least during some periods of the 20th Century. In the 1970s, the development in Poland undoubtedly meant a strong flow of spiritual development, both Christian and Buddhist. For example, the travels behind the Iron Curtain were in many cases easier for Poles than for Czechs. In the 1970s, Polish university students were able to go on trips to India, Sri Lanka, and the Far East, as the author can testify based on own observations, and these experiences certainly impacted young people significantly.

---

<sup>8</sup> Foreword by Stanislav Čelíkovský to Lysebeth (1978).

<sup>9</sup> I would name for example Milada Bartoňová, Karel Nešpor.

<sup>10</sup> Again, Milada Bartoňová has to be named, and also Jiří Čumpelík and Mírko Frýba, who later became a Buddhist monk.

<sup>11</sup> Snyder, *op. cit.*

#### IV. BUDDHISM AFTER COMMUNISM – 1990S AND BEGINNING OF 21ST C. IN CZECHIA

After the fall of communism and the restoration of democracy in Central Europe in late 1989, conditions changed quickly in this field as well. Catholic priests had to come from Poland to Czechoslovakia,<sup>12</sup> which was a real desert in terms of spirituality and had a reputation as the most atheistic European country, which also had its deeper historical roots,<sup>13</sup> to fill the vacancies in the church administration, in parishes, etc. Also teachers of Eastern religions – Buddhists – came from Poland. The similarity of Czech and Polish languages made the communication easier.

Buddhist monks and teachers from abroad, prevailingly from Asia, began to come to Czechia, for instance Bhante Wimala and Lama Ole Nydahl, and gave public lectures where the attendance was very high. Buddhist literature was published by domestic authors and in translations. A number of centers were established, such as the Lotus Center in Prague,<sup>14</sup> which provides even today a home for Buddhists of several schools. Czechs began to travel abroad, mainly to India, Thailand, Sri Lanka and other Buddhist countries, in search for a deeper exposure to Buddhism. Buddhism as part of religious studies returned again to Czech universities and the Academy of Sciences.

I don't want to idealize too much this period of hectic developments, when, in addition to what has been said, a wave of New Age movement appeared and a search for a spiritual path mixed from time to time with superficiality and amateurism. Nevertheless, this period of flowering lasted throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century; it was a remarkable time of connection of the old generation of practitioners with the new enthusiasts.

#### V. CHANGES AS THE 21ST CENTURY PROGRESSES

It seems that the Buddhist scene in the Czech Republic today has changed compared to the first decade of the 21st century, and I am afraid that not for better. Buddhist teachers no longer come here, and if they do, they do not give lectures to a wider public as before, and usually only resort to their narrowest circle. At least the author of this article, who has been closely and actively following these events, has not noticed any substantial activity. Those spiritual teachers who were previously active in Czechia have mostly transferred their activities to other countries, as far as can be ascertained from the Internet.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> In Czechia, approx. one tenth of Catholic priests are Polish. Mészáros, Pavel. *Rodinný život mi chybí. Ale žádná žena by se mnou nevydržela, říká kněz Czendlik* [I miss the family life. But no women could stand me], accessed on [February 16, 2025], available at: <https://www.denik.cz/spolecnost/byt-vsichni-farari-jako-zibi-zacal-bych-chodit-do-kostela-20191019.html>

<sup>13</sup> This is caused by the interpretation of medieval Hussite movement, and by identification of Habsburg monarchy with catholicism, or rather by identification of anti-Habsburg position with Czech protestant religion and tradition.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.centrumlotus.cz/en/>

<sup>15</sup> For example, Venerable Bhante Y. Wimala.

In respect of other Central European countries, in Hungary, another Central European country, the situation is different and seems to be more favorable to Buddhist values. Although from the political view, Hungarian President Viktor Orbán, who has been the leading figure in Hungarian politics for many years, is being criticized for his departure from the European political mainstream of liberal democracy and for some his accommodating steps towards Vladimir Putin, *Dharma Gate Buddhist College*<sup>16</sup> has been operating in Budapest, the Hungarian capital, for many years, providing Buddhist education and a variety of spiritual activities and meetings. A *Buddhist stupa* has also been built in Hungary, one of the biggest or the very biggest stupa in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Other Central European country that we are examining in this brief survey is Slovakia, formerly part of Czechoslovakia, where the spiritual life is clearly at a much weaker level.

## VI. BUDDHISM IN TIME OF MATERIAL ABUNDANCE AND PROSPERITY

So far, I have briefly described and positively characterized the 1990s and the first decade - the decade and a half - of the 21st century as a time of promising development of spiritual life in Czechia, and of a society open to seek and positively accept Buddhist teaching and Buddhist teachers who often came to this country.

Of the domestic figures, few local Buddhists who went through a challenging path in search for knowledge during the communist era, without having a chance of contact with the Buddhist environment in South and Southeast Asia and the Far East, with minimal or no contact with Buddhist teachers, had later a significant influence and now enjoyed a highest respect. Very influential were Eduard Tomáš and his wife Míla, valued for their high spirituality, and also Milada Bartoňová. A different path, probably thanks to the fortunate circumstances of the Prague Spring, was chosen by Thomas Peter Guttman, who, after graduating from Charles University in Prague went abroad, continued his studies and became a Buddhist monk and teacher under the name Dhammadipa. He is now back in Czechia serving to the great benefit of the local Buddhist community.<sup>18</sup> Yet, contrary to expectations and assumptions, in the environment of abundance and prosperity that now prevails in my homeland,<sup>19</sup> both spirituality and physical moderation have sharply decreased, even though nothing prevents their development. The extraordinary generation of spiritual teachers had already reached an advanced

---

<sup>16</sup> *Dharma Gate Buddhist College Budapest*, last accessed on [February 12, 2025], available at: <https://dghc.hu>

<sup>17</sup> Molnar, Jozsef. *Zalaszántó Stupa: One of the Biggest Stupas in Europe*, accessed on [February 12, 2025], available at: <https://themindcircle.com/zalaszanto-stupa/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.dhammadipa.cz/cs/biography/>

<sup>19</sup> Although Czechs mostly complain, the truth is that the standard of living is high and the country belongs to the safest. The surveys and statistics confirm that.

age - they are mostly in their seventies, often in their eighties and older, and today we meet them exceptionally, because human age takes its toll.

What was already evident around the mid-2010s has deepened and surfaced even more after the Covid-19 pandemic. In Prague and throughout the country, there are beautifully furnished yoga studios, where beautiful and excellently trained instructors teach yoga. Many of them have also completed trainings in famous, often very expensive centers abroad, sometimes they also visited India, but everything is oriented primarily to a practice of various types of yoga - Ashtanga, Iyengar, Power Yoga, Gravid Yoga, Senior Yoga, Facial Yoga and other. However, there are just a few Buddhist centers<sup>20</sup> in the country, all of them founded during the flourishing period described above. They continue to run their programs and their management is a wonderful example of devotion, perseverance, and a true Buddhist approach. But they are less visible than they used to be and new ones do not open, or very exceptionally.

Not enough that we have in Prague several Buddha bars where people go to have alcoholic drinks, smoke not just cigarettes but also „something else,“ etc., and big golden Buddha statues are used to decorate these places. The same is the case of most of massage salons. Recently, it has even happened that Buddhist symbols and quasi-Buddhist behavior have been demonstrated in a very caricatured manner. The most bizarre situation occurred last year when one of the richest Czechs, tried for a very large-scale financial fraud amounting to billions Czech Crowns in value during the privatization<sup>21</sup> of one of the largest coal mining areas in the country, declared himself a Buddhist, wore a white silk top head and orange jeans and T-shirt and constantly disturbed the legal procedure by requesting time for Buddhist meditation and exercise, used quasi Buddhist gestures, ridiculed the lawyers and made the audience laughing.<sup>22</sup>

It would certainly not be right to claim that a regime of oppression and lack of basic needs is needed for the development of authentic spirituality. However, the Middle Way (*Majjhimāpaṭipadā*) is very important, and Buddhism shows the true direction that we are currently missing.

„There's a bad mood throughout the land“

Now, I would like to address the topic from another perspective. In the period of enthusiasm and naive feeling that all problems are gone with the Iron Curtain being gone, the vocabulary used in official documents, in press, and also in diplomacy, in TV and media, correspondingly reflected expectations of positive developments.<sup>23</sup> Of course, there were many problems and I do

<sup>20</sup> A new center worth mentioning is the Shanta Vana Foundation and Meditation Center, founded in Bohemia by the venerable Dhammadipa. <https://www.dhammadipa.cz/cs/>

<sup>21</sup> Privatization was the process of returning property nationalized by the communist regime to its original owners. Despite the intention of correcting wrongs, the process was also affected by financial and property fraud, often on a large scale.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/krimi-jak-rikame-my-buddhisti-kolacek-ve-smokin-g-s-motylkem-presvedcoval-soud-o-sve-nevine-40425995>

<sup>23</sup> The 1990s are today associated with the atmosphere of enthusiasm, relief, good

not want to go deeper into this issue, and not everything was so nice – let's mention at least the 9/11. However, the prevailing narrative was positive, including narrative of European Union: common and shared European values, tolerance, cooperation, understanding, mutual support, non-aggression and such. If we say „common European values“, it looks as very far from Buddhism, as the basis of European civilization is Christianity. But many of postulates – compassion, mindfulness, non-aggressivity, peace of mind, understanding, support, and other fundamental qualities, are common for both, Buddhism and Christianity.<sup>24</sup> It was very promising time.

Unfortunately, today, the situation is very different. At first, the early bird of the coming changes was rather humorous, when the Czech President Václav Havel, who had a subtle sense of the state of society and the atmosphere of the time, uttered a memorable sentence that was later widely quoted and went down in history: “There's a bad mood throughout the land.”<sup>25</sup> I hope that the subtle and sad humor of this statement was not lost in translation. However, that was the very beginning, at least in Czechia.

Nowadays, no one mentions common European values, either in European Union neither in Czechia. The main topic that has dominated the professional and public space for several years is catastrophic visions, going as far as apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic ideas. This is something that did not exist at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century. Centers and institutes for apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies are being established at universities, one of the most important of which is at the leading German university in Heidelberg.<sup>26</sup> European centers are specialized almost exclusively on Christian eschatology only, even though cosmologies and cosmographies of all world religions deal with the theme of the end of the world, to put it short. However, all world religions, eschatologies and cosmologies deal with the end of the world, the Day of Judgment, as well as considerations of what happens to the human body after death - Christianity, Hinduism and others. Islam and Christianity are relatively close in this. According to Hinduism, very briefly, the world does not last forever, but is periodically destroyed and re-created and the time is cyclical in Hinduism. It gradually passes through four yugas (ages). Between every two ages there are 400 years of twilight of the previous one and then 400 years of dawn of the following age. Lord Shiva destroys the present world but next world is emerging on its place.<sup>27</sup>

---

expectations and trust in the future.

<sup>24</sup> In Czechia, for example, the following literature is available on this issue, primarily from domestic authors, with several titles in translation. Thích, Nhất Hạnh (1996), Scheufler (1992), Wolf (2014).

<sup>25</sup> For the first time Václav Havel used this phrase in his speech in Prague Rudolfinum Hall in 1997. *Kaiser* (2014): 222 – 228.

<sup>26</sup> Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies. University Heidelberg, Germany.

<sup>27</sup> Miltner (2001).



In respect of Buddhism, there are different Buddhist cosmologies. Certain traditional Buddhist ideas about the world are incompatible with modern science and have been abandoned by a number of modern Buddhists. The 14th Dalai Lama says that “my own view is that Buddhism must abandon many aspects of the Abhidharma cosmology.” He sees the mistakes of this traditional cosmology as not affecting the core of Buddhism (the teaching of the *Four Noble Truths* and liberation) since it is “secondary to the account of the nature and origins of sentient beings.”<sup>28</sup>

The topic of the end of the world is not just a Central European topic, as shown for example by international Symposium “Precarious Water Futures and the End(s) of World(s) – an Integrative Dialogue Across Disciplines and Societies,” organized by India-German Centre of Advanced Studies in New Delhi.<sup>29</sup>

If we dwell more on the topic of the end of Western civilization, on the one hand, this is not an easy theme, and it could at least strengthen an interest in this particular civilization and civilizations in general, which is generally quite low today for a number of reasons. However, I would like to point out that in the Western European civilization sphere, from the collapse of the Roman Empire to the present day, preachers and leaders have appeared always from time to time and continue to appear, predicting the approaching end of the world, Judgement Day, end of the civilization and other related fatalities.<sup>30</sup>

These preachers, of course, depending on the communication technology at the time, through sermons in medieval times, or via social networks today, had sometimes a large response, sometimes even hysterical, of large audiences, and some were able to trigger broad movements that sought to build a new society. I do not want to go into the teachings of Christian chiliastic sects and other movements here, but it should be emphasized that today’s journalism about the end of civilization is nothing unusual in history, it has happened many times before, whatever the main reason was. It must also be acknowledged that today’s wave of apocalyptic topics is not just a journalistic pursuit of attractivity, but has a real basis. It reflects deep-rooted existential anxiety, fear of the future, of the unknown, of the end, and death.<sup>31</sup>

In Czechia, there are at this time rather frequent public lectures on the end of European civilization and/ or end of Western civilization. These lectures are

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> ICASMP – M. S. Merian-R.Tagore International Center of Advanced Studies/Metamorphoses of the Political. <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org>

<sup>30</sup> These were chiliastic movements that appeared particularly in critical and turning points, especially in connection with the emergence and development of reformist Christian movements.

<sup>31</sup> Recent pandemic of Covid-19 was without any doubt one of the sources of these feelings and there are many evidences that people still feel the time of Covid as an interruption or break of their life. The current conflict in even increased the anxiety and stress. Hays, Hayden, Polišínská (2023).



given by serious scientists, such as the leading world-class Czech Egyptologist Miroslav Bárta,<sup>32</sup> whose specialization leads to understanding and knowledge of the development and end of the civilization of ancient Egypt, and other scholars. Their academic expertise and also responsibility allows them to speak on this topic in a qualified manner and then that is fine.

## VII. EDUCATION

Approaching the conclusion of my paper, I would like to focus on education. Traditionally, in all or most publications about Czech education, we encounter a proud presentation of excellent education, which goes back to the 18th century, to the reign of Empress Maria Theresa, who implemented a very progressive educational reform for her time.<sup>33</sup> It suddenly catapulted Czechia to the position of the most educated or one of the most educated countries in Europe with almost zero illiteracy.

But where are we today? I will now skip education during the Cold War. Curricula have been revised at all levels of the education system, in many cases accompanied by a deep discourse on the objective interpretation of a number of issues. Borders have been opened for pedagogical and student mobility at both secondary and university levels. A new accreditation system was established, and private schools of all levels, including universities, began to emerge.<sup>34</sup>

A very painful issue that has been on the table for more than 30 years is the financial undervaluation of teachers. Under the communist regime, the teaching profession was very poorly paid, because the communist ideology<sup>35</sup> considered the intelligentsia to be a segment of the population that always tends to lean towards the bourgeoisie. This was also related to the fact that the teaching profession was very feminized.

---

<sup>32</sup> Miroslav Bárta (born 1969) is a Czech professor of Egyptology, an archeologist and politician. From 2011 he has been a leader of research in the archeological site of Abusir in Egypt and 2013-2019 a Director of Czech Institute of Egyptology. In 2024 he was elected a Senator. In addition to Egyptology, he has also been studying collapses, rises and falls of civilizations in an interdisciplinary research perspective and authored several books on this topic.

<sup>33</sup> Empress Maria Theresa in 1774 introduced an universal education for both boys and girls, consisting of compulsory six-year school attendance and a system of schools with teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic, religion, agriculture and, for girls, housework. A system of higher education was build on this foundation.

<sup>34</sup> Just to mention few aspects: the academic mobility financially supported by the European Union called Erasmus provided a great source of knowledge and experience, the system of grants allowed for ambitious international research cooperation, many post doctoral students earned experience in post doct academic stays at universities and research institutions abroad. The access to foreign literature which previously was very difficult or non-existent was also a great source of knowledge and today, the university graduates easily communicate in English.

<sup>35</sup> The economy of the communist states was primarily heavy industry oriented and was regulated by COMECON, Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. The economies were regulated by central planning and gradually were not able to satisfy the need of domestic market and stayed behind the developed Western economies.

Although there were in the last decades repeated promises of correction and indeed, salaries were repeatedly increased, especially for primary school teachers, the teaching profession in the Czech Republic still remains financially undervalued. This is also associated with a number of other negative phenomena, especially in primary and secondary schools, including little respect for this profession, a tendency towards formalism, reluctance to engage more deeply and sincerely, and above all, a lack of those who would like to devote themselves to the teaching profession.<sup>36</sup>

The situation of university teachers, particularly post-docs, assistant professors and lecturers in their 30s and 40s in general, is no less difficult. Low salaries lead to the fact that most of them, especially young ones, teach courses at several universities, which makes it impossible for them to devote themselves to scientific work, research, and publishing activities. The struggle for the accumulation of „points“ prevails, and blind reviews of articles or projects are extremely rarely written with an effort to honestly evaluate and recommend improvement, but are mostly a malicious effort to harm and prevent the proposed work from being published. This unfortunate state of affairs is widely criticized, but it looks as it is not in the power of our current academia to change it.<sup>37</sup> The main mission of a teacher or scholar is disappearing.

Alarming articles by experts appear daily on the psychological state of young people, especially primary school pupils and secondary school students.<sup>38</sup> The psychologists openly admit that they do not know how to cope with this situation. Among these children, suicide attempts and completed suicides, depression, self-harm, on the other hand, aggression, bullying, etc., are increasing.

The high school admissions system<sup>39</sup> is currently heavily criticized for causing significant stress for children and high financial costs for their parents.<sup>40</sup> It would certainly not be good if young people were not prepared to set their goals and strive for them. However, I feel very clearly that this system is not entirely healthy, that the amount of information that surrounds us is so immense that it cannot be processed without a solid foundation, and that the values of Buddhism, at least the basic ones, are what is very much needed to give our world and life in it direction and guidance.

---

<sup>36</sup> Based on personal experience of the author and her family.

<sup>37</sup> Based on personal experience of the author and conversation with the peers.

<sup>38</sup> Just few titles of recent articles to illustrate the situation: We missed the train in child mental health care; The surge in aggression among young people is mainly the impact of the pandemic, which hit the teenage generation hardest; Police in Prague arrested another student due to a threat of shooting at school, and more. The articles are from <https://www.novinky.cz/> of February 2025.

<sup>39</sup> There is a unified test administered and evaluated by Cermat (Center for determining educational outcomes).

<sup>40</sup> Children can attend preparatory courses for entrance exams and also take mock exams in advance. These options come with quite high fees, which many families cannot afford.

## VIII. THE BUDDHIST PATH FROM THE DEAD END

In Czech history, there are periods of great spiritual growth and development, and they are truly admirable. However, it is a great mistake for those who experienced or experience them to believe that such events are the beginning of a permanent state, that the new, changed situation will stay with us forever.<sup>41</sup> And it is here that we find a great Buddhist lesson, which most Czechs lack. It is the awareness that everything is constantly changing and evolving. From this ignorance, a number of negative feelings, frustrations and erroneous assessments of reality stem.

After the fall of communism and the famous Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the impression arose – and it was spread and shared by the media, academics and experts alike – that the division of the world was over forever, that from now on everything would develop only peacefully, that all evil had been eliminated and so on. Although the author of this article admits that she herself, as many other people, remembers with nostalgia the enthusiasm and positive atmosphere of those times, she is well aware of the transient and changing nature of the essence and external appearance of everything.

Today, even the vocabulary of that time, in which words such as love, cooperation, common values, trust, truth, and others were often repeated, is sarcastically mocked as naive, detached from reality, etc. The main representatives of the opposition to communism, who were loved by the entire nation and abroad, are now mockingly called Truth-Lovers<sup>42</sup> (but in Czech, it sounds much more mocking), based on Václav Havel's famous slogan "Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred." Only a few of them have remained as public figures; however, their political views have also changed significantly towards the politics of realism.

I stated at the beginning of this paper that I am not a scholar researching Buddhism, but a lifelong enthusiastic follower, admirer, and student of Buddhism, trying to find and work on Buddhist theory of social sciences, in contrast to current main stream of theories of social sciences prevailing and dominating in the West. It is precisely these days that I am increasingly aware of the importance and universality of Buddhist teachings.

The *Four Noble Truths* (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*) teach the basic foundation of Buddhism on *dukkha* (suffering caused by the awareness of the transient existence of everything); *samudaya* closely related *dukkha* which means attachment to the transient, unstable world origin and existence. *Nirodha* teaches that the attachment to this transient substance of everything can be ended by letting go of this attachment. *Marga* is a path toward the liberation

---

<sup>41</sup> This state of mind was, despite many difficulties, very typical for the period after the collapse of Iron Curtain and end of the Cold war. It is a source of nostalgia of many who remember those times.

<sup>42</sup> One of the most popular mottos of Václav Havel was that „Truth and Love Must Prevail Over Lies and Hatred.“ The „True-Lovers“ is derived from this motto.

from *dukkha*.<sup>43</sup>

Closely connected and of a profound importance evidenced in the past and highly needed at present is the *Noble Eightfold Path* (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*).<sup>44</sup> All its components are nowadays not observed, they are ignored or even violated. But Buddhism offers here a fundamental and universally valid, positive instructions or principles and the compliance with them is lacking in Czechia.

If we start from the second point, then Right Resolve (*samyaka-saṃkalpa/ sammā-saṅkappa*) is clearly not applied in today's society, just like Right Speech (*samyag-vāc/ sammā-vācā*) – let's mention at least a few phenomena here: many-hour speeches in parliament, fake news and disinformation campaigns, constant chatter on mobile phones, I would also include the tabloid press and other. Right Conduct or Action (*samyak-karmānta/ sammā-kammanta*) is not among the respected values today, wars and violence surround us and I would include here also the highly unsatisfactory situation of family and partnership life, changing of partners, which is „thanks“ to tabloid press and social magazines presented as something fashionable and attractive. Right Livelihood (*samyag-ājīva/ sammā-ājīva*: no trading in weapons, living beings, meat, liquor, or poisons – this does not need any additional comments. Right Effort (*samyag-vyāyāma/ sammā-vāyāma*) and Right Mindfulness (*sati; Satipatthana; Sampajañña*) are related to the state of mind, the strength of its focus and to its awareness. And lastly, the eight quality, Right Meditation (*samyak-samādhi/ sammā-samādhi*, teaches particularly on *dhyana* meditation. It is related to the state of mind and the strength of its focus and to its awareness. And going back to the first quality - Right View introduces to the understanding of Karma and Four Noble Truths, in essence, that our actions have consequences, death is not the end, and our actions and beliefs have consequences after death, which is very basic understanding.

After discussing briefly the *Four Noble Truths* and *Noble Eightfold Path*, I would like to add two fundamental and critical comments that I would like to make here. I am returning again to the end of the civilization topic.

The first point is the so called popularization of the topic and increase of public awareness. The articles, various reflections, documentaries on Youtube and presentations on social networks are often written and/ or created by journalists, publicists, youtubers and influencers with more or less superficial or minimal knowledge of the matter, often with the goal just to increase the number of the readers or viewers. The topic of the end of civilization is being appropriated by journalists, popularizers, etc., as an attractive commodity that sells well. And they ruthlessly flood the market with cheap, supposedly expert descriptions of the ruin and destruction into which our comfortable consumer

---

<sup>43</sup> The author of this paper used Miltner (2001). However, the literature to the foundations of Buddhism is enormously rich.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

society is rushing.<sup>45</sup> A society that is not spiritually grounded is unable to resist these irresponsible pressures. Let's add to this a fully justified environmental stress, hesitations of politicians how to proceed and what decision to take, topics of violence, both real and fictional, which are pouring on us from all sides. The media, TV, press, and the Internet is full of murders, fires and traffic accidents and crimes of all sorts. Another topic is cancer, which also dominates the media. Information on who got sick, who died, details, etc. The documentary value of such information is low and it has a very negative impact on young adults, also on old generations and basically on everyone.<sup>46</sup>

The other point that I would like to emphasize is the impact of this situation on the younger generation - it is no coincidence that bullying is spreading in schools, self-harm is increasing, children's suicide attempts and completed suicides are increasing, and recently there have been threats, often serious, of murder in schools, even at lower school levels, not to speak of mass shooting at the University in Prague.<sup>47</sup> Very often the children who take such violent steps come from broken families and often witness domestic violence.

Journalists and publicists claim that people require such information and that they try to respect the wishes of readers, and readers claim that they cannot even look at this type of news. The result however is that the picture of our society and environment the media offer is very stressful.

We could go on and on, but I have to at least mention the cinema that is coming to Central Europe. Movies are mostly Hollywood productions of horror, violence and war themes, and the same appears on television being full of crime films every day.<sup>48</sup> Social networks that create a de facto alternative

---

<sup>45</sup> There are countless short videos on this topic on YouTube alone. Some of them are talks and readings of Aldous Huxley's books *The End of Civilization* and *Brave New World*, which is OK, but also, for example, such videos as "The Northern Lights over the Czechia-the End of Civilization," there is a "Civilization Hyde Park" channel with various speakers, there are recordings of the music group *The End of Civilization* produced by a person named The Hell with topics such as children addicted to heroin and the like are presented, also topics such as the end of civilization and survival in the wilderness, and many others appear on youtube.

<sup>46</sup> For example, in February 2024 alone, the main Czech daily *Mladá fronta Dnes* published articles about cancer every day or at most every other day, either interviews with leading oncologists or well-known public figures – politicians, actors or singers. Stories of ordinary families affected by this disease were also reported, and in the fall of 2024, the main TV channel aired a film series about a young, nice and tall medical student who falls ill with a brain tumor, „Sense of Tumor.“

<sup>47</sup> On 21 December 2023, a student of history opened a fire in the building of Philosophical Faculty of Charles University in Prague, killed 14 of students and injured 25 students. After this, he committed a suicide. Before doing this, he killed his father and shot in a park a man with a small baby.

<sup>48</sup> Just as a random example of a common situation: On one of this year's March Saturdays, all channels of TV in Czechia broadcast a total of 29 films with catastrophic, highly violent and evil topic, one of them was even called *End of the World* and several had such words as *Evel*,

reality for many young people are full of violence as well.

There is a lack of restraint in our society. The number of extremely obese people is increasing, at the same time eating disorders, especially among young girls is alarming. The number of young people who doubt their sexual orientation and are often traumatized is increasing. With all the respect and understanding to this topic it could be said, however, that there are also not really medically substantiated cases, but rather a manifestation of lack of anchoring in today's world.<sup>49</sup>

To sum up this dismal list, let's say that, unlike the relatively recent times of a few decades ago, there is a toxic, disturbing atmosphere around us, which brings widespread and multi-layered social and individual stress, uncertainty and anxiety.

I am deeply convinced that this is the universality of Buddhist values that is missing and that could open a healthy way out of this toxic dead end.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Printed sources

[Indologist Otakar Pertold as the first Czechoslovak Consul in Bombay]. *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, HUCP*, 1989, XXIX /1, pp. 79-99.

12, 2025], available at: <https://themindcircle.com/zalaszanto-stupa/>

1999. Yale University Press, 2003.

2006-2010.

*Attitudes to Partnership, Marriage and Parenthood –April/May 2024*, accssed on [March13, 2025], available at: <https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/images/articles/files/5833/ov2407092.pdf>

Bádal, Marek. *Jak říkáme my buddhisti. Kolářek ve smokingu s motýlkem přesevěčoval soud*

*Centrum Lotus Prague*, last accessed on [February 12, 2025], available at: Czechoslovakia]. *Acta Geographica Universitatis Comenianae*. Vol. 63, 2019, No. 1, pp. 31-67.

---

Murder in the title.

<sup>49</sup> The Czech Republic is a liberal country in the area of LGBT rights, with the introduction of a partnership in 2024 replacing the registered partnership from 2006. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited. Czechia supports the right of homosexuals to marry by approximately 65% and is generally somewhat more tolerant than other Central European countries. Report of the Center for Research of Public Opinion, Sociological Institute of Academy of Sciences, April/May 2024, <https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/images/articles/files/5833/ov2407092.pdf>



- Czendlik [I miss the family life. But no women could stand me], accessed on [February 16, 2025], available at:
- Hays II, George, Hayden, Joshua M., Polišíenská, Milada. *Leadership in the time of COVID*.  
[https://arahat.unas.cz/cs/fd\\_cv\\_cs.php](https://arahat.unas.cz/cs/fd_cv_cs.php)  
<https://www.centrumlotus.cz/en/>  
<https://www.denik.cz/spolecnost/byt-vsichni-farari-jako-zibi-zacal-bych-chodit-do-kostela-20191019.html>  
<https://www.dhammadipa.cz/cs/>
- Kaiser, Daniel. *Prezident: Václav Havel 1990-2003*. Prague: Paseka, 2014, 222–228.
- Lípa, Jan. *Fráňa Drtíkol. Životopis*, accessed on [February 20, 2025], available at:
- Lípa, Jan. *Počátky a šíření buddhismu v Československu* [Beginnings and spread of Buddhism in
- Liščák, Vladimír. *Bratr Odorik a jeho zpráva o východních krajích světa: Styky Evropy a*
- Lysebeth, André Van. *Jóga [Yoga]*. Prague: 1978. Foreword by Stanislav Čelikovský.
- Mészáros, Pavel. *Rodinný život mi chybí. Ale žádná žena by se mnou nevydržela, říká kněz*
- Miltner, Vladimír. *Vznik a vývoj buddhismu* [Origins and development of Buddhism]. Prague: Vyšehrad, 2001.
- Molnar, Jozsef. *Zalaszántó Stupa: One of the Biggest Stupas in Europe*, accessed on [February
- mongolské Číny ve 13. a 14. století* [ Brother Odorik and his report on eastern regions of the world. Contacts od Europe with Mongolian China in 13th and 14th Centuries] Praha: Academia, 2019.
- Novinky.cz is one of the most read Czech news on the internet, accessed on daily basis during
- o své nevině* [As we Buddhists say, Koláček in a tuxedo with a bow tie tried to convince
- Olomouc: Matice cyrilometodějská, 2014.
- Pandemic responses in Central Europe*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2023.
- Polišíenská, Milada. *Indolog Otakar Pertold jako první československý konzul v Bombaji*
- Political, “last accessed on [February 12, 2025], available at: <https://micasmp.hypotheses.org>
- Prague: Pragma, 1996.
- Public Opinion Research Centre, Institute of Sociology of Academy of Sciences. *Czech Citizens’*
- Sanitrák, Josef. *Dějiny české mystiky* [History of Czech mysticism], Vol. I-III, Prague: Eminent,

Scheufler, Jiří. *Indická filozofie a křesťanství* [Indian philosophy and christianity] Prague:

Snyder, Timothy. *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569*

the court of his innocence], accessed on [February 25, 2025], available at: <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/krimi-jak-rikame-my-buddhisti-kolacek-ve-smokingu-s-motylkem-presvedcoval-soud-o-sve-nevine-40425995>

the examined period. Available at <https://www.novinky.cz/>

The M.S. Merian – R. Tagore International Centre of Advanced Studies: „Metamorphoses of the

Thích, Nhất Hạnh. *Živý Buddha, Živý Kristus* [orig. Living Buddha, Living Christ; translated].

Tomáš Dhammadīpa, last accessed on [February 2, 2025], available at:

Unitaria, 1992

Websites

Wolf, Václav. *Buddhismus v katolické perspektivě* [Buddhism in the catholic perspective].

# THE CONCEPT OF PROMOTING SELF-ACTUALIZATION NEEDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES APPLICATION USED FOUR FOUNDATIONS FOR ACCOMPLISHMENT (IDDHIPĀDA 4)

Ven. Dr. Phramaha Chakrapol Acharashubho Thepa\*

## Abstract:

This study explores a conceptual framework for promoting self-actualization needs sustainably through the application of Buddhist principles, particularly the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4). The research employs qualitative methodologies, integrating Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) to gather insights from purposively selected key informants, including Buddhist monks, educators, youth mental health experts, parents, and learning media specialists. Data collection emphasizes structured group input, and analysis incorporates triangulation techniques and content analysis to ensure reliability and comprehensive coverage.

Key findings highlight three core components essential for fostering self-actualization: aspiration for self-actualization need, which emphasizes creating supportive environments, inspirational role models, and real-life narratives; promotion of self-actualization through wisdom (Paññā), which involves self-directed learning, the integration of technology, and skill-building through critical thinking; and application of the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4), focusing on goal setting, mindful stability, and linking Dhamma principles to life goals. The study achieved high data saturation (85.83%), underscoring the robustness of its findings.

---

\* Lecturer at the Department of Buddhism and Philosophy, the Faculty of Religion and Philosophy, Mahamakut Buddhist University, Thailand.

The results suggest that fostering self-actualization through Buddhist principles requires a holistic approach, combining motivational strategies, intellectual development, and the practical application of Iddhipāda principles. These findings offer actionable insights for designing learning modules that inspire youth, leverage modern tools, and cultivate systematic self-development, aligning individual aspirations with sustainable growth and life success.

**Keywords:** *Self-actualization need, sustainable, Buddhist principles, Iddhipāda 4.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of self-actualization, rooted in humanistic psychology, represents an individual's pursuit to achieve their full potential and live a meaningful life. In alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations, Goal 3 emphasizes ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for at all ages, including fostering mental health (SDG, 2019; Pedersen, 2018). Mental well-being, characterized by a balanced relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviour, is pivotal in achieving sustainable personal development. Additionally, sustainable education development that integrates religious principles has been highlighted as a critical factor in promoting long-term well-being (Tomalin et al., 2019).

Despite these priorities, challenges remain in bridging the gap between the theoretical understanding of self-actualization and its practical application in daily life. Research from Thailand's Department of Mental Health (2019) emphasizes that unregulated thoughts often diminish human capacity. Individuals frequently fail to reflect on their thought patterns, unconsciously allowing emotions to guide behaviour. Positive thinking, for instance, can lead to constructive actions and ultimately result in success, while negative thinking fosters a cycle of stagnation and failure. This interplay between thoughts, emotions, and actions underscores the need for a systematic approach to cultivate self-awareness and purpose-driven behaviour.

Previous studies have explored frameworks for promoting mental well-being and self-actualization, but gaps remain in incorporating Buddhist principles as a structured methodology for achieving sustainable self-actualization. The Buddhist Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4) offer a profound perspective on developing focus and achieving goals through Chanda (desire), Viriya (effort), Citta (thought), and Vimamsa (investigation). These principles align closely with modern psychological constructs of motivation, resilience, and cognitive reflection, yet their integration into contemporary frameworks for self-actualization remains underexplored.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing a conceptual model for promoting self-actualization through the application of Iddhipāda 4. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, it aims to examine how Buddhist principles can be adapted to foster intellectual development, sustainable behavioural

change, and holistic well-being. This approach not only aligns with global objectives like SDG Goal 3 but also provides a culturally relevant strategy for enhancing individual and collective well-being. By synthesizing Buddhist insights with contemporary psychological theories, this research seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on sustainable development, mental health promotion, and the role of spirituality in fostering self-actualization. In doing so, it aims to provide practical recommendations for educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers to cultivate a more mindful and fulfilled society.

### **1.1. Research objective**

To analyze the concept of promoting the desire for success in Life with Intellect and Buddhist principles.

### **1.2. Theoretical review**

#### **1.2.1. Self-actualization need**

Self-actualization, as proposed by Maslow in his hierarchy of needs, represents the highest level of psychological development where an individual seeks to realize their fullest potential.<sup>1</sup> This concept emphasizes the intrinsic drive for personal growth, creativity, and the pursuit of meaning. Research indicates that self-actualization is closely linked to psychological well-being, resilience, and life satisfaction<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory underscores the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering self-actualization. Despite its significance, achieving self-actualization remains a challenge for many, requiring intentional efforts to align thoughts, emotions, and actions with personal values and aspirations<sup>3</sup>.

#### **1.2.2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 3**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations in 2015, provide a blueprint for achieving a sustainable future. Goal 3 specifically focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all, with mental health being a critical component.<sup>4,5</sup> Studies reveal that mental health is integral to overall health and productivity, influencing individual and societal outcomes (World Health Organization, 2018). Pedersen (2018) highlights the importance of addressing mental health disparities and promoting preventive care through education and community engagement. Furthermore, integrating cultural and religious values into mental health initiatives has shown promising results in fostering holistic well-being and sustainable development.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Maslow (1943): 11 - 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan & Deci (2000): 68 - 78.

<sup>3</sup> Sheldon (2018): 166.

<sup>4</sup> SDG, 2019: 33 - 41.

<sup>5</sup> Pedersen, 2018: 191.

<sup>6</sup> Tomalin et al., 2019: 470.

### 1.2.3. Iddhipāda 4

The Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4) offer profound guidance for cultivating focus and achieving goals by harmonizing the mind and channeling effort toward meaningful aspirations. Rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, these principles emphasize Chanda (desire), Viriya (effort), Citta (thought), and Vimamsa (investigation) as the pathways to success and personal transformation. The Buddha explains the Iddhipāda in the Pāli Canon as follows:

“Katamo ca bhikkhave chando iddhipādo? Idhā, bhikkhave, bhikkhu atthi chandassāti ānākāṅkhā hoti, tāya chandena chandaṃ adhivāseti.”

(*Samyutta Nikaya* 51.2, Cattāro Iddhipāda Sutta)

Translation:

“And what, bhikkhus, is the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to desire and volitional formations of striving? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu generates desire for the non-arising of unarisen unwholesome states, for the abandoning of arisen unwholesome states, for the arising of unarisen wholesome states, and for the maintenance of arisen wholesome states.”

(*Samyutta Nikaya* 51.2)

Iddhipāda 4, or the Four Bases of Accomplishment, is a core concept in Buddhist teachings that outlines the path to success and self-mastery. These principles include:

#### i. Chanda (Desire)

The aspiration or will to achieve a goal. Chanda refers to a wholesome aspiration or interest in pursuing goals aligned with one's values and ethical principles. Unlike craving (*tanha*), chanda is driven by intention and mindfulness, as explained in the commentaries (*Atthakatha*).

#### ii. Viriya (Effort)

Persistent effort and diligence in pursuing objectives. Viriya represents perseverance and energy applied to meaningful tasks. The Buddha compares effort to the persistent flow of a river, which steadily carves its path over time (*Anguttara Nikaya* 2.5).

#### iii. Citta (Thought)

Focused and mindful contemplation. Citta refers to focused concentration and mental clarity. It emphasizes cultivating a calm and collected mind capable of directing thoughts toward productive outcomes.

#### iv. Vimamsa (Investigation)

Critical reflection and evaluation to refine strategies. Vimamsa entails the application of wisdom and analytical reflection. It involves evaluating one's progress, learning from experience, and making adjustments for continuous improvement.

Studies suggest that Iddhipāda 4 provides a comprehensive framework for



personal and professional success. For instance, Gunaratana (2001) emphasizes the relevance of mindfulness (Citta) in fostering emotional regulation and clarity of purpose.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Chanda and Viriya are linked to motivation and resilience, essential traits for achieving long-term goals.<sup>8</sup> Research exploring the application of Iddhipāda 4 in educational and organizational contexts highlights its potential to enhance productivity, ethical behavior, and overall well-being.<sup>9</sup> By integrating Iddhipāda 4 with contemporary psychological and educational frameworks, this study seeks to address gaps in existing research and offer a culturally relevant approach to promoting self-actualization and sustainable development.

By practicing the Iddhipāda principles, individuals can develop a balanced approach to life, where desire is harmonized with effort, thought is focused, and self-investigation fosters continuous growth. This framework provides timeless guidance for achieving both spiritual and practical goals.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examines qualitative factors to propose a conceptual framework for promoting self-actualization needs through the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4). Specifically, it explores the integration of Buddhist principles and intellectual development to foster self-actualization. The research employs qualitative research methods, utilizing Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the Nominal Group Technique (NGT)<sup>10</sup>.

2.1. Population and key informants

Population: The study population consists of 30 individuals, with a purposively selected sample of 10 participants. The Focus Group Discussions use the Nominal Group Technique (NGT), recognized for its effectiveness in structuring group input and decision-making.

Key Informants: The study employs Purposive Sampling, focusing on individuals with relevant expertise.<sup>11</sup> Key selection criteria include availability, willingness to participate, and demonstrated expertise. The sample includes 10 participants, categorized by specific qualifications as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Selection Criteria and Participant Expertise

Expertise Area	Key In- formants	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Buddhist monks (ethics camps)	5	Available/ volunteering	Not available/ no prior camp experience

<sup>7</sup> Gunaratana, 2001: 7 – 9.  
<sup>8</sup> Analayo, 2003.  
<sup>9</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012.  
<sup>10</sup> Olsen, 2019: 2 - 4.  
<sup>11</sup> Campbell et al., 2020: 294 – 320.

Expertise Area	Key Informants	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Learning innovation experts	1	Available/ volunteering	Not available/ unwilling
Youth mental health experts	1	Available/ volunteering	Not available/ unwilling
Parents	1	Available/ volunteering	Not available/ unwilling
Teachers/ educators	1	Available/ volunteering	Not available/ unwilling
Learning media creation specialists	1	Available/ volunteering	Not available/ unwilling

2.2. Research instruments and instrument validation

The primary research instrument is an **unstructured interview guide** developed from a synthesis of relevant literature. This guide aligns with the research objectives, theoretical framework, and hypotheses to support the development of a structural equation model (SEM) for the conceptual framework.

Instrument Validation used the Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated following the procedures outlined by Crocker & Algina (1986), with five experts reviewing the instrument:

$$I-CVI = (\text{agreed item}) / (\text{number of experts}) \tag{1}$$

$$S-CVI/Ave = (\text{sum of I-CVIscores}) / (\text{number of items}) \tag{2}$$

The assessment scale includes four levels: 4 = Highly consistent with the concept. 3 = Somewhat consistent, requiring minor adjustments. 2 = Partially consistent, requiring significant revisions. 1 = Not consistent with the concept. Acceptance thresholds were set at  $I-CVI \geq 0.80$  for individual items and  $S-CVI \geq 0.90$  for the entire instrument, consistent with the recommendations of Zamanzadeh et al. (2015). Experts evaluated the tool using Polit & Beck’s (2006) methodology, which ensures reliability and alignment with study objectives. Instruments exceeding these thresholds were deemed to have excellent validity, while those falling below were revised to improve consistency. Critical cut-off values were set at  $I-CVI \geq 0.80$  and  $S-CVI \geq 0.90$ . Instruments scoring above these thresholds were considered to have excellent validity (Zamanzadeh et al., 2015). By adhering to these validation standards, the study ensures that the research tools are robust and capable of eliciting meaningful insights. The qualitative approach, combined with NGT and validated instruments, provides a rigorous framework for exploring self-actualization through Buddhist principles.

### 2.3. Data collection

Data collection was conducted through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) using the Nominal Group Technique (NGT), a structured method designed to facilitate brainstorming by enabling participants to share their ideas in written form rather than verbally. This approach minimizes dominance by more vocal participants and encourages equal contributions.<sup>12,13</sup> Participants prepared their written responses individually before the group session. During FGDs, the facilitator introduced topics sequentially, inviting participants to present their written contributions one by one. The group then discussed and summarized each idea before moving to the next topic. Data was systematically documented in narrative form and analyzed using tables to highlight themes, word frequency, and percentages derived from coding.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.4. Data analysis

This study employed qualitative methods, including document analysis and FGDs with 10 experts. A review of theoretical frameworks and prior studies informed the identification of variables for a conceptual model promoting self-actualization through wisdom and Buddhist principles.<sup>15</sup> FGDs utilized the NGT technique alongside unstructured interviews validated for Content Validity Index (CVI) by five experts, ensuring methodological rigor.<sup>16</sup>

#### 2.4.1. Content analysis

Data analysis involved systematic Content Analysis to organize and interpret narrative data and tables. The study implemented Triangulation techniques to ensure credibility and reliability, including Data Triangulation is verifying consistency across multiple sources.<sup>17</sup> Multiple Investigator Triangulation is engaging multiple researchers for independent analysis to reduce bias.<sup>18</sup> Reviews Triangulation is inviting external reviewers to validate findings.<sup>19</sup> Methods Triangulation is comparing results derived from different methods of data collection.<sup>20</sup> Theory Triangulation applies various theoretical perspectives to interpret the same data set.<sup>21</sup> Interdisciplinary Triangulation is integrating insights from multiple disciplines for comprehensive interpretations.<sup>22</sup>

#### 2.4.2. Coding and analysis

FGD data were categorized by coding keywords derived from discussion

---

<sup>12</sup> Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1972: 337 - 342.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey & Holmes, 2012: 188 - 194.

<sup>14</sup> Cording et al., 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Creswell & Poth, 2016: 147 - 181.

<sup>16</sup> Zamanzadeh et al., 2015: 165 - 178.

<sup>17</sup> Flick, 2018: 100.

<sup>18</sup> Patton, 1999: 1189 - 1208.

<sup>19</sup> Creswell & Miller, 2000: FL 32887.

<sup>20</sup> Olsen, 2004: 103 - 118.

<sup>21</sup> Denzin, 1978: 29 - 32.

<sup>22</sup> Flick, 2018: 62 - 70.

themes, such as “life success,” “wisdom principles,” “Iddhipāda 4,” “goal-setting,” and “critical thinking.” Key steps in the data analysis included: Keyword Identification (Coding) that is extracting keywords from participant responses for each topic. Frequency Analysis is counting the number of occurrences for each keyword. Percentage Calculation: Converting frequencies into percentages relative to the total occurrences. Data Saturation Assessment is evaluating the sufficiency of data coverage using the formula of Data Saturation as  $D.S. = (f/N \times 100)^{23}$ , where  $f$  is the frequency of a keyword and  $N$  is the total number of keywords. The data saturation process involved ranking keywords by their percentage scores to identify thematic dominance and ensure comprehensive coverage of discussion topics.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.5. Statistical

The study employed Content Analysis for both narrative and frequency data, complemented by thematic analysis. Results were presented using Tables, which summarizing key themes, frequencies, and percentages. Descriptive Statistics are reporting frequency ( $f$ ) and Data Saturation (D. S.). The combination of qualitative and statistical approaches offered a holistic view of the data, reinforcing the robustness of the findings in evaluating Buddhist principles for self-actualization.

## III. FINDING

The Concept Promoting Self-Actualization Need to Sustainable through Buddhist Principles Application by Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4)

### 3.1. Aspiration for self-actualization need

Key Findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

**3.1.1. Inspiration from achievers:** Participants emphasized the importance of using stories of successful individuals to inspire youths. For example, a monk facilitator (NGT1) noted, *“Drawing inspiration from accomplished individuals or role models is crucial. I believe the principle ‘Attānaṃ upamaṃ kare’ (treat others as oneself) can help guide youth to see that life success is achievable and promote good role models as sources of inspiration.”*

**3.1.2. Community connection:** Another facilitator (NGT2) suggested, *“Introducing stories of achievers from both within and outside the community allows youth to see the effort and journey behind success.”*

**3.1.3. Interactive experiences:** Facilitators (e.g., NGT3) highlighted the importance of enabling youths to interact with role models. As one facilitator explained, *“Allowing young people to hear real-life stories through conversations or activities can give them a clear path to self-improvement.”*

**3.1.4. Confidence building:** Repeated exposure to role models was suggested to strengthen youth’s self-confidence and determination (NGT4, NGT5).

<sup>23</sup> Kanraman & Kaya, 2021: 60602–60611.

<sup>24</sup> Guest et al., 2020: e0232076.

### 3.2. Promotion of self-actualization need through wisdom (*Paññā*)

**3.2.1. Self-directed learning:** Participants emphasized continuous learning and self-discovery. As one monk (NGT1) remarked, *“Youth must approach learning with an open mind, akin to the philosophy of ‘an empty cup.’ The principle ‘Attanā jodhaya attānaṃ’ (urge oneself to self-improvement) supports this mindset.”*

**3.2.2. Leveraging technology:** Experts in educational innovation (e.g., NGT6) advocated the use of modern technology to enable self-directed learning. One expert said, *“Integrating innovative and engaging learning tools encourages continuous intellectual development.”*

**3.2.3. Sustained curiosity:** Encouraging an attitude of lifelong learning was seen as essential by mental health experts (NGT7).

**3.2.4. Critical thinking and problem-solving:** Teachers (NGT9) emphasized the role of teaching methods that focus on analytical thinking and creativity.

**3.2.5. Effective learning materials:** Participants noted the significance of well-designed, captivating educational media to sustain interest and enhance wisdom.

3.3. Promotion of self-actualization need through the four foundations for accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4)

**3.3.1. Application of the iddhipāda principles:** Facilitators (e.g., NGT3) stressed the importance of adapting the Four Iddhipāda principles – *chanda* (desire), *virīya* (effort), *citta* (thought), and *vimaṃsā* (examination) – in fostering self-development and success.

**3.3.2. Goal setting:** Facilitators (e.g., NGT4) explained, *“Encouraging youths to consider the benefits and drawbacks of their choices and to set realistic, actionable goals helps them navigate their personal development.”*

**3.3.3. Mindful stability:** Techniques like meditation (NGT5) were recommended to stabilize the mind and enable clarity in setting and pursuing goals at all levels – short-term, intermediate, and ultimate life aspirations.

**3.3.4. Integration of learning tools:** Experts (NGT6, NGT7) highlighted the value of integrating the Four Iddhipāda principles into educational content to enhance understanding and practical application.

**3.3.5. Holistic development:** Teachers (NGT9) suggested creating materials that interconnect goal-setting, wisdom cultivation, and the practice of the Four Iddhipāda principles to ensure comprehensive development.

The thematic data, including key terms and participant insights, were categorized and analyzed for frequency and data saturation. The findings revealed that promoting Self-Actualization Need through Buddhist principles requires integrating motivation, wisdom, and systematic self-development practices based on the Four Iddhipāda principles (table 2).

Table 2: Keyword Frequency and Data Saturation Analysis of the Three Themes of Self-Actualization Need, Promotion of Self-Actualization Need through wisdom (*Paññā*), and Promotion of Self-Actualization Need through

the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4) (N=10)

Key Terms from Focus Group Discussions (Coding)	Frequency (f)	Data Saturation (D.S.) (%)	Percentage (%)
1. Self-Actualization Need			
Inspirational figures	8	80	2
Presentation of real-life stories	7	70	3
Creation of a supportive learning environment	9	90	1
Total	24	80	
2. Promotion of Self-Actualization Need through Wisdom (Paññā)			
Self-directed knowledge acquisition	10	100	1
Use of modern technology and learning media	9	90	2
Skill development through practical experience	7	70	3
Teaching that emphasizes analytical and creative thinking	9	90	2
Total	35	87.5	
3. Promotion of Self-Actualization Need through the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4)			
Application of the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda)	10	100	1
Content connecting Dhamma principles with life goals	9	90	2
Reflection on the benefits and drawbacks of phenomena	7	70	3
Developing clear life goals	10	100	1
Total	36	90	



Key Terms from Focus Group Discussions (Coding)	Frequency (f)	Data Saturation (D.S.) (%)	Percentage (%)
Overall Data Saturation ( $\Sigma f$ )	95	85.83	

3.4. Interpretation of data

From **Table 2**, the analysis and interpretation of focus group discussion data using the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) revealed key points derived from discussions with experts on three main themes. The table summarizes key terms (coding), frequency (f), and data saturation in term of percentages (D.S.), providing insights into the creation of content for learning modules with three main components:

3.4.1. Self-actualization need

**Rank 1:** Creating a supportive learning environment ( $f = 9$ ,  $D.S. = 90\%$ ). This environment fosters self-development and practical application among youth. **Rank 2:** Inspirational figures ( $f = 8$ ,  $D.S. = 80\%$ ). Exposure to successful individuals inspires youth to aim for success. **Rank 3:** Presentation of real-life stories ( $f = 7$ ,  $D.S. = 70\%$ ). Stories of success illustrate the efforts required to achieve life goals. **Total:**  $\Sigma f = 24$ ,  $D.S. = 80\%$ .

3.4.2. Promotion of self-actualization need through wisdom (*Paññā*)

**Rank 1:** Self-directed knowledge acquisition ( $f = 10$ ,  $D.S. = 100\%$ ). Encourages the development of essential skills through independent research. **Rank 2:** Modern technology and media in learning ( $f = 9$ ,  $D.S. = 90\%$ ). Technology enhances learning efficiency and engagement. Analytical and creative teaching approaches ( $f = 9$ ,  $D.S. = 90\%$ ). These methods foster critical and innovative thinking. **Rank 3:** Skill-building through practical experience ( $f = 7$ ,  $D.S. = 70\%$ ). Practical experiences aid in skill acquisition. **Total:**  $\Sigma f = 35$ ,  $D.S. = 87.5\%$ .

3.4.3. Promotion of self-actualization need through the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (*Iddhipāda*)

**Rank 1:** Application of the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (*Iddhipāda*) ( $f = 10$ ,  $D.S. = 100\%$ ). These principles (*Chanda*, *Viriya*, *Citta*, *Vīmaṃsā*) provide a clear framework for self-development. And, setting clear life goals ( $f = 10$ ,  $D.S. = 100\%$ ). Clear objectives guide youth in their personal growth. **Rank 2:** Content linking Dhamma principles to life goals ( $f = 9$ ,  $D.S. = 90\%$ ). Connections between Dhamma and life aspirations provide clarity for life direction. **Rank 3:** Reflection on benefits and drawbacks ( $f = 7$ ,  $D.S. = 70\%$ ). Evaluating phenomena enhances decision-making skills. **Total:**  $\Sigma f = 36$ ,  $D.S. = 90\%$ .

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating Buddhist principles, particularly the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (*Iddhipāda* 4), into educational frameworks to promote sustainable self-actualization

among youth. The results align with existing literature on motivational theory and the practical application of Buddhist principles in personal development.

#### 4.1. Aspiration for self-actualization need

The findings underscore the critical role of inspiration in fostering self-actualization. Exposure to successful individuals, or “inspirational figures,” emerged as a key factor ( $f = 8$ , D.S. = 80%). This supports Bandura (1997) social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the influence of role models on self-efficacy.<sup>25</sup> The principle “Attānaṃ upamaṃ kare” (treat others as oneself) reflects the interconnectedness emphasized in Buddhist teachings and guides youth to view life success as achievable. Similarly, presenting real-life stories of achievers ( $f = 7$ , D.S. = 70%) resonates with research showing the motivational impact of narrative learning (Lindgren, 2020). A supportive learning environment ( $f = 9$ , D.S. = 90%) was identified as the most significant factor in promoting self-actualization. This finding is consistent with Dweck (2006) mindset theory, which posits that a growth-oriented environment facilitates personal and professional development.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.2. Promotion of self-actualization need through wisdom (*Paññā*)

The integration of wisdom in fostering self-actualization was evident in the emphasis on self-directed learning ( $f = 10$ , D.S. = 100%) and the use of modern technology ( $f = 9$ , D.S. = 90%). This aligns with Mezirow (1997) transformative learning theory<sup>27</sup>, which highlights the value of critical self-reflection and independent knowledge acquisition. The Buddhist principle “Attanā jodhaya attānaṃ” (urge oneself to self-improvement) reinforces the importance of cultivating an open and inquisitive mindset. Additionally, critical thinking and creativity-focused teaching methods ( $f = 9$ , D.S. = 90%) are crucial for equipping youth with problem-solving skills, as noted in Bloom’s taxonomy.<sup>28</sup> The findings further suggest that the effective design of educational media plays a vital role in sustaining engagement and nurturing intellectual curiosity.

#### 4.3. Promotion of self-actualization need through the four foundations for accomplishment (*Iddhipāda* 4)

The application of the Iddhipāda 4 principles – *Chanda* (desire), *Viriya* (effort), *Citta* (thought), and *Vīmaṃsā* (examination) – emerged as a cornerstone for fostering sustainable self-actualization. Goal-setting ( $f = 10$ , D.S. = 100%) and content linking Dhamma principles to life goals ( $f = 9$ , D.S. = 90%) emphasize the structured application of these principles. These findings align with Locke and Latham’s (2002) goal-setting theory, which posits that clarity and commitment to goals enhance motivation and achievement. Reflection on benefits and drawbacks ( $f = 7$ , D.S. = 70%) enhances decision-making, as supported by the Buddhist practice of mindfulness consist of the

<sup>25</sup> Bandura, 1997: 4 - 6.

<sup>26</sup> Dweck, 2006: 2 - 15.

<sup>27</sup> Mezirow, 1997: 5 - 12.

<sup>28</sup> Voskoglou, 2022: 106.

study of Sekhon (2023) mentioned mindfulness-based interventions have gained popularity as effective approaches for promoting mental health and well-being. Mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist meditation practices, particularly in the Vipassana and Zen traditions.<sup>29</sup> Techniques such as meditation provide a foundation for mindful stability, enabling youth to pursue their aspirations with clarity and focus.

#### 4.4. Practical implications

The results indicate that integrating the Four Foundations for Accomplishment into educational curricula can provide a comprehensive framework for personal growth. Educators should focus on fostering inspiration, encouraging reflective practices, leveraging modern technology, and promoting systematic self-development. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on the relevance of Buddhist principles in contemporary education and underscore their potential for fostering resilience and sustainable success.

The analysis of data from FGDs identified three core components essential for promoting the aspiration for integrating the Four Foundations for Accomplishment display of the Three Core Components Concept of Promoting Self-Actualization Need for Sustainable through Buddhist Principles Application Used Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4):

Aspiration for Self-Actualization Need:

- Creating a supportive learning environment
- Inspirational figures
- Presentation of real-life stories

Promotion of Self-Actualization Need through Wisdom (Paññā):

- Self-directed knowledge acquisition
- Modern technology and media in learning
- Skill-building through practical experience

Promotion of Self-Actualization Need through the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4):

- Application of Iddhipāda principles
- Setting clear life goals
- Content linking Dhamma principles to life goals
- Reflection on benefits and drawbacks

---

<sup>29</sup> Sekhon, 2023: 252 - 255.

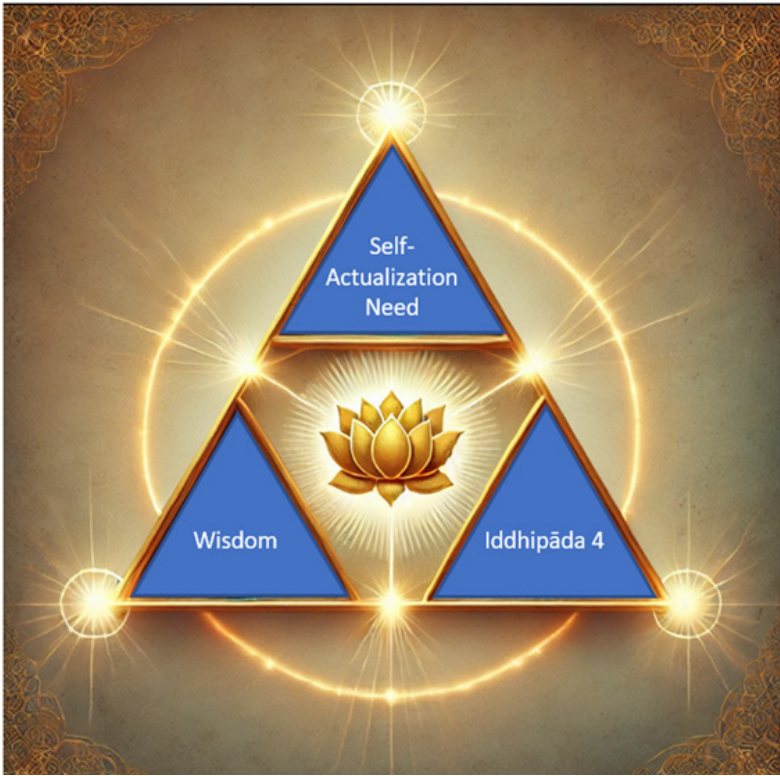


Figure 1: Three Core Components Concept of Promoting Self-Actualization Need for Sustainable through Buddhist Principles Application Used Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4)

**V. CONCLUSION**

Data Saturation arecvhe overall data saturation from the three themes is D.S. = 85.83%, indicating a high level of completeness and comprehensiveness. Content creation for the learning modules should focus on fostering inspiration, utilizing modern learning tools, building practical skills, encouraging reflection, and applying the Four Bases of Success (Iddhipāda) to provide youth with clear guidance for self-development and achieving life success.

**5.1. Implementation**

The implementation of the concept for promoting self-actualization through the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (Iddhipāda 4) seamlessly aligns with the overarching theme of Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development. This alignment is achieved through a shared emphasis on fostering holistic development, mutual respect, and sustainable self-growth rooted in Buddhist teachings. The outlined strategies translate these principles into actionable steps that promote unity, inclusivity, and sustainability while upholding human dignity.

### **5.2. Unity through shared aspirations and mutual support**

The implementation encourages creating a supportive learning environment, where students interact with role models and engage in community-building activities guided by the principle *Attānaṃ upamaṃ kare* (treat others as oneself). This fosters a sense of unity by emphasizing collective growth and shared aspirations. By leveraging interactive experiences such as “Life Path Dialogues” and collaborative projects, the program builds bridges between individuals of diverse backgrounds, promoting inclusivity and a shared commitment to development.

### **5.3. Inclusivity through diverse role models and personalized development**

Utilizing inspirational figures from varied walks of life broadens horizons and reduces stereotypes, encouraging learners to appreciate diverse paths to success. This reinforces inclusivity by highlighting that everyone’s journey, regardless of background, contributes to the collective good. Personalized coaching and learning modules cater to individual strengths and aspirations, ensuring that all participants – regardless of their unique needs – are empowered to pursue self-actualization.

### **5.4. Human dignity through self-actualization and skill development**

The implementation integrates the Four Foundations for Accomplishment (*Iddhipāda* 4) into educational practices, enabling individuals to discover and realize their potential. This fosters human dignity by aligning personal growth with mindfulness, effort, and critical self-reflection. Practical skill-building and goal-setting workshops prepare learners to contribute meaningfully to their communities, ensuring they feel valued and respected in their societal roles.

### **5.5. Sustainability through wisdom and mindful practices**

By promoting self-directed learning and analytical thinking, the program empowers individuals to develop lifelong skills that support sustainable personal and societal development. Mindfulness and stability practices cultivate emotional resilience and clarity, essential for maintaining peace and balance in a rapidly changing world.

### **5.6. Buddhist insights for global peace and development**

Integrating Dhamma principles into life goals bridges spiritual values with practical aspirations, ensuring that learners are equipped to make ethical, compassionate decisions that contribute to global peace and sustainability. The reflective and holistic approach connects personal growth with broader societal impact, emphasizing that individual transformation is foundational to achieving world peace and sustainable development.

The implementation process demonstrates that promoting self-actualization through the Four Foundations for Accomplishment is not only a method of individual empowerment but also a pathway to fostering global unity and inclusivity. It shows how Buddhist principles – grounded in compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom – can create an inclusive environment where individuals thrive while contributing to the collective good. This dual



focus on personal and societal development aligns with the broader goal of achieving world peace and sustainability through dignity and mutual respect. By embedding these principles into actionable strategies, the program ensures that learners not only achieve their personal goals but also become agents of positive change, embodying the Buddhist ideals of unity, inclusivity, and sustainable growth.

### 5.7. Acknowledgments

This research article is part of the research titled “Innovation of Concept Promoting Self-Actualization Need Through Intellect and Buddhist Principles: Application of Structural Equation Modeling Analysis.” The successful completion of this study was made possible through the generous support of the Research and Innovation Grant Program of the Yan Sangvorn Research Institute, Mahamakut Buddhist University, under the fiscal year 2022. I extend our gratitude to the grant program for funding this research, as well as to all participants more two of researchers Assist. Prof. Dr. Phrasutthisanmethi Chaiyan Suebkrapan, Dean of Graduate School, Mahamakut Buddhist University, Thailand. Email: chaiyan.sueb@mbu.ac.th and Asst. Prof. Dr. Chatwarun Angasinha, researcher, Faculty of Social Innovation, Rangsit University, Thailand. Email: chattrsu@gmail.com, who provided valuable insights and to the experts who offered guidance and advice. Their contributions have been instrumental in ensuring the completeness and success of this research.

### 5.8. Research fund

This research received funding from the Research Support Grant under the Teaching and Learning Development Program of the Yan Sangwon Research Institute, Mahamakut Buddhist University, for the fiscal year 2022 (Approval ID: 0174/2565)

### 5.9. Ethical approval

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Ayutthaya, Thailand. The approval was granted under the ethical and research identification number R. 182/2566, April 10, 2023. The Ethics Committee has verified that the research follows both the International Code of Ethics, national law and regulatory requirements.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Analayo, B. (2003). *Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization*. Windhorse Publications.
- Anguttara Nikaya 2.5, *Balava Sutta* (On Effort).
- Bandura, A., & Wessels, S. (1997). Self-efficacy (pp. 4-6). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- Bhikkhu Bodhi. (2012). *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Buddhist Publication Society.
- Campbell, J. L., Quincy, C., Osserman, J., & Pedersen, O. K. (2013). Coding In-Depth Semistructured Interviews: Problems of Unitization and Intercoder Reliability and Agreement. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 42(3), 294-320.
- Cording, M., Harrison, J. S., Hoskisson, R. E., & Jonsen, K. (2020). Coding and Data Saturation in Qualitative Research: An Operational Approach. *Journal of Management Studies*.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Crocker, L., & Algina, J. (1986). *Introduction to Classical and Modern Test Theory*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227-268.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. McGraw-Hill.
- Department of Mental Health, Thailand. (2019). Promoting positive thinking for mental well-being. Ministry of Public Health.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random house.
- Flick, U. (2018). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications.
- Francis, J. J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M. P., & Grimshaw, J. M. (2010). What is an Adequate Sample Size? Operationalizing Data Saturation for Theory-Based Interview Studies. *Psychology & Health*, 25(10), 1229-1245.
- Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A Simple Method to Assess and Report Thematic Saturation in Qualitative Research. *PLOS ONE*, 15(5), e0232076.
- Gunaratana, H. (2001). *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Harvey, N., & Holmes, C. A. (2012). Nominal group technique: an effective method for obtaining group consensus. *International journal of nursing practice*, 18(2), 188-194.
- Kanraman, O., & Kaya, F. (2021). Using Data Saturation in Qualitative Research: Implications and Recommendations. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative Learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions For Adult and Continuing Education*, 74, 5-12.
- Olsen, W. (2004). Triangulation in social research: qualitative and quantitative methods can really be mixed. *Developments in sociology*, 20, 103-118.

- Olsen J. (2019). The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) as a tool for facilitating pan-disability focus groups and as a new method for quantifying changes in qualitative data. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18:1–10.
- Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Analysis. *Health Services Research*, 34(5 Pt 2), 1189–1208.
- Pedersen, J. (2018). *Mental health and well-being in sustainable development*. United Nations.
- Pedersen, P. (2018). *Multiculturalism as a fourth force*. Routledge.
- Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2006). *Essentials of Nursing Research: Appraising Evidence for Nursing Practice*. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2006). The Content Validity Index: Are You Sure You Know What's Being Reported? Critique and Recommendations. *Research in Nursing & Health*.
- Rodrigues, M., Goodwin, J., & Becker, J. (2017). Content Validity in the Development of Research Instruments. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
- Samyutta Nikaya 51.2, *Cattāro Iddhipāda Sutta* (The Four Bases for Spiritual Power).
- Sheldon, K. M. (2018). *Optimal human being: An integrated multi-level perspective*. Psychology Press.
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). (2019). Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. *United Nations Development Programme*.
- Tomalin, E., Haustein, J., & Kidy, S. (2019). Religion and education: Comparative and international perspectives on sustainable development. *Comparative Education*, 55(2), 165–187.
- Tomalin, E., et al. (2019). *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Development*. Routledge.
- Van de Ven, A. H., & Delbecq, A. L. (1972). The Nominal Group as a Research Instrument for Exploratory Health Studies. *American Journal of Public Health*, 62(3), 337–342.
- Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification), *Buddhaghosa, Chapter 12 – A detailed commentary on the Iddhipāda*.
- Voskoglou, M. (2022). Use of Soft sets and the Bloom's Taxonomy for Assessing Learning Skills. *Transactions on Fuzzy Sets and Systems*, 1(1), 106.
- World Health Organization. (2018). *Mental health: Strengthening our response*.
- Zamanzadeh, V., Ghahramanian, A., Rassouli, M., Abbaszadeh, A., Alavi-Majd, H., & Nikanfar, A. R. (2015). Design and implementation content validity study: development of an instrument for measuring patient-centered communication. *Journal of Caring Sciences*, 4(2), 165–178.

# THE ROLE OF BUDDHIST TEACHINGS IN TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Asst. Prof. Dr. Asha Singh\*

## Abstract:

The paper, “The Role of Buddhist Teachings in Transforming Education for a Sustainable Future”, explores how Buddhist principles can revolutionize education to tackle global sustainability challenges. In a world struggling with climate change, social inequalities, and resource depletion, traditional education systems often lack the ethical and moral dimensions that are essential for fostering sustainable practices. Buddhist teachings, with their emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, interconnectedness, and the Middle Path, provide a transformative framework to instill values that promote environmental preservation, social harmony, and ethical living.

The paper highlights practical applications of Buddhist philosophy, such as integrating mindfulness into classrooms, encouraging experiential learning through community service projects, and promoting sustainable consumption habits. It underscores the role of education in cultivating critical thinking, emotional resilience, and a global sense of responsibility among learners. Despite its potential, the integration of Buddhist principles in education faces challenges such as curriculum constraints and a lack of awareness. The paper proposes strategies like teacher training, community engagement, and evidence-based research to address these barriers. By embedding Buddhist values into educational systems, the paper argues that we can nurture empathetic, responsible, and mindful global citizens capable of addressing pressing environmental, social, and economic issues. This holistic approach transforms education into a powerful tool for building a sustainable and equitable future.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, education, sustainable, environment, teachings.*

---

\* Assistant Professor, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, humanity faces serious challenges that demand immediate action. Climate change threatens our planet through rising temperatures, unpredictable weather patterns, and an increasing frequency of natural disasters. Social divisions are exacerbated by economic inequality, widening the gap between the rich and the poor and intensifying existing social struggles. The expansion of industrial and human activities has led to severe environmental degradation due to harmful actions such as pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Given the increasing severity of these challenges, working towards an environmentally sustainable future is no longer a choice; it is an urgent necessity. A sustainable future is one where human societies live in harmony with nature, ensuring that resources are used wisely and responsibly so future generations can thrive.

The twenty-first century brings forth complex environmental, social, and economic challenges that require innovative solutions, particularly in education. Modern education systems often focus primarily on economic growth and individual success while overlooking the collective well-being of humanity and the planet. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for quality education underscores the need for inclusive, equitable learning that fosters lifelong opportunities. However, current education systems prioritize academic performance and technical skills, often neglecting the moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions essential for fostering sustainable development. This oversight leaves students ill-prepared to tackle pressing challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and resource depletion. Addressing these gaps requires a transformative educational approach that fosters both intellectual growth and values essential for sustainable living and holistic well-being.

Education plays a crucial role in achieving a sustainable future. Schools, universities, and learning institutions worldwide have the power to shape the minds and values of young people. Beyond simply teaching facts and skills, education can help cultivate a deep sense of responsibility, ethical behavior, and a commitment to positive change. However, for education to effectively address the global sustainability crisis, it must embrace new approaches that foster holistic thinking, emotional intelligence, and a sense of interconnectedness with the environment.<sup>1</sup> This paper argues that Buddhist wisdom offers valuable tools for transforming education to foster sustainability. It explores how integrating Buddhist principles into education can inspire values and actions essential for a sustainable future. Rooted in the Middle Way, interdependence, and mindfulness, Buddhist teachings offer a rich philosophical foundation for reshaping education to prioritize sustainability.

Buddhist teachings, rooted in ancient wisdom and over 2,500 years of guiding human behavior, offer profound insights for enhancing modern education.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNEP. (2012). *The Global Environmental Outlook 5: Environment for the Future We Want*, p. 33 – 179.

At its core, mindfulness (awareness of actions and their consequences), compassion (toward oneself and others), and interconnectedness (the Buddhist view of the interdependence of all living beings) are fundamental values that align with the challenges of achieving sustainability in our time. Integrating these Buddhist perspectives into educational systems can help educators motivate students toward sustainable lifestyles, empathy, and a sense of global citizenship. This approach encourages learners to reflect on how their choices impact both society and the environment, fostering long-term thinking over short-term rewards. Buddhism-inspired education fosters critical thinking grounded in ethical values, empowering students to actively contribute to a fairer and more sustainable world. This paper explores how incorporating Buddhist values into education can create a transformative framework for sustainability. It emphasizes that education should be about acquiring knowledge and developing character, empathy, and a sense of guardianship for the planet. Contemporary education has the potential to evolve into a powerful tool for addressing the world's most pressing challenges. The global environmental crisis has prompted religiously committed, socially conscious individuals to seek insights from their traditions to address both its root causes and symptoms - Buddhists are no exception. The Buddhist worldview of interdependence, its emphasis on compassion and nonviolence, and the example set by the Buddha and the early *Saṅgha* offer meaningful contributions to the dialogue on sustainable living.<sup>2</sup> Buddhism perceives nature and humanity as interconnected rather than separate, fostering a sense of responsibility for environmental stewardship. In Buddhism, education is not merely about acquiring knowledge but also about personal development. The term *sikkhā* encompasses not just intellectual growth but also the cultivation of virtue, self-discipline, and moral integrity. Buddhist education emphasizes holistic development, integrating knowledge with ethical conduct to shape a way of life. This model promotes habit formation, deep understanding, and self-reflection, ensuring that learning translates into meaningful action. Ultimately, the integration of learning and virtuous action cultivates well-being and a balanced, fulfilling life.

Buddhist philosophy helps us understand the interconnectedness of all life forms and the environment. Two main ideas are essential for understanding this relationship: karmic causality and dependent origination. Karmic causality suggests that every action has consequences, encouraging individuals to carefully consider how their choices impact others.<sup>3</sup> Dependent origination asserts that all phenomena are interdependent, illustrating the relationship between humans, nature, and other living beings. This concept calls for awareness of how our actions affect ourselves, the planet, and all forms of

---

<sup>2</sup> Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Rytken Williams (1997), *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Dorji Phuntsho, (2023). *Cause and Effect: A Study on the Concept of Karma in the Buddhist Tradition*. Bhutan Journal of Research and Development. Vol.12. No.1, p. 32 - 37.



life. The Buddhist principle of dependent origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*) teaches that all things arise in dependence on multiple causes and conditions. The world operates as a dynamic system of interconnections, where actions and events influence one another. This mirrors ecological systems, in which each component plays a role in maintaining the balance of the whole. For instance, deforestation disrupts local ecosystems and exacerbates global climate challenges. As such, this principle serves as a foundational concept in education, as it addresses the complex interdependencies between social, economic, and ecological systems. Incorporating interconnectedness into curricula can help students recognize how human behavior impacts the environment, economies, and societies. For example, deforestation in one region can contribute to climate change, ultimately reducing agricultural productivity and affecting livelihoods worldwide. When students learn about these connections, they develop critical thinking skills and begin to assess the broader impact of their behavior. This awareness further fosters empathy and a sense of global citizenship, encouraging students to act in ways that promote social equity, ecological balance, and sustainability. Educating students about interdependence can deepen their understanding of how their daily choices - such as energy consumption, waste management, and dietary habits - affect the environment.

Mindfulness is a fundamental aspect of Buddhist practice, emphasizing full presence and awareness of one's thoughts, actions, and surroundings. This awareness enables individuals to better understand their emotions, behaviors, and their broader impacts. By fostering intentional living, mental clarity, and thoughtful decision-making, mindfulness helps reduce impulsive behavior.<sup>4</sup> The historical Buddha can be seen, among other things, as an early scientist and physician who, despite lacking scientific instruments, used his mind, body, and personal experience to deeply examine human suffering and the human condition. His rigorous contemplative investigation led to profound insights and the formulation of a "medicine" to address fundamental suffering, often characterized by the three "poisons": greed, hatred (aversion), and ignorance (delusion)<sup>5</sup>. Within the Buddhist Eightfold Path, mindfulness is closely tied to ethical action, which provides guiding principles for responsible living. Right Speech promotes truthfulness, kindness, and constructive communication to prevent harm through words. Right Action advocates behaviors that uphold compassion and fairness while avoiding harm to others and the environment. Right Livelihood encourages ethical professions that contribute positively to society while discouraging work that exploits or harms people, animals, or the planet. Together, mindfulness and ethical action form a foundation for personal well-being, social harmony, and environmental sustainability. Mindfulness-

---

<sup>4</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (1992). *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, Bantam Books, p. 34 – 36.

<sup>5</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future*. Clinical Psychology: Science And Practice. vol.10. no.2, Summer 2003, p. 145.



based methodologies, which encourage present-moment awareness and intentionality, have shown significant benefits in education. Research indicates that these practices enhance students' ability to focus, regulate emotions, and develop empathy. Techniques such as meditation, mindful breathing, and self-reflection play a crucial role in this process, fostering an educational environment that prioritizes conscious decision-making, self-awareness, and interpersonal sensitivity. By integrating mindfulness into the classroom, students develop improved concentration, stress management, and emotional resilience. They also gain a deeper understanding of how their consumption habits impact the environment and how their actions affect others. Mindfulness encourages self-reflection and wise decision-making, both of which are essential for sustainability.<sup>6</sup> By teaching students to pause, observe, and act with intention, education systems can cultivate a generation of mindful individuals who prioritize sustainability and ethical responsibility.

Compassion, or *karuṇā* in Buddhism, is a fundamental value that emphasizes empathy and kindness toward all living beings. It calls for understanding the suffering of others and taking active steps to alleviate it. True compassion extends beyond mere sympathy; it requires proactive engagement to foster harmony, well-being, and fairness in relationships and communities. The Buddhist principles of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness) offer a meaningful alternative to the competitive and often harsh model that dominates many modern education systems. As Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) notes, we all possess the seeds of love and compassion, which can be cultivated as powerful sources of positive energy. By nurturing unconditional love that expects nothing in return, individuals can free themselves from the anxiety and sorrow that often accompany attachment and expectation.<sup>7</sup> In traditional educational settings, students frequently operate in a competitive environment where success is narrowly defined as a triumph over others' failures. This mindset fosters stress, anxiety, and an excessive fixation on external achievement, ultimately hindering personal growth and healthy social relationships.

## II. DISCUSSION

In contemporary education, students are encouraged to cultivate empathy, fostering inclusive interactions where respect, cooperation, and understanding naturally thrive. Such students demonstrate kindness and attentiveness to the needs and emotions of others, enhancing their social and emotional skills while strengthening interpersonal relationships. Integrating values of care and compassion into education instills a sense of social responsibility within school culture. A student who embraces these values will respect diversity, advocate for the rights of marginalized individuals, and contribute to building equitable communities. Ethical and compassionate living requires students to

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 147 - 150.

<sup>7</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (1992). *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, Op. Cit., p. 81.

critically evaluate their impact on their surroundings and the broader world. For example, lessons on environmental stewardship, fair trade, and ethical decision-making empower individuals to make thoughtful choices that benefit society and future generations. This approach also nurtures compassion-driven critical thinking on social justice and ethical issues, helping students balance personal interests with the collective well-being of their communities. As they engage with real-world challenges such as climate change, income inequality, and animal rights, learners develop a sense of moral accountability. They begin to see themselves as active contributors to a more sustainable and just world, empowered to drive positive change within their communities. The Buddhist approach to compassion and ethical living encourages education systems to transcend the mere transmission of knowledge. It aims to cultivate individuals who are not only skilled and knowledgeable but also empathetic, socially responsible, and dedicated to fostering a just and sustainable world. This holistic educational philosophy integrates cognitive understanding, emotional intelligence, and practical action - merging "head, heart, and hand" - to shape well-rounded global citizens.

Buddhist non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*) is deeply rooted in the principles of environmental conservation and sustainable development. The Buddhist concept of non-violence extends beyond the mere avoidance of physical harm; it is grounded in the understanding that all forms of life are interconnected. This perspective recognizes that every living being, regardless of size or significance, plays a crucial role in maintaining the balance of life.<sup>8</sup> The ecosystem exemplifies this principle - when one part is damaged, a chain reaction ensues, affecting the entire system. Central to this understanding is the concept of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which teaches that nothing exists in isolation. Every entity, from the smallest insect to the tallest tree, contributes to the functioning and equilibrium of the whole. This perspective manifests in the way Buddhist practitioners engage with nature. When a Buddhist refrains from harming even the tiniest creature, it is not merely an adherence to a rule but an acknowledgment of the intricate web of life in which all beings are interconnected. This ethical stance extends to broader environmental concerns, such as protecting forests, rivers, and entire ecosystems. Just as one would avoid harming their own body, which consists of countless interdependent cells, Buddhist ethics advocate for the protection of the Earth's ecosystems, recognizing them as an extension of life itself. This commitment to life and interdependence serves as a guiding framework for sustainable practices that benefit both the planet and its inhabitants. Such integrated thinking aligns with modern sustainable development goals. Practicing non-violence in environmental terms means preserving biodiversity by protecting habitats, maintaining ecological balance to prevent natural disasters, ensuring genetic diversity to secure future food resources, and sustaining ecosystems

---

<sup>8</sup> Karam Tej Sarao. (2017). *Ahiṃsā (Buddhism)*. *Buddhism and Jainism: Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*. Springer, Dordrecht, p. 19 - 26.

to regulate the planet's climate. In response to contemporary environmental challenges, this principle translates into actionable solutions, such as investing in renewable energy sources that do not destroy habitats, designing wildlife corridors in urban areas to allow safe animal migration, adopting sustainable farming techniques that preserve soil health and biodiversity, and reducing waste to minimize harm to marine life. This perspective goes beyond mere resource management; it fosters a deep sense of reverence and responsibility toward all living systems, leading to more sustainable and ethical choices. When individuals genuinely comprehend their interdependence with nature, they are more inclined to adopt environmentally conscious behaviors - purchasing eco-friendly products, supporting conservation initiatives, participating in habitat restoration projects, and advocating for policies that protect endangered species. This is how Buddhism's principles of non-violence and interconnectedness provide a robust ethical foundation for a sustainable future, fostering respect for all forms of life. Furthermore, Buddhist meditation cultivates four boundless and unconditional positive mental states, known as the *brahma-vihāras*: Loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Together, these qualities promote the well-being of all beings without discrimination, diminish envy and attachment, eliminate aversion and possessiveness, and encourage an impartial, responsible perspective on one's actions. The *brahma-vihāras* offer psychological benefits, enhancing personal well-being, and at a deeper level, they dissolve the illusion of a fixed, independent self. This transformative insight reinforces the Buddhist approach to ethics, sustainability, and interconnected living.<sup>9</sup>

The Middle Path originates from Buddhist teaching, emphasizing balance and moderation in all aspects of life. It rejects two extremes: indulgence, characterized by excessive pleasure-seeking, and asceticism, defined by rigorous self-denial. The Buddha himself experienced both extremes before realizing their futility and discovering, through personal insight, the Middle Path - "which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to Calm, Insight, Enlightenment, Nirvana."<sup>10</sup> The Middle Path, therefore, represents a dynamic and mindful approach to living, advocating for equilibrium rather than excess or deprivation. This perspective aligns closely with the principles of sustainable living, which involves fulfilling present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. Sustainable living in relation to the environment requires balancing human desires, such as material comfort and consumption, with ecological constraints. It addresses critical issues like resource depletion, environmental degradation, and climate change, emphasizing mindful consumption and responsible stewardship of natural resources.

---

<sup>9</sup> Colin Ash (2008). *Happiness and Economics: A Buddhist Perspective*, Henley Business School, University of Reading, United Kingdom, p. 110 – 112.

<sup>10</sup> Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, revised edition (New York: Grove Press, 1974), p. 45.

In education, teaching the Middle Path can guide students in developing sustainable consumption habits. Sustainable consumption involves using resources in ways that meet immediate needs while preserving the planet's long-term health. Lessons can address topics such as resource conservation, teaching students how to use water, energy, and raw materials efficiently to avoid depletion and minimize waste. Ethical consumerism emphasizes selecting environmentally and socially responsible products, buying locally, supporting ethical companies, and opting for sustainable goods. Students can also learn to reduce waste through recycling, reusing, and prioritizing necessities over excess consumption. Minimalism in student life promotes simplicity, contentment with experiences, and an appreciation for quality and durability over mere quantity. Implementing the Middle Path in education fosters dynamic learning experiences. Practical applications may include organizing awareness programs or workshops on energy conservation and waste reduction. Hands-on projects such as recycling drives, community gardening, or designing energy-efficient products provide students with tangible ways to practice sustainability. By integrating these principles into education, students gain a deeper understanding of mindful consumption and responsible stewardship, reinforcing a balanced and ethical approach to life.

The Buddhist teaching of *anattā* or non-attachment encourages individuals to let go of rigid identification with possessions, status, and self-centered desires, promoting the understanding that material things and even our notions of identity are transient and not inherently tied to true well-being. This aligns with sustainability principles, which balance human needs with the planet's health. Modern society's fixation on excessive consumption and materialism drives environmental degradation. By embracing non-attachment, individuals cultivate mindful consumption, valuing simplicity and prioritizing long-term ecological well-being over short-term gratification. This mindset reduces the urge for endless accumulation and fosters a culture of reuse, recycling, and resource conservation. Teaching non-attachment in sustainability education develops critical awareness of consumerism, encouraging students to seek innovative, fair solutions that benefit both the environment and social justice. Freedom from material dependency empowers students to embrace compassion, mindfulness, and collective responsibility for the planet. Integrating non-attachment into sustainability efforts shifts the focus from mere conscious consumption to true coexistence with nature, making this mindset essential for a more sustainable future.

Now, the question that comes to mind is, how can we bring these valuable teachings into our school system and what difficulties might we encounter in the process? Curriculum development can be greatly enriched by integrating values inspired by Buddhist teachings and practices, encouraging a holistic education that emphasizes sustainability, ethics, and compassion. The practice is based on the three Buddhist principles of learning: *sīla-sikkhā* (moral conduct), *samādhi-sikkhā* (mind training), and *paññā-sikkhā* (wisdom development). In this holistic approach, the principles are practiced

simultaneously and can be applied to many dimensions, including personal, family, school, and communal levels, to cultivate responsive sustainable living practices for the learners.<sup>11</sup> These principles can be adapted to the wide radius of the learning environment to enhance not merely the acquisition of knowledge but also a strong sense of moral compass and responsibility towards the wider community and environment. This sort of values-based learning can be adapted to other subjects in order to create holistic, meaningful engagement. Ethics education can draw directly from the Eightfold Path as a practical framework for ethical living. Students can engage in case studies to analyze ethical dilemmas, applying principles of right action, right speech, and right livelihood to develop balanced, thoughtful solutions.

Classroom discussions can cover topics like ethical consumerism, integrity in leadership, and the power of truth and kindness in communication. In social studies, the Buddhist focus on compassion and responsibility can enhance understanding of global issues. Lessons on poverty, access to education, and healthcare can be paired with discussions about the moral responsibility to alleviate suffering. Learning about environmental justice and climate change in relation to marginalized communities develops empathy and a sense of collective responsibility. Projects might include awareness campaigns around specific environmental issues or research on sustainable practices and customs from different cultures. The teaching of Buddhist principles in school is not merely a theoretical notion but a practical guideline for addressing pressing global issues. It is in this light - both immediate experience and long-term prospects - that the study of Buddhist economics becomes relevant, even for those who prioritize economic growth over spiritual or religious values. The question is not about choosing between “modern growth” and “traditional stagnation” but about finding the right path of development - the Middle Way between materialist heedlessness and traditionalist immobility. In essence, it is about achieving “Right Livelihood.”<sup>12</sup> Together, these principles enable students to engage thoughtfully, responsibly, and proactively in their communities. By embedding these values into educational systems, we can cultivate a more harmonious and sustainable world where wisdom, compassion, and care guide the actions of present and future generations.

Experiential learning in Buddhism aligns deeply with the Buddha’s core teaching of “*ehipassiko*”, meaning “come and see for yourself.” This principle emphasizes that discovering the truth should not be based on blind faith but on direct personal experience. The Buddha instructed his disciples to investigate reality for themselves, a practice that remains central to Buddhist education today. Meditation and mindfulness practices form the foundation of this experiential learning. When students engage in meditation, they do not

---

<sup>11</sup> S. Chansomsak, & B. Vale, (2008). *The Buddhist approach to education: an alternative approach for sustainable education*. Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 28 (1), p. 35 – 50.

<sup>12</sup> E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. London: Blond & Briggs, 1973. p. 56 - 66.



merely study mindfulness as a theory; they experience it firsthand. For example, practicing breathing meditation (*Ānāpānasati*) allows students to observe their mental processes - how thoughts arise and dissipate, how concentration develops, and how awareness calms the mind. This direct experience transforms stress management from a mere concept into a lived reality, offering deep, personal, and practical insight into the workings of the mind and emotions.

The Community Service Projects provide another substantive channel for experiential learning and, in this sense, embody the Buddhist notion of *kamma* (action) and its consequences. Activities like tree planting give students an immediate experience of the principle of interdependence. When they plant a tree, they witness how one action contributes to life in the ecosystem - providing shade, creating habitats for birds, and purifying the air. This hands-on engagement transforms the abstract idea of interconnectedness into a tangible reality they can see, touch, and feel. Immersing students in nature allows them to practice *Dhammānupassanā*, observing natural laws in action. A visit to a forest, for instance, offers an opportunity to witness growth and decay, interdependence among species, and the delicate balance of ecosystems. Regardless of its form, direct observation teaches lessons about impermanence and interconnectedness, not through intellectual theories but through lived, sensory experiences.

Experiential learning serves as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and lived wisdom. Rather than merely reading about waste management, students can engage in projects that involve tracking their daily waste production. By collecting, sorting, and analyzing their waste, they gain firsthand awareness of their environmental impact and explore practical strategies to reduce it. Such activities encourage self-reflection on consumption habits, fostering a sense of accountability for sustainable living. This hands-on approach transcends theoretical learning, offering students a direct, personal experience of their role in environmental sustainability. It nurtures what Buddhism calls *paññā* (experiential wisdom), an integration of knowledge, emotional connection, and practical skills. Through experiential learning, students do more than understand concepts - they develop the insight and motivation necessary to become genuine advocates for sustainable and ethical change.

When we prioritize collaborative projects over individual achievements, we cultivate *Saṅgha* - the Buddhist principle of a supportive community based on mutual learning. For instance, rather than working on assignments alone, students can collaborate in small groups, each contributing their unique strengths. A student skilled in mathematics might assist peers in solving complex problems, while another with strong writing abilities helps articulate the group's findings. This approach reinforces the idea that success is not an isolated endeavor but an interconnected achievement. Peer mentorship programs exemplify *dāna* (the practice of giving) in action. When experienced students guide newer ones, both parties benefit beyond academics. The mentor hones patience, communication, and a deeper grasp of the subject through teaching, while the mentee gains academic support and learns that seeking help



is a strength, not a weakness. Celebrating collective success aligns with *muditā* (sympathetic joy). Instead of fostering competition and envy, students learn to take genuine pleasure in each other's accomplishments. For example, when a class completes a challenging group project, the focus shifts from individual contributions to the shared effort that made the achievement possible. This fosters a classroom culture where cooperation and mutual encouragement replace rivalry and isolation.

One of the biggest challenges in integrating Buddhism into education is that many educators have limited knowledge of Buddhist concepts, making it difficult to teach them effectively. To address this, professional development programs, workshops, and resources can be introduced to deepen educators' understanding. These training sessions - whether in the form of workshops, courses, or collaborative discussions with Buddhist scholars and practitioners - can equip teachers with the necessary skills and confidence to present Buddhist principles accurately and meaningfully. Additionally, developing curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, and multimedia resources can provide practical support for incorporating Buddhist teachings into education. Collaborating with Buddhist scholars or practitioners ensures that these ideas are conveyed in a way that is both accessible and relevant, enriching students' learning experiences while maintaining authenticity.

Another major challenge is the time constraints of existing curricula. With school programs already packed with compulsory subjects, there is often little room for adding new content like Buddhist studies. However, this challenge can be addressed by integrating Buddhist concepts into existing subjects such as philosophy, history, ethics, or world religions. Instead of creating a standalone subject, mindfulness, compassion, ethical decision-making, and other Buddhist values can be woven into these courses, making their inclusion seamless. This approach ensures a broad integration without overburdening the curriculum, allowing students to engage with these teachings in a natural and meaningful way.

To gain broader support for integrating Buddhist teachings, it is crucial to provide evidence-based demonstrations of their benefits. Research on mindfulness, meditation, improved focus, emotional regulation, and overall well-being can help persuade educators, policymakers, and parents of their value in education. Additionally, showcasing success stories from schools that have implemented Buddhist principles - such as improved mental health, reduced stress, and enhanced academic performance - can build momentum for adoption. Community engagement and advocacy also play a vital role in embedding Buddhist precepts in classrooms. Collaborations with families, Buddhist community centers, and religious organizations can provide valuable resources and support. Involving parents through workshops, discussions, and forums helps bridge cultural or ideological divides, fostering a stronger sense of community backing. When the broader community is engaged, the integration of Buddhist teachings becomes more natural and aligned with shared values. By combining teacher training, gradual integration, evidence-based research,

and community support, we can establish meaningful ways to incorporate Buddhist principles into education. This holistic approach not only empowers students but also nurtures a deep understanding of interconnectedness, encouraging responsible environmental stewardship and collective action for global sustainability.

### III. CONCLUSION

The study explores how Buddhist teachings can transform education, fostering a more sustainable future. Core principles like mindfulness, compassion, and interdependence catalyze environmental awareness, social harmony, and ethical living. The discussion emphasizes the practical integration of Buddhist philosophy in classrooms through experiential learning, which deepens intellectual engagement and encourages sustainable consumption. By embedding Buddhist ethics in education, students develop a greater sense of responsibility toward the planet and their communities. Despite its benefits, integrating Buddhist teachings faces challenges such as curriculum constraints and limited awareness of their relevance in modern education. Addressing these obstacles requires interdisciplinary collaboration, policy advocacy, and teacher training programs incorporating Buddhist perspectives on sustainability and ethics. By implementing these strategies, schools can create a holistic learning environment that nurtures empathy, responsibility, and global consciousness. Ultimately, Buddhist education goes beyond knowledge acquisition - it shapes individuals into compassionate, ethical leaders dedicated to sustainability and social well-being. Grounded in wisdom and mindfulness, these future generations will be better equipped to address pressing environmental, social, and economic challenges.

\*\*\*

### REFERENCES

#### Primary sources

- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. Bantam Books, 1993.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Together We Are One*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2010.
- Phuntsho, Dorji. *Cause and Effect: A Study on the Concept of Karma in the Buddhist Tradition*. *Bhutan Journal of Research and Development*. Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 32-37, 2023.
- Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. Revised edition. New York: Grove Press, 1974.

#### Secondary sources

- Ash, Colin. *Happiness and Economics: A Buddhist Perspective*. UK: University of Reading, 2008.
- Chansomsak, S., & Vale, B. *The Buddhist Approach to Education: An Alternative Approach for Sustainable Education*. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 28(1),

p. 35–50, 2008.

Donde, S. *Buddhist Perspective on Environmental Conservation and Sustainable Development*. Mumbai: National Conference on Sustainable Society and Environment, 2014.

Harvey, P. *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teaching, History and Practices*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2013.

Kabat-Zinn, J. *Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future*. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), p. 144–156, 2003.

Kovács, Gábor. *Sustainability and Buddhism*. 2nd International Sustainability Conference: People Planet Prosperity, 2011.

Matz, L. *Buddhism, and Sustainable Development*. In: Romanos, M., Auffrey, C. (eds) *Managing Intermediate Size Cities*. The GeoJournal Library, vol. 69. Springer, Dordrecht, 2002.

Sarao, K.T.S., Long, J.D. (eds). *Buddhism and Jainism*. *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*. Springer, Dordrecht, 2017.

Schumacher, E.F. *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. London: Blond & Briggs, 1973.

Tucker, Mary Evelyn, and Williams, Duncan Rytken (edited by). *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997.

UNEP. *The Global Environmental Outlook 5: Environment for the Future We Want*. United Nations Environment Programme, 2012.

Zinn, Jon Kabat. *Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future*. *Clinical Psychology: Science And Practice*. Vol. 10, No. 2, Summer 2003.



# BUDDHIST TEACHINGS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN MONGOLIA: PAST & PRESENT

Ven. Dr. G. Myagmarsuren\*

**Abstract:**

The paper offers a comprehensive examination of the evolution, structure, and contemporary transformation of Buddhist education in Mongolia. The first key theme, the monastic wisdom systematized, explores how Buddhist pedagogy in Mongolian monasteries - from the five great and five minor sciences to tantric and philosophical curricula - shaped a civilization deeply rooted in spiritual literacy. The second idea, from ritual to renaissance, highlights how the revival of Buddhist education post-1990s marks a dynamic return to ethical, intellectual, and cultural training grounded in Mahāyāna values. The third contribution, Engaged pedagogy for a modern world, proposes forward-looking strategies: using colloquial language, integrating scientific and psychological reasoning, expanding media outreach, and fostering interfaith harmony to render Buddhist teachings accessible and applicable to modern life. The paper's new contribution lies in its contextual adaptation of traditional monastic learning into contemporary forms of pedagogy rooted in critical thinking, cultural fluency, and civic engagement. By bridging scriptural authenticity with present-day educational needs, this work envisions Buddhist education not only as a vehicle for personal awakening but also as a transformative force in cultivating human dignity, wisdom, and sustainable peace in Mongolian society and beyond.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist education in Mongolia, monastic pedagogy, educational reform, mindfulness, and cultural revival.*

---

\* Research Institute for Buddhism & Culture, Director of “Zuun Khuree” College, Zuun Khuree Dashichoiling monastery, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Mongolia, Mahayana Buddhism, which is basically much the same as the early Buddhist teaching of India, has been widespread from ancient times till now. If we thoroughly examine Buddhism in Mongolia and its tradition and fundamental teachings, one will conclude that Buddhism spread at various times in different countries in different forms, but it has preserved the fundamental principles of the ancient religious philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Mongolian Buddhists chiefly studied and commented on theoretical works on religious philosophy, logic, psychology, and literature by famous thinkers of ancient India, such as Nagarjuna, Asanga, Ariyadeva, Vasubandhu, Chandrakirti, Dignagi, Dharmakirti, Buddhapalita, and others. On the whole, Mongolian Buddhists have been adhering to the concept of the middle path.

## II. THE FOUNDATION OF MONGOLIAN MONASTIC EDUCATION

From the second half of the 17th century, when Ikh Khuree, which is based on the current capital of Mongolia, was founded, Buddhist education in Mongolia was systematized. Ikh Khuree was a major centre of Buddhist culture in Mongolia for several centuries. Over ten thousand monks were studying in Ikh Khuree. In general, at each monastery in Mongolia, there existed a Buddhist school where, besides the Buddhist teaching, they taught the language, theory of literature, medicine, astrology, history, and art. Among the Mongolian Buddhist schools, the Buddhist University at Gandan monastery, founded in 1739, was very popular not only in Mongolia but in all of the East. Mongolian Ikh Khuree was the official religious centre. But Gandan was different from it by its liberal reformation. Gandan was set up as a philosophical school to teach the highest doctrine of Buddhism. Most prominent scholars of Buddhism graduated from this University, and spiritual life at Gandan was conducted in the form of lively discussions and debates.

At that time, in the Buddhist schools of Mongolia, Buddhist teaching was the major subject of study. Besides that, it was of primary importance to train monks to perform all kinds of religious rituals at numerous monasteries, and they were taught the five great sciences and the five small sciences, which were introduced in Mongolia simultaneously with Buddhism. According to the ancient Indian, Tibetan, and Mongolian tradition, the five great sciences were Buddhist doctrine, philology, logic, art, and medicine, and the five small sciences were astrology, theory of literature, allegorical poetics, and drama playwriting.<sup>2</sup>

At Buddhist schools, they first taught how to read and trained them to learn by heart primary recitation. The second stage was to study in various faculties, or datsans. The faculties were the most important seats of religious education, and almost every monastery had its faculties. In Mongolian monasteries, there

---

<sup>1</sup> Myagmarsuren, G. (2022). *Buddhist teachings for public education in Mongolia: Past & present*. Ulaanbaatar: Zuun Khuree Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Heissig, W. (1980). *The Religions of Mongolia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.



were mostly faculties of philosophy, medicine, Mantra, Tantra, and astrology. There were over ten faculties in Ikh Khuree. The faculty of Tantra was founded in 1739, the faculty of philosophy in 1756, the faculty of medicine in 1760, the faculty of astrology in 1779, and the faculty of Mantra in 1790.<sup>3</sup>

### III. SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS AND LITERARY HERITAGE

In the Gandan monastery in Ikh Khüree, founded in 1838, there were three faculties of Buddhist philosophy, such as Dashchoimbol, Gungaachöiling, and Idgaachöiling. The most important fundamental subject at various faculties was the Buddhist philosophy, which was the core of the Buddhist doctrine. Anyone who graduated from the faculty of Buddhist philosophy got the degree of Gabju. After that, he had to enter the faculty of Tantra to obtain the highest degree of Buddhology, Agramba, where the main subject of study was Tantra. It was considered that by studying Tantra, one could reach the peak of Buddhist studies and acquire supernatural powers. Graduates from various faculties of Buddhist studies stayed at monasteries and temples, being engaged in religious services, teaching Buddhist students, and propagating among the believers.<sup>4</sup>

Those well-versed in the Buddhist teaching translated or made commentaries on Buddhist sutras as well as composed their works. They translated and printed by xylographic means various works by ancient Indian and Tibetan scholars and religious hymns. Between 1718 - 1720 were printed by xylographic means 108 volumes of Kanjur translated under the guidance of Ligden Khan, and between 1741 - 1749, 220 volumes of Tanjur were translated by 35 translators and scholars headed by Kunga-Odser.

The Mongols translated works in various fields of knowledge from Sanskrit and Tibetan, and they also created an increasing number of works of their own in Tibetan and Mongolian. The Most Venerable Gabju Samaageen Gombojav Khambo lama of the Gangdantegchenling Monastery, in his report to the First International Congress of Mongolists, enumerated 108 authors with a list of their works and stated that it was not a complete list. Their works numbered several hundreds, and they were mainly commentaries on the basic sutras by Indian and Tibetan scholars.<sup>5</sup>

There were a great number of monks who translated from Tibetan into Mongolian or composed their works in Tibetan in the five great sciences and the five small sciences. For example, in philosophy – Agvankhaidav, Khamba lama of the Ikh Khuree, Agvanbaldan of the same monastery and Artsedbazar of Dalai Choinkhor Wang Banner of Sain Noyan Khan aimak, in philology – Gabju Lubsangdash and Gabju Damdinsuren of Ikh Khuree, Jamiyangarav of Sain Noyan Khan aimak, in logic – Gabju Shijiye of Ikh Khuree, Agvandarji of the same monastery, incarnated lama Lubsangsodov of Sartul Khuree of Zasagt

<sup>3</sup> Kapstein, M. (2006). *The Tibetans*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Bawden, C. R. (1989). *The Modern History of Mongolia*. London: Kegan Paul.

<sup>5</sup> Myagmarsuren, G. (2019). *Reforming Monastic Education in Contemporary Mongolia*. Journal of Mongolian Buddhist Studies, 6 (1), 45 – 58.

Khan aimak, in medicine – Toyin Lubsangchoimbol of Dalai Choinkhor Wang Banner of Sain Noyan Khan aimak, in art– astrologer Ubgenkhu of Mergen Wang Banner of the Tushet Khan aimak and others created numerous valuable works.<sup>6</sup>

Scholarly lamas of Mongolia, while doing translations of works by Indian and Tibetan scholars, wrote their independent works mostly on the Buddhist philosophy, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries. Certain works by Mongol monks have been highly valued by European Buddhist scholars as well as modern Mongolian scholars. In the second volume of “The History of the Mongolian People’s Republic,” it was said that the most scholarly monks studied thoroughly ancient Indian naive materialism, dialectics, logic, and the history of Buddhist philosophy and compiled books on the defending of the progressive heritage of these subjects. One of the prominent representatives was Agvanbaldan, who, in his work entitled “Commentary on the Fixed Great Tenet,” modestly called his work a commentary on “Great Tenet” by the Tibetan philosopher Jamiyanshadab (1644-1723). His work was a monograph on the history and theory of philosophy of ancient India. In his work, Agvanbaldan covered not only history, ideology, and the theory of Buddhism but also various fixed tenets and problems of theory.

#### **IV. CULTURAL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM**

Various religious books appeared in xylographic print as there were a lot of xylographic printing shops such as in the Ikh Khuree Holy Lama’s Monastery, Uizen Wang Monastery, Mangkhan Khuree, Choir Monastery, Muren Monastery, Olgei Monastery, Khalkha Temple, Sartul Monastery and others. In Zuun Khuree, over thirty big aimaks or monasteries were continuously offering all kinds of secular and Buddhist studies.

Buddhism strongly influenced all spheres of spiritual life in Mongolian society and natural history, particularly historiography, philology, translation, printing, architecture, mathematics, astrology, and so on, as well as medicine and veterinary science. Under the influence of Buddhism, at each major Buddhist monastery, there was a workshop to produce Buddhist images, various objects related to religious services for erecting temples and other buildings and for doing decorative work. Various really unique works of Buddhist art are still kept in different monasteries and museums of Mongolia.

So, the Buddhist ideology, theory, and teaching widely penetrated into the daily life of the Mongols from their very birth to their death, and their life was directly under the blessing of monks.

#### **V. SUPPRESSION AND REVIVAL: FROM THE COMMUNIST ERA TO PRESENT**

Between 1936 and 1990, Mongolia experienced a profound rupture in its religious and cultural continuity under the Communist regime. During

---

<sup>6</sup> Anacker, S. (1984). *Seven Works of Vasubandhu, the Buddhist Psychological Doctor*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

this period, an estimated 700 monasteries were destroyed, over 17,000 monks were executed or imprisoned, and traditional Buddhist education was forcefully eradicated.<sup>7</sup> The state's policy aimed to eliminate what was perceived as "superstitious remnants" of the old order, replacing religious consciousness with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Amidst this cultural annihilation, the Gandantegchinleng Monastery in Ulaanbaatar stood as the only institution permitted to carry out limited religious activities, acting under close surveillance. Despite such restrictions, Gandan symbolized the unbroken lineage and resilience of Mongolian Buddhism.<sup>8</sup>

In 1970, the establishment of the Zanabazar Buddhist University within Gandantegchinleng marked a subtle yet significant effort to preserve remnants of monastic education. Although tightly controlled by the state, the institution maintained a basic curriculum for training monks, safeguarding doctrinal transmission for future generations.<sup>9</sup>

The fall of communism in 1990 ushered in an era of democratic reform, granting constitutional religious freedom and sparking a spiritual renaissance across Mongolia. Monasteries were rebuilt, Buddhist rituals reinstated, and traditional learning revitalized. Thousands of young aspirants began to enter monastic life, and lay participation in Buddhist ceremonies grew significantly.<sup>10</sup>

More than a return to the past, the revival movement seeks to align ancient wisdom with contemporary values. Educational institutions such as the Zuun Khuree Buddhist Institute, Zanabazar University, and new Buddhist departments in secular universities now cultivate a new generation of scholars and monks grounded in both scriptural study and interdisciplinary knowledge (Myagmarsuren, 2021). The current renaissance thus represents not merely the restoration of lost traditions but a forward-looking effort to make Buddhism intellectually vibrant and socially engaged in modern Mongolia.

## VI. CONTEMPORARY BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN MONGOLIA

In recent decades, Mongolia has witnessed a remarkable revival of Buddhist education, reflecting both a return to traditional monastic roots and an adaptive response to the needs of a modernizing society. With the restoration of religious freedom and growing public interest in the Dharma, many historic monasteries and temples have been gradually restored. Alongside the physical reconstruction of religious sites, efforts have been made to reestablish traditional datsan - monastic colleges that once served as the intellectual heart of Buddhist scholarship in the country.

<sup>7</sup> Batbayar, T. (1996). *Democratic Movement and Reform in Mongolia*. East Asian Review, 8 (1), 71 – 92.

<sup>8</sup> Tsedendamba, S. (2002). *History of Gandan Monastery and Buddhist Education in Mongolia*. Mongolian Historical Review, 4 (2), 23 – 34.

<sup>9</sup> Myagmarsuren, G. (2019). *Reforming Monastic Education in Contemporary Mongolia*. Journal of Mongolian Buddhist Studies, 6 (1), 45 – 58.

<sup>10</sup> Humphrey, C., & Ujeed, O. (2013). *Monastery Life in Post-Socialist Mongolia*. Asian Ethnology, 72(2), 217–240.

Today, Buddhist education in Mongolia can be categorized into three interrelated domains: traditional monastic studies, integrated modern-traditional institutions, and Buddhist cultural and research centers.

The first domain is composed of traditional monastic studies, continuing the centuries-old curriculum of Buddhist philosophy, logic, tantric practice, and ritual training. These programs are conducted within monasteries where students - typically novice monks - receive instruction in classical texts such as the *Abhidharmakośa*, *Pramāṇavārttika*, and *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. The curriculum remains rooted in the Tibetan Gelug scholastic system but with increasing emphasis on the application of Buddhist ethics to daily life.<sup>11</sup> Core teachings are often transmitted through formal debate, memorization of root texts, and ritual practice - hallmarks of traditional Buddhist pedagogy in the Mongolian context.

The second domain represents hybrid institutions that blend traditional monastic learning with elements of modern secular education. These include general schools offering Buddhist-based curricula; the Zanabazar Buddhist University of Mongolia, which continues to provide advanced training in Buddhist philosophy within Gandantegchinleng Monastery; and the Zuun Khuree Buddhist Institute under Dashichoiling Monastery, which emphasizes both religious training and interdisciplinary studies. Furthermore, Buddhist studies departments have been established in several secular universities, offering courses in Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan language, and traditional medicine (Myagmarsuren, 2021).<sup>12</sup> These programs are designed not only to train future monastics but also to engage lay scholars and students who wish to explore Buddhism as a living philosophical tradition.

The third domain encompasses Buddhist cultural and research centers, many of which operate independently or in collaboration with monasteries and academic institutions. These centers are actively engaged in promoting the right understanding and propagation of the Buddha's teachings among the general public. They host public lectures, interfaith dialogues, academic seminars, and workshops on mindfulness, meditation, and ethics. In recent years, some centers have also taken part in international research collaborations, contributing Mongolian perspectives to global Buddhist studies discourse.<sup>13</sup>

Importantly, the Mongolian Buddhist educational landscape is evolving to meet contemporary needs. While maintaining reverence for scriptural tradition, educators increasingly recognize the necessity of contextualizing teachings for today's youth. Initiatives include integrating topics such as environmental ethics, comparative religion, mental health, and even digital literacy within monastic education. As a result, the revitalized Buddhist education system

---

<sup>11</sup> Myagmarsuren, G. (2019). *Reforming Monastic Education in Contemporary Mongolia*. Journal of Mongolian Buddhist Studies, 6 (1), 45 – 58.

<sup>12</sup> Myagmarsuren, G. (2021). *Education for Enlightenment: A Vision for Buddhist Schools in Mongolia*. Zuun Khuree Press.

<sup>13</sup> Humphrey, C., & Ujeed, O. (2013). *Monastery Life in Post-Socialist Mongolia*. Asian Ethnology, 72 (2), 217 – 240.

aspires to produce not only spiritually mature practitioners but also socially responsible citizens and critical thinkers grounded in compassion and wisdom.

This contemporary transformation marks a pivotal juncture in Mongolian Buddhist history - an era in which monastic and lay communities work collaboratively to ensure that the Dharma continues to flourish as both a source of inner liberation and a guiding light for collective well-being in the 21st century.

## **VII. TOWARD AN ENGAGED AND RELEVANT BUDDHIST PEDAGOGY**

Recently, Buddhist leaders of Mongolia express great emphasis on approaching Buddhism as an interactive learning system involving logic, reason and investigation rather than an arcane set of rituals and customs, urge Mongolian monastic community to follow the lead of Tibetan monasteries in India where modern education including science, math and English as pre-requisites for a complete education are taught. "Merely cultivating faith in the teaching of the Buddha is not enough, we must use critical analysis to properly understand what he taught," one of the religious leaders said.

Here, we include some ideas for Buddhist education for modern society. These methods are discussed among Buddhist leaders, educators, and teachers.

In what ways can Buddhist education be made applicable to people today? First, if oral teachings were given in the language with which people are most familiar, the language in which they are educated, then they could understand the meaning better. Colloquial language communicates much better to lay people than what does classical language.

Secondly, Buddhist doctrines must be clearly and logically explained. Today's youth is well-educated. They have knowledge of science, philosophy, psychology, and so forth. Not satisfied with hearing only the story of Buddha's life and the Jataka tales and thereby generating faith, they now want to know how the doctrine of selflessness relates to quantum physics and how Buddha's teachings on patience can be integrated into modern psychology. Young people who have a modern secular education will not believe in rebirth just because Buddha said so. They want to understand the logical proof for it and to know current examples of people who have memories of their previous lives.

Thirdly, Buddha's doctrine becomes extremely clear in the minds of the youth when it is explained clearly about modern, twentieth-century lifestyle and problems. In this way, the profound meaning of the Buddha's teachings is directly made applicable to current situations, and the people easily see the value of practicing the Dharma.

Fourth, Buddhism can be explained by using a variety of media. Traditionally, education was done by the disciple listening to the teacher in a strict teaching situation, or by children mimicking their parent's actions. But now videos, television, radio, comic books, weekly articles in the city newspaper, theater, and modern music are viable media for people to learn about the Dharma and to express what they have learned. If these media are used more, then young people will feel that Buddhism fits into their modern culture.



Fifth, it is beneficial for explanations of Buddhist theory and practice to be made available to the public in general. Here, Buddhism is explained in a more academic way, without people feeling obliged to call themselves Buddhists or adopt Buddhist practices. To this effect, public talks could be given in libraries and auditoriums, as well as courses on comparative religion or philosophy could be taught in universities and adult education courses.

Lastly, inter-religious dialogue is extremely valuable, especially in multi-religious societies. In our rapidly-shrinking world, people need to respect, and not offensively criticize, other religions. This can be achieved only by knowing about other belief systems and emphasizing the common, uniting points. It is important not only that religions be harmonious among themselves but also that leaders of all religions present a united front in encouraging world peace and better living conditions. This would truly be an inspiring example of openness and tolerance for all peoples of the world.

### **VIII. CONCLUSION: THE TIMELESS RELEVANCE OF THE DHARMA**

In short, conventional Buddhism is at a critical juncture. The path to liberation and enlightenment that the Buddha described from his own experience is a timeless one. Compassion and wisdom, the essence of the doctrine, are always needed to make our lives meaningful and beneficial to others. However, if we neglect to express these principles in a form that is easily understood by the people of today, then we are denying them access to the beauty of the teachings. Having huge temples and elaborate statues will not guarantee the continuation of the doctrine in the minds and actions of people. Performing rituals which few understand while neglecting to give advice suitable to people's mentality and problems is not sufficient to ensure that people benefit from the Dharma.

For people to touch the real meaning of the Dharma and to enrich their lives through Buddhism, education that is relative to their modern culture, lifestyle, and language is necessary. To provide this is the responsibility and the joy of those of us who ourselves cherish having met the precious doctrine of the Buddha.

\*\*\*

### **REFERENCES**

- Anacker, S. (1984). *Seven Works of Vasubandhu, the Buddhist Psychological Doctor*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Bareja-Starzyńska, A. (2015). *Mongolian Buddhism: History and Culture*. Warsaw University Press.
- Batbayar, T. (1996). Democratic Movement and Reform in Mongolia. *East Asian Review*, 8(1), 71–92.
- Bat-erdene, D. (2003). The Role of Monasteries in Mongolian Social Development. *Ulaanbaatar University Journal*, 5(3), 49–62.



- Bawden, C. R. (1989). *The Modern History of Mongolia*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Dhammajoti, K. L. (2009). *Abhidharma Doctrines and Controversies on Perception*. Centre of Buddhist Studies, HKU.
- Elverskog, J. (2010). *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Heissig, W. (1980). *The Religions of Mongolia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Humphrey, C., & Ujeed, O. (2013). Monastery Life in Post-Socialist Mongolia. *Asian Ethnology*, 72(2), 217–240.
- Kapstein, M. (2006). *The Tibetans*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Kohn, R. (1991). *The Psychology of Buddhist Monastic Training*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Myagmarsuren, G. (2017). *Buddhism and Cultural Heritage in Mongolia*. Ulaanbaatar: Dashchoiling Press.
- Myagmarsuren, G. (2019). Reforming Monastic Education in Contemporary Mongolia. *Journal of Mongolian Buddhist Studies*, 6(1), 45–58.
- Myagmarsuren, G. (2021). *Education for Enlightenment: A Vision for Buddhist Schools in Mongolia*. Zuun Khuree Press.
- Myagmarsuren, G. (2022). *Buddhist teachings for public education in Mongolia: Past & present*. Ulaanbaatar: Zuun Khuree Institute.
- Tsedendamba, S. (2002). History of Gandan Monastery and Buddhist Education in Mongolia. *Mongolian Historical Review*, 4(2), 23–34.
- Wallace, V. A. (2007). *The Inner Science of Buddhist Practice: Vasubandhu's Summary of the Five Heaps*. Snow Lion Publications.



# UNITY AND INCLUSION FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES ON WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Cynthia Chantal Infante Medina

## Abstract:

In an era of escalating social inequalities, environmental degradation, and emotional disconnection, the need for holistic educational approaches has become more pressing than ever. This paper explores the integration of Buddhist teachings, particularly mindfulness (*sati*), into educational systems as a means to cultivate compassion, resilience, and ethical consciousness. By incorporating the ethical principles of Buddhism, such as the Five Precepts and the Noble Eightfold Path, education can become a transformative tool that fosters a more compassionate and sustainable society. The paper emphasizes the potential of mindfulness not only in reducing stress but also in enhancing students' socio-emotional skills and ethical decision-making. It argues that education, when aligned with Buddhist values, can bridge the gap between technical knowledge and holistic well-being, preparing individuals to address contemporary global challenges with wisdom and compassion. The paper concludes that incorporating Buddhist principles into education offers a profound opportunity to reshape learning paradigms, fostering unity, inclusion, and dignity for all.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, sustainable development, world peace.*

\*\*\*

## I. JUSTIFICATION

In today's world, societies and the natural environment face an array of challenges, including social inequalities, armed conflicts, environmental degradation, and an increasing emotional disconnection among individuals. Addressing these pressing issues necessitates the exploration of innovative ways of thinking and acting to build a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future. In this context, Buddhist teachings - particularly mindfulness, or "*sati*" in Pāli - and the ethical principles they embody provide a profound

and transformative framework. This essay aims to justify the relevance of integrating these teachings into educational systems, not only as a tool for individual well-being but also as a means to cultivate more compassionate and ethical societies. As seen in verses 129 and 130 of the Dhammapada, in Buddhism, the principle of equality is rooted in the understanding that all beings fear suffering: “All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill”<sup>1</sup> “All tremble at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill”<sup>2</sup>. The rapid pace of globalization and technological advancement has brought numerous benefits but has also exacerbated significant imbalances. Emotional disconnection, rising rates of anxiety and depression, and social fragmentation are indicative of a system that prioritizes productivity and consumption over holistic well-being. Additionally, environmental crises such as climate change and biodiversity loss highlight humanity’s estrangement from nature, pushing it towards an irreversible tipping point. These interconnected challenges necessitate holistic solutions that address both the internal and external dimensions of human experience.

Education, as the cornerstone of society, holds immense potential to serve as a catalyst for structural change. However, conventional educational models predominantly emphasize the accumulation of technical knowledge and competition, often overlooking the development of emotional, ethical, and social competencies. This approach has resulted in a gap in preparing individuals to navigate the complexities of the 21st century with resilience, compassion, and creativity. Incorporating mindfulness and Buddhist ethical principles into educational frameworks presents an opportunity to bridge this gap and promote holistic learning.

Mindfulness, understood as the ability to be fully present in the moment, has gained significant recognition in recent years due to its effectiveness in reducing stress and enhancing well-being. However, its potential extends far beyond these individual benefits.

Within the educational context, mindfulness can play a pivotal role in fostering socio-emotional skills such as emotional regulation, empathy, and ethical decision-making.

From a Buddhist perspective, mindfulness is not merely a tool for calming the mind but rather a pathway to the complete eradication of suffering for all beings. The ethical principles of Buddhism offer a robust foundation for fostering more just and sustainable societies. Integrating these principles into educational curricula does not imply the imposition of a religious belief system; rather, it promotes universal values that transcend cultural and religious boundaries.

Buddhist ethics emphasize the significance of intentionality behind actions,

---

<sup>1</sup> Dhp 129.

<sup>2</sup> Dhp 130.

a principle particularly pertinent in educational contexts where students must learn not only how to solve problems but also how to reflect on the ethical ramifications of their decisions. Encouraging such reflective practices can empower students to make responsible and compassionate choices in their personal and professional lives. As the Khaggavisāṇa-Sutta reminds us: “Renouncing violence for all living beings, harming not even one<sup>3</sup>.”

Sustainability - defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own - is one of the most pressing challenges of our time. Buddhist teachings provide a unique perspective on sustainability by advocating for simplicity, moderation, and respect for nature. An educational system that incorporates these values could inspire students to engage in sustainable practices, such as reducing waste in their communities, adopting responsible consumption habits, and actively participating in environmental justice initiatives.

In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, rethinking educational approaches to align with the needs of the current era is crucial. This essay argues that Buddhist teachings, particularly mindfulness and ethical principles, offer a powerful framework for addressing contemporary challenges and fostering a more compassionate, ethical, and sustainable future. By integrating these teachings into educational systems, individuals can be nurtured not only to achieve professional success but also to become agents of positive change within their communities and the world at large.

This holistic approach represents an opportunity to transform education into a driving force for structural change that benefits humanity and the planet. It calls for the adoption of an inclusive vision of learning that acknowledges the interdependence of all beings and promotes values that transcend cultural, religious, and economic divisions. In doing so, we can aspire to build a society that does not merely survive but thrives in harmony with the world around it.

## II. INTRODUCTION

The benefits of meditation have been widely disseminated globally, with mindfulness being recognized for its potential to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. However, from a Buddhist perspective, this practice transcends these immediate benefits and aims at the complete eradication of suffering. In the Mahā-Satipatthāna-Sutta discourse, the Buddha addresses the monks with the following words: “This is the only path, bhikkhus, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for attaining the Noble Path, for the realization of Nibbāna, that is, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.”<sup>4</sup>

While mindfulness can be practiced independently, in the modern world, it is often approached from a purely technical perspective, neglecting its deeper integration within Buddhist teachings. This fragmented approach omits

<sup>3</sup> Sn. 284 – 290

<sup>4</sup> D. II. 231.

essential elements necessary for achieving true inner peace, namely virtue (*sila*) and right understanding (*sammā-ditthi*). Ethics serve as the foundation for mindfulness practice, allowing for a remorse-free mind that facilitates a more profound and transformative experience.

Ethical conduct plays a crucial role in Buddhist practice, providing a moral framework that fosters both personal and collective well-being. Without anchoring mindfulness within ethical principles, it becomes challenging to achieve long-term personal transformation and meaningful societal change. Virtue and right understanding must therefore precede mindfulness practice, forming a solid foundation for the attainment of *Nibbāna*. From the *Dhammapada*: “To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one’s mind, this is the teaching of the Buddhas.”<sup>5</sup>

In today’s globalized world, marked by increasing technological, economic, and social interconnectedness, persistent inequalities and conflicts continue to hinder the pursuit of world peace and sustainable development. Human dignity, a fundamental principle that should guide collective actions, is constantly threatened by social exclusion, armed conflicts, environmental degradation, and disparities in access to education. Addressing these crises requires not only corrective measures but also ethical and transformative approaches that tackle the root causes of suffering.

This essay explores how Buddhist teachings offer valuable perspectives for addressing these global challenges, emphasizing the fundamental role of ethics as a tool for fostering a more compassionate and sustainable future. In Buddhist thought, ethics are not merely a set of external norms but rather an internal discipline aimed at aligning human actions with the principles of compassion, responsibility, and mutual respect. This ethical orientation not only prevents individual and collective suffering but also promotes harmonious and sustainable relationships between individuals and their environment.

Within this framework, mindfulness emerges as a central practice that strengthens the capacity to act ethically in every aspect of life. Beyond its widely recognized personal benefits, such as stress reduction and emotional resilience, mindfulness serves as a bridge to a life governed by ethical principles. In the educational sphere, it has the potential to transform not only students and educators but also entire communities by fostering values such as empathy, compassion, and respect for the interdependence of all beings.

Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (United Nations, 2015). This essay argues that the integration of Buddhist ethics into pedagogical strategies can position education as a catalyst for structural change. By complementing mindfulness practice with ethical principles, global citizenship can be nurtured, prioritizing collective well-being, environmental sustainability, and peace.

---

<sup>5</sup> Dhp 183.



The Buddhist perspective, which emphasizes interdependence and shared responsibility, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the root causes of global suffering and offers practical tools to address them. Ethics, conceptualized as an act of generosity toward the world, serve to prevent suffering by fostering an awareness of the broader impact of individual and collective actions. Therefore, this essay seeks to highlight the relevance of Buddhist teachings in contemporary education and to advocate for ethics as an essential pillar in the pursuit of a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

### III. DEVELOPMENT (PROPOSALS)

The current global situation is marked by a series of interconnected challenges affecting both people and the natural environment. These challenges include mental health crises, social inequalities, armed conflicts, and environmental problems that worsen over time. Among the most alarming issues is the global rise in anxiety and depression, reflecting a widespread emotional disconnection that affects individuals of all ages and contexts.

Mental health, a fundamental pillar of human well-being, is being eroded by factors such as work-related stress, academic demands, the impact of social media, and socio-economic uncertainties. Recent studies, such as those conducted by Xiang, Martinez, Chow, Carter, Negriff, Velasquez, Spitzer, Zuberbuhler, Zucker, and Kumar (2024), highlight the growing need for mental health services targeted at young people. This phenomenon reveals a crisis of emotional neglect, hindering the building of healthy relationships and the development of solid self-esteem.

Simultaneously, social inequalities persist as insurmountable barriers for millions of people. Poverty, social exclusion, and lack of access to basic services, such as education and healthcare, perpetuate cycles of injustice that affect present and future generations. These inequalities not only generate conflicts and tensions within communities but also limit opportunities for sustainable global development. For instance, gaps in access to quality education restrict the potential of millions of young people, condemning them to precarious living conditions and limiting their ability to contribute to the progress of their communities. The Metta-Sutta emphasizes the importance of cultivating loving-kindness: "May all beings, whether weak or strong, long or short, large, medium, or small, subtle or gross, visible or invisible, near or far, born or yet to be born, without exception, experience joy and happiness"<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, the environment faces an unprecedented crisis. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution affect all living beings, underscoring the urgent need for action. These issues cannot be separated from social and economic inequalities, as vulnerable communities are often the most affected by natural disasters and environmental degradation. The disconnection between humans and nature is also a reflection of a lack of awareness of the interdependence that defines our lives. In this context, education plays a crucial role as a transformative tool. However, traditional

---

<sup>6</sup>Sn. 1 - 2.

educational models are often designed to prioritize the accumulation of technical and academic knowledge, neglecting the holistic development of emotional, ethical, and social skills. This limited approach has created a gap in the formation of individuals capable of facing the complex challenges of the contemporary world with resilience, compassion, and creativity. The impact of this disconnection is evident on multiple levels. On a personal level, the lack of socio-emotional skills hinders self-regulation, empathy, and peaceful conflict resolution. On a social level, the absence of robust ethical principles fosters corruption, violence, and exploitation, perpetuating systems that prioritize individual interests over collective well-being. On an environmental level, emotional and ethical disconnection leads to irresponsible exploitation of natural resources, ignoring the long-term consequences for the planet and future generations. The Buddhist precepts emphasize the importance of ethical conduct by stating: I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct. I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.”<sup>7</sup>

Faced with these challenges, the opportunity arises to reimagine education as a powerful tool for transforming society. Instead of focusing exclusively on technical knowledge, the educational system can become a space where ethical values, emotional skills, and a deep connection with others and nature are cultivated. This would not only benefit individuals but also strengthen social cohesion and promote a more harmonious relationship with the environment. Programs that incorporate mindfulness have been shown to have a positive and significant impact on students’ self-regulation skills in preschool and primary education (Roeser, Galla & Baelen, 2022).

Transformative education is based on a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. By incorporating universal ethical principles, such as compassion, respect, and responsibility, educational systems can shape global citizens capable of effectively addressing current challenges. Moreover, by integrating practices like mindfulness, students can develop greater self-awareness and awareness of their surroundings, enabling them to make more informed and ethical decisions.

An example of this transformative approach is the growing adoption of educational programs that combine academic teaching with the development of socio-emotional skills. These initiatives have proven effective in improving academic performance, reducing stress levels, and fostering a more inclusive and collaborative learning environment. Instead of perpetuating individual competition, these programs promote cooperation and mutual understanding, laying the foundation for a more equitable and supportive society. However, for

---

<sup>7</sup> “Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī-sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Adinnādānā veramaṇī-sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī-sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Musāvādā veramaṇī-sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī-sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

this vision to materialize, several obstacles must be overcome. First, a paradigm shift in how education is conceived is required. This involves recognizing that success is not measured solely by academic achievements but also by individuals' ability to contribute positively to their communities and the world at large. Second, it is essential to have the support of public policies prioritizing inclusive and quality education aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The world faces complex challenges requiring innovative and holistic solutions. The mental health crisis, social inequalities, and environmental issues cannot be addressed in isolation; they are deeply interconnected and demand an approach that considers both the internal and external dimensions of human experience. Education, as the foundation of any society, has the potential to be a catalyst for this structural change. By envisioning education as a tool for cultivating emotional skills, ethical values, and a deep connection with nature, we can lay the groundwork for a more compassionate, equitable, and sustainable future.

Meeting the needs of people suffering from depression is a public health priority (World Health Organization, 2020).

In Buddhism, ethical principles, known as *sīla*, form the foundation of a virtuous and meaningful life. These principles focus on cultivating essential qualities such as compassion, nonviolence, honesty, and respect for the interconnectedness of all beings. Unlike a rigid moral code, *sīla* is not confined to external rules; it is an internal discipline that guides our intentions and actions toward collective well-being. Buddhist teachings emphasize that mindfulness is essential for practicing ethics, enabling us to observe our bodily, verbal, and mental actions correctly at any given moment and to avoid transgressions when the opportunity arises.

The foundation of Buddhist ethics lies in the understanding that our actions have consequences not only for ourselves but also for others and the world around us. Interconnection, a central principle of Buddhism, teaches us that every thought, word, and action impacts the fabric of existence. Therefore, acting with compassion and respect toward all beings is not merely an ethical ideal but a practical necessity for living in harmony.

One of the most notable aspects of *sīla* is its focus on the intention behind actions.

Buddhism teaches that actions motivated by compassion and right understanding not only prevent suffering but also promote harmonious relationships and strengthen collective well-being. For example, the first Buddhist precept, "to abstain from killing living beings," goes beyond avoiding physical violence; it also encompasses preventing emotional suffering and respecting life in all its forms. This principle reflects a deep commitment to nonviolence and empathy.

Likewise, honesty and integrity are fundamental values in Buddhist ethics. These qualities not only strengthen interpersonal relationships but also foster an environment of trust and mutual respect. In a world marked by

misinformation and self-serving agendas, practicing honesty is a revolutionary act that can transform social and political dynamics.

Another key principle is respect for interconnectedness. Rather than seeing ourselves as separate entities, Buddhism invites us to recognize our profound interdependence with all beings and the environment. This understanding fosters a sense of responsibility for collective well-being and motivates us to act in ways that benefit everyone, not just ourselves.

Buddhist ethics also play a crucial role in the practice of mindfulness. According to Buddhism, meditation and other contemplative practices cannot be separated from a solid ethical framework. Virtue and ethics are essential for creating a calm and remorse-free mind, which in turn facilitates a deeper and more effective mindfulness practice. In this sense, *sila* not only precedes but also guides mindfulness, forming an integrated system aimed at eradicating suffering in all its forms.

This ethical approach has profound implications for education and human development. By integrating the principles of *sila* into educational curricula, students can be trained not only as competent professionals but also as ethical and compassionate citizens. For example, teaching young people the importance of nonviolence and empathy can help them develop healthier relationships and contribute positively to their communities.

Furthermore, the ethical principles of Buddhism offer a solid foundation for addressing global challenges such as social inequalities and environmental issues. By promoting values like moderation and respect for nature, *sila* invites us to reconsider our priorities and adopt a more mindful and balanced lifestyle. In a world where excessive consumption and resource exploitation are the norm, these ethical principles offer a transformative alternative that promotes harmony and balance. This approach is not only relevant on a personal level but also in collective and global contexts, where individual actions, when combined, have a significant impact on social and environmental dynamics.

For instance, the Buddhist teaching on contentment challenges us to reflect on our consumption patterns and their impact on the planet's resources. This reflection extends to food, as illustrated by this contemplation: "Reflecting properly, I use food not for amusement, intoxication, fattening, or beautification, but solely for the continuation and sustenance of this body, to end the discomfort of hunger and to practice the holy life, considering: 'Thus I shall eliminate old sensations of hunger and not create new sensations of hunger, and I shall be healthy, blameless, and live comfortably.'"<sup>8</sup>

This correct consideration toward food does not advocate deprivation but rather balance, enabling us to meet our needs without compromising the well-being of other beings and future generations. Adopting an ethical approach based on moderation can be an effective response to overconsumption and the environmental crises we face today, such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

---

<sup>8</sup>M. I. 12 – 3,

In the social sphere, applying the ethical principles of Buddhism can play an essential role in reducing inequalities and building more inclusive communities. Compassion understood not only as a feeling but as a committed action, urges us to work for social justice, equality, and respect for human dignity. Buddhist ethics challenge us to transcend personal and selfish interests, inviting us to adopt a global perspective that values collective well-being over individual benefit.

A distinctive feature of *sila* is its universal applicability. Although rooted in Buddhist teachings, its principles are relevant to people of any religious or philosophical tradition, as they are based on fundamental human values. This makes it a valuable tool for fostering mutual understanding and cooperation in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

From an educational perspective, incorporating the ethical foundations of Buddhism into learning can prepare students to face the challenges of modern times with greater compassion, responsibility, and creativity. For example, an educational program that integrates the teaching of *sila* could include activities such as discussions on ethical dilemmas, community service projects, and workshops on conflict resolution. These activities not only reinforce an understanding of ethical principles but also allow students to apply them in practical and real-world contexts.

Additionally, Buddhist values such as compassion and empathy can be powerful tools for addressing the growing mental health crisis in educational communities. By teaching students to recognize and manage their emotions from an ethical perspective, a healthier and more supportive environment can be promoted in both classrooms and society at large.

Mindfulness practice, guided by an ethical framework like *sila*, can be an effective intervention to reduce stress, anxiety, and emotional disconnection that affect many young people today.

Finally, the transformative impact of Buddhism's ethical foundations extends beyond individuals. On a broader level, they can guide public policies and organizational decisions toward a more equitable and environmentally responsible model. For example, organizations that adopt ethical practices based on principles such as transparency, integrity, and respect for all forms of life not only contribute to a more positive work environment but also generate tangible benefits in terms of social and environmental impact.

The ethical foundations of Buddhism, represented by *sila*, offer a comprehensive framework for addressing the challenges of our time. By prioritizing compassion, nonviolence, and interconnectedness, these principles invite us to reflect on how our actions affect the world and provide tools for living more harmoniously and meaningfully. Incorporating these values into education and daily life can transform individuals, communities, and the world as a whole.

#### Towards an Education Based on Ethical Values

Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion and ethics, offers a valuable framework for redesigning educational curricula. Instead of focusing exclusively



on the transmission of technical knowledge, ethical education inspired by Buddhist principles seeks to foster essential human qualities such as empathy, responsibility, and critical reflection.

Compassion, understood as the genuine desire to alleviate the suffering of others, can be integrated into educational activities through community service projects, discussions about social issues, and exercises that develop empathy for different perspectives.

In a multicultural and interconnected world, the ability to recognize and value cultural, religious, and intellectual diversity is essential. Incorporating these principles into education fosters mutual understanding and prevents prejudice and discrimination. Education can teach students that their actions have an impact beyond their individual lives, contributing to the well-being of their community and the planet. Practical activities, such as environmental sustainability projects, can help cultivate this understanding.

**Ethical Curricula and Sustainability:** The design of curricula reflecting ethical principles and sustainable practices is a critical step toward transformative education. Specific proposals include:

(1) **Ethics-Based Subjects:** Integrate topics such as compassion, social justice, and environmental sustainability into existing subjects like social sciences, ethics, or environmental education. For instance, a geography course could analyze the interdependence between human communities and ecosystems, highlighting collective responsibility for environmental preservation.

(2) **Interdisciplinary Projects:** Design activities that bring together different areas of knowledge to address global problems from an ethical and sustainable perspective. A project on climate change, for example, could involve subjects like science, economics, and ethics, promoting comprehensive and responsible solutions.

(3) **Historical Narratives and Examples:** Incorporating stories of figures who embodied universal ethical values, such as Gandhi or Wangari Maathai, inspires students and shows how principles of compassion and sustainability can be applied in real life.

**Mindfulness Applied to Ethical Understanding:** Beyond its role in emotional regulation, mindfulness can be a powerful tool to foster ethical understanding among students. From a Buddhist perspective, mindfulness is not separate from an ethical framework; instead, it is enriched and guided by values such as compassion and responsibility.

(1) **Meditation Exercises:** Incorporate mindfulness practices that invite students to reflect on ethical issues, such as the nature of their actions and their impact on others and the environment.

(2) **Group Dynamics:** Design activities that promote conscious dialogue and mutual understanding, such as listening circles where students share experiences and perspectives, cultivating empathy and connection.

(3) **Programs Linking Mindfulness to Social Commitment:** Adapt



mindfulness programs to include activities that connect awareness with social engagement, such as workshops on responsible consumption, conflict resolution, and ethical leadership.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite the evident benefits, implementing ethical and sustainable education faces significant challenges, such as institutional resistance, inadequate teacher training, and the need for financial resources. However, these challenges also present opportunities to innovate and build more inclusive and relevant educational systems.

Strategies to overcome these challenges include:

(1) **Teacher Training:** Provide educators with practical tools to incorporate ethical values and mindfulness into their teaching methods.

(2) **Community Collaboration:** Involve families and communities in the educational process, ensuring that ethical values are reinforced both inside and outside the classroom.

(3) **Progressive Educational Policies:** Promote educational reforms prioritizing the integral development of students by combining academic competencies with ethical and socio-emotional skills.

**A Path to the Future:** A study on the importance of “informal mindfulness,” understood as the practice of mindfulness during everyday activities like washing dishes or walking, highlights that this practice gradually increases through repetition and accumulated experience. This increase may drive the benefits associated with mindfulness practice (Mettler, Zito, Bastien, Bloom, & Heath, 2024).

Integrating Buddhist principles into education does not mean imposing religion or ideology but rather adopting universal values that transcend cultural and spiritual barriers. By designing curricula that combine mindfulness with ethical principles like compassion and respect for diversity, education can be transformed into a powerful tool for addressing global challenges.

Ultimately, ethical and sustainable education benefits not only students individually but also contributes to collective well-being, promoting more just, peaceful, and resilient societies. This approach is not just an option but an urgent necessity in a world demanding innovative and compassionate solutions to the problems.

**Innovative Proposals:** Transforming education into a more compassionate, ethical, and environmentally respectful approach requires initiatives that combine theory with practice. Below are concrete proposals designed to bring mindfulness and ethical principles into reality, fostering significant change in students, teachers, and communities.

**Ethical Mindfulness Workshops:** Ethical mindfulness workshops focus on combining mindfulness practice with reflections on ethical values such as compassion, respect for diversity, and interdependence. These sessions can include:

(1) **Meditation Practices:** Simple exercises that teach students to be present

and develop greater awareness of their thoughts, emotions, and actions.

(2) **Group Reflections:** Dialogue spaces where participants analyze how to apply ethical values in their daily lives and interactions with others.

(3) **Practical Activities:** Dynamics demonstrating the importance of cooperation, mutual respect, and empathy, such as collaborative games or simulations on conflict resolution.

These workshops would not only improve students' emotional well-being but also equip them with practical tools to address contemporary ethical and social challenges.

**Teacher Training:** Teachers play a fundamental role in the success of any educational initiative. Therefore, programs are proposed to train educators to incorporate compassionate and mindful practices into their teaching methods. Key areas of this training would include:

(1) **Stress Management:** Mindfulness-based techniques to help teachers manage stress, improve their well-being, and model positive behaviors for students.

(2) **Inclusive Practices:** Strategies for creating classroom environments where all students feel valued and respected, regardless of their cultural, social, or academic backgrounds.

(3) **Ethical Integration:** Methods to connect academic curricula with universal ethical principles, helping students develop a deeper understanding of the topics they study.

Additionally, these training programs could include specific modules on teaching students to apply socio-emotional skills and ethical reflections in their daily lives.

**Innovative Educational Materials:** To complement the previous initiatives, it is essential to develop educational resources that present ethical values and mindfulness creatively and engagingly. Examples of these materials include:

(1) **Interactive Guides:** Books and digital platforms explaining concepts like interdependence and sustainability through illustrations, games, and practical activities.

(2) **Educational Videos:** Short films depicting inspiring stories of individuals and communities that have implemented compassionate practices.

(3) **Collaborative Projects:** Activities where students work together to solve ethical or environmental problems, such as designing solutions to reduce waste at school or promoting respect for diversity in their community.

These resources can be adapted to different ages and cultural contexts, ensuring they are accessible and relevant to a wide range of students.

**Community Partnerships:** Ethical and sustainable education should not be confined to classrooms; its impact is amplified when it involves local and global communities. Strategies to foster these partnerships include:

(1) **Collaboration with Local Organizations:** Work with community

groups, NGOs, and local leaders to design and implement projects promoting social and environmental justice.

(2) Community Service Projects: Initiatives where students apply ethical principles in practical activities, such as reforestation, supporting vulnerable populations, or organizing awareness campaigns.

(3) Global Exchange Networks: Create opportunities for students and teachers to collaborate with schools worldwide, sharing ideas and experiences on education, ethics, and sustainability.

These partnerships not only enrich the educational experience but also strengthen participants' sense of global responsibility.

Evaluation and Feedback: To ensure the success of these proposals, it is essential to establish evaluation systems that measure their impact and allow for continuous adjustments. Evaluation tools could include:

(1) Well-Being Surveys: Periodic questionnaires to assess the stress levels, satisfaction, and socio-emotional skills of students and teachers.

(2) Community Change Indicators: Measures to evaluate the impact of educational projects on the community, such as reduced conflicts or increased civic participation.

(3) Individual and Group Reflections: Spaces where participants can share their experiences and suggestions for improving initiatives.

A More Compassionate and Sustainable Future: These innovative proposals aim to transform education into a powerful tool for social change. By integrating mindfulness with ethical principles at all educational levels, individuals can be cultivated who are not only prepared to face the challenges of this century but also deeply committed to the well-being of others and the planet.

Implementing these initiatives has the potential to create a lasting impact not only in schools but also in communities and the broader world. This approach represents a crucial step toward a more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable society, where compassion and respect are the values that guide our actions and decisions.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In a world characterized by multidimensional crises such as climate change, growing social inequalities, and a global mental health crisis, education emerges as a key space for social transformation. In this essay, we have explored how integrating Buddhist principles such as mindfulness and ethics into education can contribute to building a more compassionate, equitable, and viable future in harmony with the environment. This holistic perspective not only addresses the emotional and ethical shortcomings of the current educational system but also proposes concrete solutions to tackle global challenges at their roots.

Education is much more than the mere transmission of technical or academic knowledge; it is an integral process that must shape individuals as ethical, conscious citizens committed to collective well-being. In this sense, mindfulness, understood from Buddhism as a practice that cultivates

full and compassionate awareness, offers a powerful tool to transform both the educational experience and the daily lives of students, teachers, and communities.

Currently, education faces challenges such as the rise of anxiety, depression, and stress among students and teachers. These difficulties not only affect academic performance but also individuals' ability to interact positively with their environment. By incorporating mindfulness into the educational curriculum, space is created for people to recognize their emotions, develop self-regulation, and strengthen essential socio-emotional skills such as empathy and critical thinking.

However, mindfulness should not be seen as an isolated practice but as part of an integral ethical framework. This is where the Buddhist principles of compassion, nonviolence, and respect for interconnectedness become the heart of transformative education. These values not only guide individual actions but also generate a culture of collaboration, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

The incorporation of ethical principles and mindfulness practices in education not only benefits individuals but also directly contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Designing curricula that combine ethical values with academic content is a key proposal for shaping global citizens capable of addressing the present age challenges. For instance, teaching students about the interdependence of living beings not only fosters respect for diversity but also promotes a caring attitude toward the environment. By connecting these teachings with mindfulness practices, a profound sense of responsibility for collective well-being can be cultivated.

Throughout this essay, we have outlined innovative proposals aimed at integrating mindfulness and ethical principles into education in practical and responsible ways. Ethical mindfulness workshops, teacher training programs, innovative educational materials, and community partnerships are just some of the concrete steps to transform the educational system from its foundations.

These initiatives not only respond to the immediate needs of students and teachers but also have the potential to generate lasting impacts on communities. For example, ethical mindfulness workshops not only help participants manage stress but also invite them to reflect on their values and their role in building a more just and compassionate world.

Similarly, partnerships with local and global communities strengthen the connection between education and real-world challenges, enabling students to apply their learning in meaningful contexts. In this way, education is fostered not only to prepare for the labor market but also to form conscious citizens committed to social change.

The implementation of these proposals has the potential to radically change how we conceive of education and its role in society. By prioritizing mindfulness and ethics, a generation of individuals is cultivated who can face the modern era challenges with resilience, empathy, and a long-term vision.

Moreover, this educational approach benefits not only students and teachers but also contributes to the creation of more equitable and sustainable societies. In a world where social, economic, and cultural divides are increasingly deep, education based on Buddhist principles offers a path toward unity and inclusion. Mindfulness in education, guided by the ethical principles of Buddhism, represents a transformative solution to contemporary global challenges. By combining full awareness with values such as compassion and respect for interconnectedness, an educational system can be built that not only forms competent individuals but also ethical and conscious citizens. Ultimately, this educational vision has the potential to transcend classrooms and transform society as a whole. By cultivating a generation of leaders and citizens committed to peace, justice, and sustainability, the foundations are laid for a future where human dignity, unity, and inclusion are the pillars of our collective development. This approach is not only a response to the challenges of the present but also a beacon of hope for generations to come.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCE

- Aṅguttara Nikāya, Ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1885 - 1900. Tr. F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1932 - 1995.
- Baelen, R. N., Esposito, M. V., & Galla, B. M. (2019). "A selective review of mindfulness training programs for children and adolescents in school settings." In P. A. Jennings, A. A. De Mauro, & P. P. Mischenko (Eds.), *The Mindful School: Transforming School Culture Through Mindfulness and Compassion* (pp. 14-56).
- Bonde, E. H., Fjorback, L. O., Frydenberg, M., & Juul, L. (2022). "The effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction for school teachers: A cluster-randomized controlled trial." *European Journal of Public Health*, 32(2), 246-253. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/32/2/246/6526190?login=false>.
- Dhammapada, Ed. S. Sumaṅgala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K.R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.
- Dīgha Nikāya, Ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.
- Emory University. (n.d.). *SEE Learning: Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning*. Retrieved from <https://seelearning.emory.edu>.
- Khuddakapāṭha, Ed. Ven. Ñāṇamoli, *The Minor Readings and the Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, PTS, London, 2015.
- Linardon, J., Messer, M., Goldberg, S. B., & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M. (2024). "The efficacy of mindfulness apps on symptoms of depression and anxiety: An updated meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials." *Clinical*

- Psychology Review, 107, 102370. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272735823001289>.
- Majjhima Nikāya, Ed.V.Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, Further Dialogues of the Buddha, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, Middle Length Sayings, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.
- Mettler, J., Zito, S., Bastien, L., Bloom, E., & Heath, N. L. (2024). "How we teach mindfulness matters: Adolescent development and the importance of informal mindfulness." *Journal of School Psychology*, 105, 101323. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022440524000438>.
- Mindful.org. (n.d.). "Mindfulness in education." accessed on [January 2, 2025], available at: <https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-in-education/>.
- Roeser, R. W., Galla, B., & Baelen, R. N. (2022). "Mindfulness in schools: Evidence on the impacts of school-based mindfulness programs on student outcomes in P-12 educational settings." <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/ascpv>.
- Roeser, R. W., Greenberg, M. T., Frazier, T., Galla, B. M., Semenov, A. D., & Warren, M. T. (2023). "Beyond all splits: Envisioning the next generation of science on mindfulness and compassion in schools for students." *Mindfulness*, 14(2), 239-254. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12671-022-02017-z>.
- Semple, R. J., Droutman, V., & Reid, B. A. (2016). "Mindfulness goes to school: Things learned (so far) from research and real-world experiences." *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(1), 29-52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21981>.
- Taylor, H., Strauss, C., & Cavanagh, K. (2021). "Can a little bit of mindfulness do you good? A systematic review and meta-analyses of unguided mindfulness-based self-help interventions." *Clinical Psychology Review*, 89, 102078. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272735821001215>.
- Thera, N. (2024). The power of mindfulness. Fivestar. Accessed on [January 5, 2025], available at: <https://books.google.es/books?hl=es&lr=&id=gWclEQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1>.
- United Nations. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Accessed on [January 4, 2025], available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/>.
- Weare, K. (2023). "Where have we been and where are we going with mindfulness in schools?" *Mindfulness*, 14(2), 293-299. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12671-023-02089-2>.
- World Health Organization. (2020). "Depression." accessed on [January 2, 2025], available at: <https://www.who.int>.
- Xiang, A. H., Martinez, M. P., Chow, T., Carter, S. A., Negri, S., Velasquez, B., Spitzer, J., Zuberbuhler, J. C., Zucker, A., & Kumar, S. (2024).



Depression and Anxiety Among US Children and Young Adults. JAMA network open, 7(10), e2436906. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.36906>

Zhang, D., Lee, E. K., Mak, E. C., Ho, C. Y., & Wong, S. Y. (2021). "Mindfulness-based interventions: An overall review." British Medical Bulletin, 138(1), 41-57. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/bmb/article/138/1/41/6306060>.



# SUBJECTIVITY, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND THE NOTION OF ANATTA

Dr. Jeff Wilson\*

## Abstract:

This paper considers the issues of unity and inclusivity on the deeper level of the meaning of those terms in personal psychology, the subjectivity of the person. In order to achieve social and international inclusivity, we need to understand the oppositions and fragmentations of the present-day personal psyche. Scholars increasingly use the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl to explain the Buddhist approach to these problems. Rather than attempting a positivistic analysis of the 'external' world like many of his contemporaries, he focused on the cognitive processes that allow us to participate in intersubjective relations with other humans. Like Buddhist epistemology, he emphasized consciousness itself rather than a third-person, objective view of the world. The notion of *suññata*, nothingness or voidness, is investigated here from the perspective of the Western phenomenologists who disconnect from this third-person approach through 'a certain refraining from judgement' (Husserl). Like the authors of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, they know that wisdom is not found in the intellectual sphere and that sometimes words get in the way.

**Keywords:** *Anatta, Phenomenology, Mindfulness, Subjectivity, Emptiness (Suññatā).*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

From a certain (Western) perspective, the construction, maintenance, and tightening of strong ego boundaries is the fundamental concern of present-day educational theories and practices. Such theories appear to be based on a belief that autonomy, rationality, and individuality are facilitated in children through the disciplined construction and policing of the parameters that surround and define subjectivity. Perspectives that question this attitude to acculturating and training the next generation of citizens can be found in the writings of

---

\* Research consultant in Buddhist Studies.

French writers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva whose cultural theories present an opposing methodology that *loosens* the parameters around subjectivity and that can be developed to coexist with this dominant third-person analytic style to simultaneously release the faculties of imagination, creativity and insight. Educational methodologies that embrace such alternative or complementary approaches prepare young people for the art of living, not just for working.

## II. DISCUSSION

When the focus is shifted to a non-Western tradition such as Buddhism, certain resonances begin to appear between these complementary methodologies and the philosophy of Buddhism. It becomes possible to construct a suitable discourse/ terminology in which to discuss subjectivity from both the internal and external viewpoints. Buddhist philosophy centres around the notion of *anatta* (no-self), while occidental epistemology is centred around the self, the ego, and the rights and responsibilities of the autonomous individual. In the West, a child's development is carefully monitored, its actions and responses accurately tuned to produce a functional ego.

What then is the Western mind to do with the notion of *anatta* ('no-self'), the negation of a seemingly universal conviction that a continuous and substantial self, or 'own-being' (Skt. *svabhava*), exists? The Freudian ego is still very much the Cartesian ego of '*cogito ergo sum*' ('I think, therefore I am'); the 'I' defined as the rationally thinking being. In the Western approach to selfhood, the thinking self stands apart from nature, observing an outside world, while the Eastern approach is to see ourselves as part of nature and nature as existing within us. This latter approach views subjectivity from a very different perspective, where an over-emphasis on autonomy does not lead to a separation from a more holistic identification, a sense of belonging to, or of being a part of nature. An ability to see from both the objective and subjective perspectives would lead to the logic of the Mahayānists in which a self both exists and does not exist.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, although it is a not altogether trouble-free analysis, it would be possible to say that the Buddhist concept of no-self questions the substantiality of a sense of self that is the product of over-intellectualised self-views. If there is an authentic self, then it resides in experience - in the momentary awareness that we have of the flowing existential stream of phenomenal interactivity. The objective of meditation practice, then, is a lowering of parameters regarding the autonomy of selfhood and in the transcendence of a mental gateway separating self from other, self from the world. The sense of self that undergoes this transition from self-oriented consciousness to liberated consciousness is still a self, but it is not a self that is bound by habitual attachments and is thus experienced in meditation practice as a relatively insubstantial part of the

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example T. E. Wood, 1994, *Nagarjunian Dispensations: A Philosophic Journey Through an Indian Looking Glass*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, p. 15.

greater psyche. Understanding the more esoteric texts of Buddhism requires a use of language that is disentangled from the Cartesian ego.

The problem requires the introduction of relatively non-differentiating perspectives to balance the analytic tendencies of disciplinary approaches.<sup>2</sup> It is a matter of reinstating the value of semiotic flow, the kind of linguistic flow found in poetic and colloquial language, against the hegemony of symbolic stasis, the language contained within the boundaries of prescriptive grammars and institutional rationalities. Science cannot shield us from our subjectivity; the methodologies that go into the 'construction' of the subject need to be thoroughly understood to conceive of better, less interventionist methodologies in the future. They would be educational methodologies designed to provide a balanced approach to living by developing a synthesis of the analytic, 'task-positive' or task oriented, style and the intuitive (default mode) style of learning and cognition. This re-definition of cognitive styles into the 'task-oriented' and 'default mode' styles has become prominent since the turn of the new millennium through fMRI studies in secular meditation techniques, which recognise two independent neural networks in the brain. One follows the cortical regions (the task-oriented mode) while the other lies beneath it (the default mode) and includes the *insular* region, which is identified with self-referencing cognitive processes.<sup>3</sup> Meditation is now believed to work particularly well with this default mode in promoting cognitive change by bringing about 'sustained attention to interoceptive sensations of respiration or bodily sensation'.<sup>4</sup> This internalised attention interrupts the habitual self-referencing patterns that create egocentric perceptual behaviours. The effect of interoceptive attention, in other words, is to free the subject, emotionally and perceptually, from over-attachment to external events and preoccupations. Instead of the automatic conceptual patterns that sometimes impose on behaviour, a more flexible and adaptive mode of cognitive organisation emerges, one that can be characterised as a semiotic flow, as the neuroplasticity of human creativity and which can complement the dominant mode of task-oriented thinking and behaviour.

The problem of the boundaries drawn around subjectivity first presents itself as a contradiction between rational thought and holistic or poetical cognition. But bridges can be built between the disciplined thought of logico-empirical investigation and the internal quest for 'psychic' meaning and value, even if only in the Jungian sense. It may be remembered that C. G. Jung saw the profound, underlying form of consciousness, the *alaya vijñana*, as a collective unconscious containing archetypal figures resembling spirits and

---

<sup>2</sup> Edward Crangle, 1997, 'Hermeneutics and the Ontological Categorisation of Religious Experience' in *Australian Religious Studies Review*. Vol 9, No 2, pp. 22 - 31, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> A. S Farb et al, 2012, *Mindfulness Meditation Training Alters Cortical Representations of Interoceptive Attention*, Downloaded from <https://academic.oup.com/scan/article-abstract/8/1/15/16060> on 27/02/2020

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

*devas*. His work demonstrated that psychology sometimes needs to use the language of religion and mysticism to properly describe the workings of the human Psyche. The *external* view produced by logico-empirical approaches to knowledge seems to radically exclude the *internal* experience of hermeneutic subjectivity and to see it as 'mere' subjectivity as opposed to the detached and impartial perspective of the empirical gaze. But the task-oriented and default-mode areas of the mental sphere can work together as we learn to both think and not think, to objectively analyse our immediate environment or to simply be aware of the ebbs and flows of the present moment.

The term 'cognition' has been employed here in preference to alternatives such as 'consciousness', which seems dependent on an opposition to 'unconsciousness'; or to 'mind' which similarly depends on an opposition to 'body'. However, cognition should not be confused with the notion of 'cognitivism,' which tends to be used as a signifier for the type of mentation that operates through a process of symbolic manipulation, deduction, and inference. These latter aspects of cognition are related here to the 'analytic' modality and always contrasted with the equally valuable cognitive modality of the 'global', the intuitive, pre-symbolic, and undifferentiated modes of knowing and understanding.

'Cognition' then refers to the whole spectrum of consciousness, including the subliminal and hardly-noticed sensorimotor interactions that are regarded here as forming the fundamental cognitive basis for the so-called higher cognitive functions. Cognition, then, basically means 'knowing', as the Greek root of the word demands: it means 'knowing' in both the sense of knowledge acquired through logico-empirical investigation and in the sense of knowledge acquired through direct experience, through intimate acquaintance with the content of our environment.

The terms 'global' (or non-analytic) and 'analytic' refer here to cognitive states or cognitive styles characterised respectively by low differentiation and high differentiation. A non-analytic style, by this definition, will describe the person's preferred mode of perceptually-guided activity as a means of dealing with the world in a holistic or 'whole-istic' manner, as a continuum of contextually-related (but not highly articulated) phenomena. The analytic style, meanwhile, is characterised by a tendency to articulate the world into a highly complex multiplicity. As most people utilize a mixture of the two main styles, even though one style may predominate over the other, it can be hypothesized that everyone is capable of operating within one or both styles. In the field of Buddhist contemplative practices, the global style has been correlated with certain *Mahayāna* practices - tranquility meditation and emptiness - while the analytic style has been compared with the mindfulness techniques characteristic of the Theravada schools.

The two basic forms of meditation style are sometimes found working together; they are never contradictory opposites but rather the characteristics of two different cognitive states: a) the 'global' state: characterised by emptiness, the world experienced as an undifferentiated continuum; and



(b) the 'analytic state': characterised by the tendency to differentiate and categorise phenomena. The analytic cognitive style can be seen to operate in Buddhist practice in its deconstruction of *samsaric* habits of thought, that is, in its tradition of 'mindfulness' (*sati*), where practitioners adopt an objective and detached approach to their thoughts and actions. Since the mid-nineteenth century modernisation of the Buddhist Sangha in south-east Asia, this analytic, 'open-monitoring' meditation method has become dominant. Its modern theme of moment-by-moment self-analysis attracted the attention of western psychologists, and successful secular versions have been developed and used by psychologists in areas such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

The texts produced by the 'global' and non-analytic cognitive state are not organised according to a strictly sequential schema. They are rather, to use a Deleuzian term, 'rhizomatic', that is, they do not grow upwards from a central root system as trees do, but by spreading out laterally as rhizomes do and by obeying a law of circular causality:

Any point on a rhizome can be connected to any other point... semiotic chains of all sorts are connected to quite diverse modes of encoding, chains of biological, political, economic and other kinds...

A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating quite different kinds of acts - linguistic, but also perceptual, mimetic, gestural, cognitive ones: there is no language in itself, nor any universality of language, but a concourse of dialects, patois, slangs, special languages... It develops by stems and underground flows, advances along river valleys or railway lines...<sup>5</sup>

The wide distribution of the Perfection-of-Wisdom texts around the beginning of the common era (CE) marked the beginning of the Mahayana tradition. A semiotic chain was developed in these texts between the notions of wisdom, the great mother, and emptiness. The fundamental theme of empathy is explored through the semiotic connection between wisdom and the mother; one cares for the mother as the mother cared for one. She is the mother of *even* the Buddhas, so she is the source of wisdom. Her world is empty of substantial 'things'; it is pure experience. There is no universal language:

Where there is emptiness, there is neither form nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse... nor object of mind...<sup>6</sup>

But then the text reminds us that two cognitive styles are complementary rather than oppositional:

Form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, nor does form differ from emptiness...<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Paul Foss and Paul Patton, in *Ideology and Consciousness*, No 8, Spring, pp. 49 - 71, pp. 52 - 53.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Conze, 2002, 'The Heart of Perfect Wisdom, Short Form' in Perfect Wisdom, Buddhist Publishing Group, Totnes, UK, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Conze, 2002, 'The Heart of Perfect Wisdom, Short Form' op cit.

Each issue or theme is treated as an object of meditation that draws to it a centrifugal force of inspiration and insight and which acts as a temporary centre that relates, like the tributaries of a river rather than through the roots of a Chomskian ‘linguistic tree’,<sup>8</sup> to the central question.

These present-day cultural theorists – Deleuze, Foucault, and Kristeva – find their phenomenological foundations not just in Nietzsche but even more profoundly in the writings of Edmund Husserl. The theoretical similarities found between their ‘continental’ semiotic philosophy and that found in the Buddhist texts become clear when seen from Husserl’s perspective. Like that of the Buddhists, his system focuses on the cognitive processes that allow us to participate in the intersubjective relations of our world rather than on a positivistic analysis of that world. For Husserl, this analysis of the world, this ‘natural standpoint’, must be disconnected to ‘go to the things themselves’, to turn away from the outside world and concentrate on consciousness itself.

This notion of a cognitive disconnection is found throughout the Buddhist doctrines in the notion of *suññata* (voidness, emptiness, or nothingness). The ultimate aim, in the mental practices formed around this doctrine, is the ‘sign-less concentration of mind’ (*animitta cetosamādhī*). In the *Cūḷasuññata sutta*, this state is arrived at through a series of such mental disconnections. One disconnects from perception of the ‘assembly of men and women’, from perception of earth, through to the ‘base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception’ and nothingness as sign-less concentration. Therefore, the notion of voidness is seen, in the Pāli canon, as an absence of signs, symbols, and signifiers, a state of bare awareness (*sati*).

Husserl’s idea that we all carry a ‘natural thesis’, a thesis about the natural world that is ‘present to hand, is related to the Lacanian view of a ‘symbolic order, a linguistic ordering of our perceptions of the world. The goal of both phenomenologists and Buddhists is a reduction in the influence of this cognitive nucleus of pre-conditioned relations and ideological conventions. The real theme here is the reception of Buddhist philosophy in the West. To talk about Buddhist philosophy is not to suggest that Buddhism is a philosophy rather than a religion; that’s an old debate. It is often now recognised that Buddhism is *more* than a religion, that it is a religion but also a philosophy, a system of psychology, and a system of phenomenology as in Edmund Husserl’s search for a form of pure, unadulterated consciousness.

Meditation would be a helpful tool for Western phenomenologists because they aim to disconnect the image we all carry of the ‘way the world is’. The way to be aware of things in a direct, unconditioned act of perception is to put this rationalistic thesis about the world “in brackets”. To put such a thesis or ideological standpoint into brackets is to separate it from immediate consciousness, not to suppress it, but to hold it in a disconnected state so that it can be seen as a particular perspective, thus leaving the process of *sati* or bare attention in its unconditioned state. Husserl calls this act of perception an *epoché*,

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

“a certain refraining from judgment” (Husserl, 2012:58). What is disconnected is a ‘Natural Thesis’ about a ‘fact world’ that is always already ‘out there’. His method for attempting to attain pure consciousness is to subject this thesis, this internal commentary on the world, to a ‘certain suspension’ (2012:57).

This method bears a certain resemblance to the practices revolving around the notion of *suññatā*, the concept of nothingness or emptiness. Most Buddhist disciplines and schools employ the practice of ānāpānasati, a certain method of focusing on the respiratory system and centering awareness in the internal (*ajjhata*) sphere of cognition rather than in the external (*bahiddhā*) sphere of the objectively perceived outside world. The aim is to arrive at a state or perceptual mode in which the conceptual and symbolic representations of the world are minimalized or suspended. When experience is transposed into the symbolic sphere, when it is put into order and categorised by the constraints of language, it is transformed and consequently has its existence in a separate dimension where the world is interpreted as if one were reading it as a text. It is as if an inner voice, a voice of conditioned thoughts, is constantly explaining and describing the world of experience.

*Suññatā* is translated as voidness, emptiness, or nothingness. The techniques associated with the notion are designed to instil silence in the consciousness of the practitioner, to ‘still the mind’. In the *Culasuññatāsutta*, monks are advised to disconnect from the perception of the elephants, horses, men, and women of the village and focus on the Sangha. The focus then shifts from the Sangha to the forest, the earth, the base of infinite space, and so on until reaching a state of “the sign-less concentration of mind” (*animitta cetosamādhī*). Thus, the Voidist method, coming directly from the notion of *Suññatā*, involves a series of disconnections from the symbolic order, the propositional ‘linguaging’ of the world. It is a disconnection of the inner voice of conditioned thoughts and responses that is constantly explaining, describing, and ordering the world of experience.

The ‘symbolic order’ is a term constructed by Jacques Lacan, a theorist who mixed together a new reading of psychoanalysis with the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the phenomenology of Husserl. It is a way of grouping Husserl’s ‘Natural Thesis’ with all of the different perspectives that might be targeted by his method of suspension. As the language acquisition of a child progresses, it learns the social rules and how to play the social game with all its deeply embedded conventions of speech and action. An adult gradually emerges, equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills and armed with the prescribed grammatical tools with which to interact with other subjects. An ‘order of things’ has been established, and the person is oriented within a social, psychological, and ideological environment. In Buddhist philosophy, this order of things can be expressed as *sutamayā paññā*, the form of knowledge based on language and learning. A higher form of knowledge, or wisdom, is expressed by the term *bhāvanāmayā paññā*, wisdom based on mental development and meditation and which produces insight rather than propositional representation.

There are many intersections between the two methods, especially in regard to the notion of *anatta*, or non-self. The notion of a substantial 'self' has been radically questioned by those who have followed Husserl, those so-called postmodernist theorists like Lacan, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva, who are thoroughly rooted in Husserlian thought and who see the ego or self as a 'subject in process', a subjectivity that is constantly changing and that has no true substantiality or permanence. This subject in process exists in a constant interactive relationship with its significant objects: its foundations lie in Desire, and if the desire is too great for a particular object, that object has an exorbitant effect on the subject (Kristeva, 1982). In the same way, the five aggregates are the five aggregates of clinging (*panchupādanakhandā*). We become attached to forms, feelings, sensations, and so on, while the attachments, the objects, and the subjective experiences, together, create consciousness. The idea of a substantial self is implicit in this consciousness. There is, therefore, an acknowledgement of desire, attachment, and clinging as the major driving forces behind subjectivity in both systems. Both phenomenology and Buddhism see this thirsting as fundamental in the construction of the individual.

So far, Husserl's interest in Buddhism has hardly been mentioned. He had already formed his theories and methodologies before coming into contact with the Buddha's teachings. A colleague of his had produced a German translation of a substantial part of the Pali canon. When he read it, it had quite a dramatic effect on him. He realized that what he was reading was not just an academic philosophy or a set of religious prescriptions but a methodology for living, an art of living, a *lebenswelt*. He must have seen the significance of the term *bhāvana*, which is often used simply as a word for meditation but that, on a deeper level, refers to 'mental development'. This is not just a development that leads to greater mental abilities in the areas of logic, conceptualisation, and propositional grammar but a development leading to intuition, insight, and the eventual transcendence of propositional thinking, to 'cessation' (the cessation of volitional formations). He would have seen that the Buddhist idea of wisdom was similar to his own, signifying a higher degree of knowledge than that produced by the objectifying conceptualisations of logico-empirical language.

Such wisdom is attained through contemplative practices and all the methodologies that must be learned to appreciate the calmness of mind that produces insight and a purified intuition. The practices of mindfulness, for example, are methodologies involving the focusing of attention on the experience of the present moment to free consciousness from its customary objects and complex thoughts. In a similar way, Husserl's method involves a 'bracketing' of the conceptual systems that are hindrances to the phenomenological ability to see existence in its pristine state, as emerging out of itself rather than in a formulaic manner, in a formulated mapping of the world. His method of 'transcendental reduction', the bracketing out of our received perceptions/explanations of the natural world, is a pathway to transcendental pure consciousness just as the Buddhist path leads, by way of the cessation of

conditioned thought patterns, to the cognitive freedom of enlightenment and the vibrant emptiness of *suññatā*.

Although the poststructuralist notion of “deconstruction” refers to a critical methodology associated with Jacques Derrida, its epistemological foundations lie in the philosophy of Nietzsche, and deconstruction resonates in certain ways with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation or “bare attention” (*sati*). Nietzsche views the construction of meaning and value as taking place within a highly symbolic system preconfigured by the operation of certain foundational value oppositions. Such oppositions are always already in play when culture and science come to define tradition and reason and when a logic of contradictions informs the epistemology of both. Foucault acknowledged the fundamental influence that Nietzsche had on his philosophical development in his essay, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*.<sup>9</sup> In this work, it is clear that Foucault based his post-structuralist epistemology on Nietzsche’s attempt to dislodge the privileged “origin”: the extrapolation of present needs and desires onto an imagined and sacrilegious past. It is this “sacred” origin that anchors the values and meanings of the present to a distant “essential” truth. This essential meaning is traced back to its “roots” in classical Greek and Latin texts and the pious myths of Judeo/ Christian lore, forming a “white mythology”, Derrida’s expression for the notion that a profound mythology underlies and informs Western rationality, the Nietzschean *Grundglaube* (fundamental belief), the belief in a primordial differentiation between good and evil, a misplaced faith in the synthetic terms or things which emerge from such radical opposition.

The primitive meaning, the original, and always sensory and material, figure... is not exactly a metaphor... It is a kind of transparent figure, equivalent to a literal meaning (*sens propre*)... It becomes a metaphor when philosophical discourse puts it into circulation.<sup>10</sup>

The original figure soon becomes a mere token because when it is taken up in discourse, it enters into a symbolic domain that is governed and informed by the principle of the opposition: it becomes the subject of desire or aversion according to the cultural context and period within which it emerges or re-emerges.

Deconstruction is an analysis of the “minute particulars” of any worldview that has become “accepted as the correct one”, an analysis out of which emerges a “rather different picture” than the one previously held.<sup>11</sup> The splitting of the sign into signifier and signified, into “phonic” and “graphic”, and into utterance and concept reveals the whole of a signifying process to be a “structure

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, 1971, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in (ed) Paul Rabinow (1986), *The Foucault Reader*, Penguin, London, pp. 76 - 100.

<sup>10</sup> Derrida, Jacques. 1982, ‘White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy’ in *Margins of Philosophy*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, pp. 207 - 271, p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> G. C. Spivak, 1976, ‘Translator’s Preface’ to Jacques Derrida (1976) *On Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, p.xiii.



of difference”<sup>12</sup> The quest for the “ideal” brings forth a symbolic domain where attention is taken up entirely by a fascination for value-carrying signs: everyday attention to the interactions and experiences of the present moment is dominated by a habitual bestowing of meaning and value onto every event and percept.

To measure reality is to place too much faith in the power of the analytic modality, to privilege structure over play, and in terms of the human sciences, to privilege psychometric evaluations over personal interactivity. This leads to a fundamental belief *in the opposition of values*<sup>13</sup> and the existence of a Platonic world beyond the senses, a logical, absolute, and ideal reality beyond the imperfection of interpretive human cognition. The third-person stance that anchors the empirical viewpoint becomes part of a process that obscures the sensory image that inspired the original naming. This is why the practice of bare attention follows a middle path (*madhyamika*), an approach that unselfconsciously “deconstructs” the metaphysical oppositions that arise in the mind in the process of observing the object.

Any text can be “deconstructed” if its structure can be revealed, if the network of oppositional values that set the parameters for discourse within the particular field can be demonstrated. Like Wittgenstein’s language games, the targets of deconstruction are often shown to be shallow referential systems whose meanings and values emerge from cultural structures rather than from a super-sensible truth attached to archaic origins. Beneath the rational knowledge of a society lie the silent, socially constructed cognitive processes that inform that rationality. Truth is always compromised by the fact that a value system is already in place (in any culture), that it dictates the parameters within which the search for truth can operate, and that value systems can discontinuously change within cultures.

Within cognitive experience, despite philosophical logic, theology, and careful scientific experimentation, transactions take place between the emotions and profound cultural identifications and dependencies;

Metaphysics - the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his mythology, Indo-European mythology, his logos, that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universalised form of that he must still wish to call Reason.<sup>14</sup>

Derrida describes the dominant third-person, task-oriented mode of cognition as a mythology that has gained supremacy to such an extent that it is now known as ‘Reason. He sees clearly that Western science, although it

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1998, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, [trans] Marion Faber, p.7. ‘Der Grundglaube der Metaphysiker ist der Glaube an die Gegensätze der Werthe.’

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, 1982, ‘White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy’, op cit, p. 213.



has produced so much, has no right to set itself up as scientific philosophy. By denying the subjective, it cannot successfully describe reality or satisfy its quest for certainty. There is often a mistaken sense of certainty at the centre, and the semiotic traditions holding it in place change frequently as a result of tension generated by changing social demands and by a general sense of personal discontent (*dukkha*). It is a falsely-reassuring certitude made necessary by the anxiety resulting from an experience of being 'caught by' the game, of being somehow "at stake" in the game.<sup>15</sup>

This is the same anxiety caused by what Buddhists call "*tanha*" (thirst, craving, attachment), a vague awareness that there is some deeply desired specific outcome at stake. In the twelve 'links' (*Nidāna*) of the Buddhist chain of circular causality, *tanha* precedes *upadana*; that is, thirst leads to attachment. A "certain mode of being implicated in the game",<sup>16</sup> together with an investment of self, desire, and the need to belong, conspire in bringing about the circumstances for a deep attachment to particular outcomes, to a fear of losing the game. Such an urgent need to win and such a profound anxiety at the thought of losing - or of "being lost" - create the conditions for the emergence of an epistemology of certainty, an absolute and formal knowledge able to answer all questions and resolve all disputes. A vocabulary worthy of representing such a truth requires formal definitions created from semantic histories leading back to distant origins, to an archaic palimpsest, a parchment that has been erased and then reinscribed.

This mythology, which clings to "bare" experience and which deludes us into believing that our objective gaze produces empirical truths, is a kind of conceptual screen that creates a distance between understanding, desire, and the world. The early Buddhists realised through their mindfulness practices that it was possible to differentiate between the object itself (in its "suchness") and the value-laden perspectives that habitually emerge in recursive situations. They found that by suspending, as it were, these culturally created perspectives, they could gain a less distorted view of the world. Their practices were designed to deconstruct all habitual attachments to objects, thus liberating the attention from unconscious desire. But desire itself was not an object of judgement or suppression; it was noted and recognised by a detached, mindful attention that chose 'immediate coping' as the foundation of its ethical practices instead of a codified and preconfigured morality.

### III. CONCLUSION

The patriarchs of this Enlightenment - Descartes, Locke, Kant, and others - treated reason as if it were a panacea for all social ills. Rational beings would be cogs in an infinitely rational machine, the "social body," and a correspondingly rational mental hygiene would be established that would protect this perfectly ordered and reasonable utopia from any corruption by irrational thought and

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 252.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 213.

behaviour. The dream has been repeatedly criticised and deconstructed, but it is still embedded in the disciplinary orientation of Western institutions and the get-tough-on-crime speeches of ambitious politicians. The rational society requires rationalised behaviour from its citizens (the elements of its totality), and it demands disciplined, highly differentiated acts of perception. This involves the establishment of a habitual, third-person, objective viewpoint on the world. It is not that the third-person view, the objective gaze, is purely the creation of science, but that science has given it enormous precedence over other perceptual attitudes.

In Foucault's philosophy and in the fusion of psychoanalytic theory and semiotics of Julia Kristeva, the positing of a "semiotic" domain of pre-symbolic cognition that prefigures and anticipates the forming of the symbolic realm of formal language seems to suggest a foundation for the establishment of a language in which to discuss Asian epistemologies. Edward Crangle's idea that certain meditation techniques favour a non-analytic, undifferentiated cognitive style while others favour a more analytic, more differentiated style resonate strongly with the Kristevan notion that a pre-symbolic cognitive flow precedes the establishment of symbolic, conceptualised understanding. Her pre-cognitive flow, where awareness is more visual than verbal, resonates with the non-analytic cognitive style while her "conceptualised understanding" represents the analytic style. Nagarjuna would be happy with this configuration as an example of the workings of the "middle path" in which no absolute opposition between objective and subjective can exist. Patterns emerge around the construction of subjectivity along the lines of two distinct, contrasting, and non-interventionist cognitive methodologies or modalities. The opposition between the third-person, objective gaze of the scientist and the immediate and intuitive perspective of the meditator is dissolved in the realisation that the ultimate truth is ineffable.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Crangle, Edward. (1994). *The Origin and Development of Early Indian Contemplative Practices*.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.
- Derrida, Jacques. (1978). *Writing and Difference*.
- Dīgha Nikāya. *The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.
- Foucault, Michel. (1977). *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*.
- Husserl, Edmund. (2012). *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. (1968). *Man and His Symbols*.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.

- Kristeva, Julia. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.
- Lacan, Jacques. (1977). *Écrits: A Selection*.
- Majjhima Nikāya. *The Cūḷasuṇṇata Sutta*.
- Nagarjuna. (2nd century). *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way)*.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1967). *On the Genealogy of Morality*.
- Ricoeur, Paul. (1970). *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*.
- The Heart Sutra. *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya*.



# BRIDGING HEARTS AND MINDS: MINDFULNESS, HEARTFULNESS, AND AI IN TEACHING DHARMA CHINESE IN BHUTAN FOR COMPASSION A ND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Yun Fu (Frank) Tien\*

**Abstract:**

This paper explores the transformative potential of integrating mindfulness, heartfulness, and artificial intelligence (AI) in language education, with a particular focus on the innovative teaching of “Dharma Chinese” in Bhutan. Through a case study of the DE-SUUNG (Guardian of Peace) program, this research demonstrates how the mindful and heartfelt teaching of a Buddhist-infused language curriculum fosters compassion, inclusivity, and sustainable development. By combining language acquisition with Dharma teachings, the program not only facilitates linguistic growth but also enhances intra-religious dialogue and cultural understanding. Moreover, the application of AI in the curriculum provides advanced tools for language learning while ensuring a human-centric approach that upholds ethical considerations in the digital age. The study highlights the importance of mindfulness in education and its role in fostering a compassionate and sustainable future. Finally, it proposes the concept of “Dharma Language Education” – a fusion of language teaching and Dharma principles, offering an innovative path for global harmony through interfaith and intra-religious understanding.

**Keywords:** *Dharma language education, mindfulness in education, mindfulness and heartfulness, kindness, AI in language teaching, compassionate education, intra-religious dialogue, Chinese dharma.*

---

\* Consultant, Freedom Crossing Institute, USA.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language education serves as a vital medium for promoting cultural understanding and global harmony. By incorporating mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI into teaching methodologies, educators can create transformative learning experiences that transcend traditional paradigms. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and technologically advanced, balancing these innovations with human-centered values is critical. This paper reflects on these methods and their implications for fostering inclusivity, ethical responsibility, and compassionate and sustainable development through language education. Our three-month experience teaching “Dharma Chinese” in Bhutan as part of the DE-SUUNG (Guardian of Peace) program exemplifies this integrative approach. The program combined mindfulness practices, heartfulness-driven pedagogy, and AI tools to support language acquisition while nurturing empathy, compassion, and cultural competence<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.1. Dharma Chinese

“Dharma Chinese” is a new term we use, inspired by “Dharma English.” It refers to learning Mandarin Chinese through Buddhist terminology, expressing one’s Buddhist tradition in Chinese, and exploring how to convey Dharma concepts within the Mahayana Chinese tradition. In this context, “Dharma Chinese” specifically refers to the Mandarin Chinese language course that my wife, Dr. Christie Chang, and I taught in Bhutan between October and December 2022. In addition to covering basic knowledge and common daily expressions in Mandarin Chinese, our course focused on these unique aspects of language and the Dharma.

### 1.2. Teaching Dharma Chinese in the De-SUUNG program<sup>2</sup>

De-suung, literally meaning “Guardians of Peace,” is a transformative initiative in Bhutan established in 2011 under the patronage of the Bhutanese King. It aims to instill civic responsibility, promote community service, and build a peaceful and resilient society. Designed as a value-based personal development program, De-suung provides participants, known as De-suups, with ethical training and skills to contribute meaningfully to national development in Bhutan. De-suups are actively involved in various roles, including disaster relief, community welfare, and charitable activities, demonstrating their commitment to Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness (GNH) principles. Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, De-suups played a crucial role in supporting the nation’s response, illustrating the program’s adaptability to emerging challenges.

In 2021, the De-suung Skilling Programme (DSP) was introduced to address youth unemployment through short-term, high-quality vocational training. This extension reflects Bhutan’s commitment to equipping its youth with practical skills for self-employment and entrepreneurship, further solidifying the program’s role in national progress. Embedded within this vision of holistic development, De-suung invited us – a Taiwanese Buddhist couple – to teach Mandarin Chinese to a cohort of enthusiastic Bhutanese



learners. However, as practitioners deeply rooted in Buddhist traditions, we saw this opportunity as more than just language instruction. With the De-suung program granting us complete liberty in shaping our curriculum, we transformed the course into “Dharma Chinese,” seamlessly blending linguistic education with the profound spiritual wisdom of Buddhism.

This adaptation was significant on multiple levels. First, it aligned with the De-suung program’s emphasis on ethical and value-based education. By incorporating Buddhist principles and Mahayana teachings into the language curriculum, we fostered a deeper cultural and spiritual engagement among students. For example, instead of focusing solely on conversational Mandarin, we introduced Buddhist terms, chants, and concepts from Chinese Mahayana scriptures, creating an enriched learning environment that resonated with Bhutan’s own Vajrayana Buddhist heritage.

Second, this approach facilitated a unique cross-cultural exchange. As the first Taiwanese couple to undertake such an initiative, our presence itself symbolized a bridge between Bhutan and Taiwan, uniting shared Buddhist values through the medium of language. The students – many of whom were De-suungs working as tour guides – found this synthesis particularly valuable. Learning Buddhist terminology in Mandarin empowered them to communicate Bhutanese spiritual traditions to international visitors, enhancing their professional competence while deepening their appreciation of Buddhist philosophy.

Ultimately, this freedom to innovate within the framework of the De-suung program enabled us to incorporate heartfulness and mindfulness practices throughout the teaching process. From guided meditations on compassion to reflective discussions on Buddhist ethics, our curriculum aimed to nurture not just linguistic proficiency but also emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity. Singing sessions, mindfulness-in-motion exercises, and collaborative projects further enhanced the learning experience, embodying the core values of both De-suung and Dharma Chinese.

This collaboration exemplifies how the De-suung program’s vision for holistic development can integrate seamlessly with Buddhist pedagogy and modern educational methods. It reflects the transformative potential of teaching initiatives rooted in compassion, inclusivity, and cultural exchange. Through this unique initiative, we witnessed the harmonious blending of language learning, spiritual growth, and national service, reaffirming the enduring relevance of human-centered education in an increasingly interconnected world.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Mindfulness and education**

Mindfulness, defined as present-moment awareness, has become a cornerstone of holistic education. Research highlights its benefits in fostering focus, emotional regulation, and resilience (Brown & Ryan, 2003). These qualities are essential in language education, which requires sustained attention

and cultural sensitivity. Mindfulness practices, such as breathing exercises and meditation-in-motion, enhance cognitive flexibility and reduce anxiety, fostering an environment conducive to deep learning.

Mindfulness aligns with holistic education by cultivating intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth. In Bhutan, where Buddhist traditions underpin societal values, integrating mindfulness into education naturally connects learners with their cultural heritage. Every morning, we started our class by leading students in mindfulness-in-motion exercises. These warm-up activities, conducted under the sun as the weather turned colder in the Himalayas, helped students center themselves and prepare for the day's lessons.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, studies show that mindfulness fosters compassion and a sense of global interconnectedness, which are critical for addressing global challenges (Davidson & Kabat-Zinn, 2004).

The incorporation of mindfulness in educational contexts has also been shown to improve linguistic retention and reduce the stress often associated with learning a new language (Wallace, 2006). For instance, mindfulness-based activities such as the visualization of Chinese characters and meditation on Buddhist texts helped students in Bhutan not only understand language concepts but also internalize them within a meaningful spiritual framework. Moreover, mindful reflection after every lesson allowed students to evaluate their progress, celebrate their achievements, and identify areas for improvement, making the learning experience more engaging and rewarding.

## **2.2. Heartfulness in Pedagogy**

Heartfulness complements mindfulness by directly emphasizing compassion and emotional intelligence. Like mindfulness, heartfulness meditation has also been explored in the context of education, focusing on its potential benefits for student well-being, stress reduction, and academic performance. Studies suggest that heartfulness can reduce stress and enhance life satisfaction among students, particularly in female student populations, supporting its integration into educational settings (Bhatnagar, 2020). Additionally, research on its broader applications in promoting emotional regulation, mindfulness, and cognitive focus could have significant implications for pedagogy (Rao, 2021). The integration of Heartfulness meditation into education may support resilience and overall mental health, fostering better learning environments.

Rooted in Buddhist traditions and modern psychology, our application of heartfulness in teaching Dharma Chinese focuses on cultivating empathy, kindness, and interpersonal harmony in the class. In the educational context, heartfulness ensures that learning is not only intellectually enriching but also emotionally meaningful. Practices such as reflective discussions and collaborative projects imbue the classroom with a sense of community and shared purpose.

Ajahn Brahm's concept of "kindfulness" extends heartfulness by incorporating active kindness into mindful practices (Brahm, 2016). This

approach, which prioritizes empathy and community, played a central role in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment during the “Dharma Chinese” program. Singing, a much-loved activity among Bhutanese students, was incorporated into our everyday lessons. These sessions not only brought our hearts together but also made learning Chinese enjoyable and effective.<sup>4</sup> The strong bonds formed through such activities extended beyond the classroom. The students, being Desuups (volunteers devoted to their country and King), exhibited deep gratitude and spontaneity in learning. Our shared heartfulness led to lifelong friendships; we remain in contact with the students through WhatsApp and other personal connections.<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis on heartfulness also provided students with the tools to reflect on their cultural heritage. By comparing Mahayana Buddhist concepts taught in Chinese with their own Vajrayana traditions, students gained a deeper appreciation of both cultural and linguistic diversity. This intra-religious dialogue enriched their understanding of Buddhism and allowed them to articulate these ideas more effectively, particularly for students who worked as tour guides. For example, one student expressed that learning Buddhist terms in Chinese enabled him to better explain Bhutanese cultural and spiritual traditions to foreign tourists, deepening cross-cultural appreciation.

### **2.3. AI in language education**

AI technologies have revolutionized language learning by providing personalized and efficient tools. Adaptive learning platforms, real-time translation applications, and virtual language assistants cater to diverse learning needs and contexts (Liao & Wang, 2020). However, integrating AI into education necessitates a mindful and ethical approach to ensure that technology enhances rather than replaces human-centered teaching.

By AI, we refer more broadly to all online tools available and accessible to students on their cell phones for learning the Chinese language, including applications that provide interactive exercises, language practice, and digital resources to enhance their learning experience. Social media like Facebook and Instagram were very useful, too. These tools complemented traditional instruction by providing students with opportunities to practice beyond the classroom. Flexible and responsive to the students’ needs, we often adapted our lessons based on local events, Buddhist festivals, or environmental cues, ensuring a dynamic and contextualized learning experience.<sup>6</sup>

For example, in addition to daily conversations on the internet, students were shown how to access Buddhist sutras translated into Chinese via digital libraries. Such activities allowed students to engage with authentic language materials while deepening their knowledge of Buddhist teachings. The inclusion of AI-driven tools also enabled students to receive instant feedback on their pronunciation and grammar through speech recognition software, empowering them to refine their skills independently.

Additionally, students utilized collaborative platforms to create digital portfolios showcasing their progress, including video recordings of oral

presentations, written essays, and reflections. This allowed teachers to provide individualized feedback while also fostering a sense of accomplishment and ownership over their learning.

#### **2.4. Integration of mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI**

The synergistic combination of mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI in education fosters holistic learning experiences. This integrative approach addresses cognitive, emotional, and technological dimensions, preparing learners to navigate complex global challenges with compassion and competence. For instance, incorporating AI tools with mindfulness exercises ensured that students remained engaged while fostering both intellectual and emotional growth.

### **III. IMPLEMENTATION: THE DHARMA CHINESE PROGRAM**

#### **3.1. Bhutan's unique context**

Bhutan, known for its Gross National Happiness philosophy, provides a fertile ground for integrating mindfulness and heartfulness in education. Predominantly Vajrayana Buddhist, Bhutan's cultural and spiritual heritage informed the design of the "Dharma Chinese" program. This initiative aimed to teach the Chinese language while fostering an understanding of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist principles.

The DE-SUUNG program's emphasis on community service and ethical responsibility created an environment where students were highly motivated to learn. Many participants saw language acquisition as a way to further contribute to their society by fostering cross-cultural dialogue and promoting sustainable development goals.

#### **3.2. Mindfulness practices in teaching**

Mindfulness practices were embedded into daily lessons to enhance focus and retention:

- **Meditation-in-motion:** Short sessions at the beginning of each class helped students transition into a focused learning state.
- **Mindful breathing:** Guided exercises during breaks reduced cognitive fatigue and maintained attentiveness.
- **Reflective learning:** Students reflected on their linguistic and spiritual growth, fostering deeper engagement.

These practices were especially impactful during outdoor lessons held amidst Bhutan's natural beauty, where students practiced mindful observation and incorporated their experiences into language exercises.<sup>7</sup> For example, during a class held at a local monastery, students practiced describing their surroundings in Chinese, integrating new vocabulary with cultural and environmental awareness.

#### **3.3. Heartfulness-centered pedagogy**

Heartfulness practices created an emotionally supportive learning environment:

- **Empathy-Building Activities:** Group projects and discussions encouraged students to connect with peers and share perspectives.
- **Cultural Reflection:** Lessons included reflections on Bhutanese traditions, fostering a sense of pride and cultural identity.
- **Community-Oriented Goals:** Students connected their learning to broader aspirations, such as promoting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The role of singing was particularly significant in fostering a sense of community and improving language acquisition. Traditional Bhutanese songs were adapted to include Chinese vocabulary, creating a bridge between cultural traditions and language learning.

#### IV. ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF LEARNING MANDARIN CHINESE

Mandarin Chinese is often considered one of the most challenging languages to learn, particularly for non-native speakers. The tonal system, with its four distinct tones, presents difficulties for learners accustomed to non-tonal languages. Additionally, the Chinese writing system, based on intricate characters rather than an alphabet, can be daunting. Recognizing these challenges, our program emphasized immersion and personalization to help students overcome these barriers. For example, we skillfully introduced the language by using materials closely related to students' cultural and spiritual contexts, such as Dharma texts. We also translated songs praising the Bhutanese King into Chinese, which students learned to sing. This approach not only made learning more engaging but also provided an intimate connection to the material. Writing Chinese characters from song lyrics further helped students develop both linguistic and cultural fluency, fostering enthusiasm and mastery.

##### 4.1. Teaching UN SDGs in Chinese

One of the most impactful activities in the class involved having students write short essays in Chinese about how they could contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through their roles as Desuups, Bhutan's national volunteers committed to community service. This exercise not only encouraged them to reflect deeply on their responsibilities and aspirations but also provided a meaningful context for practicing their Chinese writing skills. After completing their essays, the students presented their ideas during a group session. These presentations served multiple purposes: they fostered linguistic confidence by encouraging students to express themselves in Chinese publicly, deepened their understanding of the SDGs, and instilled a shared sense of purpose among the class.

To build on this experience, students were also tasked with incorporating the SDGs into their final presentations. Each student was asked to prepare a five-minute presentation, which included a brief self-introduction in Chinese, followed by a discussion of a specific SDG goal they wished to support. This task allowed them to apply their language skills in a structured yet creative way while simultaneously reinforcing their commitment to global sustainability.



efforts. The students approached the assignment with remarkable enthusiasm and effort, demonstrating both their growing proficiency in Chinese and their dedication to meaningful social causes.

The results were truly inspiring. Each student brought a unique perspective to the task, linking their interests and future goals with the broader framework of the SDGs. Whether it was promoting quality education (SDG 4), advocating for gender equality (SDG 5), or contributing to climate action (SDG 13), their presentations reflected thoughtful engagement and a genuine desire to make a difference. To amplify their voices and reach a wider audience, the students were encouraged to share their presentations on their personal Facebook pages. This initiative not only showcased their progress in learning Chinese but also highlighted the potential of language learning as a tool for promoting social and environmental awareness.

The response from the students' networks was overwhelmingly positive. Friends, family members, and community members expressed amazement and admiration for their achievements. Many were impressed not only by the students' ability to communicate complex ideas in a foreign language but also by their commitment to global issues. The presentations became a source of pride, both for the students themselves and for the class as a whole.

This activity exemplified the power of integrating real-world relevance into language education. By connecting language learning with the SDGs, the students were able to see their studies as part of a larger purpose, transforming what could have been a routine academic exercise into an empowering and inspiring experience.

#### **4.2. Field trips and experiential learning**

Our teaching extended beyond the classroom to include field trips and real-life activities. For instance, we visited local festivals and Buddhist sites, using these opportunities to create authentic learning materials.<sup>8</sup> In the final sessions, students and teachers collaboratively expressed their reflections and aspirations in Chinese, transforming these insights into personalized materials for continued practice.

Field trips also provided students with the chance to practice conversational Chinese in real-life contexts. During a visit to a market, students practiced bargaining and discussing local products in Chinese, solidifying their practical language skills.

#### **4.3. Watching and discussing films**

To foster language skills and cultural understanding, we watched movies together, such as *A Yak in the Classroom*. Students expressed their thoughts in both English and Chinese, and we guided them to articulate their ideas more effectively.<sup>9</sup> Post-film discussions often revolved around themes of compassion, community, and environmental sustainability, linking linguistic practice to broader social values.

#### **4.4. AI-enhanced language learning**

AI tools complemented the program's human-centric methodologies by:



- Providing interactive exercises for grammar and vocabulary practice.
- Facilitating access to digital resources, such as Buddhist texts in Chinese.
- Offering personalized feedback to support individual learning trajectories.

These tools also provided opportunities for students to engage with authentic language materials and simulations, such as virtual tours of Buddhist temples in Chinese. Furthermore, collaborative online platforms enabled students to create digital portfolios showcasing their learning progress.

## **V. OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS**

### **5.1. Linguistic and cultural achievements**

Students demonstrated significant progress in language proficiency and cultural understanding:

- Confidently delivered oral presentations in Chinese, articulating complex Buddhist concepts.
- Produced written assignments showcasing mastery of Chinese characters and syntax.
- Expressed their understanding of SDGs and personal aspirations related to these goals in fluent Chinese.

### **5.2. Personal and community transformation**

The program nurtured students' personal growth and social contributions:

- Increased empathy and understanding through heartfulness practices.
- Strengthened professional skills, particularly for tour guides engaging with international visitors.
- Inspired lifelong learning and active participation in community development initiatives.

### **5.3. Implications for sustainable development**

By integrating mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI, the program aligned with global goals of education for sustainability. This approach prepared students to address challenges such as cultural preservation, ethical AI use, and global interconnectedness.

The initiative also demonstrated the potential for education to serve as a platform for promoting peace and cross-cultural dialogue, addressing SDGs such as quality education, gender equality, and climate action.

## **VI. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The success of the “Dharma Chinese” program underscores the transformative potential of holistic education. While the integration of mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI proved impactful during our time teaching in Bhutan, the future direction of the program does not rest on replicating our specific methods. As freelance educators with a free-spirited approach, we recognize the importance of flexibility and individuality in teaching styles.

In communicating with the teacher succeeding us – a non-Buddhist educator from Singapore – we shared our observations and experiences,

including the integration of mindfulness and heartfulness practices, as well as AI-supported methodologies. However, we understand and respect that each teacher brings their perspective, skills, and pedagogical preferences to the role. Rather than impose our approach, we offered suggestions with the hope that some aspects might inspire adaptation within her unique framework. This respectful exchange exemplifies the collaborative spirit that underpins sustainable educational initiatives.

Looking ahead, the program's development could benefit from fostering an open dialogue among educators. Creating a platform where past and current teachers can exchange ideas and share best practices may enhance the program's adaptability and continuity. Such a network could ensure that each iteration of the program builds on its foundational values while embracing the diverse contributions of its educators.

Future initiatives could:

- Expand to other Buddhist-majority regions, adapting content to local contexts.
- Develop resources for mindfulness and heartfulness in AI-enhanced education.
- Foster cross-cultural exchanges to promote inclusivity and mutual understanding.

Creating networks of educators who specialize in integrating these elements could amplify the program's impact, inspiring broader adoption of such methodologies.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The integration of mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI in teaching “Dharma Chinese” demonstrates the profound potential of holistic education to bridge cultural, linguistic, and technological divides. By leveraging these approaches, the program not only enriched the students' linguistic skills but also fostered emotional intelligence, ethical awareness, and a deeper understanding of global and local contexts. This multifaceted methodology highlights the value of balancing traditional educational practices with modern innovations to create a truly transformative learning environment.

At the heart of this success lies mindfulness, which helped students navigate the complexities of learning Mandarin Chinese by fostering a calm and focused mindset. Through mindfulness practices such as meditation-in-motion and mindful breathing, students were equipped with tools to regulate their emotions, improve their concentration, and develop a sense of presence. These practices also encouraged a reflective approach to learning, allowing students to connect linguistic concepts with their personal and spiritual growth. The incorporation of mindfulness, deeply rooted in Bhutan's cultural heritage, further underscored the program's alignment with the nation's values and traditions.

Equally vital was the role of heartfulness, which brought a compassionate and empathetic dimension to the educational experience. By emphasizing

kindness, collaboration, and interpersonal harmony, heartfulness practices helped build a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. Activities such as singing, group discussions, and cultural reflections fostered a sense of community among students and teachers alike. These activities not only facilitated language acquisition but also created a space where students could connect on a deeper level, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

The integration of AI tools added another layer of effectiveness to the program. By providing students with access to personalized learning resources, instant feedback, and digital platforms, AI complemented the human-centered teaching methodologies employed in the classroom. These tools extended learning opportunities beyond the classroom, enabling students to practice independently and at their own pace. Moreover, the use of AI technologies helped address some of the logistical challenges of teaching Mandarin in Bhutan, such as limited access to physical resources and teaching materials. By bridging gaps in accessibility and providing dynamic, adaptive learning experiences, AI played a pivotal role in enhancing educational outcomes.

One of the most striking outcomes of the program was the students' ability to connect their language learning with broader global objectives. By incorporating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the curriculum, the program encouraged students to reflect on their aspirations and responsibilities as global citizens. Discussions on topics such as gender equality, quality education, and climate action were not only conducted in Mandarin but also deeply resonated with the students' values and commitments as Desuups. This integration of SDGs into language education underscored the interconnectedness of linguistic proficiency and global awareness, preparing students to engage meaningfully with the world around them.

Another significant achievement was the students' progress in mastering Mandarin, a language often perceived as challenging due to its tonal system and complex writing structure. By incorporating culturally relevant materials, such as Dharma texts and translated songs, the program made the learning process more relatable and engaging. Activities such as singing and writing Chinese characters from song lyrics allowed students to connect emotionally with the material, fostering both enthusiasm and mastery. These methods exemplified the power of contextualized and immersive learning experiences in overcoming the inherent difficulties of language acquisition.

The personal growth and transformation observed among the students were equally noteworthy. Many students expressed increased confidence, empathy, and a renewed sense of purpose as a result of their participation in the program. For instance, students who initially struggled with public speaking were able to deliver articulate presentations in Mandarin by the end of the course. Similarly, those who had limited prior exposure to Buddhism in the context of other cultures gained a deeper appreciation of their own Vajrayana traditions through comparative discussions in the target language. The program thus served as a platform for both linguistic and personal development, empowering students to contribute more effectively to their communities and professions.

From a broader perspective, the program's success underscores the potential of holistic education to address pressing global challenges. By fostering cultural understanding, ethical responsibility, and emotional resilience, holistic education equips learners with the skills and mindsets needed to navigate an increasingly interconnected and complex world. The program's alignment with Bhutan's Gross National Happiness philosophy further highlights the role of education in promoting well-being, sustainability, and social harmony.

However, the program's impact extends beyond the immediate context of Bhutan. Its innovative integration of mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers worldwide. As societies grapple with the challenges of technological advancement, cultural preservation, and social cohesion, the program serves as a model for balancing innovation with tradition. By prioritizing human-centered values and fostering holistic development, education can become a powerful catalyst for positive change on a global scale.

Looking ahead, the success of this program opens up several avenues for future exploration. For instance, adapting the methodologies employed in Bhutan to other cultural and educational contexts could reveal new insights and applications. Similarly, further research on the long-term impacts of integrating mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI in education could provide a more comprehensive understanding of its potential benefits. Collaborative initiatives among educators, researchers, and policymakers could also help refine and expand these approaches, ensuring their sustainability and scalability.

Moreover, the program's emphasis on cross-cultural dialogue and inclusivity offers a framework for addressing global disparities in education. By creating opportunities for learners from diverse backgrounds to connect, share, and collaborate, holistic education can foster mutual understanding and respect. In an era marked by division and polarization, such initiatives are more important than ever in building bridges across cultures and communities.

In conclusion, the integration of mindfulness, heartfulness, and AI in teaching "Dharma Chinese" represents a groundbreaking approach to education that transcends traditional boundaries. By addressing the cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning, this holistic methodology not only enhances linguistic and cultural competencies but also cultivates a sense of compassion, responsibility, and interconnectedness among learners. As educators and policymakers continue to explore innovative approaches to education, the lessons learned from this experimental program can serve as a valuable guide. By embracing the principles of mindfulness, heartfulness, and technological innovation, education can become a transformative force for a compassionate, inclusive, and sustainable world.

### Notes

1. I would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Bhutanese government for having invited my wife and me to serve as the first two Chinese language teachers in Bhutan. We deeply appreciate the freedom

and support provided to us, which allowed us to adopt innovative approaches tailored to the students' actual needs within their specific environment, free from traditional paradigms. We are also profoundly grateful to the students for their cooperation and enthusiasm throughout the course. It is no exaggeration to say that teaching in Bhutan has been the happiest, the most fulfilling and joyful experience of our teaching careers.

2. <https://desuung.org.bt/home/>.

3. Morning mindfulness-in-motion activities proved particularly effective in preparing students for the day's lessons, especially during the colder months in the Himalayan region. Engaging in mindful warm-up exercises, such as gentle arm-swinging movements performed outdoors under the sun while rhythmically chanting "Amitabha," became a cherished class ritual. Students consistently reported significant benefits from this practice, including enhanced focus, improved physical readiness, and a deeper sense of mindfulness.

4. Singing activities played a significant role in fostering a sense of community and enhancing the language learning process. However, students were consistently reminded that Mandarin Chinese is a tonal language, and it is essential to learn and practice accurate tones independently of the melodies in songs. The Bhutanese students displayed a strong enthusiasm for singing, which culminated in the class performing three Chinese songs together on stage during the graduation ceremony. Their performance was met with great applause and appreciation from the audience. One of the three songs, adapted from the Bhutanese praise for the much-beloved King, as mentioned, can be found here: [https://www.facebook.com/christie.chang.sakyadhita/videos/1238584940031038?locale=zh\\_TW](https://www.facebook.com/christie.chang.sakyadhita/videos/1238584940031038?locale=zh_TW).

5. The strong relationships formed during the program have continued through digital connections like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.

6. The lessons were flexibly adapted to align with local contexts, cultural festivals, and the specific needs of the students. For instance, during significant Buddhist festivals in the Bhutanese calendar, such as Lha Bab Düchen (the Descending Day of the Buddha), students were introduced to the corresponding Chinese term, 天降日 (Tiān Jiàng Rì). Similarly, when encountering "Bodhisattvas' birthdays" celebrated in the Mahayana Chinese Buddhist tradition, these occasions were used as opportunities to teach the relevant Chinese expressions and explain how such events are observed in the Chinese Buddhist context.

7. Outdoor lessons in Bhutan's scenic landscapes did greatly enhance cultural and linguistic learning.

8. Field trips offered students invaluable opportunities for practical language application and cultural immersion in real-life contexts. Throughout the program, we organized three extended field trips using hired buses, complemented by two shorter hiking excursions to nearby monasteries. These experiences enriched the students' understanding of the local culture while providing meaningful contexts to practice their language skills.

9. Post-film discussions served as a platform to reinforce linguistic skills while delving into relevant social themes. Students were encouraged to initially articulate their thoughts and ideas in the language they felt most comfortable using. Subsequently, teachers guided them in translating and expressing these reflections in simple Chinese, fostering both confidence and practical language development.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Bhatnagar, S. (2020). Effect of Heartfulness Meditation Program on Perceived Stress and Satisfaction with Life Among Female Students. National Library of Medicine. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10652785/>
- Brahm, A. (2016). *Kindness*. Wisdom Publications.
- Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), 822–848.
- Chen, L., & Zhou, G. (2019). A cognitive approach to Chinese tone acquisition. *Journal of Chinese Language Education*, 17(3), 295–312.
- Davidson, R. J., & Kabat-Zinn, J. (2004). Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 66(1), 87–88.
- Gupta, R., & Agrawal, S. (2018). Exploring AI-driven tools for language acquisition. *Educational Technology & Society*, 21(4), 12–21.
- Liao, W., & Wang, L. (2020). The application of artificial intelligence in language education: Challenges and opportunities. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 68(2), 575–588.
- Rao, P. V. (2021). Heartfulness Meditation: A Yogic and Neuroscientific Perspective. National Library of Medicine. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9128627/>
- Wallace, B. A. (2006). *The Attention Revolution: Unlocking the Power of the Focused Mind*. Wisdom Publications.
- Wang, X., & Wang, Y. (2022). Integrating mindfulness practices in Mandarin learning classrooms. *Journal of Asian Studies in Education*, 14(2), 101–115.



# INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR DAY OF VESAK AND VIETNAM BUDDHIST SANGHA MINDFULNESS EDUCATION-A SOLUTION TO HELP STUDENTS FACE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CRISES

Dr. Nguyen Thi Bich Van\*

## **Abstract:**

Modern education, within the context of globalization and rapid social change, encounters numerous new pressures. Beyond providing students with knowledge and skills to meet labor market demands, education must also foster humanistic values to shape a future generation that is conscious, responsible, and compassionate. In response to urgent issues such as environmental crises, social inequality, and moral decline, compassion and a commitment to sustainable development have emerged as core values requiring greater emphasis. This paper examines the role of Buddhist mindfulness in imparting these two values. Mindfulness, by cultivating awareness and deep understanding, enables students to regulate emotions, alleviate stress, and develop compassion for themselves, others, and nature. Engaging in mindfulness practice not only facilitates a deeper connection with oneself but also nurtures empathy and a sense of responsibility in one's actions. While compassion fosters harmonious relationships, the recognition of sustainable development underscores the necessity of preserving the environment and natural resources, ensuring equilibrium between humanity and ecosystems. The study advocates for the integration of mindfulness into modern education through subjects such as ethics, life skills, extracurricular activities, community initiatives, and a supportive learning environment. These efforts aim to nurture a generation of students who are not only intellectually proficient but also empathetic, understanding, and socially and environmentally responsible. This serves as the foundation for cultivating a sustainable and humane future in the new era.

---

\* University of Architecture Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

**Keywords:** *Modern education, Buddhist mindfulness, compassion, sustainability, development, social responsibility.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education has long been regarded as the most powerful tool for shaping the future of humanity, playing a central role in building a civilized, progressive, and sustainable society. However, in the modern world, which is deeply influenced by rapid technological advancements and the immense pressures of contemporary society, education appears to be drifting away from its core objectives. Instead of fostering holistic human development – both intellectually and morally – the current education system places excessive emphasis on achievements, grades, and competitiveness. As a result, students are subjected to an overwhelming academic workload, leaving them with little time and space to connect with their families, nature, and essential humanistic values. This not only diminishes their quality of life but also erodes the fundamental values necessary for individuals to lead fulfilling lives with awareness, responsibility, and a deep sense of connection to their community and environment.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the world is currently facing major environmental and social crises. Phenomena such as the rise in school violence, the apathy of a portion of young people toward social issues, and the moral decline within communities clearly highlight the gaps in today's education system. (Phú & Phu, 2024)<sup>2</sup>. Elements such as compassion, sustainability awareness, and a sense of responsibility seem to be insufficiently emphasized in educational programs, leading to a lack of holistic character development among younger generations. In this context, Buddhist mindfulness has been proposed by many researchers as an effective educational approach. With its focus on awareness, deep understanding, and empathy, mindfulness is not only a philosophy of life but also an essential skill that helps learners develop self-awareness, regulate emotions, reduce stress, and improve mental well-being. Furthermore, mindfulness has the potential to cultivate compassion, foster a sense of responsibility toward society and the environment, and strengthen the connection between humans and nature.<sup>3</sup>

Numerous studies have shown that practicing mindfulness can help students improve their concentration, reduce academic pressure, and encourage them to be more aware of the connection between individuals and the community. This not only helps them develop essential life skills but also contributes to fostering a generation that is responsible for society and the planet.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Mueller (2009): Volume 18, p. 1031–1056, in 2009. The specific excerpt appears on p. 1032.

<sup>2</sup> Phú & Phu, *Tạp chí tâm lý – Giáo dục*, vol 30 (2024), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Frank, Fischer, & Wamsler (2020), p. 547.

<sup>4</sup> Hải, Đ. H. Quan điểm Phật giáo về phát triển bền vững và các nhân tố ảnh hưởng tới hiệu quả

Compassion and awareness of sustainable development – fundamental values for creating a better world – can be deeply integrated through mindfulness education, shaping generations that are not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually enriched and socially conscious.

This paper focuses on analyzing the role of mindfulness in modern education while proposing specific methods to integrate mindfulness into the curriculum. These solutions aim not only to enhance academic competence but also to emphasize spiritual development, compassion, and social responsibility, preparing younger generations to face global challenges in a sustainable and humane manner.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To research the role of mindfulness education in helping students cope with environmental and social crises, this paper adopts a mixed-methods approach, including the following specific steps:

**Document analysis:** This study synthesizes theoretical and practical literature related to mindfulness, mindfulness education, and the relationship between mindfulness education and the development of compassion and awareness of sustainability. The materials are collected from: Published scientific studies in international and domestic journals, specialized books, reports, and guidelines on mindfulness education from major educational organizations, and documents related to the impact of environmental and social crises on students.

**Synthesized evaluation:** Combining quantitative and qualitative data to conclude the impact of mindfulness education on helping students face crises. The effectiveness and scalability of mindfulness education models in school settings. This multidimensional research approach ensures a comprehensive and insightful perspective, evaluating practical outcomes while providing strategic direction for the future application of mindfulness education.

## III. RESULTS

### 3.1. Compassion in modern education

**Definition and Importance of Compassion:** Compassion, from a Buddhist perspective, is the ability to understand the suffering of others and the desire to alleviate that suffering. In the context of education, compassion is not only an ethical value but also an essential life skill. Studies have shown that students and teachers with high levels of compassion tend to have better relationships, fewer conflicts, and higher satisfaction in their learning and work.<sup>5</sup>

The life of Buddha is the fullest and most profound embodiment of wisdom and compassion, the two core values that make up His transcendent character. From any perspective, we can feel the light of compassion and the vast wisdom

---

giáo dục, phổ biến quan điểm đó trong xã hội. *Gia đình hòa hợp và xã hội bền vững*, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Hạnh, T. L. Đ. “The role of buddhism in moral education in vietnam. Advice and guidance”, p. 75.

radiating from His life and teachings. Wisdom is the vast sky through which the mind of compassion flows, and although it is difficult to fully grasp the enormity of Buddha's wisdom, His compassion is something that anyone can easily recognize and feel (Davids J & Indrani Kalupahana).<sup>6</sup> To think of Buddha is to think of the great compassion He manifested throughout His life. Scholar G.C. Pande once remarked that the greatness of Buddha lies not only in His teachings but also in His timeless influence, as no other figure has left as deep an imprint in the history of Indian culture as He has. According to him, wisdom (Bodhi) and compassion (*karunā*) are the perfect embodiment of Buddha's character – a great and transcendent personality. In agreement, philosopher S. Radhakrishnan describes Buddha as a symbol of boundless tolerance. He wrote: "Buddha did not view life solely as a series of sins but also as suffering that must be resolved through understanding and awakening. He faced adversity with a clear mind and strong faith, combining gentleness and love with a firmness that was sometimes tough but always resolute".<sup>7</sup>

Not only in philosophical terms, but historian Will Durant also praised Buddha as a symbol of absolute compassion. He commented: "Buddha is the one who 'repays hatred with virtue.' When misunderstood or insulted, He remains silent. If someone harms Him, He shields them with love. Even when that person continues to do evil, He still uses good deeds to resolve the situation." Buddha's compassion is not just mere affection but also a sacred practice (*ariyacariyā*) – a path of enlightenment, shaped and nurtured through many lifetimes of Bodhisattva practice. This is not temporary or personal compassion but the result of a long process of cultivation, transcending all selfish limits, thinking only of the benefit and happiness of countless beings. The *Saṅgīti Sūtra* records Buddha's confirmation that He cultivated compassion over many lifetimes, and it was this merit that allowed Him to be reborn as a universal monarch before attaining supreme enlightenment and becoming the Fully Enlightened One.<sup>8</sup>

The Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Lakkhaṇasuttanta*, also state that the 32 marks of excellence of the Buddha are the result of practicing compassion and noble virtues toward beings in many past lifetimes. Therefore, when He came into this world, the Buddha not only carried infinite wisdom but also expressed boundless compassion through every action and teaching. Even as a young prince, Siddhattha demonstrated compassion for all suffering in life. Legend tells that during the land-plowing ceremony of the *Sākya* royal family, the young prince was not pleased by the sight of small creatures writhing in pain under the plow's blade. Instead of joining in the festive ceremony, Siddhattha quietly sought refuge under a persimmon tree, sat in deep meditation, and quickly attained the serene state of the first *jhāna* (as recorded in the *Saccaka*

<sup>6</sup> Davids J & Indrani Kalupahana (1987), *The Way of Siddhartha – A Life of the Buddha*. University Press of America, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> S. Radhakrishnan (1950), *The Dhammapada*. Oxford University Press; London, p. 12 - 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Kinh Capala Sutta*.

*Sūtra, Majjhima Nikāya*). Furthermore, other texts record that the prince had no interest in the hunting pleasures that were typical of royals at the time. Once, when out walking in the forest with Devadatta and Naradatta, Siddhattha became disappointed and protested when they killed animals. Upon seeing a white crane shot down by Naradatta, the young prince rushed to its aid, removed the arrow, and cared for it with boundless love. These actions clearly revealed the compassion and noble character of the future Buddha.<sup>9</sup> From childhood to enlightenment, the life of the Buddha is the most compelling proof of the power of compassion, not only as a personal virtue but also as a guiding principle for liberation and enlightenment. His life continues to be an endless source of inspiration for all beings on the path to truth, love, and liberation from suffering.

**Current Situation:** The modern education system, despite many advancements in technology and teaching methods, often lacks specialized programs to nurture compassion. Instead, the pressure from grades, achievements, and increasing competition has become an inseparable part of the educational environment. The consequences of this include the rise of mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, and even school violence. These pressures not only negatively impact student's personal development but also reduce their ability to collaborate, a crucial skill for sustainable development in the future.<sup>10</sup> The modern education system often lacks programs that nurture compassion. Instead, the pressure from grades and competition often leads to isolation, stress, and even school violence. This not only affects student's mental health but also reduces their ability to collaborate and develop sustainably in the future.

**Buddhist mindfulness and compassion:** What exactly is mindfulness, and why has it become such a common term nowadays, especially for children? Simply put, mindfulness means focusing entirely on what you are doing right now without getting lost in other thoughts or worries. It's like focusing on one task, such as eating your favorite ice cream, and truly savoring each bite without thinking about the homework you need to submit tomorrow or the new game you want to play. It's all about being present in the moment.

Why is mindfulness important for children, especially in today's fast-paced digital world? Children today are surrounded by screens, notifications, and constant stimuli that make it easy for their minds to wander. From video games to social media, there's always something competing for their attention. This can lead to distractions, difficulty focusing on schoolwork, and even increased stress levels. By practicing mindfulness, children learn to bring their attention back to the present moment, which can help them manage these distractions significantly.

Mindfulness is an effective tool for cultivating compassion. Through practices like loving-kindness meditation (*mettā* meditation), students can

---

<sup>9</sup> Davids J & Indrani Kalupahana (1982), *The Way of Siddhartha – A Life of the Buddha*, University Press of America, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Phú & Phu (2024), p. 20.

develop empathy while also improving self-awareness and emotional regulation. In the context of modern education, mindfulness is understood as the ability to focus on the present moment without being distracted by unnecessary worries or thoughts. It is not only a philosophy but also an essential life skill, especially for children in today's world, where technology and media continuously compete for their attention. Research shows that practicing mindfulness can help children reduce stress levels, improve focus, and better regulate emotions. By directing attention to the present, children learn to manage distractions, thereby enhancing their ability to learn and develop character. Moreover, mindfulness is a powerful tool for nurturing compassion. Through practices like *mettā* meditation, students not only develop kindness but also enhance self-awareness and emotional regulation. These values play a crucial role in creating a positive and sustainable school environment.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2. Sustainable development in education

The Meaning of Sustainable Development in Education: Sustainable development in education is an important aspect, not only focusing on environmental protection but also encompassing social and economic aspects. The goal of education for sustainable development is to create a balance between these factors, aiming for a comprehensive and sustainable future for the next generations. According to Da Silva (2024), sustainable development in education requires a comprehensive curriculum that helps students gain a deeper understanding of individual and collective responsibility in protecting the planet.

In the context of growing global issues such as climate change, social inequality, and resource depletion, education becomes a vital tool in addressing these challenges.<sup>12</sup> Education is not only a means of conveying knowledge but also a foundation for forming awareness, skills, and responsible behaviors. According to Hyland (2013), education also plays a role in nurturing ethical values and building social capital, contributing to the promotion of sustainable solutions for society. One of the key goals of sustainable development in education is to foster sustainable awareness through practical activities. Small actions such as saving energy, reducing waste, and recycling not only help protect the environment but also contribute to building a sustainable lifestyle. However, as Mueller (2009) emphasized, education for sustainable development needs to go further, encouraging students to engage in solving major issues such as environmental crises, promoting a circular economy, and building a fair society. According to Hâi (2024), raising sustainable awareness should start early, as children and adolescents are the most receptive and capable of changing behaviors. When equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills, they can make better decisions, contributing to the sustainable development

---

<sup>11</sup> Hyland, T. (2013). *Moral education, mindfulness, and social engagement: Fostering social capital through therapeutic Buddhist practice*. Sage Open, 3(4), p. 2158244013509253.

<sup>12</sup> Frank, P., Fischer, D., & Wamsler, C. (2020). "Mindfulness, education, and the sustainable development goals". *Quality Education*, p. 545 - 555.



of society. Sims et al. (2020) also affirm that sustainable education not only helps students face environmental crises but also helps them build resilience against issues such as climate anxiety.

Furthermore, sustainable development in education is not only for students but also requires the participation of teachers, parents, and the community. According to Miller-Porter (2024)<sup>13</sup>, educational programs require close coordination between schools and stakeholders to create a comprehensive and cohesive learning environment. This not only helps students learn but also promotes the application of sustainable values in daily life. Thus, sustainable development education also contributes to enhancing critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. These skills are not only essential for solving current problems but also help prepare the younger generation for future challenges. As Paswan (2024)<sup>14</sup> pointed out, the combination of education and ethical values can promote peace and sustainable development on a global scale. Sustainable development education is not only a tool to raise awareness but also an important foundation for building a future where people, society, and nature can coexist and develop harmoniously.

#### The Role of Mindfulness in Sustainable Education

Mindfulness plays a particularly important role in sustainable education because it helps students develop the ability to be aware of the impacts their actions can have on the environment and society. In the current context, where issues such as climate change, environmental degradation, and social inequality are becoming increasingly serious, educating environmental awareness is more essential than ever. Mindfulness, to nurture awareness, encourages students to pay attention to their every action and recognize the connection between individual actions and their effects on the community and the planet.

Practicing techniques like “environmental mindfulness meditation” not only helps students connect more deeply with nature but also helps them develop a sustainable and respectful relationship with the world around them. When students take the time to observe and feel the environment mindfully, they gradually become more aware of environmental issues more clearly and deeply. Mindfulness helps them notice seemingly small things that have lasting impacts, such as excessive use of natural resources, food waste, or the habit of littering. These actions can be changed through awareness and mindfulness. Research has shown that applying mindfulness in education can help enhance awareness and reduce anxiety, especially for students facing increasing environmental challenges. Mindfulness not only helps students understand environmental issues but also helps them maintain a positive and responsible attitude toward taking action to address those issues. Practicing mindfulness in the context of sustainable education encourages students to act responsibly

---

<sup>13</sup> Miller-Porter, A. (2024). *Mindfulness in Sustainability Education*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Paswan, T. C. Phát triển bền vững và hòa bình thế giới: định hướng Phật giáo. *Lãnh đạo bằng chánh niệm vì hòa bình bền vững*, p. 253.

not only for themselves but also for the community and the planet.<sup>15</sup>

(1) Mindfulness, through nurturing awareness and attention, can become a powerful tool in promoting sustainable education. It not only helps students learn about environmental protection but also practice protective actions from a young age. When equipped with knowledge and awareness through mindfulness education, the younger generation will become responsible citizens, capable of proactively and effectively facing future environmental challenges.<sup>16</sup> These skills are not only important in addressing current environmental issues but also serve as the foundation for building a sustainable future for the next generation.

### 3.3. Integration of Buddhist mindfulness into modern education

In the context of modern education, the application of mindfulness is not only a method for stress reduction but also a strategy to enhance the quality of learning and promote holistic human development. Mindfulness practices should be tailored to specific groups, from preschool children to teachers and lecturers, to achieve optimal results.

**Preschool children:** Shaping awareness from an early age breathing and body awareness activities: Preschool children need simple and engaging methods to develop mindfulness. Guiding them to practice exercises like “deep breath in, blow the balloon out” not only helps them become aware of their breath but also supports their ability to focus and regulate emotions. **Mindful storytelling:** Short stories about love, gratitude, and patience help children understand emotions while also developing the habit of listening and focusing on the present moment. **Practicing gratitude through play:** Activities like “Gratitude Circle” allow children to share what makes them happy, fostering gratitude and social connection.

**Primary School Students:** Developing focus and creativity mindful art exercises: Encouraging students to draw or color in a quiet state, focusing on every detail and color, helps develop creativity and concentration. **Mindfulness box:** A box containing objects like sand, seashells, or small balls, when used, encourages children to focus on sensory perception, reduce stress, and improve concentration. **Focus games:** Games such as “Listening to Sounds” teach students how to listen and recognize, enhancing their focus during learning activities.

**Secondary and High School students:** Writing a diary in mindfulness: Writing a diary in mindfulness is an effective method for students to recognize their emotions and thoughts without judgment, thus developing self-awareness. **Short mindfulness meditation:** Short meditation sessions, 5-10

---

<sup>15</sup> Sims, L., Rocque, R., & Desmarais, M. É. (2020). Enabling students to face the environmental crisis and climate change with resilience: inclusive environmental and sustainability education approaches and strategies for coping with eco-anxiety. *International Journal of Higher Education and Sustainability*, 3 (2), p. 112 - 131.

<sup>16</sup> Da Silva, L., & Wise, S, (2006), “Parent perspectives on childcare quality among a culturally diverse sample”, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 31(3), p. 6 - 14.

minutes long, at the beginning or end of class, help students reduce stress, improve concentration, and boost mental health. Compassionate group activities: Group discussions on compassion and empathy help students understand and apply these values in daily life, thus building a positive school community.

University students: Mindful Skills Course: Organizing short courses on meditation, emotion management, and positive thinking helps students balance life and study more effectively. Meditation practice in libraries or quiet spaces: Creating mindfulness spaces on campus for students to practice meditation, recharge, and improve focus. Social projects: Encouraging students to participate in community projects to practice compassion and social responsibility through hands-on activities, fostering sustainable relationships with the community.

Teachers and lecturers: Role Models for the Learning Community Teachers play a central role in integrating mindfulness into the classroom. Training teachers in mindfulness not only helps them manage work-related stress but also enables them to become role models for students to follow. Teachers need to develop mindfulness skills to create a friendly, peaceful learning environment where students can grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Furthermore, teachers should focus on building positive relationships with students, helping them feel supported and loved. When teachers practice mindfulness, they can inspire students, helping them develop the necessary skills to face challenges in both their studies and life. Mindfulness will be a powerful tool to help teachers maintain calmness and clarity in any situation, thus creating a healthy and effective learning environment.<sup>17</sup> Through the development and application of these methods, teachers not only enhance the quality of education but also contribute to the creation of a sustainable learning community, where students not only gain knowledge but also learn how to live harmoniously and responsibly towards society and the environment.

(1) Mindfulness training programs: Offer in-depth courses that help teachers develop stress management skills, build positive relationships with students, and maintain emotional balance. (2) Daily meditation practice: Allocate brief moments before or after work hours for teachers to practice meditation, helping them maintain peace of mind and clarity in their teaching. (3) Support for colleagues: Establish mindfulness practice groups within schools, where teachers can share experiences and support each other in maintaining mindfulness practices. The integration of mindfulness into education not only enhances the quality of learning but also contributes to building a humane, harmonious, and sustainable society.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ritchhart, R., & Perkins, D. N. (2000). "Life in the mindful classroom: Nurturing the disposition of mindfulness". *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(1), p. 27 - 47.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Buddhist mindfulness offers a comprehensive and profound method for teaching compassion and sustainable development awareness in modern education. When integrated into the educational system, mindfulness is not just a technique to help students improve concentration and reduce stress, but also an essential tool for developing humanistic values, building character, and nurturing students' spirits. Mindfulness practice helps students learn not only to listen to themselves but also to listen to the world around them with care and understanding.

By promoting awareness and empathy, mindfulness helps students recognize the impact of their actions and decisions on society and the environment. This is a critical step in fostering environmental protection awareness and building a sustainable society. Mindfulness encourages students to view issues from a holistic and deep perspective, enabling them to act responsibly and sustainably, not just for personal gain, but also for the benefit of the community and future generations. The integration of mindfulness into education also contributes to improving student's mental health. Research has shown that mindfulness can help reduce anxiety, stress, and insecurity while enhancing inner peace. This not only helps students overcome academic challenges but also prepares them to face difficulties in life. When students can confront life's issues with a resilient mindset, they become stronger, and more resilient, and develop effective problem-solving skills.

Mindfulness in education is a path towards a humanistic education, where every student learns how to live responsibly and with empathy. When compassion and awareness of sustainable development are nurtured in student's hearts from an early age, we are helping to build a peaceful, harmonious, and compassionate world. A generation of students raised with these values will have the ability to bring about positive changes, not only in their communities but also globally. Therefore, integrating mindfulness into education is not just an option but an essential requirement for building a sustainable and humane future.

\*\*\*

#### REFERENCES

- Bai, H. (2001). Beyond the educated mind: Towards a pedagogy of mindfulness. *Unfolding body-mind: Exploring possibilities through education*, p. 86 - 99.
- Da Silva, L., & Wise, S, (2006), Parent perspectives on childcare quality among a culturally diverse sample, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 31 (3), p. 6 - 14.
- Dauids J & Indrani Kalupahana (1987), *The Way of Siddhartha – A Life of the Buddha*. University Press of America.
- Đức, T. T. M., & Tiến, T. N. V. (2019). *The Necessity of Bringing Buddhism into Schools. Buddhist Moral Education in Schools and Society*, p. 243.

- Ericson, T., Kjøenstad, B. G., & Barstad, A. (2014). Mindfulness and sustainability. *Ecological Economics*, 104, p. 73 - 79.
- Frank, P., Fischer, D., & Wamsler, C. (2020). Mindfulness, education, and sustainable development goals. *Quality Education*, p. 545 - 555.
- Gu, Y., Sun, B., He, J., & Huang, W. (2024). Sustainability Education as a Predictor of Student Well-Being Through Mindfulness and Social Support: A Mediated Moderation Model. *Sustainability*, 16 (23), p. 10508.
- Hải, Đ. H. *Buddhist views on sustainable development and factors affecting the effectiveness of education, popularizing those views in society. Family harmony and sustainable society*, p. 195.
- Hạnh, T. L. Đ. *The role of Buddhist ethics education in Vietnam. Advisor and guide Venerable Thich Tri Quang, First Deputy Dharma Master and Vinaya Supervisor of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha*, p. 75.
- Hyland, T. (2013). Moral education, mindfulness, and social engagement: Fostering social capital through therapeutic Buddhist practice. *Sage Open*, 3(4), 2158244013509253.
- Lama, D., Kabat-Zinn, J., & Davidson, R. J. (2015). *La meditazione come medicina*. Edizioni Mondadori.
- Liên, T. H. *Equality in Buddhism for the development of global humanity. Mindful and peaceful leadership*, p. 207.
- Miller-Porter, A. (2024). *Mindfulness in Sustainability Education*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.
- Mueller, M. P. (2009). Educational reflections on the “Ecological Crisis”: Ecojustice, environmentalism, and sustainability. *Science & Education*, 18, p. 1031 - 1056.
- Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *History of Indian Civilization*, p. 78
- Paswan, T. C. *Sustainable Development and World Peace: A Buddhist Perspective. Mindful Leadership for Sustainable Peace*, p. 253.
- Ritchhart, R., & Perkins, D. N. (2000). Life in the mindful classroom: Nurturing the disposition of mindfulness. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(1), p. 27 - 47.
- Ryan, C. T. (2012). *A mindful nation: How a simple practice can help us reduce stress, improve performance, and recapture the American spirit*. Hay House, Inc.
- Sims, L., Rocque, R., & Desmarais, M. É. (2020). Enabling students to face the environmental crisis and climate change with resilience: inclusive environmental and sustainability education approaches and strategies for coping with eco-anxiety. *International Journal of Higher Education and Sustainability*, 3 (2), p. 112 - 131.
- Spitzer, B., & Aronson, J. (2015). Minding and mending the gap: Social psychological interventions to reduce educational disparities. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85 (1), p. 1 - 18.
- Strittmatter, J. (2023). *Educating the Whole Child: Using a Holistic Education Approach and Mindfulness in the Classroom*.
- The Dhammapada*. S. Radhakrishnan (1950), Oxford University Press; London.

Veil, S. R. (2011). Mindful learning in crisis management. *The Journal of Business Communication* (1973), 48 (2), p. 116 - 147.



# MINDFULNESS-BASED LEARNING (MBL) PROCESS: A CASE STUDY OF PHD STUDENTS IN THE INNOVATIVE MINDFULNESS AND PEACE STUDIES PROGRAM AT MAHACHULALONGKORNRAJAVIDYALAYA UNIVERSITY

Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Hansa Dhammaso\*  
 Nadnapang Phophichit\*\*

## **Abstract:**

This study investigated the physiological and psychological effects of the Ph.D. in Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Program at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. Utilizing a one-group pretest-posttest design, 27 Ph.D. students enrolled in the Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Program were assessed before and after two academic terms (August 2024–March 2025). Measurements included salivary cortisol, body composition, blood pressure, heart rate, brainwave activity, and self-reported stress using the Suanprung Stress Test-20 (SPST-20). Results indicated a significant reduction in diastolic blood pressure and perceived stress levels, alongside modest but statistically significant increases in total body water and heart rate. The EEG alpha/beta ratio, which indicates mental relaxation, increased slightly but did not reach statistical significance. Cortisol levels showed no significant change; the subtle differences observed between measurements may be attributed to natural biological variability. These findings support the potential of the Mindfulness-Based Learning (MBL) process to reduce psychological stress and improve select cardiovascular indicators in higher education contexts. Limitations include the absence of a control group and a small sample size. Further research is warranted to validate and expand upon these preliminary results.

---

\* International Buddhist Studies College, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand.

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness-Based Learning, Innovative Mindfulness, Peace Studies, EEG, Stress Reduction, Higher Education.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have increasingly gained attention across various domains, from clinical settings to education, due to their potential to reduce stress, enhance psychological well-being, and improve physical health (Khoury et al., 2015; Pascoe, Thompson, & Ski, 2017). Originating from Buddhist meditation practices, contemporary MBIs have been adapted to diverse contexts, showing promising results in managing stress-related conditions, enhancing emotional resilience, and improving cardiovascular health markers such as blood pressure (Hughes et al., 2013; Gu et al., 2015).

Higher education institutions, recognizing these benefits, have progressively integrated mindfulness into academic curricula. However, empirical research assessing physiological and psychological outcomes specifically within mindfulness-based academic programs remains relatively limited, particularly regarding doctoral-level curricula designed explicitly around Buddhist mindfulness principles.

The Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Ph.D. program at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University provides an ideal setting for such exploration, employing a unique educational framework by the Subcommittee on the Reform of Buddhist Education, emphasizing structured mindfulness practice and its integration into daily life and academic activities.

While many contemporary MBIs are delivered in secular formats, Buddhist-informed mindfulness frameworks maintain close ties to ethical teachings, concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), which may influence their outcomes differently than purely clinical adaptations. Scholars have emphasized that traditional Buddhist mindfulness incorporates a holistic path toward liberation and moral cultivation, which can deepen practitioners' engagement and potentially amplify psychological and physiological benefits (Monteiro, Musten, & Compson, 2015; Grossman, 2015). Understanding the distinctions between secular and Buddhist mindfulness is essential when evaluating interventions rooted in explicitly Buddhist educational contexts, as these programs may cultivate broader transformations aligned with the Eightfold Path.

Mindfulness, defined as the purposeful, non-judgmental attention to present-moment experiences, has been extensively studied for its stress-reducing properties (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Research consistently demonstrates mindfulness's effectiveness in reducing psychological stress, improving emotional regulation, and enhancing overall quality of life (Khoury et al., 2015; Gu et al., 2015). Physiologically, mindfulness practices have shown notable effects on stress biomarkers, including reductions in cortisol levels and blood pressure improvements (Pascoe et al., 2017; Hughes et al., 2013).

Despite widespread support, variability in mindfulness outcomes has been reported. For instance, some studies have observed negligible changes in physiological markers such as cortisol, particularly when measurements are influenced by external stressors (van Eck & Nicolson, 1994). Furthermore, methodological considerations such as timing of data collection, the specific mindfulness techniques employed, and participant backgrounds may contribute significantly to inconsistent findings. However, research has also shown that a targeted seven-day mindfulness intervention program can positively impact body composition and brainwave activity (Phophichit et al., 2025).

Within educational contexts, mindfulness practices are increasingly recognized for promoting students’ mental health and academic resilience. Yet, relatively few studies have specifically evaluated doctoral-level mindfulness curricula or tracked comprehensive physiological and psychological outcomes longitudinally. The current research seeks to address this gap by evaluating a structured mindfulness-based doctoral program and its impact on key stress and wellness indicators over two academic terms. Thus, this study not only contributes to the broader literature on mindfulness interventions but also offers valuable insights into the potential integration of mindfulness into higher education curricula to promote holistic student well-being.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design to evaluate the effects of two academic terms (August 2024 to March 2025) in the Ph.D. in Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Program at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. Participants were 27 doctoral students who agreed to provide data at two time points—prior to program enrollment (pretest) and after completing two terms (posttest). The sample was recruited via purposive sampling to capture learners actively engaged in this curriculum. One participant was a Buddhist monk, and the remaining 26 were laypeople. Only those completing both assessments were included in the final analysis. The majority of participants were aged 51–60 years (51.85%), followed by those aged 61–70 years (22.22%). Smaller proportions were aged 41–50 years (14.81%) and under 40 years (11.11%).

Age Distribution of Participants

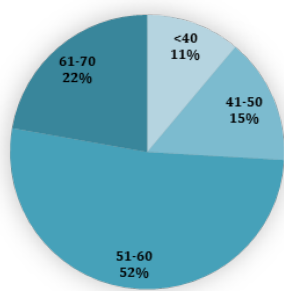
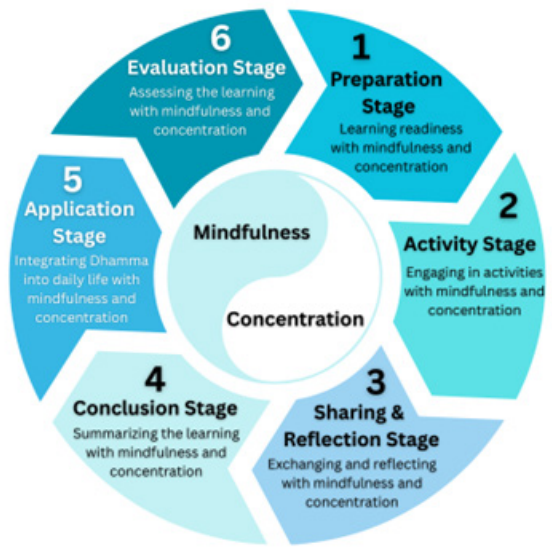


Figure 1: Age distribution of participants

The Ph.D. in Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Program incorporates the Mindfulness-Based Learning (MBL) Process, which emphasizes mindfulness and concentration at each stage: (1) Preparation, (2) Activity, (3) Sharing and Reflection, (4) Conclusion, (5) Application, and (6) Evaluation. Students regularly engage in theory, practice, and group discussions aimed at integrating mindfulness and concentration into both academic and personal contexts. This study aimed to determine whether enrollment in, and exposure to, this MBL process affected physiological and psychological markers over two academic terms , covering a span of seven months in the program.



**Figure 2:** Mindfulness-Based Learning (MBL) Process

Data were collected at two time points: in August 2024 (pretest) prior to program enrollment and in March 2025 (posttest) following the completion of two academic terms. Both physiological and psychological variables were assessed using validated tools and standardized procedures.

Salivary cortisol was measured as a biomarker of physiological stress. Participants provided saliva samples between 9:00 and 10:00 AM to control for diurnal cortisol variation. Each sample was collected by having participants chew on a sterile cotton swab for approximately two minutes. The samples were then centrifuged and analyzed using the Elecsys 2010 Analyzer (Roche Diagnostics), which employs a competitive polyclonal antibody immunoassay with electrochemiluminescence detection for cortisol quantification.

Body composition was assessed using the TANITA DC360 Body Composition Analyzer, which utilizes bioelectrical impedance analysis. Participants stood barefoot on the device while it measured multiple parameters, including body weight, body mass index (BMI), fat mass, muscle mass, total body water, and visceral fat rating.

Blood pressure and heart rate were measured using a TM-2657P Fully Automatic Blood Pressure Monitor. Participants rested quietly for three to five minutes before measurements were taken to ensure standardization. Readings were consistently taken from the same arm at similar times of day across both data collection points to control for variability.

Brainwave activity was evaluated using an EEG system (SeMind) provided by the Faculty of Medical Technology at Mahidol University. Participants were instructed to sit comfortably with eyes closed for a 15-minute recording session. Electrodes were affixed to the scalp using conductive gel, and the system recorded alpha and beta wave activity to analyze patterns associated with cognitive states and relaxation.

Psychological stress was measured using the Suanprung Stress Test-20 (SPST-20), a 20-item self-report questionnaire developed by the Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand. The SPST-20 provides a total stress score, categorizing responses into mild, moderate, high, or severe stress levels. Participants completed the questionnaire privately during both pre- and post-intervention assessments to minimize external influence.

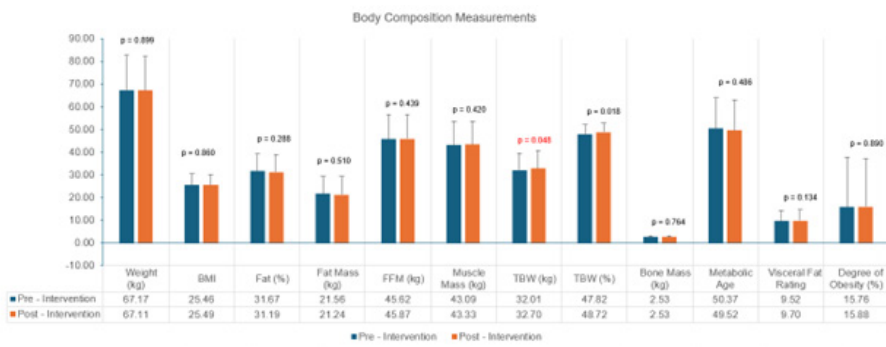
All measurements were performed under similar conditions (location, ambient temperature, and time of day) to reduce confounding effects. Trained researchers oversaw the procedures to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Statistical analyses were conducted using paired t-tests to compare pre- and post-intervention scores on all continuous variables (cortisol levels, body composition metrics, blood pressure, heart rate, brainwave ratios, and SPST-20 stress scores). Participants with missing data at either time point were excluded from the final analysis. Significance was set at  $p < .05$ . All participants provided informed consent before data collection. They were informed of their right to withdraw without penalty at any time.

### III. RESULTS

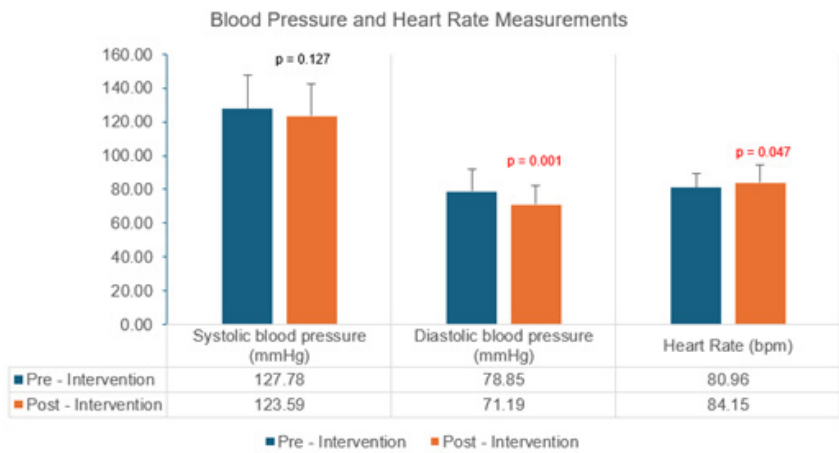
A total of 27 participants completed both pre- and post-intervention assessments. Overall, results revealed minimal changes in most body composition parameters, a significant improvement in diastolic blood pressure and self-reported stress levels, and non-significant findings in other physiological markers. Detailed outcomes across each measurement domain are presented below.

Figure 3 summarizes the pre- and post-intervention body composition data. Most metrics—including weight, BMI, fat percentage, fat mass, fat-free mass (FFM), muscle mass, bone mass, metabolic age, visceral fat rating, and degree of obesity—did not significantly differ after two terms of study in the mindfulness-based curriculum ( $p > .05$  in each case). However, there were significant increases in both total body water (TBW in kg) and TBW percentage, with mean TBW rising from 32.01 to 32.70 kg ( $p = .048$ ) and TBW% increasing from 47.82% to 48.72% ( $p = .018$ ). This finding suggests a possible improvement in hydration status among participants, though the exact mechanism remains unclear without additional physiological data.



**Figure 3:** Body composition measurements before and after two terms of the Ph.D. program.

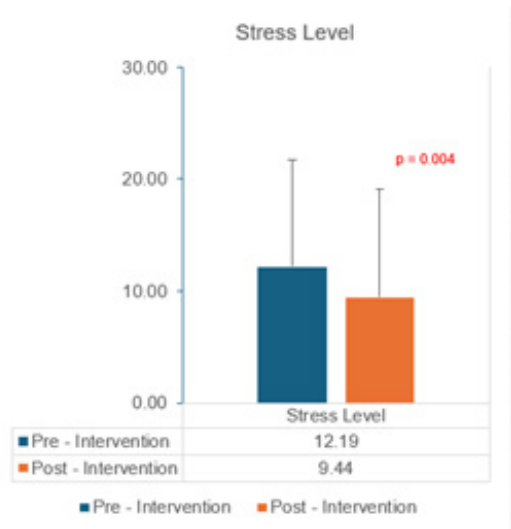
As shown in Figure 4, diastolic blood pressure decreased significantly from 78.85 mmHg pre-intervention to 71.19 mmHg post-intervention ( $p = .001$ ). Systolic blood pressure demonstrated a slight reduction (127.78 mmHg to 123.59 mmHg), but this change did not reach statistical significance ( $p = .127$ ). In contrast, the mean heart rate showed a small but statistically significant increase, rising from 80.96 bpm to 84.15 bpm ( $p = .047$ ).



**Figure 4:** Blood pressure and heart rate measurements pre- and post-intervention

The Suanprung Stress Test-20 (SPST-20) showed a significant reduction in self-reported stress (Figure 5). Mean scores dropped from 12.19 at pretest to 9.44 at posttest ( $p = .004$ ). Although this scale’s raw numerical range differs from some published norms, the consistent downward trend suggests an improvement in perceived stress after two terms of mindfulness and peace studies.





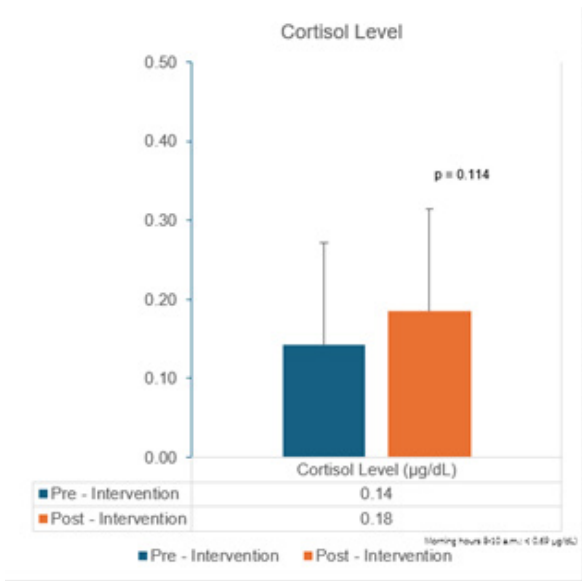
**Figure 5:** Changes in psychological stress levels (SPST-20 scores).

Brainwave measurements (Figure 6) indicated no significant changes in either the highest alpha/beta ratio (76.49 pre to 78.94 post;  $p = .850$ ) or the average alpha/beta ratio (8.29 pre to 9.40 post;  $p = .300$ ). While slight numerical increases were observed, these differences did not reach statistical significance and may reflect normal variability in EEG readings under test conditions.



**Figure 6:** Changes in brainwave activity (Alpha/Beta ratio)

Figure 7 shows an increase in mean salivary cortisol from 0.14  $\mu\text{g/dL}$  pre-intervention to 0.18  $\mu\text{g/dL}$  post-intervention; however, no statistically significant difference was observed, as the results remained within the established reference range. Although the rise appears modest, potential confounding factors (e.g., day-to-day variation in sample collection, lifestyle habits, or circadian rhythms) may have influenced these readings.



**Figure 7:** Salivary cortisol levels before and after the intervention

**IV. DISCUSSION**

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate physiological and psychological changes among doctoral students enrolled in the Ph.D. in Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Program at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. Utilizing a comprehensive set of biomarkers and psychological assessments, findings indicated selective but meaningful effects after two academic terms of study within the program, which implements the Mindfulness-Based Learning (MBL) process.

A notable finding was the significant reduction in diastolic blood pressure (DBP), suggesting beneficial cardiovascular effects associated with sustained mindfulness practice. This aligns with previous research, where mindfulness and meditation practices have been consistently associated with improved cardiovascular function and reduced hypertension risk (Hughes et al., 2013; Pascoe et al., 2017). Although systolic blood pressure (SBP) demonstrated a downward trend, it did not reach statistical significance, possibly due to the limited duration or modest sample size. The unexpected increase in heart rate may be attributed to situational factors, including anticipation or mild anxiety associated with the assessment procedures, a phenomenon previously documented in clinical and academic settings (Kamarck et al., 2000).

Improvements observed in psychological stress levels, as measured by the SPST-20, reinforce the efficacy of the Mindfulness-Based Learning (MBL) process in managing stress. This finding aligns closely with existing literature, consistently linking mindfulness interventions to lower perceived stress, improved emotional regulation, and enhanced psychological resilience (Khoury et al., 2015; Gu et al., 2015). Such psychological benefits not only contribute to overall mental health but are particularly valuable within

rigorous academic environments, highlighting the relevance and potential for integration of mindfulness practices into higher educational curricula.

Body composition parameters largely remained stable, reflecting minimal physiological changes within the short intervention period. However, a statistically significant increase in total body water (TBW) and its percentage suggests improved hydration, potentially associated with lifestyle or behavioral changes fostered through mindfulness practices. The exact mechanisms behind these hydration-related changes remain unclear and warrant further exploration, potentially involving dietary and hydration habit assessments.

EEG-measured alpha/beta brainwave ratios showed no significant changes. Given that increased alpha/beta ratios typically signify greater relaxation or reduced stress (Travis & Shear, 2010), the non-significant results may reflect the complexity and variability inherent in EEG measures, the relatively brief measurement protocol, or adaptation among experienced practitioners. However, it is important to note that the group's mean brainwave measurements did increase, suggesting a trend towards greater relaxation. Individual factors, such as personal application of Mindfulness-Based Learning (MBL) in daily life, meditation experience, attention, discipline, consistency, and the ability to manage emotional reactions, may contribute to variability in responses. Future studies could benefit from extended EEG recording durations or the incorporation of additional neurophysiological metrics to more effectively capture mindfulness-induced changes in brain activity.

The observed slight elevation in salivary cortisol at post-intervention was initially unexpected. However, the natural variability of cortisol levels could account for these subtle differences observed between measurements. Cortisol levels can fluctuate due to various factors, including lifestyle, sleep patterns, and individual stress responses. Additionally, it is important to note that this measurement occurred one day after a devastating earthquake struck Myanmar, with notable tremors felt in Bangkok. Although direct damage was limited in the study location, psychological distress triggered by such rare natural disasters can transiently elevate cortisol levels (van Eck & Nicolson, 1994). Therefore, future studies should carefully control for acute stressors, such as these sources of variability, or plan assessments with a wider buffer period following significant external events to capture more stable trends in cortisol changes.

This study's findings must be interpreted within its limitations. Primarily, the lack of a control group restricts causal interpretations; observed effects could be influenced by extraneous factors, including individual lifestyle changes and concurrent events. Furthermore, the relatively small sample size and absence of gender-related data may limit the generalizability of the results. Despite these constraints, the study offers valuable preliminary insights into mindfulness-based education's potential physiological and psychological benefits.

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, participation in two terms of the Ph.D. in Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies Program, which implements the Mindfulness-

Based Learning (MBL) process, appears beneficial for reducing perceived stress and improving specific cardiovascular parameters. While certain physiological markers exhibited minimal change or were influenced by external events, these findings collectively reinforce the relevance and value of mindfulness training within academic settings. Further research utilizing larger, more diverse samples and controlled experimental designs is encouraged to validate these results.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Gu, J., Strauss, C., Bond, R., & Cavanagh, K. (2015). How do mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and mindfulness-based stress reduction improve mental health and wellbeing? A systematic review and meta-analysis of mediation studies. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 37, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2015.01.006>
- Grossman, P. (2015). Mindfulness: Awareness informed by an embodied ethic. *Mindfulness*, 6(1), 17–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0372-5>
- Hughes, J. W., Fresco, D. M., Myerscough, R., van Dulmen, M. H. M., Carlson, L. E., & Josephson, R. (2013). Randomized controlled trial of mindfulness-based stress reduction for prehypertension. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 75(8), 721–728. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0b013e3182a3e4e5>
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delacorte Press.
- Kamarck, T. W., & Lovallo, W. R. (2003). Cardiovascular reactivity to psychological challenge: Conceptual and measurement considerations. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 65(1), 9–21. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.psy.0000030390.34416.3e>
- Khoury, B., Sharma, M., Rush, S. E., & Fournier, C. (2015). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for healthy individuals: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 78(6), 519–528. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2015.03.009>
- Monteiro, L. M., Musten, R. F., & Compson, J. (2015). Traditional and contemporary mindfulness: Finding the middle path in the tangle of concerns. *Mindfulness*, 6(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0301-7>
- Pascoe, M. C., Thompson, D. R., & Ski, C. F. (2017). Yoga, mindfulness-based stress reduction and stress-related physiological measures: A meta-analysis. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 86, 152–168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psyneuen.2017.08.008>
- Phophichit, N., Kittisobhano, P. P., Anando, P. A., Pariyattidhari, P. D., Jeungprasopsuk, W., Khaokhiew, T., & Sakabucha, S. (2025). Effects of four foundations of mindfulness-based intervention (FFMBI) on salivary cortisol levels, body composition, blood pressure and pulse rate, and brain

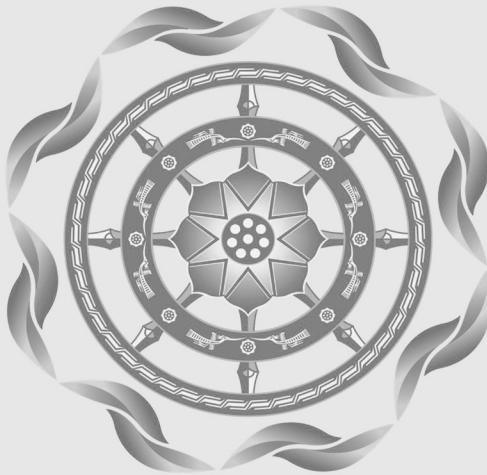
waves of practitioners. *Spirituality Studies*, 11(1), 19–39.

- Travis, F., & Shear, J. (2010). Focused attention, open monitoring and automatic self-transcending: Categories to organize meditations from Vedic, Buddhist and Chinese traditions. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 19(4), 1110–1118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2010.01.007>
- van Eck, M. M. M., & Nicolson, N. A. (1994). Perceived stress and salivary cortisol in daily life. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 16(3), 221–227. <https://doi.org/10.1093/abm/16.3.221>





**FOSTERING UNITY:  
COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS  
FOR GLOBAL HARMONY**





# CONFLICT RESOLUTION: BUDDHIST SOCIAL WORK APPROACH BASED ON BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Ven. Omalpe Somananda\*

## Abstract

Buddhism has long been recognized as a religion of peace and nonviolence. In today's world, conflicts arise between nations, religions, and ethnic groups. The Buddha taught that people can live together freely as individuals, be equal in principle, and be responsible to one another. He emphasized that every member of the human family, both men and women, has an equal right to liberty. He recognized that each of us is fundamentally the same – a human being like everyone else. The Buddha demonstrated this principle within his monastic community. Monks from different castes lived together in the same monastery and engaged in communal activities such as meetings, alms round (*piṇḍapāta*), and *Dhamma* discussions, irrespective of ethnicity, caste, or religion. This study aims to examine the Buddha's teachings on social and ethnic harmony as preserved in the Buddhist scriptures (*Pāli Canon*) and to explore their application in conflict resolution. Special attention is given to the doctrines expounded by the Buddha that can foster mutual understanding, strengthen relationships, and promote peace. The research methodology involves a content analysis of historical texts (*Sutta Piṭaka*), employing a library-based survey approach

**Keywords:** *Social harmony, Buddhism, Sutta Pitaka, conflict resolution.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism has long been celebrated as a religion of peace and nonviolence. In today's world, various conflicts arise between nations, religions, and ethnic groups, often threatening the stability of societies. However, the modern world has become increasingly interconnected, functioning as a global entity, almost like one nation. The Buddha taught that people can coexist freely as individuals, equal in principle, and responsible to one another. The social aspect of Buddhism is rooted in the pursuit of social justice through

---

\* Postgraduate, Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia.

nonviolence. Buddhism, founded by Siddhārtha Gautama (the Buddha) more than 2,500 years ago in India, is followed by approximately 470 million people today. Scholars recognize it as one of the world's major religions. Some have argued that Buddhism focuses solely on personal salvation without concern for broader societal welfare. This perspective was notably promoted by German sociologist, philosopher, and political economist Max Weber.

In his book *The Religion of India*, he writes concerning the Buddhist ideal of liberation: "Salvation is a personal performance of the self-reliant individual. No one and, particularly, no social community can help him. The specific asocial character of genuine mysticism is here carried to its maximum."<sup>1</sup> This is a gross misrepresentation of the facts since several texts in the *Pāli Canon* (*Tipiṭaka*) negate this claim. The image of the socially withdrawn character of Buddhism created by Weber was taken for granted by later sociologists, either due to their inability to read the original texts or their lack of proper understanding of Buddhism in practice: "The teaching of the Buddha evolved into a religion with followers of different mental capacities even during the lifetime of the Buddha. All were admonished to realize the truth themselves. However, the social and political dimensions found in many parts of the *Pāli Canon* bear evidence to the fact that early Buddhism held social service in high esteem."<sup>2</sup> This is a strong rebuttal to the idea that there is no encouragement of social welfare in Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism has the opportunity to speak about social and ethnic harmony.

### 1.1. Research problem

The wave of globalization has been connecting all the countries of the world into a single community to an unprecedented extent, which implies that a society of mankind in its true sense is taking shape. In the face of globalization, there have been various conflicts, violence, and animosities between different ethnic groups and religions based on the economy. Social, economic, political, and cultural factors have been identified as the main factors influencing this. Powerful countries try to keep poor countries under their control. These can be considered as major barriers to bringing peace in the world. As a result, precious human lives, as well as socio-cultural value systems, are destroyed while suspicion and animosity are spreading among nations.

In the meantime, the significance of peace and harmony is recognized by more and more far-sighted people because they can bring peaceful and stable order to society, and they are necessary conditions for the survival and development of mankind. A world deprived of peace and harmony will certainly fall apart and return to the jungle era in which the strong prey on the weak. Peace and harmony are enjoyed and possessed jointly by mankind, which is the base for the full realization of the creative potential of individuals, the sustainable development of the economy and culture of nations, and true security for the long-lasting prosperity of human society.

<sup>1</sup> Weber (1958): 213.

<sup>2</sup> P. Gñānārāma (2012): 4.

In such a situation, Buddhist teachings on conflict and conflict resolution can be utilized more effectively to reduce the conflict, violence and animosity mentioned above. The research problem of this paper is to explore how Buddhist teachings are related to harmony and how they can build social and ethnic harmony to promote human society. Moreover, this paper will identify conflict resolution strategies based on Buddhism and explore the core values that underpin those strategies.

## 1.2. Research methodology

This paper is based on a literature study analyzing both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of Buddhist teachings (*sutta*) and original texts, primarily the *Sūtra Piṭaka*. The secondary sources include academic articles in this field, which are referenced where deeper analysis is required. This research focuses on exploring how Buddhist teachings can be applied to conflict resolution in social work. The methodology employed in this study involves content analysis of primary Buddhist teachings relevant to the subject area.

## II. CORE CONCEPTS: WHAT IS HARMONY?

The term “social harmony” cannot be defined separately. Definitions vary from one another. It is necessary to look at the etymological meaning of the term “social harmony” for explicating the expression “social harmony” to explain the term. The word combines two words: social and harmony. The word “social” comes from the French root word “social” or the Latin word “socialism/socius.” It means “friend”, a word relating to society which is concerned with the mutual relations of human beings. The second word is “harmony”. It comes originally from the Greek root, “*harmonia*,” in French “*harmonie*” which means “Joining concord.” Thus “harmony” means a combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions.

The term ‘social harmony’ does not have a single, universally accepted definition, as its meaning varies across different contexts. To clarify its significance, it is essential to examine its etymological origins. The phrase consists of two words: ‘social’ and ‘harmony.’ The word ‘social’ is derived from the French ‘social’ or the Latin ‘socius,’ meaning ‘friend’ or ‘companion.’ It pertains to society and the mutual relationships among human beings. The term ‘harmony’ originates from the Greek *harmonia* and the French *harmonie*, meaning ‘joining’ or ‘concord.’ In its musical sense, ‘harmony’ refers to the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions. Thus, in a broader sense, ‘social harmony’ implies a state of unity, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence within a society.

Social harmony can be simply defined as “a society or human being living together with other societies in a friendly or cordial manner”.<sup>3</sup> In a narrow sense, harmony in human relationships might be defined using Heider’s conception, highlighting the drive toward one’s psychological balance as a cognitive

---

<sup>3</sup> Oxford Dictionary (1989): 937.

consistency motive used and developed also in social network theory.<sup>4</sup>

However, from the social work perspective, social harmony should be defined as follows. “Social harmony is about maintaining the level of equilibrium in economic terms in civil society.” Social harmony is multi-tiered: it encompasses harmony between all ethnic groups and cultures (between the dominant culture and subculture and cultures of different social classes): harmony in the sense of respect for a country or a culture, harmony between different religions, and harmony between man and nature.<sup>5</sup> Thus, social harmony can be said to be the peace between ethnicities, castes, and religions, and it has an impact on the development of a country.

Buddha explains that every member of the human family, men and women alike, has an equal right to liberty. He recognized that each of us is just a human being like everyone else. The Buddha has given this example in his monasteries. The monks who belonged to different castes were allowed to spend time together in the same monastery, which included holding meetings altogether irrespective of ethnicity, caste, or religion, walking together in the *Pindapāde*, and holding *Dhamma* discussions together in the single *Dhamma* hall.<sup>6</sup> This shows that the Buddha practically contributed to the building of harmony between different ethnic groups, between the rich and poor, and between castes.

### III. CORE CONCEPTS: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Even if a society seeks harmony, there are many conflicts that must be dealt with at the individual, family, society, or global level. As Mayer pointed out, “In many respects, the social work field has always been about conflict. We deal with people who conflict with social institutions, communities, their families, peers, and themselves. One of our basic roles is to facilitate the interaction between individuals and systems, and our effectiveness is strongly connected to our ability to handle conflict.”<sup>7</sup> By saying “we,” Mayer addresses his text to social workers who are supposed to have the knowledge, skills, and competency to deal with various conflicts. However, any conflict resolution process must necessarily reflect social structure, lifestyle, patterns of behavior, and shared values. It is needless to say that cultural competence and humility are crucial in this process. Moreover, this process may show huge diversity reflecting different value systems. In this study, we focus on Buddhism and its value system to add a new piece to the discussion on this diversity.

In the field of social work, conflict resolution strategy is represented by Thomas-Kilmann’s five modes.<sup>8</sup> They identified avoiding, competing,

---

<sup>4</sup> Heider (2015): 1 - 8.

<sup>5</sup> Craip (2013): 3.

<sup>6</sup> In *Pāli-pindapātikāṅga*, the practice of going for alms is one of the thirteen ascetic purification - exercises.

<sup>7</sup> Mayer (2013): 76.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas; Kilmann (1974): 1 - 11.



accommodating, collaborating, and compromising as the main strategies. Keeping these strategies in mind, this study derives original resolution strategies from Buddhist teachings. Mayer recognizes three dimensions of conflict: perception, feeling, and action.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in this study, these dimensions will be followed to show how Buddhist teaching perceives conflicts and how causes are recognized, and further, which strategies are provided as conflict resolution.

#### IV. BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON SOCIAL HARMONY

Appreciating world peace, the Buddha worked hard to spread his teachings in the world, promoting unity and harmony among nations. The Buddha has advised about how to live harmoniously in societies where those of different religions or ethnic backgrounds are free from oppression, savageness, and exploitation. His teachings provide a ground of liberation upon which each nation and person can build according to their own needs. To understand the Buddha's authentic teachings, one must examine the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

The *Sutta Piṭaka* is one of the three sections of the *Tiṭṭaka* (*Pāli*) or Tripitaka (Sanskrit), the Buddhist canonical collection. *Tiṭṭaka* means "three baskets," which are *Sutta Piṭaka*, *Vinaya Piṭaka* (summarizing monastery rules), and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (summarizing detailed scholastic analysis). Out of these, the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which includes the core texts of Buddhist teaching, has been selected for this study.

The Buddhist texts (*Tiṭṭaka*) form an integral part of the Buddhist tradition. Initially transmitted orally by Buddhist monastics, these texts were later committed to writing and compiled into manuscripts in various Indo-Aryan languages such as *Pāli* and Sanskrit. Over time, they were incorporated into different Buddhist canons and translated into languages such as Sinhala, English, and many others. Buddhist historical texts serve as one of the most important sources for students of Buddhism, as they preserve the original teachings and philosophical ideas of the tradition. These texts have been carefully transmitted from the past to the present without compromising their core values. The *Theravāda* school of Buddhism asserts that it has preserved the original teachings of the Buddha. There are strong reasons to consider that the doctrine found in the *Pāli* scriptures comes as close as possible to the Buddha's actual teachings. In any case, the *Pāli Tiṭṭaka* remains the only fully preserved canon of an early Buddhist school.<sup>10</sup>

##### 4.1. Perception and causes of conflict

According to the causes of the present and previous wars of the world, we can see craving and sensual desire of the people as the basic causes for war and conflicts. In the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*, Buddha has explained three types of causes of immorality (unwholesome roots).<sup>11</sup> They are:

<sup>9</sup> Mayer (2000): 97 – 214.

<sup>10</sup> Walshe (1995): 19.

<sup>11</sup> MN. 110/MLDB. 132 - 133.

- (1) Greed (*Lobha*)<sup>12</sup>
- (2) Hate (*Dosa*)<sup>13</sup>
- (3) Delusion (*Moha*)<sup>14</sup>

The Buddha explains that the person who controls their senses and has eliminated craving does not tend to quarrel or cause harm to others, abuse others, or steal or despoil another's wealth. The Buddha points out that there is no end to human wants and desires, and people are slaves to their cravings.<sup>15</sup> They are difficult to give up.<sup>16</sup> As the *Madhupīṇḍika Sutta* reads, the following seven kinds of psychological tendencies tend to cause conflicts:

- (1) *Kāmarāga* - the latent tendency to sensual pleasure
- (2) *Paṭigha* - the latent tendency to aversion
- (3) *Diṭṭhi* - the latent tendency to speculative opinion
- (4) *Vicikiccā* - the latent tendency to speculative doubt
- (5) *Māna* - the latent tendency to conceit and pride
- (6) *Bhavarāga* - the latent tendency to crave to continue existence
- (7) *Avijjā* - the latent tendency to ignorance

These seven kinds of tendencies lead to the taking up of rods and bladed weapons, to arguments, quarrels, disputes, accusations, divisive tale-bearing, and false speech. However, when individuals eliminate these tendencies by properly cultivating their minds, they gradually cease engaging in such harmful actions. They stop taking up rods and bladed weapons, refrain from arguments, quarrels, disputes, and accusations, and abandon divisive tale-bearing and false speech. The *Sutta* further clarifies that people typically experience the world in two ways: through attraction and repulsion. They seek ownership of what they find attractive, often leading to quarrels and conflicts in an attempt to acquire those things. Conversely, they attempt to reject and distance themselves from what they dislike, generating further discord. Buddhism primarily focuses on identifying the root causes of conflict rather than offering temporary solutions. Its teachings emphasize inner transformation as the fundamental approach to resolving disputes and fostering lasting harmony.

In the *Sangīti Sutta*, the Buddha has shown three ways of seeing oneself. They are (1) I am better than others, (2) I am equal to others, and (3) I am worse than others.<sup>17</sup> Of these, one who sees himself as superior to others acts with the idea that he is always 'right.' It is a cause of conflict. The same *Sutta* Buddha has shown four ways of going wrong (*agati-gamanī*)<sup>18</sup>: One goes wrong through

<sup>12</sup> *lobha*, "greed", is one of the three unwholesome roots (*mūla*) and a synonym of *raga* and *tanhā*.

<sup>13</sup> *dosa*: "hatred", anger, is one of the three unwholesome roots, *Citta*: hate consciousness.

<sup>14</sup> *moha*: "delusion", is one of the three unwholesome roots. The best-known synonym is *avijjā*.

<sup>15</sup> *kāmesu loke na hi atthi titti* – MN 2. 420.

<sup>16</sup> MN 2. 420.

<sup>17</sup> DN 3. 358-360/LDB. 481 - 482.

<sup>18</sup> *Agati*: the four "wrong paths" (DN 3 .386/ LDB. 491)

- (1) desire (*chanda*)<sup>19</sup>
- (2) hatred (*dosa*)
- (3) delusion (*moha*)
- (4) fear (*bhaya*)<sup>20</sup>

Misunderstanding is a major factor influencing many conflicts in society. Disagreements eventually lead to a confrontation. This situation goes from the so-called family institution to the social organizations. Reluctance to respect the opinions of another person, personality traits, social status, and economic and political power are all factors that contribute to this. Buddha also taught about issues that could lead to arguments and quarrels. There are ten reasons for increasing arguments, quarrels, contention, and disputes, which are mentioned in the *Vivāda Sutta*.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 1: Ten reasons for increasing arguments, quarrels, & disputes**

<i>Bhikkhus</i> explain non- <i>Dhamma</i> as non- <i>Dhamma</i>	Others say, “ <i>Dhamma</i> as <i>Dhamma</i> ”
They explain non-discipline as non-discipline.	Others say “discipline as discipline”
They explain what has not been stated and uttered by the <i>Tathāgata</i> <sup>22</sup> as not having been stated and uttered by him	Others say, “What has been stated and uttered by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as having been stated and uttered by him.”
They explain what has not been practised by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as not having been practised by him.	Others say, “What has been practised by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as having been practised by him.”
They explain what has not been prescribed by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as not having been prescribed by him.	Others say, “what has been prescribed by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as having been prescribed by him.”

The distortion of the Buddha’s doctrine (*Dhamma*), the distortion of discipline (*Vinaya*), and the redefinition of the doctrine were the causes

<sup>19</sup> Intention, desire, will., As evil quality, it has the meaning of “desire”, and is frequently coupled with terms for “sensuality”, and greed.

<sup>20</sup> As an emotional arousal fear arises in the mind as a mental state. Fear does not arise by itself alone but in combination with other factors, such as suspicion, presumption, jealousy, misleading information, vanity, and hostility.

<sup>21</sup> AN 6. 138.

<sup>22</sup> *Tathāgata*: the ‘Perfect One’, the one who has ‘thus gone’, or ‘thus come’, is an epithet of the Buddha used by him when speaking of himself. Thera (1952): 208.

of disputes.<sup>23</sup> Some *bhikkhus* declared what was non-*Dhamma* to be non-*Dhamma*, while others argued that *Dhamma* was indeed *Dhamma*, leading to divisions within the monastic community. The *Vepacitti Sutta* describes that responding with tolerance in such conflict situations is a mark of an individual's wisdom and character.<sup>24</sup> If individuals fail to act wisely, conflicts inevitably arise. Similarly, the *Paṭhamasaṅgāma Sutta* states that victory fosters the maturing of hatred, while the defeated suffer in sorrow.<sup>25</sup> However, one who remains at peace finds ease, having abandoned both victory and defeat. The Buddha further elaborates on the consequences of conflict and aggression in the *Dutiyaṣaṅgāma Sutta*. He explains that a person may plunder as he pleases, but when others plunder, the plunderer himself will eventually be plundered. The fool believes it is his turn to act without consequence, but when his misdeeds ripen, he inevitably faces distress. The killer eventually encounters another killer in turn; the victor ultimately faces another vanquisher. The abuser is met with abuse, and one who acts with anger encounters another who responds in anger. Thus, as the tides of fortune shift, the plunderer inevitably becomes the victim of plunder.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.2. Buddhist values and ethical aspects necessary to develop harmony

As in many other teachings, Buddhism rejects war and values peace. In his teaching, Buddha introduced love (compassion) and kindness instead of violence.<sup>27, 28</sup> War and peace have been the fundamental concerns of modern man. Wars of aggression, conflict, and confrontation taking place all over the world because of politics, culture, religion, and race are detrimental to both the material and spiritual welfare of humanity. It has been pointed out that due to the arms race, the very survival of man is at stake. Buddhism aims to create a peaceful society in the sense of the attainment of inner peace and finding the way to peace. It also has the strongest tradition of non-violence and peace in world history. Moreover, Buddhism aims to create a world where Compassion and Loving-Kindness are the driving forces. Buddhism conquers hatred by kindness and evil by goodness, where enmity, jealousy, ill-will, and greed are absent. For Buddhism, the most effective and forceful reason for conflicts is unwholesome psychological traits such as greediness, acquisition, unlimited hunger for power, hatefulness, and ignorance. Buddha describes both peace and the consequences of war. There is no victory or defeat in war. The group that wins the war is happy, and the other group that loses is unhappy. Those who are unhappy often live with hatred and anger towards the other group.

<sup>23</sup> *Vinaya*: The ethics taught by the Buddha to bring about the unity of the monks. Taught about "how you should behave". For example, how to act at the time of eating.

<sup>24</sup> SN 1. 222 – 223.

<sup>25</sup> SN 1. 154 – 156.

<sup>26</sup> SN 1. 157.

<sup>27</sup> Recognized as *Karuṇā* in both, *Pāli* and Sanskrit.

<sup>28</sup> *Mettā* (*Pāli*) is generally translated as loving-kindness is one of core values in Buddhism (called *Maitrī* in Sanskrit).

There is no victory in that. In the *Paṭhama Saṅgāma Sutta*, Buddha shows shown results of war, namely: (1) Victory breeds enmity; (2) The defeated one sleeps badly; (3) The peaceful one sleeps at ease, having abandoned victory and defeat.<sup>29</sup>

This also shows that war causes mental anguish, and no one can be happy about it. The one who wins (the victor) hates the one who loses (the defeated), and the one who loses hates the one who wins. Accordingly, neither can be mentally happy. The conflicts and wars that occur in society are observed in Buddhism as an unavoidable part of *samsāric* misery.<sup>30</sup> The Buddha speaks of unrest in the form of quarrels (*kalahā*), disputes (*viggahā*), and contentions (*vivādā*), which occur at different levels of social interaction. The *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* begins with the sensory process and identifies *papañca* (mental proliferation) as the most noteworthy psychological cause for social conflicts. The discourse highlights that Buddha and his disciples have higher moral practices. They never harm others and never plunder or steal from others. Once, when Buddha was in Kapilavatthu, his hometown, he went for alms rounds (*piṇḍapāta*), sat under a tree, and started to rest. Atpilavatthu, a *Sākyan* named *Dandapāṇi*, also came to that park in the morning for exercise. He went where Buddha sat and worshipped and asked Buddha one question: “What is the contemplative doctrine? What does he proclaim?”<sup>31</sup>

Buddha answered: “The nature of doctrine, friend, is where one does not keep quarreling with anyone in the world with its *devas*, *māras*, and *brahmās*. These are the teachings of the *Dhamma*. Then, the Buddha explains the two concepts that are needed to practice to live life without conflict. These concepts are extremely vital to protect peace in society. Conflicts and wars arise first in our minds due to following the teachings of Buddhism. These two concepts are: (1) departing from the sensual pleasures (*kāmehevisaṃyuttaṃ*); (2) eliminating craving (*vitatanhaṃ*)

The *Sāriputtasihanāda Sutta*<sup>32</sup> explains how Buddha resolved the conflict. According to this Sutta, Venerable Sāriputththa, at the end of the *wassāna* program, went to Buddha and took permission from Buddha before leaving the temple. Then, while going to live in another place, another monk complained to Buddha by saying, “When Venerable Sāriputththa left, he fell on my body and left without apologizing.” Buddha recalled Venerable Sāriputththa back to the temple. The two met and discussed many issues. Venerable Sāriputththa spoke in detail. In the end, the other monk confessed to the Buddha that he had lied. Buddha asked Venerable Sāriputththa to forgive the monk, and Venerable Sāriputththa apologized. Misunderstanding is a major factor

<sup>29</sup> SN 1. 154.

<sup>30</sup> *Samsāra*: ‘round of rebirth’, perpetual wandering; is a name by which is designated the sea of life ever restlessly heaving up and down, the symbol of this continuous process of ever again and again being born, growing old, suffering and dying. – Unbroken chain of the rebirth.

<sup>31</sup> *Kim vādī samaṇo, kimakkhāyīti?*

<sup>32</sup> AN 5. 402

influencing many conflicts in society. Disagreements eventually lead to a confrontation. This situation progresses from the so-called family institution to the social organizations. Reluctance to respect the opinions of another person, personality traits, social status, and economic and political power are all factors that contribute to this. Also, the story of this principle shows us some important points in problem-solving. At the same time, it is clear that the right leadership is important in resolving conflicts as well.

The *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* draws attention to how conflicts take place due to sensual pleasure.<sup>33</sup> The Buddha speaks of conflicts in the form of quarrels (*kalaha*), disputes (*viggaha*), and contentions (*vivāda*) arising at various levels of social interaction. These conflicts manifest on a large scale as wars between nations or states when one ruler disputes with another (*rājānopi rājūhi vivādenti*). They also occur within a single nation between religious or ethnic groups and even within families among relatives. The root cause of conflict, as the Buddha teaches, is attachment to sensual pleasures. The *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* emphasizes how the pursuit of sensual pleasure leads to discord and strife, ultimately giving rise to suffering and conflict.

“Again, *Bhikhu* with sensual pleasures as the cause, sensual pleasures as the source, sensual pleasures as the basis, the cause being simply sensual pleasures, kings dispute with kings, warriors with warriors, *Brahmins* with *Brahmins*, householders with householders, mother disputes with the son, the son with the mother, the father with the son, the son with the father, brother with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. They dispute, quarrel, and approach each other with hands, clods, sticks, and weapons, and even face death or come to deadly unpleasantness.<sup>34</sup> This is the danger here, the mass of unpleasantness owing to sensual pleasure.”<sup>35</sup>

Buddha pointed out that the way to build harmony between ethnic groups is to have patience with the opinions of others and respect for the diverse ethnicities and religions of others. Buddha also pointed out that patience is the main way to solve conflicts. This is mentioned in the *Punnovāda Sutta*. This factor is clearly explained in the dialogue between the Venerable Punna *Bhikkhu* and Buddha known as “On how to practice patience.”

**Table 2: Dialogue with Punna Bhikkhu: Patience is the main way to solve conflicts.**

<sup>33</sup> Sensual pleasure, (*Bhikkhu* Bodhi translation). (*kāmahetu* (sensual pleasures as the cause), *kāmanidānam*, (sensual pleasures as the source) *kāmadhikaranam*, (sensual pleasures as the basis) *kāmānamewa hetu*, (the cause being simply sensual pleasures): *Kāma*; two kinds of *kāma* are called 1. *Kilesa-kāma*, (*kāma* as a mental defilement), [eg: The restlessness of mind. Occurrence of lustful thoughts.], 2. *Vatthu-kāma*, *Kāma* as the object-base of sensuality. A liking for material things. (eg, Lands, houses, wife, husband/ and children...) Thera (1952): 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Bhikhu* means Buddha’s followers, Buddhist monks.

<sup>35</sup> MN 1. 204.



Questions asked by Buddha	Punna Bhikkhu's Answers
The people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> are fierce and rough. If they abuse and threaten you, what will you think then?	If the people threaten me, then I shall think: "These people are kind, truly kind as they did not give me a blow with the fist."
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do give you a blow with the fist, what will you think then?"	If the people do give me a blow with the fist, then I shall think: "These people are kind as they did not give me a blow with a clod"
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do give you a blow with a clod, what will you think then?"	If the people do give me a blow with a clod, then I shall think: "These people are kind; they did not give me a blow with a stick."
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do give you a blow with a stick, what will you think then?"	If the people do give me a blow with a stick, then I shall think: "These people are kind as they did not give me a blow with a knife."
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do give you a blow with a knife, what will you think then?"	If the people do give me a blow with a knife, then I shall think: These people are kind as truly kind as they have not taken my life with a sharp knife"
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do take your life with a sharp knife, what will you think then?"	If the people do take my life with a sharp knife, then I shall think thus: There have been disciples of the Blessed One who, being humiliated and disgusted by the body and by life, sought to have their lives deprived by the knife. But I have had my life deprived by the knife without seeking it.

The Buddha expressed his admiration for the patience of the Venerable Punna *Bhikkhu*. The Buddha said, "Good, good, Punna! Possessing such self-control and peacefulness, you will be able to dwell in the *Sunāparanta* country.

Now, Punna, it is time to do as you think fit.”<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.3. Application in the context of social work/ conflict resolution strategies

*Ahimsā* is the principle of non-harm.<sup>37</sup> Most Buddhists strive to practice *ahimsā* in their daily lives, believing that violence is wrong in all circumstances. This principle suggests that a Buddhist may refuse to engage in violence, even in situations of conflict. In the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, the Buddha describes how one should respond when faced with blame or criticism. If someone blames us and we respond with blame in return, conflict arises. To prevent such conflicts, the Buddha provides clear guidance on cultivating patience and restraint. He advises that if conflicts arise within the home, one should reflect: “My mind will remain unaffected. I shall speak no harsh words. I shall abide with compassion for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, free from inner hatred.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, if someone strikes with their hand, throws a clod, wields a stick, or even a knife, the Buddha instructs that one should maintain inner composure and recall: “My mind will remain unaffected. I shall abide with compassion for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, free from inner hatred.”

The Buddha further emphasizes:

“If anyone should strike you with their hand, a clod, a stick, or a knife, you must abandon all desires and thoughts rooted in household life. You should train yourself as follows: ‘My mind will remain unaffected, and I shall speak no harsh words. I shall abide with compassion for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, free from inner hatred.’ That is how you should train, Phaggunā.”<sup>39</sup>

According to the *Kosambiya Sutta*, there was a conflict of opinion among the *Kosambi bhikkhus* over a minor issue. As a result, the monks were divided into two groups and blamed each other. Here, Buddha preached the following six points for the development of love and virtue among the monks, explaining the consequences of violence to both groups. They are (1) Good acts of the body, (2) Avoiding mistakes in one’s words (speech), (3) Avoiding mistakes in the mind, (4) Sharing what one gets in his/her bowl, (5) Good discipline, (6) By living according to Buddhist virtues.<sup>40</sup> In the *Ambalatthikārāhulowāda Sutta*, Buddha states that one should research the effects of an action before committing to it. Buddha said: “Investigate the situation before you take action” (1) Action with the body should be done after repeated reflection, (2) Action by speech should be done after repeated reflection, and (3) Action by mind should be done after repeated reflection.<sup>41</sup> Rahula *Bhikkhu* was instructed by

<sup>36</sup> MN 3. 548.

<sup>37</sup> The Buddhist principle of total non-violence, in thoughts, words & actions (c.f. five precepts).

<sup>38</sup> MN 1. 312.

<sup>39</sup> MN 1. 312.

<sup>40</sup> MN 1. 752 - 455.

<sup>41</sup> MN 2. 132.

Buddha to inquire into the outcome of an action before committing it.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the above analysis, it is clear that the Buddha focused on social and ethnic harmony and provided encouraging teachings on harmony. Buddhism always speaks of peaceful and harmonious ways, which are essential for the whole world, including both human society and the environment. According to the details given of the Buddhist perspective of social harmony, we can summarize the following resolutions: Refusing violence, affirming friendship, focusing on negotiations, respecting diversity, true understanding of humanity, bad results of using weapons, evaluation of morality, and proper reflection. Buddhism aims at creating a society that is free from violence in any form; where calm and peace prevail apart from conquest and defeat; where there is no persecution of the innocent; where hatred is conquered by kindness, and evil by goodness; where enmity, jealousy, ill will and greed do not infect peoples' minds; where compassion, peace and harmony thrive.

There are several ways in which a social worker can intervene in any social problem, including in conflict situations. There are four main approaches in social work intervention, which are the therapeutic approach, preventive approach, correctional approach, and developmental approach. Similar approaches could be found in Buddhism as well. "Instead of treating the illness, you should treat the causes". In Buddhism, it is said that. This is the Buddha's vision. An example can be seen in violence or conflicts; immediately after the conflicts, the victims are physically and mentally disrupted. They lose their possessions, and their lives collapse. Ordinary people volunteer to help rescue them and provide basic human needs. It is a "therapeutic approach" that may include legal work, etc. But the Buddha's teachings are to create a social environment to avoid such a situation. That is, to make sure that something does not happen instead of regretting it after it has happened. This concept is a reflection of the vision of Buddhists' "preventive approach." The simple idea here is to eliminate the causes of conflict.

Buddha teaches that our views influence all other aspects of our lives. The influence begins with the impact of our views on our motivation. In the structure of the eightfold path, the wrong view is the condition for wrong motivation, for intentions governed by lust, ill will, and violence, while the right view is the condition for right motivation, for intentions governed by non-attachment, benevolence, and compassion.<sup>42</sup> Buddha pointed out the importance of behaving wholesome instead of behaving unwholesome. Running parallel with the adoption of wholesome conduct is the endeavor of inner cultivation. Mental cultivation involves a double process aimed at shifting the mind away from defiled emotions and at generating mental qualities conducive to lightness, purity, and inner peace. Therefore, many of the Buddha's discourses deal with these two processes. In addition to these, the training of the mind involves the cultivation of virtuous qualities. Among

---

<sup>42</sup> Bodhi (2016): 29.

the virtues most crucial to establishing ethnic harmony are those comprised under the “four divine abodes” (*brahmavihāra*), which are loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity.<sup>43</sup>

Problem-solving strategies are necessarily rooted in the cultural background. While exploring the appropriate and culturally relevant method or strategy, cultural and societal foundations should be taken into consideration. In his study, Eisenbruch identified the Buddhist roots of impunity in post-war Cambodia and showed how Buddhist teachings affect relationships between former perpetrators and victims in avoiding social conflicts.<sup>44</sup> As proved in Buddhist social work projects, social work theories and methods should be based on the local context.<sup>45</sup> In other words, not indigenization or localization of imported models, but exploring the indigenous (local) model might lead to a more culturally relevant intervention. This paper shows how this scheme may be applied in the field of conflict resolution.

### Abbreviations

AN - *Āṅguttaranikāya*

DN - *Dīghanikāya*

MN - *Majjhimanikāya*

SN - *Saṃyuttanikāya*

SN – *Suttanipāṭa*

\*\*\*

### REFERENCES

#### Primary sources

*Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed. V.Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñāṇamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repJayanti r. 2023.

*The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (M. Walshe, Trans.). (1995). Wisdom Publications.

#### Secondary sources

Bodhi, B. (Ed.). (2016). *The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*. Wisdom Publications.

Dharmakirti. (2008). *Sutra Dharma Nāvaṇiya*. Buddhist Cultural Center.

<sup>43</sup> The four ‘sublime’ or ‘divine abodes’ - also called the four boundless states (*appamaññā*) – are living kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), altruistic (or sympathetic) joy (*mudītā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Thera (2016): 42.

<sup>44</sup> Eisenbruch (2018).

<sup>45</sup> Gohori (2017).

- Eisenbruch, M. (2018). The cloak of impunity in Cambodia I: cultural foundations. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 22 (6), 757–773. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2018.1454905>
- Gñānārāma, P. (2012). *An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy*. Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association.
- Gohori, J. (Ed.). (2017). *From Western-rooted Professional Social Work to Buddhist Social Work*. Gakubunsha.
- Heider, F. (2015). *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. Martino Fine Books.
- Mayer, B. (2013). Conflict Resolution. *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.80>
- Mayer, B. S. (2000). *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practitioner's Guide*. Wiley.
- Ñānārāma, P. (1996). *An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy*. Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association.
- Nyanatiloka. (1980). *Buddhist dictionary: manual of Buddhist terms and doctrines* (Nyanatiloka, Ed.). Buddhist Publication Society.
- Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (2008). *Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE instrument* [Report].
- Valters, C. (2013). *Community Mediation and Social Harmony in Sri Lanka* [Research program]. The Asian Foundation.
- Weber, M. (2020). *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (D. Martindale, Ed.; H. H. Gerth, Trans.). Dev Publishers & Distributors.





# COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR GLOBAL HARMONY: HISTORY OF BUDDHISM IN GERMANY

Prof. Dr. Susanne von der Heide\*

## **Abstract:**

The paper “History of Buddhism in Germany” presents a comprehensive analysis of the trajectory of Buddhism’s integration into German society, highlighting its transformative impact on interfaith dialogue, cultural adaptation, and global harmony. Beginning with intellectual curiosity during the Enlightenment, Buddhism’s philosophical appeal influenced prominent thinkers like Schopenhauer. Its evolution from an academic interest to an institutionalized practice saw pivotal contributions from German scholars and pioneers such as Max Müller and Paul Dahlke, who bridged the gap between Eastern traditions and Western audiences. Key historical moments include the post-war reconstruction of Buddhist communities, the arrival of Asian teachers, and the establishment of meditation centers. The paper identifies significant themes: “Buddhism as a Framework for Unity,” which underscores its role in fostering interfaith collaboration; “Environmental Sustainability Inspired by Buddhist Teachings,” detailing its engagement in ecological activism; and “Diversity Within German Buddhism,” exploring the coexistence of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions. Prof. Dr. von der Heide emphasizes the unique contributions of immigrant communities and German-born practitioners in shaping a distinct yet authentic Buddhist identity. This study contributes a nuanced understanding of Buddhism’s role in addressing modern challenges like climate change, mental health, and ethical leadership, positioning it as a vital force for compassion and sustainable development globally.

The development of Buddhism in Germany is a story that intertwines cultural exchange, intellectual curiosity, and spiritual transformation. The journey of Buddhism from distant Asian lands to becoming a significant spiritual

---

\* Chairperson, HimalAsia Foundation, Cottbus University and Technical University of Berlin.

movement in Germany offers valuable insights into global interconnectedness and the adaptability of religious/ spiritual traditions.

With this paper, I will explore the introduction of Buddhism to Germany, its development through the 19th and 20th centuries, and its contemporary expressions in German society.

**Keywords:** *German Buddhism, cultural integration, interfaith dialogue, environmental activism, Asian influence, mindfulness practice, spiritual diversity.*

\*\*\*

## I. EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH BUDDHISM

The first encounter between Buddhism and German culture did not happen in Germany itself but in the south of Russia in the second half of the 19th century, when Volga-German settlers met with Kalmyk people who were Buddhists; And subsequently the Russian- German scientist Isaak Jacob Schmidt (1779 - 1847) was writing the first books on Buddhism in German language, that were published in St. Petersburg<sup>1</sup>.

The story of Buddhism in Germany itself begins not with spiritual practice but with intellectual curiosity and cultural fascination. The first encounters between Germany and Buddhist thoughts took place during the 18th and 19th centuries, primarily through the works of scholars, philosophers, and travelers. While Buddhism as a lived spiritual tradition would not take root until the 20th century, its early intellectual reception in Germany laid the groundwork for its eventual adoption and development.

### 1.1. Philosophical engagement (18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> Century)

The Enlightenment era in Europe sparked a newfound interest in world religions, particularly those of the East. German scholars and philosophers were deeply intrigued by non-Christian traditions, seeking alternative perspectives on life, ethics, and spirituality.

One of the most influential figures in this context was Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860). Schopenhauer was among the first Western philosophers to incorporate Buddhist ideas into his philosophical framework. Drawing heavily on translations of Indian and Buddhist texts, he viewed life as an endless cycle of ‘suffering,’ echoing the Buddha’s teachings on *dukkha*. Schopenhauer’s concept of the “will to live” as the source of human suffering resonated deeply with the Buddhist idea of attachment as the root cause of suffering. Schopenhauer’s works, such as *The World as Will and Representation*,<sup>2</sup> not only introduced Buddhist ideas to German intellectual circles but also inspired subsequent thinkers, including Friedrich Nietzsche and e.g. world-famous composer Richard Wagner. Though Nietzsche was critical of Buddhism, he acknowledged its profound psychological insights, thus further embedding

<sup>1</sup> Hartmut Walravens, 2005, Isaak Jacob Schmidt (1779 - 1847) – Leben und Werk des Pioniers der mongolischen und tibetischen Studien: Eine Dokumentation, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.

<sup>2</sup> Artur Schopenhauer, 1819, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig.

Buddhist ideas into Western philosophical discourse.

Parallel to these philosophical engagements, German linguists and Indologists began translating Buddhist texts, opening the door to a deeper understanding of the religion. Max Müller (1823 – 1900), a German comparative philologist and Orientalist based as a professor at Oxford University, played a pivotal role in this process. His monumental series, *Sacred Books of the East*<sup>3</sup>, published between 1879 and 1910, included translations of key Buddhist scriptures, such as the Dhammapada. These works were instrumental in making Buddhist philosophy accessible to European audiences, including those in Germany.

### 1.2. Theosophy and early spiritual movements

While academic and philosophical interest in Buddhism grew, the late 19th century saw the emergence of movements that sought to integrate Buddhist ideas into spiritual practice. One such movement was Theosophy, which blended Eastern and Western spiritual traditions.

The Theosophical Society, founded by the Russian-German Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831 - 1891)<sup>4</sup> and the American Henry Steel Olcott (1832 - 1907)<sup>5</sup> in 1875, was particularly influential in bringing Buddhist concepts to the West. The society's teachings, which emphasized karma, reincarnation, and meditation, drew heavily from Buddhist philosophy. In Germany, Theosophy gained a substantial following, with German intellectuals and spiritual seekers embracing its syncretic approach.

Theosophy also facilitated direct engagement with Asian teachers. For example, Blavatsky and Olcott, after having travelled to India and Sri Lanka, were formally acknowledged as Buddhists at the Wijayananda Vihara near Galle, where they took the Five Precepts (Śrāvakayāna precepts), symbolizing their commitment to the Buddhist path. Being in contact with the scholar Max Müller, they also compiled the tenets of Buddhism for the education of people in the West. These cross-cultural exchanges helped to demystify Buddhism for German audiences and laid the foundation for its future institutionalization.

### 1.3. Socio-political context and early encounters with Asia

The late 19th century was also marked by Germany's increased interaction with Asia, both through colonial ventures and academic endeavors. Although Germany had relatively limited colonial involvement in Asia compared to Britain or France, its intellectual and cultural exchanges were significant.

Besides, since 1900, steam shipping allowed more passenger travels to Asia, and then after German travelers and diplomats stationed in countries like India, China, and Japan brought back accounts of Buddhist practices and traditions. These firsthand observations enriched academic studies and piqued

<sup>3</sup> Max Müller, 1879-1910, *Sacred Books of the East*, 50 Vols., Oxford University Press, Oxford.

<sup>4</sup> Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, 1907, *Der Schlüssel zur Theosophie*, Max Altmann, Leipzig.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Steel Olcott, *A Buddhist Catechism*, 1881, Madras; *Der buddhistische Katechismus*, 1997, Reprint-Verlag, Leipzig.

public interest in Buddhism.

The violin player Anton Walther Florus Gueth (1878 - 1957)<sup>6</sup> e.g. is the first German to be ordained as the Buddhist monk Nyānatiloka in 1903 in Burma, and Martin Steinke (1882 - 1966) was ordained as a monk in China. He founded the first association of Chan-Buddhism. They were taken as examples for other Germans who followed in their steps, as for the Jewish Siegmund Feniger (1901 - 1994), who became the prominent monk Nyanaponika Maha Thera (1901 - 1994) in Sri Lanka<sup>7</sup>.

One notable example is the work of German explorers such as Albert Grünwedel (1856 - 1935), an Indologist, Archaeologist, and Tibetologist. Grünwedel's expeditions to Central Asia uncovered Buddhist art and manuscripts, which were brought back to Germany and displayed in museums. These artifacts provided tangible evidence of the historical and cultural significance that Buddhism had, sparking further curiosity among Germans. Two of several notable works that he published were e.g. *Buddhist Art in India*<sup>8</sup> and *Mythology of Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia*<sup>9</sup>, where he could prove as the first scientist the Greek origins of the Buddhist art of Gandhara.

The interest that German educated citizen had in Buddhism is also shown in their interest for selected literature at this time: The later Nobel Prize winner for Literature (1946), Hermann Hesse e.g. set a monument for Buddha when he published in 1922 one of his most successful books *Siddharta*<sup>10</sup> which increased the interest for Buddhism in the West.

#### 1.4. The role of translations in spreading Buddhism

The translation of Buddhist texts into German played a crucial role in the early dissemination of Buddhist ideas. In addition to Max Müller's contributions, the Austrian Karl Eugen Neumann (1865 – 1915), who was deeply influenced by Schopenhauer, deserves special mention. Neumann was one of the first Europeans to translate significant portions of the Pāli Canon, the foundational scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism<sup>11</sup>. His translations, which emphasized the practical and ethical dimensions of Buddhism, resonated with German readers seeking alternatives to traditional Christian teachings. Neumann's works also inspired early practitioners and provided a foundation for the first German Buddhist societies. His dedication to accurately conveying the Buddha's

---

<sup>6</sup> Anton Walther Florus Gueth, 1922, *Dhammapada: Des Buddhas Weg zur Weisheit*, Jhana Verlag, Oy-Mittelberg; and 1926, *Der Weg zur Reinheit (Visuddhimagga)*, Jhana Verlag, Oy-Mittelberg.

<sup>7</sup> Thera Nyanaponika, 1998, *Abhidhamma Studies: Buddhist Explorations of Consciousness and Time*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville.

<sup>8</sup> Albert Grünwedel, 1893, *Buddhistische Kunst in Indien*, Handbücher der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin -Vol.; 4, Spemann, Berlin.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Grünwedel, 1900, *Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet und der Mongolei*, F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig.

<sup>10</sup> Hermann Hesse, 1922, *Siddharta*, S. Fischer, Berlin.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Eugen Neumann, 1911, *Die Reden Gotamo Budhas, aus der Sammlung der Bruchstücke Suttanipato des Pali-Kanons*, R. Piper, München.

teachings earned him the title of the “pioneer of German Buddhism.”

### **1.5. Early Misinterpretations and Romanticization**

It is important to acknowledge that early German encounters with Buddhism were not without their flaws. Many Western interpretations romanticized Buddhism as a rational, ethical, and atheistic alternative to Christianity. This perception, while appealing to some, often stripped Buddhism of its rich cultural and ritualistic dimensions. For instance, German intellectuals frequently emphasized the philosophical aspects of Buddhism, such as its teachings on suffering/ compassion and impermanence, while downplaying its devotional practices. Despite these limitations, these early interpretations laid the groundwork for a deeper engagement with Buddhism in the 20th century.

## **II. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF BUDDHISM IN GERMANY**

This initial encounters with Buddhism in Germany were characterized by intellectual curiosity and philosophical engagement. While Buddhism was initially perceived as an academic and philosophical subject, these early efforts set the stage for its eventual institutionalization and practice as a lived spiritual tradition.

The early 20th century marked a turning point for Buddhism in Germany, as it transitioned from being a subject of academic and philosophical inquiry to becoming a formalized religious presence. This phase witnessed the establishment of the first Buddhist organizations, the translation of key texts for practice, and the formation of communities. However, this development was not without challenges, as global conflicts and political ideologies influenced its growth.

### **2.1. The first Buddhist societies**

The institutionalization of Buddhism in Germany began in the early 20th century with the founding of the *Deutsche Buddhistische Gesellschaft* (German Buddhist Society) in 1924. This society, established in Leipzig, was among the first in Europe dedicated to promoting Buddhist teachings and practices. Its founders were different German intellectuals, philosophers, and spiritual seekers who had been inspired by the early translations of Buddhist texts and their encounters with Asian traditions.

One of the society's prominent figures was the Indologist Karl Seidenstücker (1876 - 1936), a German Buddhist pioneer who played a pivotal role in organizing and spreading awareness about Buddhism in Germany. Seidenstücker authored several introductory texts on Buddhism, providing German readers with accessible explanations of Buddhist teachings and practices<sup>12</sup>. His works aimed to demystify Buddhism and present it as a practical philosophy for modern life.

Around the same time, another key figure, Paul Dahlke (1865 - 1928), emerged as a leader in the effort to establish Buddhism as a spiritual path in

---

<sup>12</sup> Karl Seidenstücker, 1923 - second edition, *Pali Buddhismus in Übersetzungen*, Oskar Schloss, München.

Germany. Dahlke, a physician by profession, was deeply influenced by the teachings of Theravāda Buddhism after he had studied Schopenhauer and visited Sri Lanka several times. And had also been to India, Burma, Thailand, and China to learn more about Buddhism<sup>13</sup>. In Sri Lanka, he was deeply influenced e.g. by Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala, Ven. Nyananissara and Ven. Wagiswara. In 1924, he established the Berlin Buddhist House (Buddhistisches Haus), which became one of the first Buddhist centers in Europe. This center served as a hub for study, meditation, and community building, laying the foundation for the later expansion of Buddhist organizations in Germany. The place, which was converted later into the first Buddhist Vihara in continental Europe, still exists and is stationing Buddhist monks mainly from Sri Lanka.

## **2.2. Challenges during the Nazi Era**

The rise of the Nazi regime in the 1930s posed significant challenges for Buddhism in Germany. The Nazis, with their emphasis on racial purity and nationalism, viewed non-Christian religions, including Buddhism, with suspicion. While Buddhism was not explicitly persecuted, its growth was severely hindered during this period.

Some efforts were made to align Buddhism with Nazi ideology in an attempt to gain acceptance. For example, certain individuals attempted to portray Buddhism as a rational, Aryan tradition that emphasized discipline and self-control. However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful and alienated many genuine Buddhist practitioners.

The Nazi era also disrupted the nascent Buddhist institutions in Germany. Many Buddhist societies disbanded, and the Berlin Buddhist House struggled to maintain its activities. Despite these challenges, the Buddhist community persisted, albeit in a limited and often underground capacity.

## **2.3. Post-war reconstruction of Buddhist communities**

The end of World War II marked a new beginning for Buddhism in Germany. The devastation caused by the war led many Germans to seek alternative spiritual paths, and Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion and liberation from suffering, appealed to those searching for meaning in a shattered world. The reconstruction of Buddhist institutions began during the 1950s. The Berlin Buddhist House was restored and reopened, becoming a symbol of resilience and continuity for German Buddhists. New Buddhist societies were established across the country, including the German Buddhist Union (Deutsche Buddhistische Union, DBU), founded in 1955. The DBU aimed to unite the diverse Buddhist traditions emerging in Germany and provide a platform for collaboration and mutual support.

One of the key factors contributing to the growth of Buddhism in post-war Germany was the increasing availability of Buddhist teachings and texts. Returning travelers and expatriates who had studied Buddhism in Asia brought back not only knowledge but also a commitment to establish authentic

---

<sup>13</sup> Paul Dahlke, 1920 - Second edition, *Buddhismus als Weltanschauung*, Oskar Schloss, München.



Buddhist practices in Germany.

#### 2.4. The role of Asian teachers and communities

The post-war period also saw the arrival of Asian Buddhist teachers and immigrants, who played a crucial role in revitalizing and diversifying Buddhism in Germany. Among the most influential were Theravāda monks from Sri Lanka and Thailand, having been invited to stay at Buddhist Centres as in Berlin, e.g., who introduced traditional monastic practices to German audiences.

The arrival of Japanese Zen teachers in the West, such as Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, (1870 - 1966), who visited several times Europe after having founded already various Zen Centres in the US, as well as Shunryu Suzuki (1905 - 1971), whose introduction into the Zen practice, became an extremely popular book in Germany<sup>14</sup>, and Taisen Deshimaru Roshi (1914 - 1982), who is also called the “Bodhidharma of Modern Times”, brought Zen Buddhism to prominence in Germany. Zen’s emphasis on meditation and mindfulness resonated with the growing interest in Eastern spirituality during the 1960s and 1970s. In the meantime, nearly all important schools of Zen with roots in Japan, Korea, China, and Vietnam are represented in Germany.

Similarly, the Tibetan diaspora following the Tibet incident in 1959 led to the spread of Vajrayāna Buddhism, with teachers like the H. H. the Dalai Lama, H. H. the Sakya Trizin, or H. H. the 16th Karmapa and, e.g., making frequent visits to the West including Germany. Until then, hardly anything was known about Tibetan Buddhism in the world. After the movement of the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan high lamas and meditation masters together with thousands of Tibetans to India and thereafter to the West, the interest for Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism with its specific rituals and comprehensive experiential knowledge grew in the West. Subsequently, great scholars as Jampa Panglung Rinpoche, Dagab Rinpoche, and Dzongsar Ngari Thingo Rinpoche were invited to the German Universities of Munich, Bonn, and Cologne, e.g., to introduce Tibetan culture and art.

It has been Dzongsar Ngari Thingo Rinpoche (1945 - 2008) who introduced H. H. the Dalai Lama to Germany and organised official visits with well-known public personalities, politicians, and high-ranking dignitaries from the church. As a consequence, many centres of all four main Tibetan schools were established in Germany, and interfaith dialogues between Christians and Buddhists have been intensified. Besides, exhibitions on the Tibetan culture, initially organised by Ngari Thingo Rinpoche, who was also a Tibetan art historian who published in German language, became very popular in Germany and grew public interest for Tibetan Buddhism<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> Shunryu Suzuki, 1970, *Zen Mind – Beginners Mind*, Weatherhill, Tokyo, New York; In German: 1975, *Zen Geist - Anfänger Geist*, Kamphausen, Bielefeld.

<sup>15</sup> G - W. Essen und T. T. Thingo, 1989, *Götter des Himalaya 2 Vols.*, Prestel; und 1991, *Padmasambhava – Leben und Wundertaten des grossen tantrischen Meisters im Spiegel der tibetischen Bildkunst*, München und DuMont, Köln

Asian immigrant communities also contributed to the institutionalization of Buddhism in Germany. Vietnamese and Thai communities, in particular, established temples and cultural centers, which became focal points for both immigrants and native Germans interested in Buddhism. The Vietnamese communities were especially growing in West Germany when the Government allowed a certain number of Vietnamese refugees to settle in Germany due to factors then. After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the then East-German Socialist Government had invited contract workers to stay, and in 1989, around 60000 Vietnamese were permanently living in East Germany. Until then, also in West Germany, around 40000 Vietnamese had settled permanently. Since the reunion of East and West Germany in 1990, the German-Vietnamese people formed the biggest Buddhist community with over 100,000 followers, mainly of Mahayana Buddhism, and established 12 Buddhist Pagodas in different parts of Germany.

## 2.5 Growth of secular and practical Buddhism

Another significant development in the institutionalization of Buddhism during the mid-20th century was the rise of secular and practical approaches to Buddhist teachings. Influenced by figures like Ven. Ayya Khema (Ilse Kussel, married Ledermann 1923 - 1997), a German-born Buddhist nun who had been ordained in Sri Lanka at the Vajirarama Temple by Ven. Narada Mahathera, this movement emphasized meditation and mindfulness as tools for personal growth and well-being. Ayya Khema's establishment of retreat centers and her accessible teachings<sup>16</sup> helped Buddhism appeal to a broader audience, including those who did not identify themselves as religious. In the meantime, several German disciples of Buddhist masters from the East became qualified teachers and translators, not only in the West but also in Asia.

Besides, the incorporation of Buddhist practices into secular contexts, such as psychotherapy and stress reduction, further expanded its reach. German psychologists and therapists began integrating mindfulness techniques into their work, inspired by Buddhist principles of self-awareness and non-attachment.

## 2.6. Legacy and foundations for future growth

By the late 20th century, the institutional foundations for Buddhism in Germany were firmly established. Buddhist societies, temples, and meditation centers could be found across the country, reflecting the diversity of Buddhist traditions. These institutions provided not only a space for practice but also a platform for education, dialogue, and community building. The institutionalization of Buddhism in Germany had been a gradual but transformative process, marked by the dedication of early pioneers, the resilience of practitioners during challenging times, and the contributions of Asian teachers and immigrant communities.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ayya Khema, 1987, *Being Nobody, Going Nowhere: Meditations on the Buddhist Path*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville; and 1997, *Who is myself? A guide to Buddhist meditation (commentary on the Potthapāda Sutta)*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville.

### III. DEVELOPMENT OF DIVERSE BUDDHIST TRADITIONS

As Buddhism evolved in Germany, it became clear that its diversity was both a strength and a challenge. The various schools of Buddhism – *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* – offered distinct philosophies and practices, each appealing to different groups within Germany. This section explores how these traditions developed and flourished, highlighting their unique contributions to German Buddhism.

#### 3.1. *Theravāda* Buddhism in Germany

Theravāda Buddhism, often referred to as the “Teaching of the Elders,” is rooted in the early teachings of the Buddha and emphasizes meditation, ethical conduct, and monastic life. It was one of the first Buddhist traditions to establish a presence in Germany, primarily through the efforts of scholars and the influence of Asian teachers.

#### 3.2. Early influences

As mentioned before, the works of translators like Karl Eugen Neumann introduced German audiences to the Pāli Canon, the foundational texts of Theravāda Buddhism. These texts resonated with those seeking a systematic and rational spiritual path. In the post-war period, German practitioners who had studied Theravāda Buddhism in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar began to establish meditation centers in Germany.

#### 3.3. Establishment of temples and centers

The arrival of Theravāda monks from Asia significantly shaped the tradition’s growth in Germany. Sri Lankan and Thai monks, in particular, played a pivotal role in introducing traditional practices, such as Vipassanā (insight meditation). Temples such as the Wat Dhammavihara in Hannover and the Sri Ganesha Buddhist Temple in Berlin became focal points for Theravāda practitioners, offering teachings, ceremonies, and retreats.

#### 3.4. Engagement with German society

*Theravāda* Buddhism gained prominence among Germans interested in mindfulness and meditation. Teachers like Nyānatiloka Mahathera (Anton Walther Florus Gueth 1878 - 1957), as mentioned above - a German-born monk ordained in Sri Lanka- bridged the gap between traditional Theravāda teachings and the needs of Western practitioners. The emphasis on meditation as a tool for self-awareness and personal growth made Theravāda practices particularly appealing in secular contexts, such as psychotherapy and stress management.

#### 3.5. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in Germany

Mahāyāna Buddhism, known as the “Great Vehicle,” encompasses a wide range of traditions, including Zen and Pure Land Buddhism. Its emphasis on compassion, the Bodhisattva ideal, and the interconnectedness of all beings has made it a significant part of German Buddhism.

#### 3.6. Zen Buddhism: A path of mindfulness and discipline

Zen Buddhism, originating in Japan, became highly influential in Germany during the mid-20th century. The minimalist aesthetics and disciplined

meditation practices of Zen resonated with Germans seeking spiritual clarity and simplicity. Zen was introduced to Germany primarily through Japanese teachers such as Taisen Deshimaru, who established Zen centers across Europe. The Sanbo Kyodan lineage and the Rinzai and Soto schools of Zen became particularly popular. Meditation retreats, or sesshin, drew practitioners eager to experience the transformative power of seated meditation (zazen). German teachers also emerged as leaders in the Zen tradition, blending traditional teachings with insights relevant to Western audiences. Figures such as Hugo Lasalle (Hugo Makibi-Enomiya, 1898 - 1990)<sup>17</sup>, a Jesuit Zen-master from Westfalia who lived mainly in Hiroshima, where he built the Worldpeace Church and later again in Germany, then Niklaus Brantschen, a Swiss Jesuit and Zen-master, or Pia Gyger, a Swiss psychologist and Zen-master, contributed to the growth of Zen communities in Germany, emphasizing the practical application of Zen principles in daily life.

### 3.7. Pure land and other *Mahāyāna* traditions

While Zen dominated the *Mahāyāna* landscape, other schools, such as Pure Land Buddhism (followers believe that rebirth in Amitabha's Western Paradise – Sukhavati, known as Pure Land, is ensured for all those who invoke Amitabha's name with devotion), also found a foothold in Germany. Vietnamese and Chinese immigrant communities played a key role in establishing Pure Land temples and promoting practices like chanting and devotional rituals. These traditions enriched the spiritual diversity of German Buddhism and fostered cross-cultural exchange.

### 3.8. *Vajrayāna* Buddhism: The Tibetan influence

The arrival of Tibetan Buddhism, or *Vajrayāna*, in Germany was a transformative moment in the development of German Buddhism. This esoteric tradition, characterized by elaborate rituals, visualization practices, and the guidance of spiritual teachers (lamas), brought a unique dimension to the Buddhist landscape.

### 3.9. The Dalai Lama and Tibetan Diaspora

The 1959 incident and the subsequent diaspora of Tibetan refugees brought *Vajrayāna* Buddhism to the West. The Dalai Lama's frequent visits to Germany and later also of other high Lamas played a crucial role in raising awareness about Tibetan Buddhism and the plight of the Tibetan people. His charisma and message of compassion inspired many Germans to explore *Vajrayāna* teachings.

### 3.10. Establishment of Tibetan Buddhist centers

Tibetan Buddhist centers proliferated across Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. Organizations like e.g. the Karma Kagyu Lineage and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) established monasteries, retreat centers, and study programs. Prominent centers as the Kamalashila

---

<sup>17</sup> Hugo Makibi-Enomiya Lasalle, 1960, *Zen, Weg zur Erleuchtung - Hilfe zum Verständnis, Einführung in die Meditation*, Herder, Wien.

Institute and the Tibetisches Zentrum Hamburg were established, which offer teachings and retreats in traditional Vajrayāna practices. One of the unique aspects of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Germany is the emergence of German-born teachers who have been trained under Tibetan lamas. They popularized Tibetan Buddhism among Western audiences, emphasizing meditation and the integration of Vajrayāna principles into daily life.

### 3.1.1. Contributions to German society

The diversity of Buddhist traditions in Germany has enriched its spiritual and cultural life. From Theravāda's focus on mindfulness to Zen's emphasis on discipline and Tibetan Buddhism's colorful rituals, these traditions have contributed to:

- **Psychological Well-being:** Buddhist meditation techniques are widely used in therapy and stress management.
- **Art and Culture:** The aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of Buddhism have influenced German art, literature, and film.
- **Environmental Awareness:** Many Buddhist groups in Germany advocate for environmental sustainability, inspired by teachings on interconnectedness and compassion for all beings.

One of the defining features of Buddhism in Germany is, moreover, the coexistence and collaboration of diverse traditions while each school maintains its unique identity. For example:

- **Meditation and Mindfulness:** Practices such as mindfulness (*sati*) have transcended traditional boundaries, becoming a unifying thread among Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna practitioners.
- **Interfaith Dialogue:** Buddhist communities in Germany often engage in interfaith initiatives, fostering dialogue not only between Buddhist traditions but also with other religions, such as Christianity and Islam.

## IV. CONTEMPORARY BUDDHISM IN GERMANY

Buddhism in modern Germany reflects a dynamic synthesis of tradition and adaptation. While retaining the core teachings and practices of its diverse traditions, contemporary Buddhism has evolved to address the unique spiritual, cultural, and social needs of German society. This section explores the current state of Buddhism in Germany, examining its demographics, contributions to society, and ongoing challenges.

### 4.1. Demographics and diversity

Buddhism in Germany today is a diverse and growing tradition. It is estimated that around 350,000 people in Germany are confessing Buddhists, with the population split between ethnic Buddhists – primarily immigrants from Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Tibet – and Western converts who have adopted Buddhism as their spiritual path, whose number is growing.

### 4.2. Ethnic Buddhist communities

Immigrant communities continue to play a significant role in maintaining



traditional Buddhist practices and rituals. Vietnamese Buddhists, who arrived in large numbers as refugees following the Vietnam War, have established temples and cultural centers throughout Germany. For example, the Vien Giac Temple in Hannover, one of the largest Buddhist temples in Europe, serves as a spiritual and cultural hub for the Vietnamese community.

Thai and Sri Lankan Buddhist communities have also contributed significantly, particularly through Theravāda temples that offer meditation classes, traditional ceremonies, and community services. These temples often serve dual purposes, catering to the spiritual needs of their ethnic communities while also welcoming German practitioners.

### **4.3. German converts to Buddhism**

Western converts make up a significant portion of the Buddhist population in Germany. Many are drawn to Buddhism for its emphasis on mindfulness, meditation, and ethical living. Zen and Tibetan Buddhism are particularly popular among German practitioners, who often engage in retreats, study groups, and meditation practices tailored to a modern audience.

### **4.4. Buddhist institutions and organizations**

Contemporary Buddhism in Germany is supported by a wide range of institutions, including temples, meditation centers, academic programs, and national organizations. The German Buddhist Union (Deutsche Buddhistische Union, DBU)<sup>18</sup> continues to serve as the primary umbrella organization for Buddhist groups in Germany. Representing over 60 member organizations, it fosters collaboration among diverse Buddhist traditions, promotes public awareness of Buddhism, and engages in interfaith dialogue. The DBU also advocates for issues such as environmental sustainability and social justice, inspired by Buddhist principles of interconnectedness and compassion.

Besides, Germany is home to numerous Buddhist retreat centers and monasteries that offer meditation programs, workshops, and teachings. Notable examples include:

- **Tibetisches Zentrum Hamburg:** A leading center for Tibetan Buddhist studies and practice.
- **Benediktushof:** A retreat center in Bavaria founded by Zen teacher Willigis Jäger, focusing on mindfulness and meditation.
- **Haus der Stille (House of Silence):** A meditation center in northern Germany next to Lauenburg, offering teachings from various Buddhist traditions.
- **Sakya Kalden Ling- Buddhistisches Zentrum (Buddhist Centre):** A meditation centre in Frankfurt, founded by the Tibetan Sakya Lineage.

These institutions provide opportunities for both beginners and advanced practitioners to deepen their understanding of Buddhist teachings.

The academic study of Buddhism has also flourished in Germany, with universities offering programs in Buddhist studies, philosophy, and Asian

---

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.buddhismus-deutschland.de>



religions. Institutions like e.g. the University of Hamburg, the Friedrich-Wilhelms University of Bonn, and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich have established departments specializing in Buddhist texts, history, and philosophy, furthering scholarly engagement with Buddhism.

#### **4.5. Challenges, innovations, and adaptations**

Despite its growth and contributions, Buddhism in Germany faces several challenges. Public understanding of Buddhism in Germany is sometimes shaped by stereotypes, such as viewing it solely as a philosophy or a meditation technique rather than a comprehensive spiritual path. This limited perception can obscure the richness and diversity of Buddhist traditions.

In response to these challenges, German Buddhist communities have developed innovative approaches to ensure their relevance and accessibility. Many Buddhist teachers in Germany adapt their teachings to address contemporary issues such as work-life balance, mental health, and environmental sustainability. Secular mindfulness programs and online meditation courses have made Buddhist practices more accessible to younger generations and urban professionals.

Moreover, the digital age has enabled Buddhist groups in Germany to reach a wider audience through social media, podcasts, and online platforms. Virtual meditation sessions, live-streamed teachings, and online discussion groups have become common, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Efforts to bridge the gap between ethnic and convert Buddhists have gained momentum. Multicultural events and joint initiatives foster unity among Germany's diverse Buddhist communities, creating a sense of shared purpose. Contemporary Buddhism in Germany reflects both continuity and change. It honors the rich heritage of its diverse traditions while adapting to the unique challenges and opportunities of modern society. Through its contributions to mental health, social activism, and interfaith dialogue, Buddhism has become an integral part of Germany's cultural and spiritual fabric.

### **V. FOSTERING UNITY: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR GLOBAL HARMONY**

In an interconnected and increasingly globalized world, Buddhism in Germany has embraced its potential as a unifying force for peace, environmental sustainability, and interfaith dialogue. This section explores how German Buddhist communities and organizations contribute to fostering global harmony through collaborative efforts that transcend cultural, national, and religious boundaries.

#### **5.1 Buddhism as a framework for unity**

The teachings of Buddhism, particularly its emphasis on compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and interdependence, provide a strong foundation for unity and collective action. These principles resonate deeply with global challenges such as social inequality, environmental degradation, and conflict. In Germany, Buddhist groups have leveraged these teachings to build connections both within their communities and on a global scale.

## 5.2. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation

Germany's Buddhist organizations are actively engaged in interfaith initiatives aimed at promoting mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among different religious and cultural groups. Buddhist leaders regularly participate in interfaith councils and events, such as the **World Interfaith Harmony Week** and the **Parliament of the World's Religions**. These gatherings provide a platform for sharing Buddhist perspectives on global issues while fostering dialogue with representatives from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other faiths.

Buddhist groups in Germany have collaborated with churches and mosques to organize public forums, workshops, and educational programs on religious tolerance. For instance, Buddhist centers such as the **Tibetisches Zentrum Hamburg** host events that bring together diverse communities to discuss common values, such as compassion, peace, and service to humanity.

In addition to interfaith work, Buddhist organizations have also collaborated with secular groups, academics, and human rights activists to address ethical and moral questions in a pluralistic society. These initiatives have contributed to building bridges between spiritual and non-spiritual communities in Germany.

## 5.3. Contributions to global environmental sustainability

Buddhist teachings on interconnectedness and respect for all living beings have inspired German Buddhist organizations to take a leading role in environmental activism. German Buddhist groups actively participate in global movements such as the Buddhist Climate Action Network (BCAN) and local initiatives like Green Buddhism, which advocate for sustainable living, renewable energy, and environmental conservation. Monasteries and retreat centers, such as the Benediktushof, often incorporate eco-friendly practices like renewable energy usage and organic farming.

Collaborative projects between German Buddhists and international environmental organizations have resulted in large-scale initiatives like tree-planting drives and ecological workshops. These projects not only raise awareness about the climate crisis but also empower communities to take collective action. German Buddhists have also been vocal in advocating for ecological policies at national and international levels. Through petitions, open letters, and participation in United Nations climate summits, they highlight the urgent need for global cooperation in addressing environmental challenges.

## 5.4. Humanitarian and social justice efforts

Buddhism in Germany also contributes to global harmony through its focus on humanitarian work and social justice. Buddhist organizations in Germany have been deeply involved in providing aid to refugees, particularly during the 2015 European migrant crisis. Temples and meditation centers have served as safe spaces for refugees, offering shelter, counseling, and vocational training. This compassionate response embodies the Buddhist principle of alleviating suffering.

Very important is the focus on gender equality for contemporary German

Buddhism, with organizations promoting the empowerment of women both within Buddhist communities and in broader society. German Buddhist groups also collaborate with international organizations to advocate for the rights of women in conflict zones and marginalized communities.

Moreover, German Buddhist groups are active participants in peace-building initiatives. They organize marches, meditative peace vigils, and educational campaigns promoting nonviolence and reconciliation. The 'Deutsche Buddhistische Union' (DBU) has also partnered with global organizations like 'The Peace Council' to address issues such as war, racism, and poverty.

### 5.5. Unity within the Buddhist community

Unity among Germany's diverse Buddhist traditions has been a critical factor in their collective ability to contribute to global harmony. For example, the DBU organizes annual gatherings that bring together leaders and practitioners from different traditions to share insights and collaborate on common goals. Another initiative comes from Buddhist institutions in Germany that have established shared platforms for education, such as the **Buddhist Academy Europe**<sup>19</sup>, which offers courses and workshops accessible to practitioners from all traditions. These platforms also serve as launching points for joint advocacy campaigns on issues such as climate change, human rights, and ethical leadership.

In the context of the global Buddhist networks, German Buddhism's contributions extend beyond its national borders, playing an active role in the global Buddhist community. German Buddhist groups maintain close ties with Asian Buddhist monasteries and teachers, ensuring the authenticity and continuity of traditional practices. These partnerships also facilitate cultural exchange and mutual learning.

Germany frequently hosts international Buddhist conferences and summits, such as the **European Buddhist Union (EBU)**<sup>20</sup> meetings, which address global challenges from a Buddhist perspective.

Germany has also been instrumental in popularizing secular mindfulness practices inspired by Buddhism. German psychologists and educators, often working in collaboration with global institutions, have helped integrate mindfulness into fields such as education, healthcare, and corporate training worldwide.

Buddhism in Germany exemplifies the potential for religious and cultural traditions to contribute to global harmony. Through interfaith dialogue, environmental activism, humanitarian efforts, and collaboration within the Buddhist community, German Buddhists have established themselves as very initiative in promoting unity and compassion on a global scale.

## VI. THE FUTURE OF BUDDHISM IN GERMANY

The future of Buddhism in Germany will depend on its ability to remain

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.buddhistacademy.eu>

<sup>20</sup> <https://europeanbuddhism.org>

relevant and accessible to diverse audiences, including younger generations, marginalized groups, and those unfamiliar with Buddhist teachings.

### **6.1. Reaching younger generations**

Younger Germans are increasingly drawn to Buddhism's emphasis on mindfulness, ethical living, and personal transformation. To engage this demographic, Buddhist organizations must continue to innovate by:

- Expanding their presence on digital platforms such as social media, podcasts, and apps.
- Offering contemporary approaches to meditation and mindfulness that address modern challenges like stress, mental health, and climate anxiety.
- Hosting youth-centered retreats and workshops that combine traditional teachings with modern themes.

### **6.2. Promoting diversity and equity**

Ensuring inclusivity within Buddhist communities is another critical challenge. This includes addressing barriers related to race, gender, and economic inequality. For example:

- Supporting the ordination and leadership of women in Buddhist traditions.
- Creating programs and outreach efforts that welcome underrepresented groups, including refugees and immigrants.
- Offering affordable and accessible programs to ensure that financial constraints do not limit participation.

### **6.3. Deepening integration with German society**

As Buddhism becomes increasingly recognized as a spiritual and philosophical resource, its integration into German society is likely to deepen in several ways:

Buddhism can play a more prominent role in education and public discourse by:

- Collaborating with schools and universities to include Buddhist philosophy, ethics, and mindfulness in curricula.
- Offer public lectures, workshops, and exhibitions that highlight Buddhism's historical and contemporary contributions to German culture.

Buddhist principles can moreover enrich various fields, including:

- Psychology and Medicine: Expanding the use of Buddhist-based mindfulness and compassion practices in therapeutic and healthcare settings.
- Leadership and Business: Promoting ethical leadership and workplace mindfulness to address issues such as burnout and corporate ethics.
- Art and Literature: Inspiring creative works that explore Buddhist themes of impermanence, compassion, and interconnectedness.

As we look ahead, the Buddhist principles of compassion, interdependence, and ethical living offer a timeless and transformative vision for a more harmonious and sustainable world.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Buddhism in Germany has come a long way since its introduction in the 19th century and has transformed from an intellectual curiosity to a thriving spiritual tradition. Today, it stands as a vibrant and evolving tradition that enriches German culture and contributes to global harmony. Its rich history, contemporary relevance, and potential for the future demonstrate its capacity to address modern challenges while fostering unity, peace, and compassion in both Germany and the global community. Its future will depend on the ability of its communities to remain adaptable, inclusive, and engaged with the pressing challenges of our time.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Blavatsky, H. P. (1907). *The key to theosophy*. Max Altmann.
- Dahlke, P. (1920). *Der Buddhismus als Weltanschauung (Buddhism as a worldview)* (2nd ed.). Oskar Schloss.
- Essen, G. W., & Thingo, T. T. (1989). *Die Götter des Himalaya (The gods of the Himalayas)* (Vols. 1–2). Prestel.
- Essen, G. W., & Thingo, T. T. (1991). *Padmasambhava – Leben und Taten des Großen Guru des Vajrayāna in der Tibetischen Kunst (Padmasambhava – The life and miraculous deeds of the great Vajrayāna guru as reflected in Tibetan visual art)*. DuMont.
- Grünwedel, A. (1893). *Buddhistische Kunst in Indien (Buddhist art in India)*. Spemann.
- Grünwedel, A. (1900). *Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet und der Mongolei (Mythology of Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia)*. F.A. Brockhaus.
- Gueth, A. W. F. (1922). *Dhammapada – Der Weg zur Weisheit des Buddha (Dhammapada: The path to the Buddha's wisdom)*. Jhana Verlag.
- Gueth, A. W. F. (1926). *Der Weg zur Reinheit (Visuddhimagga) (The path to purity (Visuddhimagga))*. Jhana Verlag.
- Hesse, H. (1922). *Siddhartha*. S. Fischer.
- Khema, A. (1987). *Nobody to be, nowhere to go: Meditations on the Buddhist path*. Wisdom Publications.
- Khema, A. (1997). *Who is myself? A guide to Buddhist meditation (Commentary on Potthapāda Sutta)*. Wisdom Publications.
- Makibi-Enomiya Lasalle, H. (1960). *Zen – Der Weg zur Erleuchtung: Eine Hilfe zum Verständnis, Einführung in das Zen (Zen – The path to enlightenment: A guide to understanding, an introduction to Zen)*. Herder.
- Müller, M. (1879–1910). *The sacred books of the East* (Vols. 1–50). Oxford University Press.
- Neumann, K. E. (1911). *Die Reden Gotamo Buddhos aus der Sammlung Suttanipāto des Pāli-Kanons (The discourses of Gotamo Buddha from the*

*Suttanipāṭa collection of the Pāli Canon*). R. Piper.

Nyanaponika, T. (1998). *Abhidhamma studies: Buddhist explorations of consciousness and time*. Wisdom Publications.

Olcott, H. S. (1881). *The Buddhist catechism*. Madras.

Olcott, H. S. (1997). *The Buddhist catechism* (Reprint ed.). In lại-Verlag.

Schopenhauer, A. (1819). *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The world as will and representation*). F.A. Brockhaus.

Seidenstücker, K. (1923). *Der Pali-Buddhismus in Übersetzungen* (*Pāli Buddhism in translations*) (2nd ed.). Oskar Schloss.

Suzuki, S. (1970). *Zen mind, beginner's mind*. Weatherhill.

Suzuki, S. (1975). *Zen-Geist, Anfänger-Geist* (*Zen spirit, beginner's spirit*). Kamphausen.

Walravens, H. (2005). *Isaak Jacob Schmidt (1779–1847) – Cuộc đời và sự nghiệp của người tiên phong nghiên cứu về Mông Cổ và Tây Tạng: Tài liệu* (*Isaak Jacob Schmidt (1779–1847) – Life and work of a pioneer in Mongolian and Tibetan studies: Documents*). Harrassowitz.

### **Online Sources**

Buddhismus Deutschland. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.buddhismus-deutschland.de>

Buddhist Academy. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.buddhistacademy.eu>

European Buddhism. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://europeanbuddhism.org>



# NEW LIFE CONCEPT TOWARDS GLOBAL HARMONY WITH THE INTERNATIONAL NATURE LOVING ASSOCIATION (INLA)

Dr. Rida Jelita\*

## Abstract:

The essence of global harmony is the belief that unity can overcome differences of opinion. This is a good time to reflect on human relations and the shared responsibility we bear in creating a peaceful world. This unity transcends borders, cultures, and ideologies. The research method used in this article is the library research method. This method is carried out by collecting data through research and understanding theories from various literature related to the research. The goals and objectives of building unity in the current concept of life that is very appropriate for a change towards global harmony with INLA. The International Nature Loving Association (INLA) is an association of universal love. The INLA Association was initiated by Master Wang Che Kuang, has established activities to instruct the younger generation in Natural Love. Nature and culture. Quoted on the official website of the International Federation of Nature Lovers, the purpose of establishing the INLA organization is to create a harmonious world through four renewals, namely New culture, namely the culture of loving the universe. New civilization, namely a civilization that respects the nobility and dignity of all forms of life. New life values, namely the concept of life that believes that the dignity of human life is priceless and New morality, namely the Morality of a World of One Family.

**Keywords:** *Fostering Unity, Collaborative Efforts, Global Harmony, INLA.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering unity is essential for ensuring global peace and prosperity. Amidst cultural, religious, and ideological differences, collaborative efforts play a crucial role in promoting understanding,

---

\* Maitreyawira Buddhist College, Indonesia.

tolerance, and cooperation among nations and communities. This article explores the significance of unity, the challenges to achieving it, and the collective strategies that can contribute to global harmony. Unity is the foundation of a peaceful society. It strengthens social cohesion, reduces conflicts, and enables collective problem-solving. When people and nations work together, they can address pressing global issues, such as poverty, climate change, and humanitarian crises, more effectively. A united world fosters economic stability, encourages cultural exchange, and ensures a better future for all.

Global Harmony is a program of the Ministry of Communications of Saudi Arabia that aims to promote diversity in Saudi Arabia to the world community. One of them is a cultural and arts festival held at Al Suwaidi Park, Riyadh, involving 9 countries, one of which is Indonesia. In the journey towards global harmony, creating a pleasant sense of unity and oneness for the people of the world is important. Building strong relationships can create positive outcomes for all citizens involved.<sup>1</sup>

The teaching of Buddhism is based on compassion, non-violence, and understanding of self and offers a moral code for all people irrespective of their gender, caste, religion, region, etc. Buddhism shows a way to reach a deeper insight into human nature and the reality of life through meditation. At last, the entire humanity can gain the harmony of mind and unity in social life. It is important to seek the way for social development by understanding the principle of unity and ways to achieve unity. The teachings of the Buddha reveal the step-by-step process of changing the state of mind for long-lasting happiness. It makes the mind become more positive and constructive so that the life experience becomes more satisfactory and helpful for others.<sup>2</sup>

The French philosopher Ernest Renan - stated that solidarity and unity is a feeling of unity without coercion because of an obsession to make something happen for the collective good that is considered noble, which ultimately creates a national identity or the identity of a nation.<sup>3</sup>

Building unity requires a detailed concept of state, nation, tribe, and national identity. According to Anthony Smith, increasing solidarity can take the form of ideology, or forms of behavior, or both. As an ideology, nationalism represents a system of ideas that affirms the right to self-determination (self-determination).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup><https://tvbrics.com/en/news/saudi-arabia-s-ministry-of-media-launches-global-harmony-initiative-to-celebrate-cultural-diversity/> Accessed in December 20, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Chaudhry P, Buddhism and Social Harmony – A Study of Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre. International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies. Assam. Scholar Publications, Karimganj, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Jati, Wasisto Raharjo, (2017) Melihat Kekinian Lima Konsep Kebangsaan dan Keindonesiaan Bung Karno, makalah Seminar Nasional di Ruang Seminar Gedung Widya Graha Lt. 1, Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI) Jalan Jend. Gatot Subroto 10 Jakarta.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, A. D., (1986): The Ethnic Origin of Nations. New York: Blackwell. P. 72.

Despite its importance, unity faces several obstacles, including:<sup>5</sup>

**1.1. Cultural and religious differences** – Misunderstandings and prejudices based on cultural or religious beliefs can create divisions. “Nonetheless, both Buddhas and their followers will free from suffering or reach the state of Nirvana by only one way, understand Three Characteristics of Nature (*Tilakkhana* in Pali); changing, suffering, and non-self (*AN* 3.134) and must practice the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Magga* in Pali); right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (*SN* 45.8). Simply put, not all religions will lead to the highest happiness, according to Buddhism, but only a doctrine that teaches the Three Characteristics of Nature and the Noble Eightfold Path. Strictly speaking, only Buddhism is the way to Nirvana during the Buddha’s time. In this regard, exclusivism can also be found in Buddhism.”<sup>6</sup>

**1.2. Economic inequality** – The gap between wealthy and developing nations often leads to competition rather than cooperation. The Buddhism of Shakyamuni’s time also assumed a low-tech culture which had comparatively little impact on its environment, as well as relative freedom from the external economic (although not political) forces that ravage many indigenous societies today. Because our situation is in many ways unique, it requires a creative response that cannot be discovered in early Buddhist teachings but must rather be informed by them. The important question is: who should decide what that response will be? In any case, there is much in those teachings to inform us. According to the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Buddha taught that some people are like the completely blind because they do not have the vision to improve their material circumstances, nor the vision to lead a morally elevated life. Others are like the one-eyed because, although they have the vision to improve their material conditions, they do not have the vision to live morally elevated life; the third class have the vision to improve both. Such Buddhist teachings imply that when measuring poverty it is not enough to evaluate the material conditions. For a more comprehensive evaluation of deprivation it is necessary to take into account the moral quality of people’s lives. But that is not to minimize the importance of the first eye. There is a causal relationship between material poverty and social deterioration, according to the Lion’s Roar Sutta (*Cakkavattisihanada Sutta*).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Eldad J. Pardo and Indri Retno Setyaningrahayu, (2023) Unity in Diversity The Indonesian Curriculum, The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, Impact-se in collaboration with Ruderman Family Foundation.

<sup>6</sup> Jesada Buaban (2021), Buddhist Perspectives On Pluralism And Public Sphere , International Review of Humanities Studies, Volume 6, Number 2, Article 20. Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/irhs/vol6/iss2/20>

<sup>7</sup> <https://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MISC/101785.htm>, accessed,

**1.3. Political conflicts** – National interests and political ideologies can sometimes hinder global collaboration. Example Radical political Buddhism has garnered unexpected support by successfully interweaving local concerns with international alarmism. Such global concerns are reproduced to fit local-level social and political contexts. In post-war Sri Lanka, Islam fills an ideological vacuum in Sinhala nationalism after the defeat of the Tamil Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009. From this perspective Islam has replaced LTTE as the significant “Other” in Sinhala nationalist ideology. Moreover global discourses on terror seem to be a convenient myth in local competition for power and resources. For example Rohingya militant groups in Rakhine are accused of international jihadist connections, even though Rohingya militancy rather must be understood in the local context of ethnic minority resistance to internal Burmese colonialism and state repression.<sup>8</sup>

The first meaningful instance of Buddhist political development occurred quite early in Buddhism’s history with the Buddha’s founding of the first sangha from his initial group of disciples. Despite lacking a broad political theory, Buddhism does place a premium on the idea of community, stemming from the Buddha’s decision to create the sangha as a means to bring together Buddhist practitioners. The term itself has a number of meaning or implications, depending on the tradition in which it is being used. Its oldest sense sangha simply describes the proper monastic community of Buddhists. However, in the Mahāyāna tradition, and in much modern usage, this term has shifted and expanded to include the totality of all Buddhist practitioners.<sup>9</sup> The sangha founded by the Buddha, though not meant to be a proper political order, nonetheless gives us some insight into the Buddha’s mindset. The Buddha chose to arrange his religious community on the principle of democracy and shared rule. The Buddha, while the religious leader of the community, was not the ruler of the sangha in any proper sense. Though it is not hard to imagine that his opinion had a disproportionate influence, decisions in the sangha were made democratically, with men and women holding equal standing.<sup>10</sup>

**1.4. Misinformation and social media** – The spread of false information can fuel divisions and misunderstandings. Today news, true and false, circulates faster and wider, especially via electronic media, although word of mouth is still a major factor in its dissemination. Social media, like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and dozens of others,

---

March 14, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Iselin Frydenlund (2015), The rise of Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Asia and possibilities for transformation, NOREF, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/195450/888bfa90bfb97db91ff78ad9a774b37e.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Huston, and Philip Novak. Buddhism. HarperCollins, 2005. Pg 144. Accessed on march 14, 2025, available at : [https://repository.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5891&-context=gradschool\\_dissertations](https://repository.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5891&-context=gradschool_dissertations)

<sup>10</sup> Jayasuriya, Pgs 51 and 53.

represent a major contributor to speed and circulation. Disinformation is information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country. Misinformation is information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm. Mal-information is information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organisation or country. It is evident that the experts who coined these definitions have given great emphasis to the thoughts, intentions - or objective – of the creator of such information, just as the Buddha did – although he defined four types.<sup>11</sup>

False speech, according to Dhammasangani Atuwa, is verbal or physical actions with the intention of doing harm:

*“Musāthi visanvādāna purekkhārassa aththabhañjako vachīpayogo kāyappayōgō vā; Visanvādanādhīppā yena parassa parañ visañvādakā kāyavachī payōga samuttāpikā chēthanā musāvādo.”*<sup>12</sup>

As per Atthasālini atuwa, such words favour one against another (third person) and bring dislike towards the third person are considered slanderous. In this includes rumours and conspiracy theories we have about other people and communities which are shared with the intention of causing harm or bringing disdain towards another who is not present)

*“Yāyavāchāya-yassanañ vāchañ bhāsathi thassa hadaye aththanō piyabhāvañ parassacha piyasuññbhāvañ karothe sā pisunāvāchā.”*<sup>13</sup>

At the poin of global harmony is the belief that unity can overcome differences of opinion. This is a good time to reflect on human relationships and the shared responsibility we bear in creating a peaceful world. This unity transcends borders, culture and ideology. In a world that often appears divided and fragmented, efforts to achieve global peace become a unifying force that transcends borders and promotes harmony between nations.

The study has found that the unity or harmony taught in the Theravāda Buddhism starts from being amiable in deed, in word and in thought towards friends and general fellows. Unity also means one should not consider oneself greater than others while should be respectful to them too. Unity will make people united and go along well which results in the completeness of action.<sup>14</sup>

Building connections and increasing solidarity between individuals and communities can contribute significantly to achieving world peace. In an age where communication occurs instantaneously, we often ignore the important role of dialogue in forming relationships and enhancing cooperation between societies and countries. The importance of prioritizing diplomacy focused on

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/news-features/Viral-false-news-and-hate-speech-online-A-Buddhist-response/131-214168>

<sup>12</sup> Dhammasangani Attakatha 109.

<sup>13</sup> Atthasālini atuwa 109.

<sup>14</sup> Phra Jittipan Sangsri, *A Study of Unity in Buddhism*, *The Journal of The International Buddhist Studies College*, Received March 9,2019; Revised Jul 12, 2019; Accepted Jul 18, 2019.

peace and dialogue is becoming clearer as conflict escalates globally. According to the UN, the world is currently experiencing the highest number of violent conflicts since World War II. By 2023, a quarter of humanity, or 2 billion people, will live in conflict-affected areas.<sup>15</sup>

The world has entered the 21st century, where science, information and technology are developing rapidly. However, in an era where everything is developing rapidly, happiness seems to be getting further away from our lives. Culture has values contained in the culture itself, one of which is the value of unity, where the value of unity in a culture is certainly related to the element of understanding that each society has in that culture. Society plays an important role in understanding society's understanding of the value of solidarity that exists in a particular culture. Therefore, this diversity must be recognized by the entire nation in order to safeguard it and maintain national unity and integrity by understanding cultural values, both regional and national culture, to foster a sense of national solidarity and unity to achieve the ideals of global harmony.

The concept of unity: according to the definition, unity is the state of being undivided or joined as a whole. All Buddhists have faith in the Buddha, his teaching (Dhamma), and the religious community (Sangha). Moreover, based on the Lord Buddha's teachings, Buddhists believe that everything in life is united somehow and somehow. Speaking about the concept of unity, G.W. Leibniz said, "many in body and one in mind."<sup>16</sup> This exposition is based on the Buddha teaching that "we are all different but share the same spirit (united)."<sup>17</sup>

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Building unity

The meaning of solidarity and unity is very important for the Indonesian people so that it can become a weapon and have negative impacts since the Indonesian people fought for their independence. The simple meaning of solidarity and unity of the Indonesian nation is to unite the nation, combine diversity and encourage progress and national development in brotherhood with full tolerance. Where unity means a combination of many different patterns of diversity into one whole. Solidarity means uniting many different models into one whole. Unity of Indonesia The third principle of Pancasila includes unity of ideology, politics, economics, social, culture and defense and security. With the values of Indonesian solidarity, Indonesian society places unity and the interests and safety of the nation and state above the interests of individuals or groups. Putting the interests of the state and nation before personal interests means that Indonesian people are able and willing to make

---

<sup>15</sup> Fay Patel, Mingsheng Li & Prahalad Sooknanan, (2013) *Intercultural Communication: Building a Global Community*, Publisher: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446270318>

<sup>16</sup> Leibniz G. W. (1965). *Philosophical Writings*. London: Dent, Rowman and Littlefield.

<sup>17</sup> Hughes, M. (2013). *Unity in Buddhism*. Blog post. Retrieved from <http://stin.ac.th/th/file.pdf>



sacrifices for the interests of the state and nation.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2. The concept of unity in Buddhism

Buddhism is a way of living. The teachings of Buddha about the noble truths and the moral code of conduct expounded by him are available for all human beings irrespective of their sex, caste, region and religion. It helps individuals to understand the true nature of human personality. It promotes understanding of self along with moral code of conduct that helps all individuals to generate respect for others, honesty and also help them to develop clear and strong mind power. Buddha realized that peace would come only when the person is happy. He wanted man to get rid of all malice, hatred, indulgence in lower desires and evil thoughts. He wanted to substitute these with good thoughts, worthy desires, feelings of generosity and compassion, and an attitude of serenity and composure. Let men purify their thoughts and desires and complete happiness will be theirs. Such a thought-effort will, then, lead to universal peace. As a social code, Buddhism leads us to peace, understanding and integration. Buddha tried to inculcate in his followers the sense of service and understanding with love and compassion by separating man from passion and elevating humanistic tendency in man with the help of morality, compassion (karuna) and concentration (samatha).<sup>19</sup>

## 2.3. Collaborative efforts

Is a term commonly used to describe the cooperative relationship model carried out by many parties. The definition of collaboration is often interpreted by many experts based on different points of view. These definitions are based on the same principles, namely solidarity, cooperation, division of tasks, equality and responsibility in joint cooperation, namely relationships between organizations that participate and work together and agree to achieve common goals, share information, share resources, share profits, and are also responsible for making joint decisions to resolve various problems. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, collaborating is working together, especially in an effort to combine ideas. This is based on what was explained by Gray who explained that collaboration is a thinking process of the parties involved looking at various aspects of a problem and looking for solutions to these differences as well as the limitations of their views on what can happen. Collaboration is also defined as solidarity, cooperation, division of tasks, equality and responsibility of the parties who collaborate with the same goal, cognitive similarity, desire to handle things. Mutually beneficial, honest, loving and community based.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Marion Edman (1994) , Journal Article Building Unity Within A Community The Elementary English Review Vol. 21, No. 5, pp. 179 - 185 (7 pages) Published By: National Council of Teachers of English.

<sup>19</sup> Saksana R. Buddhism and Its Message of Peace. Retrieved from <http://www.ayk.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SAKSANA-Rakesh-Buddhism-and-Its-Message-of-Peace.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Xavier Castañer and Nuno Olivei, Collaboration, Coordination, and Cooperation Among Organizations: Establishing the Distinctive Meanings of These Terms Through a Systematic Literature Review, Journal of Management, Vol. XX No. X, Month XXXX 2020:1–37,

The goal of collaboration is to speed things up together to achieve goals. Even in the process of achieving these goals it is not recommended to divide the work done. This problem, as Nawawi said, collaboration is an effort to achieve a common goal that has been set through dividing tasks, not by grouping work but as a unit of work that is all focused on achieving goals.<sup>21</sup>

One definition also evokes behaviors relating to common communication systems and language to facilitate collaboration, which is defined as joint learning and problem solving relying on knowledge transfer<sup>22</sup> which can be understood as both behavior (trying to learn) and outcome (having actually learnt). Interestingly, communication, a broader construct, is intrinsic to negotiation. Relatedly, one of the three outcome-based definitions treats collaboration as the product of sets of conversations, reinforcing the centrality of bilateral, functional communication in the meaning of collaboration. However, as we detail below negotiation and communication behaviors are also evoked in the definitions of coordination and cooperation. The negotiation emphasis in collaboration definitions probably stems from a power/politics perspective about the IOR context in which different organizational actors need to find a common ground.<sup>23</sup>

#### 2.4. Harmony

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), harmony is an expression of feelings, actions, ideas and interests; harmony; harmony. We can understand that harmony is an expression of differences that exist in a harmonious unity. Harmonization was also used by Chiocechetti and in the context of harmonization of legal language terminology between several countries such as the Republic of France, Germany, Italy and Austria through the LexALP (Harmonization of Legal Languages) convention. A system of spatial and environmental planning in the multilingual Alps. Unity in harmony is a dream in everyone that is expected to come true in order to show and maintain feelings of care and affection and mutual respect. In life, harmony and unity are needed to unite each organization. With the existence of harmony and unity, the organization will be strong and compact so that it can achieve common goals maximally.<sup>24</sup>

---

DOI: 10.1177/0149206320901565

<sup>21</sup> Viera Baèova, *The Construction of National Identity - On Primordialism and Instrumentalism*, accessed on [December 20, 2024], available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266484743\\_The\\_Construction\\_Of\\_National\\_Identity\\_-\\_On\\_Primordialism\\_And\\_Instrumentalism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266484743_The_Construction_Of_National_Identity_-_On_Primordialism_And_Instrumentalism)

<sup>22</sup> Holloway, S. S., & Parmigiani, A., *Friends and profits don't mix: The performance implications of repeated partnerships*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 2016: 460 – 478.

<sup>23</sup> Hardy, C., Lawrence, T. B., & Grant, D. 2005. *Discourse and collaboration: The role of conversations and collective identity*. *Academy of Management Review*, 2005: 58 - 77

<sup>24</sup> Fauziah Nurdin, *Moderasi Beragama Dalam Konteks Budaya*. *Rumah Moderasi Beragama* Accessed on [December 20, 2024] available at: <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/27312/>

The study has found that the dhamma which states virtues for fraternal living or the state of conciliation, is called “*Sāraṇīyadhamma*”. As stated in the Theravāda Buddhism, it supports harmony. The dhamma can be applied in daily life and will make people in the society live together more peaceful. It includes six dhammas which, when kept in one’s mind, bring mutual respect, sympathy or solidarity, non-quarrel, harmony, and unity. These six factors are:

- i. *Mettākāyakamma*: to be amiable in deed, openly and in private,
- ii. *Mettāvacīkamma*: to be amiable in word, openly and in private,
- iii. *Mettāmanokamma*: to be amiable in thought, openly and in private,
- iv. *Sādhāraṇabhogitā*: to share any lawful gains with virtuous fellows,
- v. *Sīlasāmaññatā*: to keep without blemish the rules of conduct along with one’s fellows, openly and in private, and
- vi. *Diṭṭhisāmaññatā*: to be endowed with right views along with one’s fellows, openly and in private (Phra Brahmagunabhorn, 2014).

All these dhammas reflect the endearing and keeping others in mind. It can be seen that when monks are in unison, admiring each other and do not engage in quarrel they would look like water that can be mixed harmoniously with milk. There will be no dissension, threaten or expelling of others, which will result in gaining trust from those who are yet to have faith, whitest increase trust from those who already faith (Phrakhru Sirithanasan, 2015).

Harmony is a concept essential to Confucianism and to the way of life of past and present people in East Asia. Integrating methods of textual exegesis, historical investigation, comparative analysis, and philosophical argumentation, this book presents a comprehensive treatment of the Confucian philosophy of harmony. The book traces the roots of the concept to antiquity, examines its subsequent development, and explicates its theoretical and practical significance for the contemporary world. It argues that, contrary to a common view in the West, Confucian harmony is not mere agreement but has to be achieved and maintained with creative tension. Under the influence of a Weberian reading of Confucianism as “adjustment” to a world with an underlying fixed cosmic order, Confucian harmony has been systematically misinterpreted in the West as presupposing an invariable grand scheme of things that pre-exists in the world to which humanity has to conform. The book shows that Confucian harmony is a dynamic, generative process, which seeks to balance and reconcile differences and conflicts through creativity. Illuminating one of the most important concepts in Chinese philosophy and intellectual history, this book is of interest to students of Chinese studies, history and philosophy in general and eastern philosophy in particular.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Chenyang Li, The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony, Accessed on [December 20, 2024] available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350173503\\_The\\_Confucian\\_Philosophy\\_of\\_Harmony](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350173503_The_Confucian_Philosophy_of_Harmony).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this article is the library research method. This method is carried out by collecting data through research and understanding theories from various literature related to research. There are four stages in the library research process, namely preparing the necessary equipment, compiling a list of libraries to be used, time management, and reading and recording research materials. Data collection is carried out by looking for relevant sources and using them as content to build research, such as books, magazines and websites. Library materials obtained from various reference materials are analyzed critically and in depth to support arguments and propose ideas.

### IV. RESULTS: BRIDGING HUMANITY AND NATURE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The modern era also complex global challenges that link globalization throughout the world. different benefits and problems. This has never happened before. The challenges of the global era currently facing humanity are so great that they must be of common concern. These challenges include climate change, increasing poverty, political conflicts within and between countries, and various social differences.

Buddhism is a gospel of peace and non-violence. Non-violence is a way of life devoid of all extremes of passion like anger, enmity, pleasure and pain. True peace emanates from non-violence which is a rational and mighty force. The practice of non-violence is life-affirming, which contributes to human unity, progress, and peace. Non-violence teaches one to live in harmony with others and with oneself. It requires adherence to high standards of truth and self-control (*Ahimsa* or Non-Violence).

Non-clinging is the basic need for attaining the state in which such mind is realized or cultivated. The theme is well elaborated in the Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-śāstra: "The highest kind of moral conduct, its perfection, consists in the non-clinging way, not clinging to sin or merit as absolute and unconditioned. The Bodhisattva that enters deep into the truth of things, cultivating the contemplation of their sūnya-nature, beholds with his eye of wisdom that sin and merit are not absolute and unconditioned."<sup>26</sup>

The value of unity in the new culture Wang Tzu Kuang, says that we have entered the 21st century, material progress has reached its peak. Progress in true mental and spiritual evolution is still far behind. The proof is that people's lives today are not happy and enjoyable. If there is only material progress but mental and spiritual evolution continues to decline, this symbolizes the Degeneration of human life. Currently, many people suffer from mental disorders, stress, depression, and even self-harm or suicide. This is the result of physical evolutionary development that surpasses mental and spiritual evolution. This is also the cause of the human survival crisis.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Kumārajīva, (tr.) The Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-śāstra of Nāgārjuna, T. 1509, Vol. 25, p. 163.

<sup>27</sup> Tzu Kuang, Wang, Jalan Keberlangsungan Hidup Umat Manusia, Publisher britan : tzu Kuang., 2015, available at [https://library.iteba.ac.id/index.php?p=show\\_detail&id=246](https://library.iteba.ac.id/index.php?p=show_detail&id=246)

全人類生存進化大潮流已蜂擁而起,為了人類自己能永續生存,實現「世界一家」這是人類歷史巨輪必然呈現的結果。適者生存,最優秀者才能生存,我們唯有不斷往上提昇,往上超越;唯有不斷往前創新和邁進,共創全人類新文化、新文明、新道德、新價值,共同實踐十共精神,讓自己具有「世界一家」的、胸襟跟理念,才能成為最優秀的人類。進而,你我、他,人人都具有世界一家的胸襟跟理念,一起實現「世界一家」,我們全人類才能永續生存當我們全人類一起來建構地球成為最可愛、最美麗、最快樂、最和諧的家園,我們人類是何等的幸福!永世太平、永世幸福,這是人類生存進化的最後成果!

(According to Wang Tzu Kuang (2009, 2) The meaning of global harmony is expressed in One Family World as follows, you and I are one family, the earth is one family, all humans are one family, the world is one family, different ethnicities, but still one family, various religions and beliefs, also one family, different ethnicities, still one family, different skin color and race, but also one family, many nationalities, all one family, different cultures but still one family, different customs are also one family, different customs, same family name, different language, same family name, same words Different spelling, same family, all humanity is one family, all life is all one family).<sup>28</sup>

People are so busy looking outward that they sacrifice their glory and survival. Current culture, civilization, concepts of life values, and morality are no longer able to solve the complex life problems that are before us. To answer the question of continuity and happiness in life in an era of rapid technological advancement and environmental challenges, the need for a balanced and sustainable way of life has never been more critical. The **International Nature Loving Association (INLA)** advocates for a **New Life Concept** – a transformative approach that harmonizes human life with nature, fostering global peace, environmental sustainability, and social well-being. INLA launched four reform movements, including a new culture, namely a culture of universal love, a new civilization, a civilization that values glory. and the value and dignity of all forms of life, a new concept of value, especially the concept of life that the value and dignity of human life is priceless, the new morality is the morality of the world of one family.

The International Nature Loving Association (INLA) is a universal love association. The INLA Association was initiated by Master Wang Che Kuang, also known as Master Wang in Hong Kong in 2006. However, since 2001, Master Wang has been holding activities to educate the younger generation about the Love of Nature and culture. Quoted on the official website of the International Federation of Nature Lovers, the aim of establishing the INLA organization is to create a New Culture (a culture that loves the universe), a New Civilization (a civilization that respects all forms of life). , New Life

<sup>28</sup> Tzu Kuang,Wang., The nature loving wonderland : the Universal family. Taiwan ROC: 2009: p.2, Tzu KuangPublisher. available at <https://www.the-inla.org/publication.html>



Values (life). values of respect for all forms of life) and New Ethics (One Family World ethics)<sup>29</sup>

國際熱愛大自然促進會 The International Nature Loving Association (INLA) 於2006年首先成立於中國香港，之後繼續於中華台北、印尼馬來西亞、美國、加拿大、菲律賓、澳洲、新加坡、韓國、尼泊爾成立分會，五大洲各國分會亦在籌備中。<sup>30</sup>

(The International Nature Loving Association (INLA) was first established in Hong Kong, China, in 2006, and has subsequently established branches in Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Australia, Singapore, South Korea, and Nepal. Branches in countries on five continents are also being planned.)

為促使世界一家，建造美麗又和諧的新世界，我們必須天天實踐十共精神 處處熱愛大自然，展現人之美，時時有幸福的時間觀。當我們的良心逐漸光明，每天都感到幸福、快樂又歡喜，才能站在「世界一家」生存進化大潮流的前面，帶領大家共同開創新文化、新文明、新道德，以及新價值。現在，就讓我們從「心」開始。(To promote the world as one family, and build a beautiful and harmonious new world, we must practice the spirit of Jukyo every day, love nature everywhere, show the beauty of human beings, and always have a happy time perspective. When our conscience gradually becomes brighter, and we feel happy, joyful and happy every day, we can stand at the forefront of the great trend of survival and evolution of “the world as one family”, and lead everyone to jointly create a new culture, new civilization, new morality, and new values. Now, let us start from the “heart”)<sup>31</sup>

The **New Life Concept** is rooted in the philosophy of living in harmony with nature while promoting ethical and sustainable lifestyles. It encourages individuals and communities to embrace values that support environmental conservation, humanitarian efforts, and peaceful coexistence. This concept is built on three core principles:<sup>32</sup>

**i. Love for Nature** – Recognizing nature as a fundamental part of human existence and protecting the environment through sustainable practices.

**Inla's motto is protecting, loving, and glorifying life.**

**ii. Compassionate Living** – Fostering kindness, empathy, and respect for all living beings, regardless of nationality, race, or religion.

<sup>29</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Pusat Pengembangan dan Informasi Budaya Kasih Semesta, page 14, <https://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/1659/3/2TA12591.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/about.html>

<sup>31</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/concept.html>

<sup>32</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/about.html>



**iii. Global Responsibility** – Encouraging collective action to address pressing global issues such as climate change, deforestation, and social inequality.

Protecting life is rolling out insight into how important it is to “protect life”, the whole of life and harmony; not hurting, not hating, not persecuting, not wasting life. Starting from how to treat your own life, understanding, understanding the meaning of life, its goals and values, affirming your own life, being able to care for yourself, maintaining health, improving the quality of life, building positive attitudes and behavior habits, and a progressive philosophy of life. Also, respecting the lives of others, helping others achieve a healthy life and positive living habits, extending to all forms of life, the right to life of all creatures, saving and appropriate use of natural resources, loving blessings, togetherness of life and common property.<sup>33</sup>

Loving life is dynamic and fighting spirit, optimistic and progressive, harmonious and together in life; always have a smile on your face, have respect, tolerance, gratitude for everything, whether towards people, work or creatures, fill your life with abundant joy and happiness. Starting from loving one's own life, progressing to loving the lives of others, helps all lives live dynamic and progressive, joyful and happy. From a mental aspect, developing altruistic actions, benefiting people, building harmonious relationships between people. All creatures that live in the air, on land, in the sea and on plants, have life. It is through human relations with the environment and the universe, mutual respect and mutual care, that we can hope to live sustainably. The relationship between humans and nature, achieving balance and order, shared glory and shared joy.<sup>34</sup>

Glorifying life is emulate the heavens, earth and countless creatures, who always give (benefit) all life, serve and serve selflessly, display the glory of life, the light that shines and prospers all creatures. With a limited life line, it produces unlimited life value, from oneself to others, helping others also participates in the glorification of life. Starting from benefits for oneself, to family, community, nation and country, even the world and the entire universe. Thus, starting from the individual to the universe. Combining everyone's strengths, together to create a peaceful world, togetherness of blessings and mutual success.<sup>35</sup>

INLA is a social organization that aims to spread moral messages, life values and a culture of universal love through cultural, artistic and educational activities. This is contained in INLA's vision, namely to love, protect and celebrate life, and the hope to achieve this is outlined in INLA's mission, especially One World of Families. This organization provides a new culture, namely the culture of universal love, meaning the culture of guarding heaven, respecting the earth, and loving the humanity of all nations. The culture of universal love is a culture of universal love, which embraces all life like one big

---

<sup>33</sup> -----, INLA Indoneisa, Accessed on [Desember 14, 2024] available at <https://www.the-inla.or.id/>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

family. This is stated in the vision and mission that INLA wants to carry out, namely protecting, loving and celebrating life to form a world of one family.<sup>36</sup>

The INLA Association is currently carrying out moral and ethical education through cultural and artistic education with various types of activities including singing, dancing, gymnastics, rhythm, all of which have the theme of universal love. It is hoped that this problem can produce virtuous young people who will create a world of one family. INLA tries to initiate activities to fill quality free time to change the lifestyle of the younger generation which is sluggish, wasteful, full of violence and emotionality. In a life full of competition, the younger generation grows up under unpredictable burdens. Since childhood, humans are programmed to compete to get the highest score in exams, and achieving material wealth is the main goal in life. As a result, the younger generation is more susceptible to stress and is looking for various ways to reduce stress. burden and stress in your life. Through songs glorifying nature and lively dance movements, it is hoped that the young generation can eliminate selfishness and greed, have a spirit of loving life and the universe, so that they become young people who are responsible for society and the country. Likewise, by borrowing dance and singing, may the distance between each other be narrowed, the frost be filled, the relationships between people thaw so that warmth reigns again.<sup>37</sup>

INLA has organized various events to engage humanity about the importance of protecting nature, loving the universe, and celebrating all forms of life. INLA (International Nature Lovers Association) is a non-profit social organization which aims to spread moral messages, life values and universal culture through arts and culture and educational activities which are steps to create a harmonious family, society, nation, world and one family. INLA wants to invite every human being to return to nature, discover the greatness of nature and then protect and love nature. INLA has been established in several countries and regions in Asia, especially Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and Korea. INLA Indonesia was founded in early 2006. INLA Indonesia's membership consists of people from various backgrounds, cultures and regions. INLA's mission is to spread a culture of love for nature to all mankind and implement educational values through cultural activities. Hopefully, through various cultural events, the younger generation will be able to find the meaning of life and participate more in appreciating life.

目標” 建立人和大自然和諧的身心；建立人和大自然和諧的家庭；建立人和大自然和諧的社會；建立人和大自然和諧的國家；建立人和大自然和諧的世界。<sup>38</sup>

(Goal: Build a harmonious body and mind between man and nature;

---

<sup>36</sup> -----, INLA Indoneisa, Accessed on [Desember 14, 2024] available at <https://www.the-inla.or.id/>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> -----, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/about.html>

Build a harmonious family between man and nature; Build a harmonious society between man and nature; Build a harmonious country between man and nature; Build a harmonious world between man and nature.)

The **International Nature Loving Association (INLA)** is a global movement dedicated to integrating these principles into daily life. Through education, environmental initiatives, and humanitarian programs, INLA inspires individuals and organizations to take part in shaping a better world. Some of its key initiatives include:<sup>39</sup>

- **Environmental Conservation Projects** – Reforestation, clean water initiatives, and sustainable agriculture programs.
- **Education and Awareness Campaigns** – promoting eco-friendly lifestyles, vegetarianism, and ethical consumerism.
- **Community-Based Activities** – Encouraging social harmony through cultural exchange, volunteerism, and interfaith dialogue.
- **Youth Engagement Programs** – Empowering young leaders to become ambassadors of peace and sustainability.

INLA held various events to appeal to humanity regarding the importance of protecting nature, loving the universe, and glorifying everyone's forms of life, including waste management such as eco enzyme, counseling about the environmental crisis, global warming campaign, vegetarian bazaar, and seminars on love of nature.

For example, the Bali DPD held an activity with the theme Loving Heaven, Earth, Humans, Creatures and Objects is a Characteristic of the Culture of Universal Love. This activity was held to commemorate International Earth Day, which falls every April 22, 2018.<sup>40</sup> On that occasion, INLA Bali invited Wayan Patut, who is a Kalpataru recipient, to share his story with INLA Bali.<sup>41</sup> At Green Bali Island present kalpataru recipients who care about the environment. This is in accordance with us who talk about natural harmony. Because nature is part of our lives, if nature is damaged, human life will be threatened. So we actually want to educate people to pay attention to the natural environment both on land and at sea.

One of the international events held is the Dance Arts Festival International Youth Dance Festival which was attended by youth from various countries with the philosophy of loving festivals, protect, and cherish life. Starting from 2004, the festival The first was held in Chinese Taipei, which at that time was only followed by 10 countries and regions. The second festival in 2005 was held again in Chinese Taipei which was attended by youth from 10 countries and regions.

---

<sup>39</sup> -----, INLA Indoneisa, Accessed on [Desember 14, 2024] available at <https://www.the-inla.or.id/>

<sup>40</sup> Donny Tabelak, INLA Bali Konsisten Tanamkan Budaya Kasih Semesta Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at: <https://radarbali.jawapos.com/events/70811636/inla-bali-konsisten-tanamkan-budaya-kasih-semesta>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Festival The third was held in Hong Kong in 2006 with more participants there are many more, namely 12 countries and regions. In 2007, the fourth festival held in Indonesia – Jakarta with participants from 16 countries and regions. And Recently the International Universal Love Dance Festival was held again on August 11 - 12 2009, held in Beijing, China. A total of 17 countries and regions participating in this festival, namely China, America, Canada, Hungary, Australia, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Madagascar and Taiwan, with a total of 27 teams. The festival is held at the Workers Gymnasium, one of the sports hall used for last year's Olympics New life values, namely a concept of life that believes that the dignity and worth of human life is priceless, and a new morality, namely the "One World Family" ethic. In advancing a pluralistic culture in Indonesia, several factors were revealed that led to the need to develop an intellectual and oriented national culture. One of these factors is: (1) the deepening of socio-cultural interactions between people who have diverse cultural backgrounds. Where the aim of cultural development and development is aimed at providing insight and meaning of culture in national development and all aspects of social, national and state life and aims to increase human honor and dignity, as well as strengthening national identity and personality.<sup>42</sup>

In Indonesia, for example, the harmony of the Sanjaya and Syailendra Dynasties in the Ancient Mataram Kingdom is clear evidence of the importance of the value of global diversity. Despite their different religious beliefs, these two dynasties were able to coexist peacefully, as can be seen from their architectural monuments, such as Plaosan Temple and Kalasan Temple. This shows that tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation were the keys to social life at that time.<sup>43</sup>

Diversity-based history learning can play an important role in strengthening and maintaining the diversity of society, as well as strengthening solidarity in the world. Each of them has a different culture. NOT only the culture, the religion may also be different. A place with diverse ethnicities and cultures is certainly very vulnerable and can trigger divisions between tribes. However, it turns out that this did not happen because the Indonesian people adhere to the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* means different but still one. Let's say *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is taken from the book *Sutasoma* written by Empu Tantular, a poet from Majapahit. The complete audio is *Bhinneka*

---

<sup>42</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Pusat Pengembangan dan Informasi Buddha Kasih Semesta Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at: <https://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/1659/3/2TA12591.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> I Ketut Ardhana and I Nyoman Wijaya, *Indian Influences on Balinese Culture: The Role of Hinduism and Buddhism in Present Day Bali*, *International Research Journal of Management, IT & Social Sciences* Available online at <https://sloap.org/journals/index.php/irjmis/Vol.4No.1,January2017,pages:88~105> ISSN: 2395-7492 <https://sloap.org/journals/index.php/irjmis/article/view/442>

Tunggal Ika Tan Hana Dharma Mangrwa. The motto of the Indonesian nation is written at the foot of the state symbol Garuda Pancasila. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is a tool for national unity. Because we have to really understand what it means. To maintain harmonious national integration, tolerance between very diverse communities needs to be further improved. In addition, national control is necessary to maintain global harmony.<sup>44</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

Fostering unity requires commitment and effort from individuals, communities, and governments. By embracing diversity, encouraging collaboration, and addressing global challenges together, humanity can move towards a more peaceful and harmonious world. In the face of adversity, unity remains our strongest tool in building a brighter future for all. The New Life Concept offers a holistic approach to achieving global harmony. By fostering environmental stewardship, ethical responsibility, and social unity, the vision of a peaceful and sustainable world can become a reality. The **INLA movement** serves as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that through collective action, humanity can thrive in balance with nature. As individuals, we have the power to contribute to this vision—whether through simple daily choices or active participation in global initiatives. The journey towards a harmonious world begins with a commitment to love nature, cherish life, and work together for a better future.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

Pāli Text Society, *Angutta Nikāya* (The Book of Gradual Saying), Oxford: Pāli Text Society, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Majjhima Nikāya* (The Collection of The Middle Length Saying), Vol. I, II, III, Oxford, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Dīgha Nikāya* (The Dialogues of The Buddha), Vol. II, Oxford: Pāli Text Society, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Roma Is. M. E. O, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom*, Boulder: Shambhala Publication, 1978

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-śāstra of Nāgārjuna*, (tr. Kumārajīva), T. 1509, Vol. 25.

------. *Āṅguttara Nikāya: Khotbah-Khotbah Numerikal Sang Buddha Jilid 1, 2, 3.. Indra Anggara* (Trans.). Jakarta: Dhamma Citta Press. 2015

------. *Dīgha Nikāya: Khotbah - khotbah Panjang Sang Buddha*. Team Giri Mangala Publication & Team DhammaCitta Press (Trans.). Jakarta:

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



Dhamma Citta Press.

Buddhist Dictionary: *Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*. Nāṇatiloka (ed.) 1980 (1952): Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.

Bhikkhu Ñānamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi., *The Middle Discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Majjhima-Nikāya*. Pali Text Society, 2009

*Pāli - English Dictionary*: T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.) 2004: New Delhi, Chennai.

Tzu Kuang, Wang, *The Compassion of Maitreya by His Holiness*, Tzu Kuang publisher, 2005, available at [https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/161879046163?chn=ps&\\_ul=GB&mkevt=1&mkcid=28&google\\_free\\_listing\\_action=view\\_item](https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/161879046163?chn=ps&_ul=GB&mkevt=1&mkcid=28&google_free_listing_action=view_item)

Tzu Kuang, Wang, *Jalan Keberlangsungan Hidup Umat Manusia*, Publisher britan: tzu Kuang., 2015, available at [https://library.iteba.ac.id/index.php?p=show\\_detail&id=246](https://library.iteba.ac.id/index.php?p=show_detail&id=246)

Tzu Kuang, Wang. (2009). *The nature loving wonderland: the Universal family*. Taiwan ROC: Tzu Kuang Publisher. available at [www.the-inla.org](http://www.the-inla.org).

### Secondary sources

Akkari, A. and Maleq, K., *Global citizenship education: Recognizing diversity in a global world*, *Global Citizenship Education: Critical and International Perspectives*, doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-44617-8\_1, 2020.

American Heritage Dictionary., *Kolaboratif Definition*. 4th Edition, 2002.

Bajpai, K., & Moitra, D., *Dialogue as a Tool for Peacebuilding: Lessons from International Practice*. *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 26(2), 91-112. 2019

Bennett, J.W., *The ecological transition: cultural anthropology and human adaptation*, *The Ecological Transition: Cultural Anthropology and Human Adaptation*, pp. 1-378, doi: 10.4324/9781351304726.2017.

Butler, D., *Peace and harmony in the world based on Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in diversity)*, *Jurnal Multikultural and Multireligius*, Vol. 15 No. 2. 2016.

Candra Ulfa Kusuma Dewi dkk., *Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Kebhinekaan Global Dalam Harmoni Kehidupan Dinasti Sanjaya Dan Dinasti Syailendra Pada Masa Kerajaan Mataram Kuno Untuk Menyongsong Pembelajaran Sejarah Abad 21*, *Jurnal Integrasi dan Harmoni Inovatif Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, 1(1), 2024.

De Juan, Alexander, Jan H. Pierskalla, and Johannes Vüllers, *The Pacifying Effects of Local Religious Institutions*. *Political Research Quarterly* 68(2): 211–24. 2015 doi: 10.1177/106591291557846.

Eichler, J., *Intangible cultural heritage, inequalities and participation: who decides on heritage?*, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 25 No. 5, 2021, pp. 793-814, doi: 10.1080/13642987.2020.1822821.

Fuster, R. R. M. and Brandt, T. B. M. *United in diversity: a complexity perspective on the role of attainment targets in quality assurance in Flanders*, In *OECD Education Working Papers* OECD Education Working Papers, Vol. 139, 2016: p. 139, doi: 10.1787/5jlr8ftvqs1-en.



- Garner, B., *The Politics of Cultural Development*, Routledge, 2016, doi: 10.4324/9781315669854.
- Gray, Barbara., *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground Formultiparty Problems*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. H, 1989.
- Jagielska-Burduk, A., Pszczyński, M. and Stec, P., *Cultural heritage education in UNESCO cultural conventions*, Sustainability (Switzerland), Vol. 13 No. 6, 2021: p. 3548, doi: 10.3390/su13063548.
- Lin, Z., Gukasyan, G. and Nasyrova, L., *Virtual reality in cultural education: cultural integration and academic performance of migrant students in the context of cultural capital*, Education and Information Technologies, 2024, doi: 10.1007/s10639-024-12450-3.
- Macy, J., *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Planetary Renewal*, Parallax Press. 2021
- Man, K. W., *Globalization and its effects on cultural identity: perspectives from developing countries*, Hong Kong International Journal of Research Studies, Vol. 2 No. 1. 2024
- Miles, M. B., A. M. Huberman, and J. Saldana., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. SAGE Publications. 2013
- Muhamad Nur., *Harmoni Bahasa Dari Perspektif Penerjemahan Dalam Kasus Pemadanan Istilah Teknis: Suatu Kajian Pustaka*, Ranah, 6 (2), 2017: 119—136.
- Pieterse, J. N., *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, Rowman Littlefield. 2019.
- Pradeep, N.M. and Kumar, S., *Soft soil improvement with encased granular piles composed of aggregates and tire chips mixture: Experimental and numerical studies*, Iranian Journal of Science and Technology, Transactions of Civil Engineering, Vol. 48 No. 4, 2024: pp. 2595-2619, doi: 10.1007/s40996-023-01306-4.
- Raihani., “A Whole-School Approach: A Proposal for Education for Tolerance in Indonesia.” *Theory and Research in Education* 9(1) 2011: 23–39. doi: 10.1177/1477878510394806.
- Rostaing, Corinne, James A. Beckford, and Sophie Gilliat., “Religion in Prison. Equal Rites in a Multi-Faith Society.” *Revue Française de Sociologie* 41(1) 2000: 188. doi: 10.2307/3322669.
- Reynolds, Katsue Akiba., “Argument Culture and Harmony Culture --a study of phatic communication in Japanese” (Draft--comments appreciated). Prepared for the Pacific and Asian Communication Association Convention Honolulu, Hawaii, August 10--11, 2000. University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Smith, A., *Unity in Diversity: The Importance of Building Connections for Global Peace*. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 23 (1), 2018: 35-51.
- Thích Nhất Hạnh. *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change*. Parallax Press, .1993: p 333
- Thích Nhất Hạnh. *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*. Edited by Fred Eppsteiner, Parallax Press. 1998
- Thích Nhất Hạnh. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. Riverhead Books. 2015
- United Nations., *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable*

- Development*. 2015 Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
- UNESCO., *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives*. 2019 Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced/global-citizenship-education-topics-and-learning-objectives>
- Van Zandt, L., *A future in ruins: UNESCO, world heritage, and the dream of peace*, The American Archivist, Oxford University Press, Vol. 84 No. 1, 2021: doi: 10.17723/0360-9081-84.1.2
- Voltmer, K., *Comparing Media Systems in New Democracies: East Meets South Meets West*. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 1, 2008: 23-40.
- Viera Baèova, The Construction of National Identity - On Primordialism and Instrumentalism, accessed on [December 20, 2024], available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266484743\\_The\\_Construction\\_Of\\_National\\_Identity\\_-\\_On\\_Primordialism\\_And\\_Instrumentalism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266484743_The_Construction_Of_National_Identity_-_On_Primordialism_And_Instrumentalism)
- Fauziah Nurdin, Moderasi Beragama Dalam Konteks Budaya. Rumah Moderasi Beragama Accessed on [December 20, 2024] available at: <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/27312/>
- \_\_\_\_\_, Pusat Pengembangan dan Informasi Buddha Kasih Semesta Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at: <https://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/1659/3/2TA12591.pdf>
- Donny Tabelak, INLA Bali Konsisten Tanamkan Budaya Kasih Semesta Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at: <https://radarbali.jawapos.com/events/70811636/inla-bali-konsisten-tanamkan-budaya-kasih-semesta>
- Kasun Sankalapa, Viral false news and hate speech online: A Buddhist response Accessed on [March 14, 2025] available at: <https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/news-features/Viral-false-news-and-hate-speech-online-A-Buddhist-response/131-214168>
- \_\_\_\_\_, Pusat Pengembangan dan Informasi Budaya Kasih Semesta, page 14, <https://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/1659/3/2TA12591.pdf>
- \_\_\_\_\_, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/about.html>
- \_\_\_\_\_, INLA Indoneisa, Accessed on [Desember 14, 2024] available at <https://www.the-inla.or.id/>

# CULTIVATING COMPASSION AND SUSTAINABILITY: MINDFULNESS, TIBETAN MEDICINE, AND THE PLANT-BASED PATH IN EDUCATION

Inga Pogosyan\*

## Abstract:

This paper explores an integrative approach to education that combines mindfulness practices, Tibetan medical principles, and plant-based ethics to cultivate compassion, well-being, and environmental sustainability. Drawing on both Eastern and Western contexts, it proposes that modern education must evolve beyond academic instruction to address emotional resilience, ethical development, and ecological consciousness. Mindfulness, rooted in contemplative traditions, enhances focus, empathy, and stress reduction for both students and educators. Tibetan Medicine offers a holistic understanding of the mind-body-environment connection, emphasizing preventative care, inner balance, and the role of mental states in physical health. Meanwhile, adopting a plant-based lifestyle fosters ethical awareness and environmental responsibility, aligning with Buddhist values such as non-harming (*ahimsā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). The paper presents practical strategies for integrating these frameworks into school curricula, including mindfulness-based learning, sustainable food practices, and interdisciplinary education. By fostering inner peace, promoting ethical action, and reducing ecological harm, this holistic educational model supports the development of compassionate, responsible global citizens equipped to create a more harmonious and sustainable world.

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness, Tibetan medicine, compassion, plant-based education, sustainability.*

---

\* Assistant & translator for Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia Tibetan Medical Doctor at Private Practice.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Imagine a classroom where children engage in mindful breathing exercises instead of reaching for their phones during breaks. Envision a curriculum that teaches academic subjects and fosters deep empathy for all living beings. Picture a school cafeteria where the aroma of plant-based meals fills the air, nourishing both bodies and the planet. This is not a utopian dream but a tangible possibility. Recent statistics reveal alarming trends: childhood anxiety rates are soaring, ecological destruction is accelerating, and social divisions are deepening. These realities demand a transformative approach to education that cultivates inner peace, ethical awareness, and ecological responsibility.

Mindfulness, derived from ancient contemplative traditions, is the practice of paying attention to the present moment with openness and non-judgmental awareness. In educational settings, mindfulness is increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for enhancing cognitive function, emotional regulation, and social-emotional learning. It involves techniques such as meditation, mindful movement, and mindful communication, which can be integrated into various aspects of the learning process. The growing body of research supporting mindfulness in education underscores its potential to address the pressing challenges students and educators face.

Contemporary education faces a multifaceted crisis. Students are grappling with unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety, often stemming from academic pressures, social media influences, and societal uncertainties. The erosion of empathy and compassion is evident in rising instances of bullying and social isolation. Furthermore, the disconnect between education and environmental awareness contributes to a culture of unsustainable consumption and ecological disregard. Traditional educational models, focused primarily on cognitive development, often fail to address the holistic well-being of students and their interconnectedness with the world around them.

This paper argues that integrating mindfulness practices, core principles of Tibetan medicine, and a plant-based lifestyle into educational curricula can cultivate compassion, promote environmental sustainability, and foster a more harmonious future. By adopting a holistic approach that nurtures inner balance, ethical awareness, and ecological responsibility, education can become a powerful catalyst for positive personal and societal transformation. This integrated approach recognizes the profound interconnectedness of mind, body, and environment, a core tenet shared by mindfulness, Tibetan medicine, and the ethical considerations of a plant-based diet. By fostering inner peace and cultivating compassion through mindfulness, promoting physical and mental balance through Tibetan medical practices, and extending ethical consideration to all living beings through a plant-based lifestyle, students develop a comprehensive understanding of their role in creating a more sustainable and harmonious world.

This paper primarily focuses on the potential applications of mindfulness, Tibetan medical principles, and a plant based diet within primary and secondary education. While the concepts discussed hold relevance for higher

education and lifelong learning, the specific strategies and examples presented will be tailored to the developmental needs and learning styles of younger students. Geographically, this study draws on examples and research from both Western and Eastern contexts, particularly highlighting the relevance of Tibetan medical principles within regions with deep cultural ties. However, the findings and recommendations are intended to be adaptable and applicable to diverse educational settings globally. It is also acknowledged that while the research will touch on the benefits of a plant based diet, this is a complex topic with many cultural and personal considerations.

## II. MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION: FOUNDATIONS AND BENEFITS

### 2.1. Definition and core principles

At its core, mindfulness is intentionally bringing one's attention to the present moment without judgment. It involves cultivating a sustained awareness of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations as they arise without getting caught up in them or reacting automatically. This non-judgmental observation allows for a deeper understanding of one's inner experience and fosters a sense of calm and clarity. Key components of mindfulness include:

**Attention:** The ability to direct and sustain focus on the present moment, whether it's the breath, a sound, or a sensation. This involves training the mind to return to the present whenever it wanders.

**Intention:** The conscious decision to cultivate awareness and openness. This involves setting an intention to observe experience with curiosity and acceptance rather than trying to change or control it.

**Attitude:** The quality of one's awareness, characterized by curiosity, acceptance, and compassion. This involves approaching experiences with kindness and non-judgment, recognizing that all experiences are transient and part of the human condition.

### 2.2. Pedagogical applications

Mindfulness practices can be seamlessly integrated into educational settings through various pedagogical applications. For teachers and students alike, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs offer structured mindfulness meditation training, helping manage stress, improve emotional regulation, and enhance overall well-being. In the classroom, mindful movement and breathing exercises can be incorporated into daily routines, providing students with tools to calm their minds and bodies. These practices can be as simple as a few minutes of deep breathing or a short mindful walk. Furthermore, mindfulness can be integrated directly into the curriculum. For example, mindful reading encourages students to pay close attention to the text and their thoughts and feelings as they read. In contrast, mindful listening cultivates active and empathetic listening skills during discussions and presentations.

### 2.3. Benefits for students

The benefits of mindfulness for students are multifaceted and well-documented. Regular mindfulness practice can lead to the following:

**Improved focus and concentration:** By training the mind to stay present, students can enhance their ability to focus on academic tasks and reduce distractions.

**Reduced stress and anxiety:** Mindfulness techniques provide students with tools to manage stress and anxiety, promoting emotional resilience and well-being.

**Enhanced emotional regulation and empathy:** By becoming more aware of their own emotions, students develop a greater capacity to understand and empathize with the emotions of others.

**Increased self-awareness and acceptance:** Mindfulness fosters a deeper understanding of oneself, leading to greater self-acceptance and kindness towards oneself.

## 2.4. Benefits for educators

Educators also reap significant benefits from incorporating mindfulness into their personal and professional lives. These include:

**Reduced burnout and increased job satisfaction:** Mindfulness practices help teachers manage stress and cultivate a sense of calm, reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction.

**Improved classroom management and student relationships:** By cultivating mindfulness, teachers can create a more peaceful and supportive classroom environment, fostering positive student relationships.

**Cultivation of a more compassionate and supportive learning environment:** Mindfulness encourages teachers to approach students with kindness and understanding, creating a more compassionate and supportive learning environment for all.

## III. TIBETAN MEDICINE: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO WELL-BEING

### 3.1. Core principles of Tibetan medicine

Tibetan Medicine, known as *Sowa Rigpa*<sup>1</sup>, is a traditional healing system predicated on a holistic understanding of health and well-being. Its foundational tenets are structured around the following core principles:

#### **The Five Elements:**

A fundamental concept in Tibetan Medicine is the doctrine of the five elements, which posits that understanding the human body necessitates a comprehension of the natural world and its reciprocal relationship with human health. This framework elucidates the genesis and developmental processes of all phenomena. The correspondence between the five elements and both the human body and the natural world is as follows:

#### **Earth (Tib. *Sa*):**

*Body:* Earth represents the corporeal solid constituents, including skeletal and muscular tissues, providing structural integrity and stability.

---

<sup>1</sup> Translation from Tibetan - "Science of Healing"



*Nature:* Earth is associated with the terrestrial landscape, encompassing mountains and ground, and embodies the principles of stability and support inherent in the natural environment.

**Water (Tib. *Chu*):**

*Body:* Water symbolizes bodily fluids and their circulatory dynamics, influencing physiological processes such as digestion, hemodynamics, and fluid homeostasis.

*Nature:* Water is linked to aquatic ecosystems, including rivers, lakes, and oceans, and signifies the fluidity and adaptability of the environment, impacting diverse ecological systems.

**Fire (Tib. *Me*):**

*Body:* Fire relates to metabolic transformations and thermogenic processes within the body, including digestion and energy production.

*Nature:* Fire is associated with solar radiation, thermal energy, and vitalizing forces in the natural world, influencing the growth and vitality of flora and fauna.

**Air (Tib. *Loong*):**

*Body:* Air is connected to kinetic functions, particularly the respiratory and circulatory systems, encompassing pulmonary ventilation and hemodynamic circulation.

*Nature:* Air is represented by atmospheric currents and meteorological phenomena, influencing climatic and weather patterns, and affecting environmental equilibrium.

**Space (Tib. *Namkha*):**

*Body:* Space represents permeability and is linked to the body's channels and pathways, facilitating the flow of energetic and informational modalities.

*Nature:* Space in nature relates to the celestial sphere, providing the expanse for all natural phenomena to manifest, and signifies the vastness and interconnectedness of the cosmos.

The absence of any of these five elements precludes the existence of any manifest entity.

As articulated in the *Four Tantras (The Secret Quintessential Instructions on The Eight Branches of the Ambrosia Essence Tantra)*:

ལ་མེད་མི་འགྲུབ་མུ་མེད་ལྷ་མི་བྱས། མེ་མེད་མི་སློན་རྩྭ་མེད་འཕེལ་མི་འགྱུར། འགྲུབ་མུ་མེད་པར་འཕེལ་བའི་གོ་མི་བྱེད།

“Without the element earth, no matter can be formed; without water, there will be no cohesion; without fire, there will be no maturing; without air, there will be no growth; and without space, there will be no room for growth.”

This passage illustrates the critical role of each element in embryonic development. The absence of any single element at the conception stage precludes the formation of a viable organism. For instance, the earth element confers solidity to the body, and its absence renders materialization impossible. Similarly, the water element facilitates cohesion, the fire element enables maturation, the air element promotes growth, and the space element provides

the necessary expanse for development.

The functional attributes of the earth element manifest as flesh, bone, olfactory organs, and the sense of smell. The water element manifests as blood, gustatory organs, and the sense of taste, as well as bodily fluids. The fire element provides thermal energy, determines complexion, and forms the visual organs and senses. The air element is responsible for respiration, cutaneous tissues, and tactile sensation. The space element forms bodily channels, auditory organs, and the sense of hearing.

Exemplary pedagogical analogies, such as the process of baking bread, are employed to illustrate the functions of the five elements. Flour represents the earth element, water facilitates cohesion, heat represents the fire element, air enables expansion, and the baking chamber represents the space element.

Tibetan Medicine underscores the dynamic interplay of these elements within the human body and the external environment, advocating for maintaining equilibrium to ensure optimal health and well-being. Imbalances in these elemental constituents, whether somatic or environmental, are posited as etioloical factors in various pathological conditions.

### 3.2. The three *nyepas* (Skt. *Doshas*):

Building upon the preceding discussion, the five elements coalesce to form the three *nyepas* (Skt. *doshas*), which are fundamental physiological and psychological regulatory forces. The term *nyepa* (Skt. *dosha*) has been variously translated as “humor,” “vital energy,” or “fault.” Given the limitations of these translations, the original Tibetan term is retained.

The three *nyepas* are: *loong* (Skt. *Vata*), *tripa* (Skt. *Pita*), and *badkan* (Skt. *Kapha*).

*Loong* (Skt. *Vata*) is primarily constituted by the air element and is associated with kinetic functions, including movement, circulation, and neurological activity.

*Tripa* (Skt. *Pita*) is primarily constituted by the fire element and governs metabolic processes, including digestion, thermogenesis, and enzymatic activity.

*Badkan* (Skt. *Kapha*) is constituted by the earth and water elements and is associated with structural integrity, lubrication, and homeostatic stability.

### 3.3. The *Nyepas* and their role in human physiology

The concept of the three *nyepas* - *loong* (Skt. *Vata*), *tripa* (Skt. *Pita*), and *badkan* (Skt. *Kapha*) - constitutes a foundational element within Tibetan Medicine. This raises several pertinent questions: Are these *nyepas* purely energetic constructs? Do they possess an inherently positive or negative valence within the human organism? And why are they designated *nyepa*, a term signifying “that which can harm” or “fault”?

A comprehensive understanding of these *nyepas* is indispensable for comprehending the broader tenets of Tibetan medical theory.

The *nyepas* are posited as the three primary forces governing human physiology. When maintained in a state of equilibrium, they promote health; on

the contrary, imbalances precipitate disease. While they can be conceptualized as “vital energies” due to their essential role in sustaining life, they are also referred to as “three diseases” in medical texts, highlighting their inherent potential to disrupt physiological harmony. This dual characterization underscores the notion that their existence carries the potential for pathological manifestation.

However, a more nuanced understanding necessitates an examination of the deeper rationale behind their designation as *nyepa*. This involves elucidating the intricate mind-body connection that forms a cornerstone of Tibetan Medicine, which is deeply intertwined with Buddhist philosophical principles. As a holistic system, it posits that physical and mental domains are inextricably linked, with emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors significantly influencing somatic health. Therefore, the *nyepas* are not merely physiological entities but also embody psychological and emotional dimensions. Maintaining psychophysical equilibrium is thus deemed crucial for optimal health, and therapeutic interventions aim to address both physical and mental etiologies.

The *nyepas* are not solely derived from the five elemental constituents; they also originate from the three mental poisons: desire, hatred, and delusion, which are manifestations of fundamental ignorance. Specifically, desire generates *loong*, hatred generates *tripa*, and delusion generates *badkan*. This causal link underscores the profound influence of mental states on physiological processes.

This concept is articulated in the *Four Tantras* (*The Secret Quintessential Instructions on The Eight Branches of the Ambrosia Essence Tantra*):

དང་པོ་ནང་འགྲེལ་སྒྲ་རྒྱལ་ཚུ་ཅན་གྱིས། ཁྱད་མེད་གྲུང་པས་ལུས་ཉིད་གཟིར་གྲུང་པ། ཁྱེད་རྩེ་རེར་བསྐྱེད་པར་མི་ལྷས་པས། ཁྱེད་པས་ནད་ལྷན་གྱི་རྩ་བ་རྩྭ་དང་། ཁྱད་རྩམས་ལྷན་གྱི་རྩ་བ་ལྷན་གྱི་ལྷན་པ། ཁྱད་མེད་དོན་མ་རྟོགས་པས་མ་རིག་ཅས། ཁྱད་པར་ན་བྱ་ནི་མཁའ་ལ་ལྷེད་གྲུང་གྲང་། ཁྱད་ལྷན་མ་དེ་དང་མི་འབྲས་ཞིང་། ཁྱེད་ལྷན་བདེ་བར་གནས་ཤིང་སྤྱོད་ན་ཡང་། མ་རིག་ལྷན་པས་ནད་དང་འབྲས་མི་སྤྱོད་། ཁྱད་པར་རྩ་བ་མ་རིག་ལས་བྱུང་བའི། ཁྱད་དོན་ཆགས་ཞི་སྤང་གཏི་ལྷན་དྲག་གསུམ་ལས། ཁྱད་པར་བྱ་རྩེ་མཁྱེད་པར་ཀན་ཉིས་པ་སྤྱོད་།

“The innumerable causes and conditions that disturb the balanced state of health accumulate innumerable natures of disorders, which affect the body. Since it is impossible to disclose each and every cause for each and every disorder, fundamental ignorance, which does not understand the inner reality of the lack of self, is considered the general cause of every disorder. Just like a bird is never separated from its own shadow, no matter how high it rises in the sky, the same way sentient beings will never be free from illness because of ever-present ignorance even though they may experience joy and happiness. The specific causes are the three mental poisons, which are desire, hatred, and delusion that arise from ignorance and cause the development of *loong*, *tripa*, and *badkan* disorders, respectively.”

While a detailed exploration of Buddhist philosophical concepts such as *samsara*<sup>2</sup> and *nirvana*<sup>3</sup> is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is essential to

<sup>2</sup> *Samsara*, in Buddhist philosophy, refers to the cyclical journey of birth, death, and rebirth, driven by karma and the three poisons of desire, hatred, and delusion. It is characterized by suffering (*dukkha*) and impermanence, and is the realm from which Buddhists seek liberation.

<sup>3</sup> *Nirvana*, in Buddhist philosophy, represents the ultimate goal of spiritual practice: liber-

recognize the influence of these concepts on Tibetan medical thought. The mind-body connection is central to understanding how negative emotions can disrupt the equilibrium of the *nyepas*, thereby predisposing individuals to disease.

In essence, while the *nyepas* in a balanced state do not directly cause disease, their inherent potential to become imbalanced renders them a constant source of potential pathology. When they deviate from their homeostatic range, they transform into the essence of disease. This explains their designation as *nyepa* – “that which can harm.”

The interconnectedness of body, mind, and environment:

Tibetan Medicine emphasizes a deep connection between physical health, mental well-being, and the surrounding environment. This holistic view recognizes that our health is influenced by a wide range of environmental factors, extending beyond just the immediate climate. These factors include:

**Climate and Seasonal Changes:** The overall weather patterns, temperature fluctuations, and seasonal shifts that directly affect our bodies and minds. For example, cold and dry conditions might aggravate certain imbalances, while warm and humid conditions might alleviate others.

**Geographical Location:** The specific characteristics of our living environment, such as altitude, proximity to bodies of water, and the nature of the terrain. High altitudes influence respiratory function, while coastal regions offer different health benefits due to the air quality.

**Environmental Quality:** Air and water purity, soil health, and pollutants. Tibetan Medicine recognizes that a polluted environment can directly contribute to imbalances within the body.

**Natural Resources:** The availability and quality of natural resources, including food, medicinal plants, and clean water. Tibetan Medicine emphasizes using locally sourced resources, believing they are best suited to the individual's constitution and environment.

**Ecological Balance:** The overall harmony and balance of the ecosystem. Tibetan Medicine recognizes that disruptions in the natural environment, such as deforestation or over-exploitation of resources, can have cascading effects on human health.

Because all these environmental factors are deeply intertwined with our physical and mental health, Tibetan Medicine advocates for a comprehensive approach to well-being. This means that treatments and lifestyle recommendations are tailored to individual constitutions and consider the environmental context in which the person lives. The goal is to create a harmonious relationship between the individual and their environment, promoting personal and ecological well-being.

---

ation from samsara. It is a state of profound peace, freedom from suffering, and the cessation of desire, hatred, and delusion. It is not a place, but a state of being, signifying the extinction of the fires that perpetuate the cycle of rebirth.

### **Emphasis on preventative care and lifestyle factors:**

A central tenet of Tibetan Medicine is prioritizing preventative healthcare by cultivating beneficial lifestyle practices. This encompasses dietary recommendations, regular physical exercise, adherence to proper sleep hygiene, and the consistent cultivation of positive mental states. Individuals are encouraged to assume responsibility for their health by adopting conscious choices that foster and sustain well-being.

## **IV. APPLICATIONS IN EDUCATION**

The principles of Tibetan Medicine can be meaningfully integrated into educational settings to promote holistic student well-being:

### **Integrating Tibetan Medicine's Understanding of Mental and Emotional Health:**

Tibetan Medicine offers a unique mental and emotional health perspective, recognizing the influence of the three nyepas on psychological states. Educators can incorporate this understanding into their approach to student well-being, recognizing the importance of addressing physical and emotional needs.

### **Promoting Healthy Lifestyle Habits: Diet, Sleep, and Exercise:**

Schools can promote healthy lifestyle habits by providing nutritious meals, encouraging physical activity, and educating students about proper sleep. Tibetan Medicine's dietary recommendations, emphasizing whole foods and balanced meals, can guide school cafeteria menus.

### **Using Traditional Tibetan Breathing and Meditation Practices:**

Tibetan Medicine incorporates various breathing and meditation techniques that can be used to calm the mind, reduce stress, and enhance concentration. These practices can be integrated into classroom routines, providing students with tools to manage their emotions and improve their focus.

## **V. CONNECTION TO MINDFULNESS**

Tibetan Medicine and mindfulness share several fundamental principles and practices:

### **5.1. Shared emphasis on inner balance and self-awareness:**

Tibetan Medicine and mindfulness emphasize the importance of cultivating inner balance and self-awareness. They encourage individuals to pay attention to their internal states and make choices that support their well-being.

### **5.2. Tibetan medicine's focus on cultivating positive mental states:**

Tibetan Medicine recognizes the profound impact of mental states on physical health. It encourages cultivating positive emotions, such as compassion, loving-kindness, and joy, which are central to mindfulness practice.

### **5.3. The plant-based lifestyle: Cultivating compassion and sustainability**

#### **5.3.1. Ethical considerations**

Adopting a plant-based lifestyle is deeply rooted in ethical considerations, primarily centered around compassion for animals and recognizing the

interconnectedness of all life.

### 5.3.2. Buddhist perspective on a plant-based lifestyle:

The first precept of Buddhism is to refrain from harming living beings.

In the Mahayana Sutras, which are also considered to be the true words of the Buddha, the consumption of flesh is prohibited.

The Buddha and his monastic community were strict vegetarians. Evidence can be found in the Mahayana collection of Buddhist laws. It describes the first instance of schism in the history of Buddhism, which occurred during the Buddha's lifetime: a group of his disciples left the monastic community, following a desire to adhere to stricter rules, one of which was the absolute rejection of meat.

From the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*:

"How then, after my nirvana, can you eat the flesh of living beings and thus pretend to be my disciple? You should know that those who eat meat, although their minds may open and realize a semblance of samādhi<sup>4</sup>, are merely great rakshasas who, after this life, will sink back into the bitter ocean of samsara and cannot be my disciples. They will incessantly kill and devour each other; how then can they escape from the three worlds of existence?" "Furthermore, you should teach the lay people who practice samādhi not to kill. This is called the profound teaching of the Buddha on the second decisive act. Therefore, Ananda, if killing is not stopped, the practice of dhyāna-samādhi<sup>5</sup> is like plugging one's ears while weeping in the hope that people will not hear the voice or trying to hide what has already been exposed to public view. All monks who live purely and all bodhisattvas always refrain even from walking on grass; how can they agree to eradicate this? How can those who practice great compassion feed on the flesh and blood of living beings? If monks do not wear clothes of (Chinese) silk, shoes of local leather and fur, and refrain from consuming milk, cream, and butter, they will truly be freed from the worldly; having paid their former debts, they will not migrate to the three realms of existence. Why? By consuming animal products, a person creates causes (which are always followed by consequences), just as a person who eats grains grown in the soil and whose feet cannot leave the ground. If a person can control their body and mind and thereby refrain from eating animal meat and animal products,

---

<sup>4</sup> Samādhi, in Buddhist and yogic traditions, refers to a state of concentrated meditation, characterized by deep absorption and unification of the mind. It represents a state of mental tranquility and clarity, often associated with heightened awareness and insight. While there are varying degrees and types of samadhi, it generally signifies a profound level of mental focus and stillness.

<sup>5</sup> Dhyāna-samādhi refers to a state of meditative absorption that integrates the qualities of *dhyāna* (meditative concentration or contemplation) and *samādhi* (unification of mind). It signifies a profound level of sustained attention and mental stillness, often characterized by heightened awareness and insight. In Buddhist contexts, it represents a key component of meditative practice aimed at cultivating wisdom and liberation.



I say that they will truly be liberated. This is my teaching - the teaching of the Buddha, whereas any other is the teaching of evil demons.”

It is known that the Buddhist emperor Ashoka (304 – 232 BCE) was not only a vegetarian but also an advocate of the principle of non-violence towards animals. In his empire, he introduced laws aimed at protecting animals, banned ritual sacrifices at court, and urged his subjects to refrain from violence against animals and from killing them. After what he saw in the war, Ashoka became a Buddhist and a vegetarian. He preached a philosophy of compassion towards all beings.

## VI. COMPASSION FOR ANIMALS AND THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF LIFE

Adopting a plant-based dietary regimen is fundamentally rooted in a profound ethical consideration for all sentient life, a principle deeply aligned with the Buddhist doctrine of *ahiṃsā*<sup>6</sup>, or non-harming. This perspective transcends mere dietary preference, reflecting a philosophical stance that acknowledges the inherent capacity of animals to experience pain, suffering, and a range of emotional states. Within Buddhist cosmology, all sentient beings are considered to possess buddha-nature, the potential for enlightenment, further emphasizing the moral imperative to treat them with respect. By recognizing this sentience, individuals cultivate a deeper sense of interconnectedness with the natural world, a concept central to the Buddhist understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda*<sup>7</sup>, or dependent origination, which highlights the interdependence of all phenomena. Human actions are not isolated events but rather ripple through the intricate web of life, influencing the karmic trajectory of all beings. This recognition fosters an ecological consciousness, where the well-being of animals is intrinsically linked to the health and vitality of the entire ecosystem. The plant-based approach, therefore, becomes a tangible expression of this ethical framework, signifying a commitment to minimizing harm, cultivating compassion (*karuṇā*<sup>8</sup>), and fostering a harmonious relationship with all living beings, reflecting the core

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ahiṃsā*, derived from Sanskrit, signifies non-violence or non-harming. It is a fundamental ethical principle in Indian religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, advocating for the avoidance of violence and harm towards all living beings, encompassing physical, verbal, and mental actions.

<sup>7</sup> *Pratītyasamutpāda*, often translated as ‘dependent origination’ or ‘conditioned arising,’ is a central doctrine in Buddhist philosophy. It posits that all phenomena arise in dependence upon other phenomena, and that nothing exists independently. This principle highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things, emphasizing that causes and conditions give rise to effects in a continuous and dynamic process.

<sup>8</sup> *Karuṇā*, in Buddhist philosophy, translates to ‘compassion.’ It signifies the active wish to alleviate the suffering of others. It is not merely empathy or sympathy, but a deep and active concern that motivates one to act in ways that reduce or eliminate suffering.

Buddhist values of loving-kindness (*mettā*<sup>9</sup>) and equanimity (*upekkhā*<sup>10</sup>).

## VII. REDUCING ANIMAL SUFFERING AND PROMOTING ANIMAL WELFARE

The contemporary paradigm of industrial animal agriculture is frequently characterized by practices prioritizing efficiency and productivity over the welfare of animals, contradicting the Buddhist emphasis on compassion and the avoidance of suffering (*dukkha*<sup>11</sup>). Such systems often involve confined spaces, restricted movement, and procedures that inflict significant physical and psychological distress, directly violating the principle of *ahiṃsā*. This systemic infliction of suffering raises profound ethical concerns, generating negative karma for those involved. Individuals can directly mitigate their contribution to this suffering by consciously choosing plant-based alternatives, aligning their actions with the Buddhist path of ethical conduct (*śīla*<sup>12</sup>). This choice represents a tangible act of ethical consumption, challenging the prevailing norms of industrial animal agriculture and promoting a more compassionate and humane approach to animal welfare, cultivating the virtue of compassion in daily life. Furthermore, promoting plant-based diets can catalyze systemic change, encouraging a shift toward more sustainable and ethically sound food systems that prioritize the well-being of animals and the environment, reflecting the Buddhist aspiration to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. This includes advocating for policies and practices that ensure animals are treated with dignity and respect and that their inherent rights are acknowledged and protected, fostering a society that embodies the principles of compassion and nonviolence.

## VIII. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The escalating environmental impact of contemporary food production constitutes a critical global challenge. In this context, the adoption of a plant-based lifestyle presents substantial advantages in fostering environmental

---

<sup>9</sup> *Mettā*, in Buddhist philosophy, is often translated as ‘loving-kindness’ or ‘benevolent love.’ It signifies a wish for the happiness and well-being of all beings, without discrimination or conditions. It is a cultivation of a warm, open-hearted attitude that extends to oneself and all others.

<sup>10</sup> *Upekkhā*, in Buddhist philosophy, translates to ‘equanimity’ or ‘impartiality.’ It signifies a state of mental balance and composure, characterized by even-mindedness and acceptance in the face of both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. It involves maintaining a detached and balanced perspective, free from attachment, aversion, or judgment.

<sup>11</sup> *Dukkha*, a central concept in Buddhist philosophy, is often translated as ‘suffering,’ ‘unsatisfactoriness,’ or ‘dissatisfaction.’ It encompasses a wide range of experiences, from physical pain and emotional distress to the subtle sense of unease and impermanence inherent in all conditioned phenomena. It is not simply about pain, but also about the inherent limitations and frustrations of existence within *samsara*.

<sup>12</sup> *Śīla*, in Buddhist philosophy, refers to ethical conduct or moral discipline. It encompasses right speech, right action, and right livelihood, forming the basis for spiritual development. *Śīla* involves abstaining from harmful actions and cultivating virtuous behavior, contributing to the purification of mind and the establishment of a foundation for meditation and wisdom.

sustainability, addressing key ecological concerns:

### **8.1. Reducing the carbon footprint of food production:**

Animal agriculture significantly contributes to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, notably methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O). Methane, produced primarily through enteric fermentation in ruminant animals, possesses a significantly higher global warming potential than carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) over shorter timeframes. Nitrous oxide, released from agricultural soils due to fertilizer use and manure management, contributes substantially to climate change. A transition toward a plant-based dietary pattern can markedly reduce an individual's carbon footprint. Plant-based agriculture, particularly when practiced sustainably, generally requires less energy input and produces fewer greenhouse gas emissions per unit of food produced, thereby mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. This shift is vital for achieving global climate targets and fostering a more sustainable future.

### **8.2. Conserving water and land resources**

Animal agriculture is inherently resource-intensive, demanding vast quantities of freshwater and arable land. The production of animal feed, which constitutes a significant portion of agricultural output, necessitates substantial water irrigation and land utilization. Livestock rearing also requires significant amounts of water for drinking and sanitation. Plant-based food production, in contrast, generally requires fewer water and land resources, leading to significant water conservation and reduced deforestation. Clearing forests for livestock grazing and feed production is a major driver of deforestation, which has detrimental consequences for biodiversity and climate regulation. Transitioning to plant-based diets can reduce the demand for land used for animal agriculture and lessen the pressure to deforest.

### **8.3. Promoting biodiversity and ecological balance**

The intensification of industrial animal agriculture often results in habitat fragmentation and destruction, leading to a decline in biodiversity. Monoculture farming for animal feed production further exacerbates this issue by reducing ecosystem diversity. Moreover, the overuse of pesticides and fertilizers in conventional animal agriculture can contaminate water sources and harm non-target species. When implemented sustainably, plant-based agriculture can support ecological balance and promote biodiversity. Diversified plant-based farming systems, such as agroforestry and polyculture, can create habitats for wildlife and enhance ecosystem resilience. Furthermore, reducing the demand for meat and dairy products can lessen the pressure on natural ecosystems, allowing for the restoration of degraded habitats and preserving biodiversity.

## **IX. NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS**

A well-planned plant-based diet offers numerous health advantages, but addressing potential nutritional concerns is essential.

### **9.1. Health advantages and chronic disease prevention**

Plant-based diets are inherently rich in fiber, vitamins, minerals, and

antioxidants, all of which contribute to optimal health. These nutritional components have been associated with a reduced risk of chronic diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. Notably, “The China Study,” a comprehensive epidemiological study conducted by Dr. T. Colin Campbell, demonstrated a strong correlation between the consumption of animal-based foods and the prevalence of chronic diseases while highlighting the protective effects of plant-based diets. The study revealed that populations with predominantly plant-based diets exhibited significantly lower rates of these diseases. Furthermore, the EPIC-Oxford study, a large-scale prospective cohort study conducted at the University of Oxford, has provided substantial evidence supporting the health benefits of plant-based diets. This study, which followed thousands of participants with varying dietary patterns, consistently demonstrated that vegetarians and vegans had a lower risk of various chronic diseases, particularly ischemic heart disease, compared to meat-eaters. This research strengthens the evidence that properly constructed plant-based diets benefit overall health. Plant-based diets also support healthy weight management, owing to their lower caloric density and higher fiber content, which promote satiety.

## 9.2. Addressing potential nutritional concerns

While plant-based diets offer numerous health benefits, it’s crucial to ensure adequate intake of certain nutrients that may be less abundant compared to omnivorous diets. These include vitamin B12, iron, calcium, and omega-3 fatty acids.

**Vitamin B12:** This vitamin, primarily found in animal products, can be obtained through fortified foods, such as plant-based milk and cereals, or through supplementation. (B12 in animal products is also injected as it comes from natural soil, and animals are raised in factories.)

**Iron:** Plant-based sources of iron, such as legumes, leafy greens, and fortified cereals, are adequate. Combining these with vitamin C-rich foods enhances iron absorption.

**Calcium:** Plant-based sources of calcium include fortified plant milk, sesame seeds, tofu, leafy greens, etc.

**Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** Sources such as flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, and seaweed provide alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), which the body can convert to EPA and DHA.

Meal planning, focusing on a diverse range of plant-based foods, can effectively address nutritional considerations, ensuring a complete and balanced plant-based diet.

## X. INTEGRATION INTO EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Integrating plant-based principles into educational settings offers a powerful opportunity to cultivate a culture of compassion, sustainability, and informed dietary choices among students. This integration can be achieved through various strategies:

### **10.1. Providing vegetarian and vegan meal options in school cafeterias**

Schools can implement comprehensive strategies to make plant-based options readily available and appealing. This includes:

- i. Offering diverse and flavorful vegetarian and vegan meals that cater to different tastes and cultural backgrounds.
- ii. Clearly labeling plant-based options and providing nutritional information.
- iii. Incorporating student input into menu planning to ensure that the offerings are desirable.
- iv. Partnering with local farms and suppliers to provide fresh, seasonal, and sustainable plant-based ingredients.
- v. Hosting taste-testing events and cooking demonstrations to introduce students to the variety and deliciousness of plant-based cuisine.
- vi. Training cafeteria staff to prepare plant-based meals. By making plant-based choices accessible, affordable, and appealing, schools can normalize and encourage these dietary patterns among students.

### **10.2. Educating students about the environmental benefits of plant-based diets**

Integrating educational content into the curriculum empowers students to make informed food choices. This can involve:

- i. Incorporating lessons on animal welfare, focusing on the sentience of animals and the ethical implications of industrial animal agriculture.
- ii. Providing education on the environmental impact of food production, highlighting the benefits of plant-based diets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conserving resources, and protecting biodiversity.
- iii. Offering science-based instruction on the health benefits of plant-based diets, emphasizing the role of nutrients in disease prevention and overall well-being.
- iv. Inviting guest speakers, such as nutritionists, farmers, and environmental advocates, to share their expertise.
- v. Using documentaries and educational videos to present information in an engaging and accessible manner.
- vi. Creating age-appropriate lessons that can grow with the students.

### **10.3. Connecting food choices to personal and planetary health**

Creating experiential learning opportunities can deepen students' understanding of the connection between food and well-being:

- i. Organizing cooking classes that focus on preparing healthy and delicious plant-based meals, teaching students practical cooking skills, and fostering a positive relationship with food.
- ii. Arranging farm visits allows students to see firsthand how food is grown and learn about sustainable agricultural practices.
- iii. Establishing school gardens where students can grow fruits and vegetables fosters a sense of connection to the food system.

iv. Conducting projects that explore the environmental impact of different food choices, such as calculating carbon footprints or analyzing water usage.

v. Hold discussions encouraging students to reflect on their food choices and their impact on their health and the planet.

vi. Creating programs that focus on minimizing food waste. By creating these connections, students can develop a more mindful and sustainable approach to food, recognizing the profound impact of their dietary choices.

## **XI. INTEGRATING MINDFULNESS, TIBETAN MEDICINE, AND PLANT-BASED PRINCIPLES: A HOLISTIC EDUCATIONAL MODEL**

### **11.1. Curriculum development**

The realization of a truly holistic educational model necessitates the development of an integrated, interdisciplinary curriculum that seamlessly weaves together mindfulness practices, the foundational principles of Tibetan Medicine, and the ethical and ecological benefits of a plant-based lifestyle. This integrated approach cultivates compassionate, sustainable, and ethically conscious individuals.

### **11.2. Designing interdisciplinary lessons: Developing thematic units that bridge these three domains is crucial. For instance:**

**i. Science (Ecosystems):** A science lesson on ecosystems could incorporate discussions on the environmental impact of industrial animal agriculture, focusing on greenhouse gas emissions, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss. This could be followed by a mindfulness exercise designed to foster empathy for all living beings, connecting scientific understanding with ethical awareness.

**ii. Language arts (Compassion and Ethics):** Language arts curricula could explore stories, poems, and philosophical texts that promote compassion, ethical living, and the interconnectedness of life, drawing upon the Buddhist principles of *ahiṃsā* and *karuṇā*. Students could analyze texts highlighting animals' sentience and the importance of ethical consumption.

**iii. Tibetan medicine (Physiology and Psychology):** Lessons on human physiology could integrate the Five Elements and Three Nyeapas of Tibetan Medicine, demonstrating the mind-body connection. Students could learn about the impact of diet, lifestyle, and emotional states on their health, understanding how to cultivate balance and well-being.

**iv. Nutrition and health:** Lessons on nutrition can focus on the benefits of plant-based diets, using data from studies such as the China and Oxford studies to highlight the benefits of plant-based diets. Students can learn how to ensure they get all their required vitamins and minerals.

**v. Incorporating experiential learning activities:** Moving beyond traditional didactic methods, experiential learning brings these concepts to life, fostering deeper understanding and engagement. These could include:

**1. Meditation and Yoga:** Regular sessions of mindfulness meditation and yoga can cultivate inner peace, body awareness, and emotional regulation,



aligning with both mindfulness and Tibetan Medicine practices.

**2. Plant-Based Cooking Classes:** Hands-on experience in preparing nutritious and delicious vegetarian and vegan meals allows students to learn about ingredients, culinary techniques, and the connection between food and health.

**3. School Gardening Projects:** Growing vegetables, herbs, and fruits in school gardens fosters an understanding of the food cycle, promotes sustainable agriculture, and cultivates a connection to nature.

**4. Nature Walks and Ecological Exploration:** Mindful exploration of the natural environment, coupled with ecological studies, fosters appreciation for biodiversity, ecosystem dynamics, and the interconnectedness of life.

**5. Farm Visits and Ethical Consumption:** Visits to local farms that practice sustainable agriculture provide students with firsthand experience of ethical food production and animal welfare.

**6. Community Engagement:** Projects that involve students in community initiatives related to animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and food security can reinforce ethical values and promote social responsibility.

**7. Mindfulness in Daily Activities:** Students should be encouraged to practice mindfulness during all activities, such as mindful eating during lunch or mindful movement during physical education.

## XII. TEACHER TRAINING

The success of this holistic model hinges on well-prepared educators. Therefore:

**Providing Professional Development:** Offering comprehensive training on mindfulness practices, the core principles of Tibetan medicine, and the ethical and environmental aspects of a plant-based lifestyle. This includes practical workshops, resources, and ongoing support.

**Cultivating a Culture of Well-being and Sustainability:** Fostering a school-wide culture that prioritizes well-being and sustainability. This involves creating supportive environments for teachers and students, promoting open communication, and celebrating ethical choices.

## XIII. CASE STUDIES AND EXAMPLES

Demonstrating the practical application of this model is crucial. This can be achieved by:

**Highlighting Successful Programs:** Showcasing schools or educational initiatives that have already integrated these practices. This includes examples of mindfulness-based curricula, schools with robust plant-based meal programs, and programs that incorporate elements of traditional medicine.

**Presenting Qualitative and Quantitative Data:** Gathering data to assess the impact of these practices. Qualitative data (interviews, observations) can provide insights into student and teacher experiences. Quantitative data (student surveys, academic performance) can measure the model's effectiveness.

## XIV. ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

Implementing this holistic model will inevitably encounter challenges. These include:

**Cultural Resistance to Plant-Based lifestyle:** Addressing potential cultural or familial resistance to plant-based lifestyle through education and open dialogue. Providing diverse and delicious plant-based options can also help.

**Financial Constraints:** Finding cost-effective ways to provide vegetarian meals and incorporate mindfulness practices. This may involve using school gardens, partnerships with local farms, and seeking grant funding.

**Teacher Training Requirements:** Allocating time and resources for teacher training. This may involve integrating training into existing professional development programs and providing ongoing support.

## XV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### 15.1. Synthesis of findings

This paper has examined the synergistic potential of integrating mindfulness practices, the principles of Tibetan Medicine, and a plant-based lifestyle within educational frameworks. The proposed integrated model offers a holistic approach to student well-being, transcending traditional cognitive development to encompass emotional regulation, ethical awareness, and ecological responsibility. By grounding education in *ahiṃsā* and *karuṇā*, the model fosters a deep respect for all sentient life and promotes a sustainable relationship with the environment.

Key benefits identified include:

- Enhanced student focus and reduced stress through mindfulness practices.
- Cultivation of empathy and compassion, reflecting Buddhist ethical principles.
- Promoting healthy lifestyle habits through integrating Tibetan Medicine principles and plant-based nutrition.
- Reduction of the environmental footprint through the adoption of plant-based dietary choices.

The practical applications demonstrated through interdisciplinary lessons, experiential learning activities, and teacher training highlight the feasibility and efficacy of this integrated approach. Incorporating studies like the China Study and Oxford Study strengthens the nutritional claims of plant-based diets.

### 15.2. Implications for educational policy

The findings of this study strongly advocate for the inclusion of mindfulness practices, relevant aspects of Tibetan Medicine, and comprehensive education on plant-based diets within educational standards and guidelines. Policy recommendations include:

- Integrating mindfulness-based social-emotional learning into curriculum frameworks, emphasizing the cultivation of *mettā* and *upekkhā*.

- Providing resources and comprehensive training for educators on mindfulness, the principles of Tibetan Medicine (including the Five Elements and Three Nyepas), and the ethical and environmental aspects of plant-based diets.

- Encouraging schools to offer diverse and nutritious vegetarian and vegan meal options, promoting food literacy and sustainable dietary choices.

- Incorporating environmental education that highlights the impact of dietary choices on climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss.

- Supporting rigorous research and evaluation of holistic educational models integrating mindfulness, Tibetan Medicine, and plant-based principles.

### **15.3. Implications for societal change**

The widespread implementation of this holistic educational model has the potential to cultivate a more compassionate, sustainable, and harmonious society. By nurturing inner peace, ethical awareness, and ecological responsibility in young people, education can contribute to:

- Reduced social conflict and increased empathy, fostering a culture of nonviolence and understanding.

- A significant shift towards sustainable consumption patterns, mitigating the effects of climate change and promoting ecological balance.

- Improved public health and well-being through adopting healthy lifestyle habits and plant-based diets.

- A greater appreciation for life's interconnectedness reflects the Buddhist principle of *pratityasamutpāda*.

- A more just and equitable world where all sentient beings are treated with compassion and respect.

### **15.4. Future research directions**

Further research is essential to explore the long-term impacts and optimize the implementation of this integrated model. Areas for investigation include:

- Longitudinal studies on the effects of mindfulness and holistic education on student well-being, academic performance, and ethical development.

- Comparative studies of different approaches to integrating mindfulness, Tibetan Medicine, and plant-based diets in diverse educational settings.

- Research these practices' cultural adaptation and contextualization, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in various communities.

- Exploration of the role of parental and community involvement in supporting holistic education, fostering a collaborative approach to well-being.

- Studies on the efficacy of integrating specific Tibetan Medicine practices, such as applying the Five Elements and Three Nyepas, in educational settings. Research on the long-term health effects of plant-based diets in children.

## **XVI. CONCLUSION**

Integrating mindfulness practices, the core principles of Tibetan Medicine,

and a plant-based lifestyle within educational frameworks present a potent and transformative paradigm for cultivating compassion, promoting ecological sustainability, and fostering a more harmonious and ethically grounded future. By prioritizing the holistic well-being of students, encompassing physical, mental, and ethical dimensions, education can catalyze profound personal and societal transformation, aligning with the Buddhist ideals of *ahiṃsā*, *karuṇā*, and *pratītyasamutpāda*.

Educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders must embrace this holistic educational approach. By prioritizing mindfulness, ethical awareness rooted in compassion for all sentient beings, and ecological responsibility, we can empower young people to become compassionate leaders and responsible stewards of the planet, contributing to a world where *dukkha* is minimized and the potential for enlightenment is fostered.

Envision an educational landscape where classrooms serve as sanctuaries of peace, students cultivate inner balance and self-awareness through mindfulness and Tibetan Medicine practices, and ethical choices, including plant-based dietary patterns, are the norm. This vision is not a utopian aspiration but a tangible possibility. By adopting a holistic educational model that integrates mindfulness, Tibetan Medicine, and plant-based principles, we can cultivate a world where compassion, sustainability, and harmony.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence \_ by Daniel Siegel  
 Becoming Vegan: Comprehensive Edition” by Brenda Davis and Vesanto Melina  
 “Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain” by Daniel Siegel  
 “Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness” Jon Kabat-Zinn  
 “Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming” by Paul Hawken  
 “Eating Animals” by Jonathan Safran Foer  
 “Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness” by Jon Kabat-Zinn  
 “Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse” by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale  
 “Plant Proof: The Hidden Truth About Plant-Based Nutrition” by Simon Hill  
 “Proteinaholic: How Our Obsession with Meat Is Killing Us and What We Can Do About It” by Garth Davis  
 “Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself” by Kristin Neff  
 “The China Study” by T. Colin Campbell and Thomas M. Campbell II: “How

Not to Die” by Michael Greger

“The Four Tantras (The Secret Quintessential Instructions on The Eight Branches of the Ambrosia Essence Tantra)”

“The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions,” by Christopher Germer

“The Mindful Way Workbook: An MBCT Program for Overcoming Depression” by Zindel Segal Mark Williams, John Teasdale, and Francesca Crane

“The Śūraṅgama Sūtra”

“The Vegetarian Advantage: How to Thrive on a Plant-Based Diet” by Matt Lederman

“Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life” by Jon Kabat-Zinn

“Your Body in Balance: The New Science of Food, Hormones, and Health” by Neal Barnard

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: <https://www.eatright.org/>

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM): <https://www.pcrm.org/>





# A BUDDHIST WAY TO FOSTER UNITY AND HARMONY FOR THE WORLD: PARTICIPATION IN THE GLOBAL INTERFAITH MOVEMENT, SUCH AS URI, TO CREATE CULTURES OF PEACE, JUSTICE, AND HEALING FOR THE EARTH AND ALL LIVES

Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Jinwol Lee\*

## Abstract

The study presents the contribution of Buddhism to the interfaith movement, especially through its participation in the Universal Interfaith Initiative (URI). The study highlights the core values of Buddhism, such as compassion, wisdom, and interconnectedness, which serve as a foundation for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The study also presents URI as a model for a global interfaith organization that promotes peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living things. The study suggests practical steps for Buddhists to participate in URI and contribute to global harmony. Finally, the study affirms the similarity between the goals of Buddhism and URI in creating a peaceful and prosperous world.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist contribution, interfaith movement, universal interfaith initiative (URI), compassion and wisdom, global harmony.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

I am writing this paper to be presented at a conference for celebrating the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) which was designed and made by the resolution of member nations at UN General Assembly in 1999 for commemorating the sacred day of the Buddha, Sakyamuni's Birth, Enlightenment, and Passing Away together, as in the Theravadan Buddhist tradition.<sup>1</sup> UNDV 2025 has been decided to hold

---

\* Member of ICDV.

<sup>1</sup> [www.undv.org/vesak2024](http://www.undv.org/vesak2024)

at Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Ming City, Vietnam, May 6-8, 2025, with the main theme of the conference as “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development”, and sub-themes are:

(1) Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace. (2) Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Path to Reconciliation. (3) Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development. (4) Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future. (5) Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony. Those subjects of studies and practice are really needed for people of the present and future of the world. It is supposed to bring attention to those themes that are considered as some of the UN’s missions for these days.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, I will seek out some insights and practical ways of Buddhist efforts to contribute to the world and sustainable future, focusing on a sub-theme, the “Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony” that is partially related to the other themes.

In the present world, we see our Global Village often divided by cultural, religious, ideological, and economic differences, the need for unity and collaboration to deal with common global issues, for instance, climate crises, pandemics, and conflicts among ethnic and religious traditions, have never been more pressing, because those problems could not be solved by a certain group or a single party. Buddhists, with their long tradition following the profound teachings of the Buddha Sakyamuni, rely on compassion, mindfulness, non-ego, interconnectedness, and interdependence, offering valuable insights and practices that can contribute significantly to global unity and harmony for the common good.

By participating in global interfaith movements like the United Religions Initiative (URI), Buddhists can play a pivotal role in fostering a more united and harmonious world. Let me first remind Buddha’s teachings related to the subject and then review the URI with its Charter and activities as a model organization for networking and cooperation with Buddhists and non-Buddhists in the world for common destiny as the same human beings. It seems good to consider that working with the URI will be a collaborative effort with various people of diverse religions and spiritual traditions around the world on peace, harmony, and healing Earth and all living beings. I will write about the topic in fact based on my practice and experiences in such fields as well as studies of related academic research in which some information from public documents would be reviewed and suggested to Buddhist colleagues and friends to work together<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Several key-words, such as Peace, dignity, equality, sustainable development, are seen on UN Homepage. [www.un.org/en/](http://www.un.org/en/)

<sup>3</sup> Author, Jinwol, is a Buddhist monk (Bhikkhu) who started monastic life at Haein Chonglim. Young Ho Lee (2002), p. 315.

## II. THE SOURCE OF BUDDHISM REGARDING HARMONIOUS WORLD THROUGH COOPERATION WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

Buddhism, founded over 2,500 years ago by Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as the Buddha, is one of the great world religions and spiritual traditions that emphasizes the cessation of suffering through ethical conduct (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and profound wisdom (*paññā*). Central to Buddhist teachings are the Middle Path and the Four Noble Truths with the Eightfold Right Path, which provide a framework for understanding the nature of suffering and the way to overcome it.<sup>4</sup> We can use these teachings as a method or tool to diagnose the situation of the world and get an insight to solve the global problems, including the subject of this discussion. The Buddha also taught reality of existence, including all physical and metaphysical (psychological) phenomena, is “Interdependent arising (*patichcha-samuppada*)” and mutually conditioned.

It is well known verses of *Dhammapada*, belongs to the *Khuddka Nikaya* (Compact Collection) of the sacred Buddhist canonical scriptures, *Tripitaka*, that “To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one’s mind - this is the teachings of the Buddha / Do not make all evil, do all good, and purify one’s mind - this is the teaching of all Buddhas/ Do not what is evil. Do what is good. Keep your mind pure. This is the teachings of Buddha.” (Verse No.183).<sup>5</sup> From this teaching, we can point out that that the Buddha basically encouraged his followers to avoid all evil but do all good, which is a very inclusive suggestion and open-minded attitude no matter what objects and ideas, as well as no matter what they believe in the world. It was widely known that Buddhism in general and Mahayana tradition in particular, all Buddhists, as *Bodhisattvas*, must concern not only for oneself but also for others, and they should take care of and become beneficial for all sentient beings.

However, Buddhism, with its rich history and profound teachings, has always emphasized the importance of compassion, wisdom, and the interconnectedness of all life. These core principles make Buddhism a natural ally in the interfaith movement, which seeks to bring together diverse religious traditions in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation for the common good in the world. Let us explore the contributions of Buddhism to the interfaith movement and how Buddhist teachings and practices can help to promote global harmony and unity for making a peaceful world.

## III. CORE BUDDHIST VALUES SUPPORTING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

### 3.1. Compassion and Loving-Kindness

At the heart of Buddhist practice is the cultivation of compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*). These values encourage Buddhists and other people to extend their goodwill to all living beings, regardless of religious affiliation. By fostering an attitude of empathy and understanding with others, Buddhism creates a foundation for meaningful interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the

<sup>4</sup> The Four Noble Truths (*ariya-satta*). Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr. (2014). p. 304 - 305.

<sup>5</sup> Jinwol Dowon (2021), p. 220; Juan Mascaro (1971), p. 62.

various fields communicating and networking to deal with common tasks and solving the problems together, as well as promoting trust and friendship.

### 3.2. Impermanence and interconnectedness

Buddhist teachings on impermanence (*anicca*) and the interconnectedness of all life (*pratītyasamutpāda*) highlight the transient and interdependent nature of existence. Recognizing that all beings are interconnected helps Buddhists appreciate the commonalities shared by different religious traditions, fostering a sense of unity and respect. It can make people's unity to enjoy their joy together as well as to share their sadness in their community beyond the differences of religious traditions.

### 3.3. Non-attachment and open-mindedness

The concept of non-attachment (*upekkha*) in Buddhism encourages practitioners to let go of rigid beliefs and biases. This open-minded and flexible approach is essential for engaging in interfaith dialogue, as it allows individuals to listen to and learn from others without judgment or preconceived notions. It can promote and improve one's way of thinking and attitude to possibilities and approaches to soften the situation in free conditions.

## IV. BUDDHIST WAYS TO CONTACT OTHER RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

### 4.1. Compassionate interfaith dialogue and understanding

Buddha emphasized the importance of dialogue and understanding for all relationships and works of people. In the spirit of open-mindedness, Buddhists are encouraged to engage in interfaith dialogues. These sincere conversations provide opportunities to learn from one another, dispel misconceptions, and find common ground. Interfaith dialogue is a powerful tool for fostering mutual respect and cooperation, enabling people of different faiths to work together for the common good of humanity.<sup>6</sup> It is good that Buddhists should remind the "Right Speech" of the Eightfold Noble Path when they are engaging a conversation with other people speaking truthfully and kindly in respect and compassion.

### 4.2. Mindfulness and meditation

Mindfulness and meditation are integral aspects of Buddhist practice that can also be shared across religious traditions. These practices promote inner peace, clarity, and empathy, which are vital for nurturing harmonious relationships. Through mindfulness, individuals can become more aware of their thoughts and actions, fostering a deeper understanding and acceptance of others. Applying mindfulness in everyday interactions helps individuals to be present and attentive, promoting genuine connections with others. In the context of interfaith cooperation, mindfulness enables individuals to listen deeply and respond thoughtfully, creating a space for meaningful and respectful exchanges. This practice can bridge gaps and dissolve prejudices, paving the way for collective efforts towards global harmony.

---

<sup>6</sup> Parallax Press (2019), p. 341.

### 4.3. Attitude of non-violence

It is well known that Non-violence (*ahimsa*) is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism. Buddha's teachings advocate for a life free from harm and violence towards all living beings. This principle is crucial for interfaith cooperation as it calls for resolving conflicts through peaceful means and understanding rather than aggression. By adhering to non-violence, Buddhists can inspire others to adopt similar approaches, contributing to a more harmonious world. The principle of nonviolence extends to promoting peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities. Buddhists are encouraged to actively participate in peace-building initiatives, mediation, and reconciliation efforts. By setting an example of peaceful living, Buddhists can influence other religious traditions to embrace nonviolence, fostering a culture of peace and mutual respect.

### 4.4. Sense of interconnectedness

Buddhists should always be aware of the concept of dependent origination, which highlights the interconnectedness of all beings. Understanding this interconnectedness fosters a sense of shared responsibility and cooperation among different religious traditions. Recognizing that all beings are interdependent encourages a collaborative approach to addressing global challenges such as poverty, social injustice, and environmental degradation, including climate change.<sup>7</sup>

## V. HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

### 5.1. King Ashoka's efforts

One of the earliest and best examples of Buddhist involvement in interfaith dialogue can be traced back to King Ashoka of India (304 – 232 BCE). Having converted to Buddhism after a bloody, tragic war, Ashoka promoted religious tolerance and dialogue through his edicts, which encouraged respect for all religious traditions and emphasized the importance of harmony and nonviolence. His administration tried to provide social peace, justice, and welfare for people, as much as possible in equality, non-discrimination, and tolerance at his time.<sup>8</sup>

### 5.2. At the world parliament of religions

In modern times, Buddhism has played a significant role in the interfaith movement, notably through the participation of Buddhist representatives in the Parliament of World Religions (PWR). The first PWR, held in Chicago in 1893, brought together religious leaders from around the world, including prominent Buddhist figures who shared their teachings and contributed to the global conversation on religious harmony. The PWR has been revived since 1993 and continued to the present. The last one was held in Chicago in 2023. Many Buddhists, including Dalai Lama, have been involved in various fields of PWR like peace and harmony as well as global ethics.

<sup>7</sup> David R. Loy (2018), p. 45 - 46.

<sup>8</sup> Damien Keown (2003), p. 21.

## **VI. BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERFAITH MOVEMENT IN MODERN TIME**

### **6.1. Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism**

Vietnamese Zen master, the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, has been a leading advocate for interfaith dialogue through his concept of Engaged Buddhism and Interbeing.<sup>9</sup> By actively addressing social, political, and environmental issues, Engaged Buddhism encourages collaboration with other religious traditions to promote peace and justice. Thich Nhat Hanh's efforts have included participating in interfaith conferences, fostering dialogue between Christians and Buddhists, and promoting mindfulness and nonviolence across religious boundaries. It is noticeable that he had a close friendship with Martin Luther King Jr, a Christian Pastor and Nobel Peace laureate.

### **6.2. The Dalai Lama's interfaith initiatives**

The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, has been a tireless advocate for interfaith understanding and cooperation. Through his writings, public talks, and meetings with religious leaders from various traditions, he has emphasized the importance of compassion, ethical conduct, mutual respect, and nonviolence. Moreover, he also pointed out the necessity of developing good relations with other faith traditions.<sup>10</sup> His works have helped bridge the gap between Buddhism and other faiths, fostering a spirit of unity and collaboration. Remarkably, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.<sup>11</sup> He has been a patron of many interfaith organizations, including PWR.

### **6.3. Organizations promoting interfaith dialogue**

Several Buddhist organizations are dedicated to promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), founded by Sulak Sivaraksa, is one such organization that brings together Buddhists and people of other faiths to address global issues and promote social justice. Another notable organization is the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), which supports interfaith initiatives and fosters collaboration between Buddhist communities and other religious groups.

## **VII. A GLOBAL INTERFAITH MOVEMENT ON PEACE, JUSTICE, AND HEALING FOR THE EARTH AND ALL LIVES OF THE UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE**

Here I will introduce the URI as an exemplary model as a global interfaith movement to create cultures of peace and healing for all living beings as well as the Earth.

### **7.1. Start and process**

It is said that the vision for the URI was sparked by an invitation from the UN to Arch- Bishop of Episcopal Church of California, the Right Rev. William

<sup>9</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (1987), p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> His Holiness Dalai Lama (1999), p. 231.

<sup>11</sup> [www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-peace-prizes/](http://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-peace-prizes/); Alexander Norman (2020), p. 272.



Swing, Founder and President Emeritus of URI, who was invited to host an interfaith service in June 1995 to help commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco 1945. He had a sudden realization that religions have a vocation to be a force for good in the world. He contacted and invited many religious and spiritual leaders around the world, and the most of them eventually joined in a global appreciative process to create a shared vision of the world they wished to inhabit and of a global interfaith organization making the vision a reality. From 1996-2000, people around the world participated in writing URI's Charter, which was signed in June 2000.

## 7.2. Charter

To understand URI, let us first see its Charter which has the vision and purpose with principle. The URI Charter was written by the collective efforts of about 200 representatives from the major religions and spiritual traditions around world during the global summits in San Francisco, 1996-1999 and signed in Pittsburgh, United State of America, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2000, the same day of UN Charter signed in 1945.<sup>12</sup> Following is the whole text of URI Charter, which is introduced at URI homepage:

Preamble: "We people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions throughout the world, hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings./ We respect the uniqueness of each tradition and differences of practice or belief./ We value voices that respect others and believe that sharing our values and wisdom can lead us to act for the good of all./ We believe that our religious spiritual lives, rather than dividing us, guide us to build community and respect for one another./ Therefore, as interdependent people rooted in our traditions, we now unite for the benefit of our Earth community./ We unite to build cultures of peace and justice./ We unite to heal and protect the Earth./ We unite to build safe places for conflict resolution, healing, and reconciliation./ We unite to support freedom of religion and spiritual expression, and the rights of all individuals and people as outlined in international law./ We unite in responsible cooperative action to bring the wisdom and values of our religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions to bear on the economic, environmental, political, and social challenges facing our Earth community./ We unite to provide a global opportunity for participation by all people, especially by those whose voices are not often heard./ We unite to celebrate the joy of blessings and the light of wisdom in both movement and stillness./ We unite to use our combined resources only for nonviolent, compassionate action, to awaken to our deepest truths, and to manifest love and justice among all life in our Earth community."

---

<sup>12</sup> [www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter](http://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter)

**Purpose:** The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

**Principles:** (1) URI is a bridge-building organization, not a religion. (2) We respect the sacred wisdom of each religion, spiritual expression, and indigenous tradition. (3) We respect the differences among religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions. (4) We encourage our members to deepen their roots in their tradition. (5) We listen and speak concerning deepen mutual understanding and trust. (6) We give and receive hospitality. (7) We seek and welcome the gift of diversity and model practices that do not discriminate. (8) We practice the equitable participation of women and men in all aspects of the URI. (9) We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence. (10) We act from sound ecological practice to protect and preserve the Earth for both present and future generations. (11) We seek and offer cooperation with other interfaith efforts. (12) We welcome as members all individuals, organizations, and associations who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles. (13) We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that include all the relevant and affected parties. (14) We have the right to organize in any manner, at any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles. (15) Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any. (16) We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles. (17) We have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of our part and to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other parts. (18) We maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct, prudent use of resources, and fair and accurate disclosure of information. (19) We are committed to organizational learning and adaptation. (20) We honor the richness and diversity of all languages and the right and responsibility of participants to translate and interpret the Charter, Articles, Bylaws, and related spirit of the United Religions Initiative. (21) Members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytized.

From the Charter, we can understand that URI is an inclusive global grassroots interfaith network that promotes enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, aims to end religiously motivated violence, and creates cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living beings with the principles of a universal and inclusive ethical spirit.

## **VIII. VISION AND MISSION<sup>13</sup>**

We see that URI envisions a world at peace and harmony where people

---

<sup>13</sup> [www.uri.org/who-we-are/vision&mission](http://www.uri.org/who-we-are/vision&mission)

of different faiths, spiritual paths, and traditions work together for a better future, sustained by engaged and interconnected communities to respect diversity, nonviolent resolution of conflict, and social, political, economic, and environmental justice.

Its mission is to achieve the purpose of the Charter operating through local and global initiatives, known as Cooperation Circles (CC), which engage in various activities of advocacy and community service. It implements the mission through diverse actions that build the capacity of its members of the CC, groups, and organizations, to engage in community action such as conflict resolution and reconciliation, environmental sustainability, education, and various service programs.

## **IX. GLOBAL PRESENCE<sup>14</sup>**

Its organizational design emerged from collective vision and values suggested by early participants of URI. It was to build an organization that let loose the creative energy and resourcefulness of the human spirit, based on qualities of inclusion, relationship, and engagement, as well as shared purpose, core principles, self-organizing interdependent parts, and freedom that allows for unlimited diversity of expression. URI is a bridge-building organization that respects the differences among all beliefs and traditions.

## **X. BASIC SETTING**

### **10.1. Global council of trustees**

It is the primary governing body, comprised of at least 24 Trustees. They are grassroots volunteers elected from and by URI Cooperation Circles. Each URI region (as a continent or multi-national) selects 3 Trustees to serve on the Global Council for a 4-year term, providing critical governance and oversight of URI's operations, finances, and mission-related activities. In addition, At-Large Trustees are appointed as needed. Various committees of the GC meet frequently via the internet. Face-to-face meetings for the GC and URI's Global Staff take place every 2-3 years.

### **10.2. Cooperation Circle (CC)**

It is a core group of URI, and each one CC has consisted of at least 3 different traditions with 7 more people while the large group has more than 20,000 members from most of all traditions. It is shown that URI now has 1,205 CCs in 113 countries networking various millions of millions around the world. They meet and work together regularly or occasionally depending on their own situations and issues for the local or regional needs.

### **10.3. Other groups and partners**

There are some supporting groups such as the Global Council Executive Committee and Senior Advisory Council, as well as the Global Support Office. They are managing, supervising, and preparing to support programs, networking, and various situational activities of CCs around the world.

---

<sup>14</sup> [www.uri.org/about#where-we-work](http://www.uri.org/about#where-we-work)

It is known that URI is committed to pursuing partnerships with like-minded organizations that work to build cultures of peace, justice, and healing the Earth and all living beings. Therefore, URI seeks collaboration to bring the collective strength of local, regional, and global organizations to achieve the shared goals of creating cultures of peace amongst religions, spiritual and indigenous traditions throughout the globe. For instance, URI works closely with the UN including UNESCO, UNEP, and ECOSOC with consultative status of NGO, as well as the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, Charter for Compassion, Unity Earth, among many.

## **XI. POSSIBILITY OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND URI**

### **11.1. Common aspiration of Buddhism and URI for peace and justice in the world**

Buddhism in general and Mahayana tradition in particular pay attention to the matters and situations of people with all living conditions and environments. Buddhists try to attain enlightenment of nature and reality for wisdom and freedom not only for themselves but also to save people and all kinds of lives by compassion. They emphasize *Dharma* regarding all are interconnected and interdependent including all lives and the Earth, so they are co-arising and co-existing anywhere and anytime. Therefore, all matters of each one and the others are common to take responsibility. Members of URI think and act similarly with the way of Buddhists, as stated in their Charter as interdependent beings to be aware of themselves as one. Therefore, they should respect and care about each other equally for the common good.

### **11.2. Common concern of social and humanistic purpose and principles**

Buddhism has long emphasized the importance of compassion, wisdom, and interdependence. These core principles guide Buddhists in their concern and care for the well-being of all people and the Earth. In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, the teachings of Buddhism offer valuable insights into how we can address the pressing ecological and social challenges of the present world. URIs has also expressed concerns about problems to be solved together to build the better future world. Both involve deep empathy for the suffering of others and a commitment to alleviating that suffering. In the context of a global society, compassion extends beyond individual relationships to encompass all beings, regardless of geographical or cultural boundaries. Buddhism and URI also state the importance of caring for the Earth, recognizing that the well-being of all living beings is closely tied to the health of the environment. The principle of "*ahimsa*" or non-harming, extends to all forms of life, and Buddhists are encouraged to live in harmony with nature. The same idea is seen in the URI Charter.

### **11.3. Moderate living and mindfulness for solving environmental issues**

Buddhists often advocate for simple living and mindfulness as ways to reduce our ecological problems. Simple living involves making conscious choices to consume less and live more sustainably. Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and aware of our actions and their consequences. By cultivating

mindfulness, individuals can make more deliberate and ethical decisions about their consumption and lifestyle, reducing harm to the environment. Moreover, throughout history, Buddhists have made significant contributions to environmental conservation and sustainability. Monastic communities, for example, have often served as stewards of natural resources, preserving forests, water sources, and wildlife habitats. In contemporary times, Buddhist leaders and organizations continue to play vital roles in environmental movements. It is noticeable that the Dalai Lama has been a vocal advocate for environmental protection. He has consistently emphasized the need for a compassionate approach to ecological issues, calling for a sense of universal responsibility towards the planet. His teachings on the environment have inspired many to take action in support of sustainability and conservation. We can see the same spirit in URI Principle number 10.

## **XII. BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO URI AND GLOBAL HARMONY**

Buddhists, with their emphasis on compassion, mindfulness, and nonviolence, have much to offer to the interfaith dialogue and cooperative efforts of the URI. Here are some ways in which Buddhism can contribute to global unity networking with the URI.

### **12.1. Compassion and wisdom**

Buddhist teachings on compassion and wisdom encourage individuals to cultivate a deep sense of empathy and care for all beings.<sup>15</sup> By practicing these qualities, Buddhists can help bridge divides and promote understanding among people of different faiths and backgrounds. Mindfulness involves being fully present and aware of the moment. This practice can enhance interfaith dialogues by fostering attentive listening, open-mindedness, and respectful communication. Mindfulness helps individuals approach conversations with a non-judgmental attitude, creating a space for genuine connection and mutual respect.

### **12.2. Nonviolence and peace**

Through various advocating for non-violent approaches to conflict resolution and emphasizing the importance of inner and outer peace, Buddhists can contribute to creating a more harmonious and just world. Participating in URI's peacebuilding initiatives, Buddhists can share their insights and practices to help reduce tensions and promote reconciliation.

## **XIII. PRACTICAL STEPS FOR BUDDHIST ENGAGEMENT WITH URI**

To actively participate in URI and contribute to global unity, Buddhists can take several practical steps:

### **13.1. Join or form a cooperation circle**

Buddhists can check and find out to join existing Cooperation Circles or establish new ones within their communities. These circles provide a platform for interfaith collaboration and action, allowing Buddhists to work alongside people of other faiths.

---

<sup>15</sup> Jeffery Hopkins (2001), p. 85 - 188.



### **13.2. Engage in Interfaith Dialogues and Events**

Participating in interfaith dialogues, conferences, and events organized by URI can help Buddhists share their perspectives and learn from others. These interactions foster mutual understanding, break down stereotypes, and build relationships based on respect and common values. It is considerable that Buddhist thinkers and practitioners take an initiative to discuss with other religious people for communicating and understanding each other to extend their knowledge and experience beyond the limitation of their own traditions, for instance, Masao Abe, a Zen Buddhist scholar and practitioner who has known well to the western theologians and religious scholars for his active and positive approach in open-minded manner.<sup>16</sup>

### **13.3. Promote education and awareness**

Buddhists can contribute to educational initiatives that raise awareness about the importance of interfaith cooperation and the principles of Buddhism. By offering workshops, lectures, and meditation sessions, Buddhists can share their teachings and practices with a broader audience, promoting a culture of peace and compassion. By spreading knowledge about the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of compassionate action, Buddhists aim to inspire positive change at both the individual and collective levels in the global society. Dharma teachings, or the teachings of the Buddha, provide valuable guidance on how to live ethically and harmoniously in the world. These teachings emphasize the cultivation of virtues such as generosity, patience, and diligence, which can help address social and environmental challenges. By integrating Dharma teachings into education programs, Buddhists seek to empower individuals with the wisdom and skills needed to create a more just and sustainable world.

### **13.4. Support social equality and justice**

Buddhists can collaborate with URI on projects that address social and environmental issues, such as poverty, discrimination, and climate change. By working together on these critical challenges, Buddhists and people of other faiths can demonstrate the power of collective action and shared commitment to a better world.

### **13.5. Public outreach and advocacy**

Buddhist leaders and organizations often engage in public outreach and advocacy to raise awareness about critical issues. Through conferences, workshops, publications, and media campaigns, they strive to educate the broader public about the importance of compassion, sustainability, and social justice. By amplifying their voices and collaborating with other faith and secular groups, Buddhists work to build a global movement for positive change. As we look to the future, the teachings of Buddhism offer a hopeful and inspiring vision for addressing the complex challenges facing our global society and the Earth. By embracing the principles of compassion, wisdom, and interdependence, we can cultivate a sense of shared responsibility and take

---

<sup>16</sup> Donald W. Mitchell (1998), p. 353.



meaningful action to protect and nurture our planet and its inhabitants.

Building a culture of peace, compassion, and healing involves fostering empathy and kindness in our interactions with others. This requires not only individual efforts but also systemic changes to create more equitable and inclusive societies. By promoting policies and practices that prioritize the well-being of all beings, we can create a world where compassion is at the heart of our collective endeavors. Promoting sustainable living involves making choices that align with the principles of environmental stewardship and ethical consumption. This includes supporting renewable energy, reducing waste, and advocating for policies that protect natural resources. By embracing sustainable practices, we can help ensure a healthy and vibrant planet for future generations.

Advancing social justice requires addressing the root causes of inequality and oppression. This involves advocating for human rights, economic fairness, and access to education and healthcare. By working towards a more just and inclusive world, we can create conditions that allow all beings to flourish. In conclusion, the Buddhist concern and care for the global society and the Earth are deeply rooted in the tradition's teachings of compassion, wisdom, and interdependence. By applying these principles to contemporary challenges, Buddhists offer valuable insights and practical solutions for creating a more compassionate, sustainable, and just world working together with other interfaith organizations like URI.

#### **XIV. CONCLUSION**

Having reviewed Buddhist aspiration and practice to benefit all sentient beings in making a better world, paralleling with the purpose of UN and URI in terms of peace and harmony for unity in diversity of people around world, we now understand that there are much similarity and common vision with practical mission somewhat overlapped, regarding humanity, peace, justice, and healing for Earth and all living beings. It is noticeable that ICDV and URI work in the ECOSOC of the UN together as the same as the Consultant Status. We see that the Buddhist approach to fostering global unity aligns with the URI. By bringing their teachings on compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence to the interfaith movement, Buddhists can play a vital role in promoting harmony and understanding among diverse communities of the Global Village. Through active participation in URI's initiatives as a leader or partner as networking with collaborating efforts for unity of the world will be achieved in the future. Therefore, Buddhists can create a peaceful and harmonious world where differences are celebrated, and all beings can coexist in peace, harmony, and interbeing as the pronouncing URI for "You are I," in other words, as "I am you," meaning the idea of non-duality in Mahayana Buddhism.

Finally, I would like to extend heartfelt congratulations to people of Vietnam for "the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Foundation" and "the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reunification" of their country, as well as to all participants for "the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UNDV" events and "the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of URI" for its launching, as well as "80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UN" establishment. Let us celebrate those anniversaries together in harmony and mutual respect.

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

*Dhammapada: Song of Enlightenment*. Beobgugyeong: Ggachimeui Norae – Dowon, Jinwol (2021), Gimhae, Korea: Sati Press.

*The Dhammapada* – Mascaro, Juan (1988), London: Penguin Books.

### Secondary sources

Buswell, Robert E. Jr. and Lopez, Donald S. (2014), *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Hopkins, Jeffrey (2001), *Cultivating Compassion: A Buddhist Perspective*. New York: Broadway Books.

Keown, Damien (2003), *Dictionary of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lee, Young Ho (2002), *Ch'oui Uisun: A Liberal Seon Master and an Engaged Artist in Late Choson Korea*. Fremont, California: Jain Publishing Company.

Loy, David R. (2018), *Ecodharma*. Somerville, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications.

Mitchell, Donald W. (1998), *Masao Abe: a Zen Life of Dialogue*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing.

Norma, Alexander (2020), *The Dalai Lama: An Extraordinary Life*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Parallax Press (2019), *True Peace Work*. Berkeley, California: Parallax Press.

The Dalai Lama, His Holiness (1999), *Ethic for the New Millennium*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1987), *Being Peace*. Berkeley, California: Parallax Press.

# THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF HUMANITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY: MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHIST TEACHINGS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Most Ven. Dr. Thich Hanh Chanh\*

## Abstract

Universality, recognition, and inclusion, the symmetry between human dignity and humanitarianism, and a cross-polynomial of logical constructs hasten philosophy's response to sustainable solutions. This paper is based on the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination), which recognizes that all phenomena arise through the interplay of causal conditions (*paṭicca*, "dependence") and arising (*samuppāda*, "arising"). Two important concepts in this doctrine are *sādhāraṇa-karma* (collective karma) and *sāmūhika-karma* (group karma), which can be major contributors to human decency and good leadership, especially in the domains of global peace and sustainable development.

Based on a qualitative hermeneutical analysis of classical Buddhist texts, this study investigates how the principles of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which is the substratum of interconnectedness, can inform contemporary leadership frameworks. This is relevant to anthropology, as many stages of our identities may be expressed as being one of many. Buddhism teaches the interdependent nature of dignity as well; therefore, some aspects of our being should not be subject to the individualistic views of social hierarchy, where we would look up to and serve those 'above' while ignoring the plight and humanity of those 'below'. Instead, dignity should be based on ascription — i.e., equality and well-being that is collective towards one another.

The findings in this study suggest that Mahāyāna Buddhist thought could offer solid ethical foundations for global governance, promoting models of

---

\* Advisor International Relations, Sharda University, India.

leadership that support inclusivity, sustainability, and harmony, centered on improving world peace and achieving sustainable development goals. The research highlights the significance of Buddhist philosophical insights in informing modern leadership paradigms and tackling global issues in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** *Paṭiccasamuppāda, sādharma-karma, sāmūhika-karma, leadership, human dignity, sustainable development, organizational transformation, global peace.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is characterized by many of the most complex global challenges we have ever faced, which no single entity can address, highlighting the inadequacies of parochial approaches to problems and reiterating the need for holistic solutions to these challenges. Climate change, social inequality worldwide, and threats to human dignity are complex, interconnected challenges that cannot be met without integrated responses based on an understanding of our profound interdependence. But to meaningfully contend with the world's problems, they also need to be recognized and addressed, making room for new paradigm alternatives that have real potential to treat root causes and deliver sustainable outcomes.

In this eclectic landscape of traditions that offer improvements in these domains, Mahāyāna Buddhism offers a distinctive model that seeks to shift the interior condition of the participants involved with each other in service of addressing the underlying causes of conflict.

Many traditions offer insight into these issues, and one of these, *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, provides a unique lens focused on shifting the inner states of participants, and so addressing the root causes of conflict.

Both philosophically and as a practical strategy for world peace, *Mahāyāna* Buddhism can provide transformative insights into the interdependence of all life. While scholars have examined each of the components of *Mahāyāna* teachings, thus far, there has been no concerted effort to demonstrate how the entire body of these teachings could work together to address the contemporary challenges facing our planet.

*Mahāyāna* Buddhism, the largest of the Buddhist traditions, is grounded in principles of compassion, wisdom, and inclusivity. Such teachings have played an immensely important role in advancing unity, human dignity, and sustainable development. More importantly, they are across cultures and traditions and are inclusive. Based on a comparison between *Mahāyāna* Buddhist principles and current global problems, this article illustrates how *Mahāyāna* Buddhism can inspire routes to world peace.

Central to *Mahāyāna* Buddhism is an idea that transforms the way we think about conflict: interdependence. Everything is interconnected: every action, thought, and event. One unresolved conflict in the world weeps into the next — politically and economically, but also emotionally. This graph links

together the futility of solving problems in isolation and taking solely self-oriented approaches.

Interdependent co-arising, interconnectedness of all concepts, as well as *sādhāraṇa-karma*, *sāmūhika-karma*, and collective *karma* lie at the heart of this tradition, arguing that all phenomena arise in dependence on multiple causes and conditions, which helps to embrace the interdependence within the human existence, building the global leadership. When applied, it also provides a fresh perspective on the challenges of human dignity, collective responsibility, world peace, and sustainable development that face the modern day.

*Mahāyāna* Buddhism offers a uniquely holistic human dignity, rooted in the understanding of the core Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) shared among all beings. Grounding dignity in radical interdependence and mutuality makes sense of the phenomenon of dignity as something qualitatively larger than individual autonomy and articulation of individual rights characteristic of the majority of Western conceptions of human dignity. Moreover, *bodhicitta* - central to the *Mahāyāna* tradition as the aspiration to attain enlightenment to assist all sentient beings - offers a particularly compelling model for comprehending universal responsibility and collective action.

This investigation is particularly pertinent within the framework of the paradigm dynamic, where there is an impetus for innovative systems that can deal with the complexity, interrelation, and integrated features of contemporary problems and create long-term viable solutions dependent on collective responsibility and action.

The paper is organized as follows: four major sections. After this introduction, Section II outlines the theoretical background, describing *paṭīccasamuppāda* and its nuances for understanding human dignity and collective *karma*. The section relates the concept of *paṭīccasamuppāda* to human dignity and explores *paṭīccasamuppāda* and collective karma through the metaphor of Indra's Net, looking into their bearing on universal responsibility. Section IV describes the practical application of leadership: Case studies and strategies. The synthesis draws together important conclusions and also has implications for future research and implementation.

## II. UNDERSTANDING HUMANITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

### 2.1. Humanity and human dignity: an exploration of collective identity and intrinsic worth

Humanity and human dignity are related but by no means synonymous attributes of our moral legacy, occasionally overlapping concepts that serve as a cornerstone of much of our ethical and philosophical discourse. Humanity refers to the qualities common to all humans, such as compassion, empathy, and the ability for moral growth, while human dignity indicates that every human being has equal worth, regardless of their situation or behavior. The combination of these ideas ultimately serves as a complete lens through which we can understand the nature of being human and our social connection to one another.

## 2.2. Humanity: Our shared identity

The term humanity is used to highlight our shared experiences and the characteristics that we, as a species, have in common with each other. This expresses itself as the ability to connect with other humans with empathy and compassion, generating a sense of unity. The celebration of being human is expressed most clearly through rituals and communal practices, another way of echoing collective identity across cultures. But such bonds can also establish hierarchies that fail to adequately acknowledge the equal dignity of all members.

The collective nature of humanity is pivotal in addressing global challenges. Climate change, technological advancements, and socio-political divides remind us that recognizing our shared humanity is essential for cooperative solutions. Humanity urges us to act not just as individuals but as a united whole, working towards growth and transformation.

## 2.3. Human dignity: Intrinsic worth and ethical imperative

Human dignity goes beyond collective identity to affirm the intrinsic value of every individual. As Immanuel Kant posited, human beings are “ends in themselves”,<sup>1</sup> emphasizing that dignity is not conditional on societal roles or achievements. Martha Nussbaum further asserts that dignity is a recognition of the fundamental capabilities and entitlements of every human being.<sup>2</sup>

This inherent worth calls for respect and the establishment of systems that protect individual rights and justice. Addressing issues like discrimination, poverty, and violence requires the acknowledgment of dignity as a non-negotiable foundation for societal structures. Unlike humanity, which binds us through shared traits, dignity focuses on respecting each person’s unique value, making it essential for social justice and ethical governance.

## 2.4. The interplay between humanity and dignity

Understanding the relationship between humanity and human dignity requires acknowledging their complementary roles. While humanity promotes unity and cooperation, dignity insists on the respect and recognition owed to each individual. Together, they demand a holistic approach to ethical and societal challenges. Fostering a just society means not only recognizing our shared humanity but also safeguarding the dignity of every individual.

## 2.5. Insights from *Mahāyāna* Buddhism

*Mahāyāna* Buddhism offers profound insights into the interplay between these concepts. In this tradition, humanity is seen as an expression of universal existence, deeply intertwined with compassion and the alleviation of suffering. The practice of *bodhicitta* — the aspiration for enlightenment for the benefit of all beings — illustrates humanity’s potential for growth and transformation.

Human dignity in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism arises from the recognition

<sup>1</sup> Kant, I. (1785/2017). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. *Earlymoderntexts.com*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press, p. 241.



of interconnectedness. Every individual possesses the intrinsic potential for awakening, emphasizing their worth not as a societal construct but as an essential truth. This perspective encourages the active cultivation of compassion and mindfulness, creating a framework where dignity is not only acknowledged but also celebrated.

## 2.6. Building a compassionate and just society

Ultimately, humanity and human dignity are guiding principles for fostering a world rooted in compassion, justice, and respect. Humanity reminds us of our shared bonds and collective responsibilities, while dignity urges us to protect and honor each person's unique worth. By aligning these principles, we can build systems that enable individuals to thrive and communities to flourish.

The teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhists echo this dual recognition, advocating for a society where compassion and mutual respect guide our actions. In embracing both humanity and dignity, we transcend societal divisions, addressing challenges with empathy and ethical resolve. Only through this balanced approach can we create a world where all individuals are empowered to contribute meaningfully, underscoring that our true measure lies in the dignity we extend to one another.

## III. UNDERSTANDING PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA

The concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is discussed in several major *Mahāyāna* texts, but I have listed the most prominent and well-documented sources. Here are the specific chapters/ sections focusing on *paṭiccasamuppāda*:

### 3.1. Avataṃsaka Sūtra

The concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, or dependent origination, is a pivotal theme in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* - *Flower Garland Sūtra*, which presents a profound exploration of the interconnectedness of all phenomena. The vision of interdependence or dependent origination originated from Buddhist philosophy and holds a very important point in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, and that is all phenomena are interdependent with each other for their arising. A prime illustration of this can be seen through the descriptions of the universe within the sūtra, where all the interactiveness of everything with everything is highlighted. This sūtra uses the metaphor of a massive network, in which every node is a phenomenon that can influence and be influenced by each other. Along with this vision, there is an implication that what befalls one being affects all beings, which brings forth an ethical aspect to how we lead our lives, and thus the importance of compassion in a Buddhist practice. Then, *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* emphasizes wisdom as the key to understanding *paṭiccasamuppāda*. By teaching practitioners to cultivate insight into the nature of reality, it guides them to recognize the impermanent, interconnected nature of all things. This is key to freeing ourselves from ignorance, which is regarded as the deepest source of suffering. The realization that all things arise dependently and are not inherently existent can lead to detachment from desire and aversion, ultimately freeing them from *saṃsāra*. Similarly, according to the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Huayan Jing), the individual and the universal are one; the one arises from and cannot

be separated from the many. This angle expands the notion of our awakening being interlinked just as one person's liberation is tied to the liberation of all.

This idea creates a sense of community and shared responsibility among practitioners, motivating them to uplift each other in their pursuit of enlightenment.

The key aspects of *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* can thus be summarized as the interdependence of all phenomena relationships, their significance for the unfolding of time, and their ceaseless flow from one moment to the next, as well as the moral implications of actions rooted in this understanding. The *sūtra* is a deep reminder of the interdependence of all beings and that liberation comes from realizing and cultivating this interdependence.

To comprehend *paṭiccasamuppāda* in this section, I concentrate on the concept of Indra's Net (*Indrajāla*) of *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Huayan Jing, 華嚴經) particularly in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* section, to elucidate the fundamental principle of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*,<sup>3</sup> which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of human dignity globally and demonstrates how this ancient wisdom remains relevant to modern organizational and social challenges. In Chinese traditions, particularly through the interpretations of Fazang (法藏, 643-712), this metaphor became central to Huayan philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2. *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*

#### 3.2.1. *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* - Heart *Sūtra*

The *Heart Sūtra*, a central text in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, emphasizes that all phenomena are interdependent, highlighting that nothing exists in isolation. This is encapsulated in the phrase “form is emptiness, and emptiness is form,” illustrating the interconnectedness of all aspects of existence.<sup>5</sup>

All phenomena are interdependent and, in their essence, lack existence and nothingness; this is what this saying teaches us. The *sūtra* stresses that all forms are contingent – reliant upon conditions and do not have independent, permanent essence – which corresponds to the Buddhist doctrine of *śūnyatā* (emptiness).

The pages of the *Heart Sūtra* illuminate the relationship between interdependence and emptiness. The *sūtra* declares that there is “no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind,” and even the full existence of these faculties relies on a tangled web of interdependent causation. The whole connection between the different senses demonstrates that nothing is solid by perceiving self. The claim that “form is emptiness” reinforces the concept that what we experience in material, solid form is predicated on many factors which,

<sup>3</sup> Cleary, Thomas (1993). *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, Boston: Shambhala, 925. See also: Thiele, L. P. (2011). *Indra's net and the Midas touch: living sustainably in a connected world*. MIT Press.

<sup>4</sup> Wei, D., & Cavayero, M. (2023). *All is One: The Profound Influence of Huayan Buddhism on Chinese Philosophy, from the Past to the Present*. *Yin-Cheng Journal of Contemporary Buddhism*, 1 (1), p. 133 - 148.

<sup>5</sup> Lopez, D. (1996). *The Heart Sūtra*. In *Elaborations on Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sūtra* (p. vii-viii). Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400884513-001>

ultimately, are empty of intrinsic reality. Additionally, emptiness, as covered in the *Heart Sūtra*, applies not only to things but the concepts and even the emotions we use to describe them, which do not have inherent existence. It manifests in the sūtra's discourse on the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness), which it states are empty of self-nature. It is a non-disposition to be in a nihilistic void, yet a fluid condition of interdependence: the existence of each element is dependent on others. The implications of these lessons are philosophical as they radically challenge dualistic thinking, inspiring practitioners to experience reality as an interplaying flow of related components. From this standpoint, we cultivate a compassionate view of being, a realization that a fundamental sameness of others emerges when we look into the emptiness of self and other, and when we realize that we all share in suffering and joy. Thus, the *Heart Sūtra* is an essential source for grasping the complex intertwinement of interdependence and emptiness in Buddhist philosophy.

All in all, the *Heart Sūtra* expresses the interdependent nature of all phenomena through the concept of emptiness, a powerful insight into the true nature of reality beyond dualistic thinking. This text is still a must-read for anyone wanting to understand Buddhist philosophy and what this means for the world: "Inner peace, world peace."<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2.2. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* - Diamond Sūtra

The *Diamond Sūtra*,<sup>7</sup> one of the most important texts in Mahāyāna Buddhism, stresses the meaning of dependent origination, which is the idea that nothing exists on its own. It suggests that every form, idea, and experience is shaped by many influences, creating a nuanced interconnectedness within every aspect of life. This mindset fosters compassion and awareness, understanding that actions reverberate widely due to this deep web of interdependence. The teachings contained within the sūtra pose a challenge to our habitual tendencies to establish concrete definitions of reality – rendering it fixed and unchanging – in that they direct practitioners to recognize that all things are in constant flux and are contingent. Meditation and mindfulness practices help us connect with the experiential elements of these teachings, develop qualities of compassion and wisdom, and cultivate skills of acting in alignment with the world. The instructions outlined in the *Diamond Sūtra* invite people to relearn their place in the universe and live into the practice of not clinging to beliefs, ideas, and identities. These teachings, if understood and applied, will lead one to cultivate a fluid, open-minded lifestyle that promotes building harmony in both living and leading. Therein lies the journey towards the cessation of suffering and, ultimately, enlightenment.

In terms of what the teachings mean in practice, it is necessary to understand a deeper level of both non-arising and dependent nature through

<sup>6</sup> Kraft, K. (Ed.). (1992). *Inner peace, world peace: Essays on Buddhism and nonviolence*. SUNY Press.

<sup>7</sup> Pine, R. (2002). *The Diamond Sutra*. United Kingdom: Catapult.

the experiential aspects of the path, including meditation and mindfulness. The sobering perspective of all things, seen as interdependent, can only be born by cultivating a sense of awareness beyond what is obvious. This realization can become experiential compassion and wisdom, and one learns to act as part of the world and not through the paradigm of separation.

Voidness and dependent nature in the *Diamond Sūtra* are not only an intellectual seminar but a call to adjust the characters of our being to align with those profound truths of interconnectedness. By connecting with all sentient beings, this path may lead to all the compassion and enlightenment in the world.

### 3.3. Āryaśālistamba Sūtra - The Rice Seedling Sūtra<sup>8</sup>

*Paṭiccasamuppāda*, meaning “dependent origination,” is a key concept in Buddhist philosophy, highlighted in the Āryaśālistamba Sūtra (The Rice Seedling Sūtra). Using the metaphor of rice seedlings, this sūtra demonstrates the interconnectedness of all things regarding the causative process from suffering to liberation.

A central message of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, as introduced in the Āryaśālistamba Sūtra, is that all phenomena arise dependent on conditions. This is akin to how rice seedlings grow based on specific environmental factors such as soil quality, water availability, and sunlight. The sūtra illustrates that just as rice seedlings cannot thrive without these conditions, sentient beings cannot escape the cycle of *samsāra* without understanding the interdependent nature of existence.

The teaching emphasizes that ignorance leads to the formation of karmic actions, which in turn leads to suffering, thus highlighting the cyclical nature of existence. Furthermore, the sūtra posits that understanding *paṭiccasamuppāda* is essential for achieving liberation. The realization of this principle allows individuals to see the transient nature of all things, which is crucial for overcoming attachment and aversion – two primary causes of suffering.

The sūtra teaches that by comprehending the nature of reality as interdependent, practitioners can cultivate wisdom that leads to enlightenment. This aligns with the notion that the ultimate truth transcends conventional truths, as seen in various Buddhist schools, including Tibetan Buddhism, which emphasizes the importance of understanding emptiness as a path to liberation.

The Āryaśālistamba Sūtra also uses the metaphor of rice seedlings to demonstrate the nurturing/ raising aspect of dependent origination. As with rice seedlings, which need special care and conditions in order to germinate and grow, individuals ultimately require the right environment – encompassing

---

<sup>8</sup> Sastri, N. A. (1950). Ārya Śālistamba sūtra; *Paṭiccasamuppādavibhaṅga nirdeśasūtra*; and *Paṭiccasamuppādagāthā sūtra*. (No Title); Schoening, J. D. *The Śālistamba Sūtra and its Indian Commentaries*. 2 vols. 1995; Barrett, T. H. (1998). *The Salistamba Sūtra*, Sanskrit Reconstruction, English Translation, Critical Notes (including Pali parallels, Chinese version and ancient Tibetan fragments). N Ross Reat. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 15 (2), p. 225-227. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v15i2.14705>

ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom – in order to grow spiritually.

This nurturing part highlights the vital role of community and supportive surroundings in the practice of Buddhism, where such environments offer the best soil to grow towards enlightenment.

Generally, there are three main features of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as viewed through the Āryaśālistamba Sūtra, which are the interdependence of all phenomena, the cyclical nature of existence, and the understanding that these concepts are essential to achieve liberation. The development of rice seedlings is a vivid metaphor for dependent origination that reveals its underlying principle at work in both the world of living things and the spiritual path of individuals.

### 3.4. Mūlamadhyamakakārikā

The Root Verses on dependent origination are largely contained in the first chapter of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. The key concept at the heart of this chapter is dependent arising, this serves to undermine more traditional ideas of causation, which plays a large part in Madhyamaka philosophy. The verses express these ideas: how all phenomena come into being in dependence on causes and conditions, and therefore, how all phenomena are dependent-arisen.

This highlights how while one should have a basic grasp of dependent origination as outlined in the first chapter, there are deeper considerations and implications to be examined in subsequent chapters where, for example, Chapter 6 of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* would demonstrate this.<sup>9</sup>

Nāgārjuna's arguments in Chapter 24: 18 of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*:

"Yaḥ paṭiccasamuppādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tām pracakṣmahe sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā.

Whatever is dependently co-arisen is explained to be emptiness. That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way."<sup>10</sup>

Nāgārjuna's reasoning in this verse focuses on what is reality while emphasizing ideas of śūnyatā and *pratyaya*. His revision of the reason argues that no phenomenon has any intrinsic nature, ultimately leading to the conclusion that nothing is ultimately real.

This radical perspective challenges conventional views and underscores the interdependent nature of existence. Conceptual interdependence is a profound philosophical exploration of the fundamental nature of reality, challenging traditional metaphysical assumptions through a sophisticated understanding of the relational existence of phenomena. In Nāgārjuna's framework, no entity exists in absolute isolation but emerges through complex, dynamic networks of interconnected conditions that continuously shape and transform one another.

<sup>9</sup> Xuezhong, L. (2015). *Madhyamakāvatāra-kārikā chapter 6. Journal of Indian philosophy*, 43 (1), p. 1 - 30.

<sup>10</sup> Garfield, Jay L, (1995) *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 304.



#### IV. UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE KARMA

This section traces the origin and doctrinal development of collective karma in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism and contextualizes its relevance within theories that are very much in fashion today in the field of global leadership. The synthesis of Buddhist ethical principles and leadership models emphasizes that qualities such as compassion, shared responsibility, and interdependence represent values that help leaders navigate the systemic challenges mentioned above. In short, collective *karma* is not just a religious idea but also a philosophical and moral approach to transforming leadership in this globalized world.

From the major sūtras, traditional commentators, and present applications, it is evidenced that this formulation clears up the applicability of this very concept with regard to building inclusive, sustainable, and virtuous communities, particularly its implications on leadership theory.

The *Mahāyāna* doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is a prerequisite for understanding the functional intention of collective *karma*. It means that everything is interconnected; things are not hewn off from everything else but reverberate in this rather huge causal network. In *Mahāyāna*, an individual's welfare is not distinguished from the welfare of the whole.

Influencing its philosophical roots in *paṭiccasamuppāda* to its scriptural expressions in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* and the *Lotus Sūtra*, collective *karma* is constructed as an important structure for spiritual and social concerns. Later doctrinal and commentarial texts reflect some of the core ideas of collective *karma*, though the concept is discussed explicitly in early *Mahāyāna* teachings themselves. It hints at some strategies with which collective karma application could contribute to inducting social cohesion and handling systemic maladies.

Currently, the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist tradition provides essential insights for encouraging a peaceful and just global community. Through the lens of the global leadership framework, this article advances how a global leadership mindset could promote transformational leadership concerning 21st-century crises such as climate crisis, social inequality, and global conflicts. From its ethical perspective, it makes the case that the communal viewpoint of collective karma is a guiding philosophy for leaders who aspire to realize inclusive and sustainable global progress.

##### 4.1. Etymology and doctrinal development of collective *Karma*

In *Mahāyāna* Buddhist philosophy, *karma* is not just an individual phenomenon but also has a collective dimension. These two concepts offer nuanced perspectives. In Buddhist scholastic literature, there is indeed a nuance in the interpretation of these terms:

- (1) *Sādhāraṇa-karma* (साधारणकर्म) - collective/ shared *karma*
  - *Sādhāraṇa* (साधारण): common, shared, universal
  - *Karma* (कर्म): action, deed, consequence
  - Etymologically means “common” or “shared” *karma*
  - Refers to collective or universal karmic experiences



- Linguistically: *sādhāraṇa* = common/ shared, *karma* = action/ deed

(2) *Sāmūhika-karma* (सामूहिककर्म) - group *karma*

- *Sāmūhika* (सामूहिक): collective, aggregate

- A later interpretative term in commentarial literature

This means “group *karma*.”

- Less standardized in classical Buddhist philosophical texts

### Chinese translations

- 共業 (gòng yè): shared/ collective *karma*

- 衆共業 (zhòng gòng yè): mass collective *karma*

- 共同業力 (gòngtóng yèlì): collective karmic force

The key distinction is that individual *karma* operates at a personal level, while collective *karma* explores how individual actions interact with and shape communal experiences. This perspective underscores the Buddhist understanding of interdependence, *paṭiccasamuppāda*, where no action exists in complete isolation.

These concepts invite reflection on both personal ethical conduct and our broader social responsibilities, suggesting that individual choices have ripple effects beyond immediate personal consequences.

### Early *Mahāyāna* sources

(1) *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (華嚴經, Huayan Jing)

Original passage in Sanskrit (from *Gaṇḍavyūha* section):

“Sarva-jagad-dhitāya karma kurvanti

sarva-sattva-samata-citta karma kurvanti

Those who act for the welfare of all beings

Those who act with a mind of equanimity towards all beings.”

Means: “They perform actions for the benefit of all beings; they perform actions with a mind of equality toward all beings.”

(2) *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (妙法蓮華經, Lotus Sūtra)

The *Lotus Sūtra* is one of the most influential texts in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. It emphasizes the importance of universal salvation and includes teachings about the shared karmic responsibility of the community.

For instance, chapter 7 explains shared karmic conditions (共因緣) and gives teachings that illustrate this: the idea of group *karma*. This chapter exemplifies what a “magic city” established by a kind ruler might look like, leading weary wayfarers on the path to enlightenment.

This story is a metaphor for the *bodhisattva*’s motivation to liberate sentient beings and embodies the interconnectedness of all beings and how the karmic actions of one contribute to others. Central to collective *karma* is the concept that an individual’s action can affect the group as a whole.

### *Abhidharma* sources

(1) *Abhidharmakośa* (阿毘達磨俱舍論) by Vasubandhu

Chapter 4 discusses:

“Sādhāraṇaṃ jagat karma janayati

Collective karma generates the shared world.”

- Discusses how individual actions generate collective consequences.

- Shows *karma* as a complex system of mutual influence.

(2) *Mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra* (大毘婆沙論)

Introduces the concept of *bhājana-loka* (器世間) – the container world created by collective karma.

### **Yogācāra development**

(1) *Mahāyānasamgraha* (攝大乘論) by Asaṅga

Discusses ālayavijñāna (阿賴耶識) as the repository of both individual and collective karmic seeds (種子, *bīja*).

(2) *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* (瑜伽師地論)

Elaborates on:

- *vipāka-vaśitā* (異熟自在): karmic ripening

- *sādhāraṇa-phala* (共相果): collective results

### **Doctrinal development**

(1) *Madhyamaka* texts emphasize the interconnected nature of karma:

From *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (中論):

“Sanskrit

Karma pratyaya-sambhūtaṃ na svabhāvena vidyate

Karma arising from conditions does not exist by its nature.”

(2) The Tiantai School (天台宗) systematized types of collective *karma*:

- 正報共業 (zhèngbào gòngyè): shared karmic retribution of beings

- 依報共業 (yībào gòngyè): shared karmic retribution of environment

### **Traditional commentarial classifications**

The concept was systematized in various ways:

(1) By Scope (from *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*):

- *sarva-sādhāraṇa-karma*: universal collective *karma*

- *prakṛti-sādhāraṇa-karma*: group-specific collective *karma*

- *asādhāraṇa-karma*: individual *karma*

(2) By Function (from Chinese commentaries):

- 引業 (yǐnyè): projecting *karma*

- 滿業 (mǎnyè): completing *karma*

- 共業 (gòngyè): collective *karma*

## **4.2. Summary**

*Mahāyāna* Buddhism teaches that all entities are interconnected, a

concept known as “interbeing” or “radical interdependence”.<sup>11</sup> These primary sources provide essential insights into the concept of collective karma within Mahāyāna Buddhism, focusing on the interconnectedness of all beings, the shared consequences of actions, and the communal nature of spiritual progress and building leadership for world peace and sustainable development.

## V. INTEGRATING THE PRINCIPLES OF *PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA* WITH HUMAN DIGNITY

### 5.1. Introduction: Bridging philosophy and human rights

The Buddhist principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, or dependent origination, offers profound insights into human dignity, presenting a framework rooted in interconnectedness. Unlike Western traditions that often emphasize individual autonomy, this principle locates dignity within the intricate web of relationships that define human existence. Integrating *paṭiccasamuppāda* with the concept of human dignity enriches our understanding of humanity and establishes an ethical foundation for addressing systemic challenges.

### 5.2. Interdependence and human dignity

*Paṭiccasamuppāda* demonstrates that all beings exist through interdependent relationships and conditions. This relational view challenges the notion of individualism by emphasizing that respecting one person’s dignity enhances the collective dignity of humanity. In contrast to frameworks that perceive human dignity as an inherent, isolated trait, this perspective underscores its dynamic and evolving nature, shaped by cultural, social, and environmental contexts.

This understanding aligns closely with human rights discourses, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declares, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”<sup>12</sup> Here, the acknowledgment of dignity as a relational principle reinforces mutual respect and responsibility across social divides.

### 5.3. Empathy, compassion, and ethical responsibility

Dependent origination also highlights the root causes of suffering, fostering greater empathy and compassion - qualities integral to upholding human dignity. Realizing our interconnectedness, we find that we must behave ethically; that is, we not only treat people with dignity, but we also must enrich the dignity of others. Not only is shared human flourishing attainable, if not perfect, end in the course of that shared journey, in which the flourishing of each and all is intrinsic to the other, but it also affirms the idea that human dignity is impossible outside the broader experience of humanity.

Moreover, the emphasis on conditionality found in *paṭiccasamuppāda*

<sup>11</sup> Long, W. (2021). *Radical Interdependence: Buddhist Philosophical Foundations for Social Theory. A Buddhist Approach to International Relations*, p. 19 - 27.

<sup>12</sup> Assembly, U. G. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights*. UN General Assembly, 302 (2), p. 14 - 25.

changes how we view systemic inequity, discrimination, and bias. It encourages a nuanced understanding of inequality as determined by context rather than inherent traits, fueling compassion and a calling toward social justice.

#### 5.4. Framework for social harmony and justice

The thread of *paṭiccasamuppāda* offers a nuanced theoretical foundation for seeing and addressing systemic inequities. It shows how structural factors interact to contradict or support dignity, thereby offering a holistic way to analyse social problems. This will enable you to build synergy around all its causes since these interconnected root causes affect the whole community.

The principle also highlights the tension between agency and responsibility. It acknowledges both the power of external circumstances and the ability of people to create new ones. This recognition of interplay invites individuals to transcend beyond the despair of current situations, towards hope to uphold the dignity of others.

#### 5.5. Psychological and educational implications

It trains emotional resilience by allowing people to position where suffering comes from as a consequence of conditions, not as an inherent fault. This curtails unwarranted self-blame, honors self-dignity, and creates communal empathy, which can help human beings psychologically at both the individual and community levels.

What does this framework suggest we do educationally: Let's move from teaching rights as a concept in abstraction to understanding how we are born from the earth, in relationship with it – its plants, animals, trees, soil, water and our human family, and the responsibility we all share to protect and sustain our world? Awareness of mutual dependence and our relationship with one another and the natural world will help to nurture ethical and sustainable behaviours that not only shape our societies but also serve to address the challenges that we now face together in a connected world.

#### 5.6. Human dignity and environmental stewardship

More than ever, human dignity depends on environmental conditions, and ecological destruction endangers the essential conditions for a dignified life. Dependent origination also emphasizes the importance of environmental sustainability for the dignity of future generations. Tackling ecological problems, therefore, becomes necessary to ensure common welfare.

The combination of *paṭiccasamuppāda* with human dignity, as represented by the Torah, provides a strong framework for inferencing that will be none other than an analysis around the human value concept for the society at present.<sup>13</sup> The covenant of dignity is the foundation of our interconnectedness and emotional bonds. It brings us together as a community, rather than

---

<sup>13</sup> Friedman, Hershey H., *Essential Core Values for Individuals and Organizations, as Derived from the Torah* (October 30, 2011). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1951522> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1951522>

isolating us as individuals, and encourages us to be ethically responsible in our interactions with one another. This unity fosters understanding, social harmony, and sustainable progress, ultimately leading to a more compassionate and connected global society.

In this context, human dignity is not something fixed or unchanging; it is a fluid state shaped by our relationships and environments. As social beings, when we become aware of our shared existence and the obligations we have toward others, we can pave the way for sustainable systems that address deep-rooted problems and ensure that everyone can live with dignity.

By examining these issues holistically, we can deepen ethical discussions and guide practical approaches towards creating a fairer and more just world.

## VI. *PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA* THROUGH THE LENS OF INDRA'S NET

The metaphor of Indra's Net offers unique insights into *paṭiccasamuppāda* that extend beyond traditional linear explanations of dependent origination. In contrast to the twelve-link chain of causation commonly used to explain *paṭiccasamuppāda*, Indra's Net presents a multidimensional model where causation operates simultaneously in all directions. Each jewel's reflection of all other jewels demonstrates how every phenomenon contains and depends upon all others, creating a web of mutual causation that more accurately represents the complexity of reality. The Śālistamba Sūtra,<sup>14</sup> a foundational Mahāyāna text, resonates with this perspective, stating: "Because this exists, that exists; because this arises, that arises."

This understanding defies simple notions of cause and effect, instead advancing a model of mutual conditioning wherein each element in the network acts simultaneously as cause and effect to all the others. The infinite regression of reflections within each jewel illustrates how mutual conditioning extends infinitely, taking in all phenomena across space and time. This aspect of the metaphor explains how *paṭiccasamuppāda* works not only on an individual level but also, more importantly, as a universal principle governing all existence.

## VII. COLLECTIVE KARMA: FROM INDIVIDUAL TO UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Buddhist view of collective karma, as in the concepts of *sādhāraṇa-karma* (shared karma) and *sāmūhika-karma* (group karma), holds important lessons about shared responsibility and universal interdependence that speak to some of the most important contemporary global challenges. *Sādhāraṇa-karma* emphasizes how actions by individuals are inescapably part of larger collective outcomes and create ripple effects that move outward from the actor, forming social structures and systems that produce shared karmic effects. These effects can ripple through generations, weaving themselves into the very fabric of society, lingering and defining outcomes long after the

<sup>14</sup> Reat, N. R. (1993). *The Śālistambha Sūtra: Tibetan Original, Sanskrit Reconstruction, English Translation, Critical Notes (including Pali Parallels, Chinese Version, and Ancient Tibetan Fragments)*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishes, p. 5 - 13.

deeds themselves. Moreover, in association with this, *sāmūhika-karma* can be established as the field of karma which is rooted in the dynamic of the groups where groups through group choice-making creates a distinct flow of karmic energy; and with that it reinforces how the groups are a unique field of karmic energy capable of intervening on the individual karma especially when we approach the fields of organizations and institutions.

This relationship between individual intention and group action highlights the importance of collective agency in shaping outcomes that affect both participants and the broader society.

The metaphor of Indra's Net, given as an introduction in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, further clarifies this interconnection with reality as gigantic world networks of jewels that reflect each other; it is a metaphor that currently resonates across modern network theory, social media dynamics, and ecological systems. In this sense, the framework retrieves how personal and collective responsibilities interconnect in facing environmental challenges, releasing sustainable development, and building global citizenship. This understanding of collective karma also speaks to the issue of environmental and social responsibility, revealing how current actions shape future conditions and how there need to be collective response mechanisms. The shift from individual to collective responsibility demands a move away from entrenched individualistic cultural paradigms and toward the establishment of institutional structures that foster collective awareness and action.

This framework is crucial for social justice in that it can show how social structures and practices create collective consequences that support the better development of more just, inclusive, and equitable systems. Collective karma, as applied in educational systems, organizational practices, policy development, and global governance, becomes a rich and practical approach toward creating sustainable, ethical, and interconnected social and environmental systems.

### **VIII. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA AND MODERN LEADERSHIP**

The complexities of today's world, from social injustice and geopolitical tensions to political instability, are more interdependent and urgent than ever before. This situation calls for leadership that enhances human dignity, promotes sustainable practices, and paves the way toward peace. Existing leadership paradigms provide valuable understandings but often fail to offer the integrated perspective required to tackle these global issues effectively. In this context, the teachings of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, particularly the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, provide a timeless perspective on achieving harmony. Emphasizing compassion, interconnectedness, collective karma, personal transformation, and the bodhisattva ideal, *Mahāyāna* Buddhism offers both philosophical guidance and practical tools for resolving discord and building a more peaceful society. The vision of interdependence inherent in this tradition furnishes a profound framework for understanding global collaboration and sustainable peace.



Successful implementation at the community level calls for adaptation to local contexts while retaining the fundamental principles of interconnectedness and collective responsibility. Initiatives that adopt participatory forms of leadership and collective decision-making have gained ground as hybrids often combine traditional wisdom with modern organizational practices to respect the cultures prevailing in the local settings while paving the way for sustainable development.

Future directions would include the development of more sophisticated measurement tools to assess the impact of Buddhist-inspired leadership practices. Research into the relationship between mindful leadership practices and organizational outcomes would provide valuable insights for refining implementation strategies. Another promising frontier for exploration is the integration of these principles with emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and decision support systems.

The role of education in shaping future leaders capable of implementing such principles cannot be overstated. Traditional leadership education must be rethought to focus more on systems thinking, ethical decision-making, and awareness of interconnectedness. Some business schools have recently started incorporating mindfulness and sustainability principles into their curricula; however, a holistic integration is still required to prepare leaders for current challenges.

In summary, the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a sophisticated theoretical framework that meets all these demands. It offers practical guidance for leadership development and organizational management. The implications of this research go beyond immediate organizational applications to more general questions about leadership in an interconnected world. Integrating *paṭiccasamuppāda* into leadership practices will allow organizations to develop more effective, ethical, and sustainable systems that will ultimately benefit both individual enterprises and the broader social and environmental contexts within which they operate.

## IX. CONCLUSION

This research study shows how modern struggles in leadership may be seen through the lens of Buddhist philosophical thought as leading to holistic leadership and sustainable development. Essentially, the investigation into *paṭiccasamuppāda* demonstrates that the knowledge of deep interdependence changes the way leaders relate with the world – shifting away from traditional hierarchical approaches toward fundamental and systematic practices of including others. The sociality of human existence, emphasized by the biblical and theological approaches, shows how human dignity is rooted in relationships and contexts of dependence rather than autonomous self-realization.

Furthermore, the discussion of collective karma adds more depth to our understanding by showing the entangled nature of individual action and collective results. It offers an adhesive-like methodology for understanding how organisational decisions trickle down to affect customers, staff, other stakeholders, and the wider community through concepts of *sādhāraṇa-karma* and *sāmūhika-karma*. Such realization can be particularly relevant to issues of

environmental problems and sustainable development, in which what is done has an obligatory by-product that harms both generations-struck-present as well as future.

These principles have practical implications that show their feasibility in today's organizational contexts. Examples of successful Buddhist-inspired leadership approaches are drawn from sectors such as national policies, organizational practices, and how such experiences lead to increased stakeholder engagement, improved decision-making processes, and more sustainable outcomes. These pragmatic illustrations support the high-level structure for the foundation of good use cases and key insights for forecasting implementations.

Moreover, this research gives insight into the transformative potential of weaving together insights from Buddhist wisdom with modern leadership theories. Understanding that every single phenomenon is interlinked with each other helps the leaders in forming better solutions to the complex problems surrounding the globe. This integration fosters leadership practices that juxtapose efficiency with ethical consideration, individual agency with collective well-being, and immediate outcomes with long-term sustainability.

The research also places much emphasis on education to inform future leaders about the principles so that they can implement them effectively. The more organizations experience complex and interrelated problems, the more value the leadership development initiative has in teaching a systems-conscious, ethical, and appreciative worldview. There is no such thing as merely formal education. Rather, education is needed in terms of the culture and practices of the organisations that should facilitate shared accountability and sustainability.

Add to that new research insights into the impact of mindfulness and hypno-leadership in corporate performance, and the fusion of Buddhist principles with contemporary leadership practices offer promising new directions for tackling pressing global challenges. It conveys the wisdom of interconnectedness and universal responsibility, which will prove even more relevant as societies deal with environmental sustainability, social justice, and economic equality. The cross-cultural applicability of these principles suggests their potential in creating more sustainable, ethical, and effective approaches to leadership across organizational and cultural divides.

The overall findings of the study, therefore, conclude that Buddhist principles help with not only theoretical enlightenment but also practical blueprints for formulating leadership approaches that are effective in responding to or addressing contemporary issues for the common good. Our world has now become overwhelmed with the business practices of globalization, the crisis of climate, response to conflict, eradication of poverty, smartphones, cyber-vulnerability, and the loss of the passion for reflection and contemplation.

## REFERENCES

- All is one: The profound influence of Huayan Buddhism on Chinese philosophy, from the past to the present.* Yin-Cheng Journal of Contemporary Buddhism, Wei, D., & Cavayero, M. 1(1), 133-148, 2023.
- Ārya Śālistamba sūtra; Paṭiccasamuppādavibhaṅga nirdeśasūtra; and Paṭiccasamuppādagāthā sūtra Sastri, N. A., 1950.
- Barrett, T. H., 1998, The Sālistamba Sūtra, Sanskrit Reconstruction, English Translation, Critical Notes (including Pali parallels, Chinese version and ancient Tibetan fragments), *Buddhist Studies Review*, 15 (2), 225-227 <https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v15i2.14705>
- Cleary, T., Boston: Shambhala, 1993. *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra*,
- Friedman, H. H., *Essential core values for individuals and organizations, as derived from the Torah*, 2011. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1951522> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1951522>
- Garfield, J. L., *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Indra's net and the Midas touch: living sustainably in a connected world*, Thiele, L. P., MIT Press, 2011.
- Kant, I., *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785-2017, [Earlymoderntexts.com](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com).
- Kraft, K. (Ed.), *Inner peace, world peace: Essays on Buddhism and nonviolence*, SUNY Press, 1992.
- Long, W., *Radical Interdependence: Buddhist Philosophical Foundations for Social Theory. A Buddhist Approach to International Relations*, 2021.
- Nussbaum, M. C., *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- p. 7-8, Lopez, D., *The Heart Sūtra. In Elaborations on Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sūtra*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400884513-001>
- The Diamond Sutra*, Pine, R., United Kingdom: Catapult, 2002.
- The Śālistamba Sūtra and its Indian Commentaries*, 2 vols., Schoening, J. D., 1995.
- The Śālistambha Sūtra: Tibetan Original, Sanskrit Reconstruction, English Translation, Critical Notes (including Pali Parallels, Chinese Version, and Ancient Tibetan Fragments)*, Reat, N. R., Motilal Banarsidass Publishes, 1993.
- UN General Assembly Assembly, *Universal declaration of human rights*, U. G., 302 (2), p. 14-25, 1948.
- Xuezhū, L. *Madhyamakāvatāra-kārikā chapter 6*, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 43 (1), 2015.



# BRIDGING WORLDS: UNITING FRIENDS OF DIVERSE FAITHS AND TRADITIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT, GLOBAL HARMONY, AND WORLD PEACE

Christie Yu-Ling Chang, Ph.D.\*

## Abstract:

This paper reflects on my journey in both intrareligious and interreligious activities throughout the years, spanning diverse traditions – from Pure Land Buddhism in Hawai'i to Vajrayana Buddhism in Bhutan, Catholicism in the Vatican, Protestantism in Taiwan, to the Muslim faith in England, and Daoism as well as folk religions in Chinese-speaking communities worldwide. Grounded in the Buddhist cosmological concept of “Indra’s Net,” this narrative explores the interconnectedness of all beings and emphasizes the critical role of mutual understanding in fostering global harmony. Using the guiding principles of Zhong Dao (“Middle Way”) and the Bodhisattva Path, this work proposes practical methods to navigate cultural and spiritual diversity while addressing challenges in unity. It aims to offer insights into building a more inclusive and peaceful world through shared spiritual values, dialogue, and compassion.

**Keywords:** *Fostering unity, global harmony, interfaith dialogue, intrareligious understanding, Indra’s net, zhong dao (middle way), Bodhisattva path, sustainable development, Buddhist philosophy.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world, the pursuit of global harmony and world peace requires an inclusive and collaborative approach that transcends cultural and spiritual divides. Central to this vision is the recognition that all beings are interconnected and that uniting individuals – both interreligiously and intrareligiously – can pave the way for mutual understanding, sustainable development, and lasting peace. As a practicing Mahayana Pure

---

\* President, Sakyadhita Taiwan, China.

Land Buddhist, my journey has taken me from Hawai'i to Bhutan, the Vatican, England, Malaysia, and Thailand, each encounter enriching my perspective on how dialogue and shared values can foster inclusivity and harmony.

This paper reflects on these experiences, grounded in the Buddhist philosophical frameworks of *Indra's Net*, which highlights the interdependence of all beings; *Zhong Dao* (the Middle Way), which guides a balanced and mindful approach; and the Bodhisattva Path, which embodies compassion and service. These principles, explored further in the following sections, form the foundation of my interfaith and intrareligious efforts, illustrating how they can inspire a vision of global harmony and world peace.

## II. ALOHA AND AMITOFO: BECOMING A BUDDHIST IN HAWAI'I

Although I was born and raised in Taiwan, my Buddhist pilgrimage truly began in Hawai'i, a land rich in languages, cultures, ethnicities, and religions, where I spent seven transformative years of study. It was here that I encountered Venerable Bhiksuni Rui Miao, a kind, compassionate, and open-minded teacher from southern Fujian, China. Her nonsectarian approach to Buddhism and her genuine devotion as a practitioner left an indelible impression on me. I often describe her as "unescapable" because her warmth and authenticity drew me in completely, making it impossible to resist her influence. Venerable Rui Miao had a remarkable ability to make friends with everyone – regardless of their religion, race, or background. Her inclusivity was a living testament to the Buddhist principle of universal compassion and became a profound source of inspiration for me.

Despite coming from Taiwan, a predominantly Buddhist, I was not initially drawn to Buddhism. Instead, I explored a wide range of religions and remained a skeptic, reluctant to embrace any particular label. However, Venerable Rui Miao made everything so simple and clear. Her guidance helped me understand that "taking refuge" was not about adopting a rigid identity but about becoming a student of the Enlightened One, the Buddha. It was under her mentorship that I took refuge in the Three Jewels, marking the start of a spiritual journey that continues to shape my life to this day.

Hawai'i, with its vibrant tapestry of spiritual traditions, provided a fertile ground for my Buddhist practice to grow. I visited numerous Buddhist temples beyond my teacher's and explored places of worship from other religions, deepening my appreciation for the diversity of human spirituality. Venerable Rui Miao's small temple was a treasure trove of books and cassette tapes from various Buddhist schools, reflecting her inclusive outlook. It was also a place where my journey as a Dharma Chinese language teacher began, as she encouraged me to become the first teacher at the Tzu Chi School in Hawai'i, one of the earliest overseas Tzu Chi Chinese schools. Later, I also took on the role of principal, an experience that further solidified my commitment to Buddhist education and service.

Venerable Rui Miao was more than a mentor in faith; she was also a connector and an advocate for Buddhist women. She introduced me to



Venerable Bhiksuni Lekshe Tsomo, one of the founders of the Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women. Her encouragement to support Western nuns, who lacked the structured support systems available in Chinese Buddhism, resonated deeply with me. When I returned to Taiwan after completing my Ph.D. in 2001, the timing coincided with the 7th Sakyadhita Conference being scheduled in Taiwan in 2002. Without hesitation, I became involved, continuing the work Venerable Rui Miao had inspired in me.

### III. SAKYADHITA: BRINGING DAUGHTERS OF THE BUDDHA AND BEYOND TOGETHER

Sakyadhita, a Sanskrit term meaning “daughters of the Buddha,” was coined at the conclusion of its inaugural gathering in 1987. Since then, Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women has convened biennial conferences that serve as a vital platform for fostering dialogue, collaboration, and empowerment among Buddhist women and supporters worldwide. Its mission, rooted in inclusivity and a nonsectarian spirit, seeks to amplify the voices of the historically underrepresented while building bridges across traditions, cultures, and religions.

My journey with Sakyadhita began serendipitously. Upon completing my Ph.D. in 2001, I returned to Taiwan and promised Venerable Bhiksuni Lekshe Tsomo, one of the organization’s co-founders, that I would assist with the preparations for the 7th Sakyadhita Conference, scheduled to take place in Taiwan in July 2002. At the time, I had only a vague understanding of Sakyadhita’s scope and impact. However, what started as a casual offer of help quickly turned into full immersion in the conference’s organization. My bilingual abilities positioned me as a key contributor, taking on responsibilities ranging from press coordination and translation to event management. In an unexpected turn, I was even asked to serve as the Master of Ceremonies for the opening ceremony, a role assigned to me mere hours before the event commenced. These intense yet enriching experiences not only deepened my appreciation for Sakyadhita’s mission but also solidified my lifelong commitment to its work.

The conference itself was a profound demonstration of inclusivity, intersectionality, and cultural sensitivity. At a time when the world was grappling with the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Sakyadhita took a bold step by inviting a female Muslim scholar to offer a prayer for world peace during the opening ceremony. This act of solidarity underscored the organization’s commitment to interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding. Similarly, the inclusion of diverse Buddhist traditions in the program highlighted its dedication to honoring the plurality within Buddhism. For example, the *Heart Sutra* was chanted in multiple languages in alphabetical order, while the *Metta Sutta* was chanted first in deference to the Theravada tradition as the earliest Buddhist school. Each morning meditation session was led by teachers from different traditions, and the evening chanting rotated among various languages, providing a platform for all voices to be heard and respected.

Although Sakyadhita's primary mission is to empower Buddhist women, it remains an inclusive organization, welcoming male participants and collaborators. Its focus on elevating the voices of the marginalized, particularly women who have been overlooked in Buddhist history, resonated deeply with me. The organization's nonsectarian ethos and emphasis on interreligious dialogue offered a model for bridging divides and fostering harmony.

My involvement with Sakyadhita has been transformative, leading to ongoing engagement and eventual leadership roles, including serving as Vice President and later President between 2009 and 2013. However, regardless of titles, my commitment has always been aligned with Sakyadhita's mission to *Bridge Worlds* – a theme that, fittingly, was the title of the 7th Sakyadhita Conference, my first. Over the years, my participation in Sakyadhita conferences has not only shaped my understanding of Buddhist inclusivity but also provided a foundation for my broader engagement with the international Buddhist community. Working closely with Venerable Lekshe Tsomo and others, I have traveled to numerous countries to collaborate with Buddhist leaders, identify hosts for future conferences, and promote the ideals of inclusivity, mutual respect, and empowerment. These experiences have reinforced my belief in the transformative potential of collective action and dialogue to foster global harmony and peace.

#### IV. TEACHING DHARMA CHINESE IN BHUTAN

My pilgrimage continued in Bhutan as the pandemic began to subside, where my husband, Dr. Frank Tien, and I were invited to teach a course on the Chinese language. This opportunity emerged after we participated in the International Vajrayana Conference, where we witnessed Bhutan's deep commitment to preserving its Vajrayana heritage while embracing learning from other traditions. Recognizing the potential for linguistic and cultural bridges to foster mutual understanding, we transformed the course into "Dharma Chinese," designed to support Bhutanese students—many of whom were tour guides—in engaging with Buddhist traditions beyond their own.

This unique course integrated mindfulness, heartfulness, and innovative teaching methodologies to create a holistic learning experience. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation-in-motion and breathing exercises, were incorporated into language lessons to help students develop a calm and focused state conducive to learning. Heartfulness activities, such as group singing and reflective discussions on Buddhist stories, fostered a sense of connection and encouraged students to explore the compassionate and ethical values embedded in their tradition while being open to learning about others.

We utilized materials and examples that highlighted both commonalities and distinctions among Buddhist traditions. For instance, students were introduced to the linguistic roots of key terms, such as "Bodhisattva" and "Nirvana," to better understand their meanings and usage across Chinese and Tibetan contexts. We also employed storytelling and role-playing exercises based on Buddhist narratives to strengthen both language skills and cultural appreciation.

Technology, including AI-assisted language tools, played an important role in making the learning process dynamic and accessible. Students engaged with AI platforms for pronunciation practice, vocabulary building, and conversational simulations, which supplemented in-person activities. These tools enabled students to improve their Chinese proficiency while gaining insights into Buddhist philosophies, illustrating how digital resources can complement traditional methods to create a well-rounded educational experience.

By engaging in these mindful and heartfelt activities, students not only improved their language skills but also developed a deeper appreciation for their Buddhist roots. They expressed that understanding the broader context of Buddhism beyond their Vajrayana tradition enriched their ability to share Bhutan's cultural and spiritual heritage with visitors. Furthermore, the exposure to other perspectives fostered an openness to interreligious and intrareligious dialogue, highlighting the universal values of compassion and interconnection.

The *Dharma Chinese* initiative demonstrated how language education can serve as a powerful tool for fostering inclusivity and mutual respect. Grounded in mindfulness and heartfulness practices (Gunaratana, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 1994), the program reaffirmed the transformative potential of education in bridging cultural and spiritual divides. By engaging in mindful learning activities and utilizing AI-assisted language tools (Li & Hsieh, 2021), students gained not only linguistic proficiency but also a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of Buddhist traditions beyond their Vajrayana roots (Williams, 2009).

#### **V. DR. "CHANGE" SMILING WITH POPE FRANCIS IN THE VATICAN**

The Vatican provided another profound experience of interfaith dialogue. My presentation, 'Smiling to Foster a Culture of Encounter at the Vatican' (Chang, 2024), introduced the Buddhist concept of Indra's Net, emphasizing the interdependence of all beings (Cook, 1977; Loy, 2018). The warm reception of this teaching reinforced the universality of interconnectedness as a foundation for dialogue. Pope Francis's call for encounter and fraternity (Francis, 2020) aligns closely with the Buddhist emphasis on compassion and mutual respect (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1995), illustrating how different faith traditions can find common ground in their ethical principles. Interfaith dialogue, as highlighted by scholars such as Cornille (2013), is a crucial pathway toward understanding and cooperation among diverse religious communities.

An amusing yet meaningful aspect of my invitation was how the first official letter mistakenly addressed me as "Dr. Change," a result of a word processor's auto-correction. While the Vatican later issued a second, corrected invitation, I embraced the humor in this mix-up. After all, "change" is precisely what I strive to bring to the world: a transformation toward harmony and peace. I am deeply committed to being a part of the positive change that can help bridge divides and nurture mutual respect among people of all faiths.

However, my engagement in this dialogue was not confined to my words alone. I did not merely talk about smiling - I practiced it. One of the most memorable moments of my life was when my joyful smile during a brief

interaction with Pope Francis was captured and shared on Vatican News. This image, representing the power of simple human connection, was a testament to how an authentic expression of happiness can transcend all barriers and bring people together. My belief in the transformative power of a smile was reinforced by the positive reception of my talk. It was heartening to know that the audience not only embraced the Buddhist concept of *Indra's Net* but also felt a sense of joy and unity from learning about the interconnectedness that binds us all. This moment reminded me of the profound simplicity of connection through shared smiles and mutual understanding.

This trip to the Vatican was a reaffirmation of my deep commitment to world peace. As a self-employed Dharma ambassador, I have dedicated my life to nurturing dialogues of inclusivity and understanding. Through this experience, I was reminded of the importance of embodying the teachings we share with others. Practicing smiles and demonstrating the deep interconnectedness of all beings is not only a method of communication but also a form of activism—an activism that promotes global harmony and peace.

## **VI. FROM “LOST SHEEP” TO SISTER IN FAITH: INTERFAITH DIALOGUE WITH TAIWANESE CHRISTIANS**

My roots in Taiwan offered a unique perspective on Protestant Christianity. Growing up next to a Presbyterian church, I learned piano, hymns, and Bible stories, admiring the love and compassion symbolized by Jesus Christ. Although my spiritual questions remained unanswered at the time, these early experiences instilled a deep appreciation for Christian values. Childhood friends at the church often referred to me as a “lost sheep,” but I never embraced that label. While I may not have followed the same religious path, my admiration for Jesus Christ has remained steadfast, which is why I continue to carry the English name “Christie,” given to me by a Mormon missionary. My journey has led me to embrace all people, regardless of their faith or beliefs, and I find no conflict in this openness. I believe that fostering mutual respect and friendship transcends religious boundaries, and I wish to remain a genuine Sister in faith, working together with others for goodness and harmony in the world.

It is with this spirit that I was both honored and privileged to serve as a translator and, eventually, the sole Buddhist representative at an international interfaith dialogue hosted by a prominent Presbyterian church in southern Taiwan. This opportunity allowed me to engage deeply with Christian perspectives while presenting Buddhist teachings, re-embracing my Taiwanese Christian Sisters and Brothers, as well as being re-embraced by them. It was a profound experience of mutual respect, understanding, and shared humanity – values that I believe can bridge any divide, building lasting friendships and fostering global harmony. Later, I was also invited by the group to serve as the MC for a study-group session and dialogue, an invitation that truly made me happy. It was a moment of further connection, reflecting my ongoing commitment to interfaith dialogue and shared growth.

## VII. SINGING GREEN TARAMANTRA AND INTRODUCING AMITABHA TO MUSLIMS

Another milestone in my interfaith journey occurred in July 2024 when my husband and I were invited to participate in Europe's largest Muslim gathering, organized by the Ahmadiyya community in England. With nearly 50,000 participants from 214 countries, the event showcased the power of collective faith and the strength of interreligious dialogue. As one of the few Buddhists present – alongside two other Buddhists from Japan, two from Taiwan (who had been able to join before a typhoon delayed others back home), and two from Nepal – I was initially told that we would be attending as observers and would not have the opportunity to give any speeches. The speeches from ambassadors and dignitaries had already been pre-arranged, and I wasn't expecting to be called upon.

However, just the night before the closing ceremony on the third morning, I received a surprise notification that I had been invited to deliver a two-minute goodwill speech. Although hesitant at first – wondering whether my Buddhist chanting might disrupt the harmony of the Muslim event, especially as the Muslim attendees were such accomplished chanters – I chose to move forward. I decided to chant the Green Tara mantra, as Green Tara symbolizes compassion in action, a value I felt deeply aligned with the spirit of the gathering. Coincidentally, I had received the photo of a completed Green Tara *thangka* from a friend's daughter in Nepal that very morning, which felt like a timely sign.

Speaking from the heart, I expressed my gratitude and shared the Buddhist concept of Amitabha Buddha, emphasizing the infinite light and infinite life that unites all beings. I also introduced the way we greet each other in Taiwan – “Amitofo” – as a simple yet profound expression of compassion and connection. To my delight, after I stepped down from the stage, many attendees, especially young people from Germany, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and beyond, came up to greet me with “Amitofo” and expressed interest in learning more about Buddhism. The experience was incredibly rewarding as it provided a platform for meaningful dialogue and fostered mutual understanding among people of diverse faiths. Several young people also asked to take photos with me and expressed a genuine curiosity to know more about the Buddhist path, a heartening reminder of the power of interfaith exchanges to break down barriers and nurture shared curiosity and respect (YouTube, 2024).

## VIII. PATROLLING WITH GUAN GONG IN MALAYSIA AND THAILAND

Engagement with Daoism and folk religions has also been a significant aspect of my journey. In September 2024, Dr. Frank Tien and I participated in a multinational pilgrimage honoring Guan Gong (關公), the revered red-faced general celebrated across Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions. This 16-day journey began in Singapore, but we joined the pilgrimage in Malaysia, continuing through Thailand. The experience was both long and enriching, bringing together devotees from various Chinese-speaking communities, including Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Taiwan, and beyond.



Guan Gong, often regarded as a fierce warrior on the battlefield, is now revered as a Dharma guardian in Mahayana Buddhism, symbolizing Buddhism's ability to integrate folk beliefs within the Chinese cultural context. This integration has allowed Buddhism to endure and thrive over time and across regions. The pilgrimage underscored the shared reverence for Guan Gong, not only as a protector of peace but as a figure transcending borders. During our journey, we had the unique opportunity to interact deeply with people from diverse faith traditions – Daoist, Confucianist, folk religious believers, and those simply devoted to Guan Gong. Despite speaking the same language, their viewpoints and beliefs were remarkably diverse, yet there was a unifying thread: the shared belief in harmony, peace, and the protection of all sentient beings.

This journey was not only a tribute to Guan Gong but also a powerful reminder of how spiritual practices and rituals can connect people from all walks of life, offering an opportunity to unite across borders and beliefs in a common mission for peace and global harmony.

## IX. INTRARELIGIOUS DIALOGUES

Within the Buddhist world, my role as the international committee chair of the International Lay Buddhist Forum (ILBF) has further deepened my commitment to fostering intrareligious understanding. From conferences in Japan, Indonesia, and Thailand to international gatherings across Southeast Asia and India, I have witnessed the transformative potential of dialogue in bridging doctrinal and cultural differences within Buddhism. These efforts highlight the importance of unity among Buddhist practitioners in addressing global challenges (ILBF Proceedings, 2014, 2016, 2019).

Buddhism, which originated in India over 2600 years ago, has spread across various regions, adapting skillfully to diverse social and cultural contexts. This adaptation is essential for Buddhism's survival and relevance throughout history. However, the differences in regional expressions and practices – often the result of local cultural and social conditions – sometimes create misunderstandings between the various schools or sects of Buddhism. While these differences can enrich the tradition, they can also be a source of division if not approached with understanding and respect.

As the most tolerant and peace-loving of religions, Buddhism exemplifies the potential for harmonious coexistence. But how can world peace be achieved if Buddhists themselves cannot find common ground or communicate effectively with each other? The Buddha's teachings offer the Four Dharma Seals – impermanence, dukkha (suffering), anatta (selflessness), and equanimity. These core principles should guide all Buddhists, irrespective of their school or sect, towards embracing each other in understanding and mutual respect. It was, therefore, quite disheartening to hear that one younger Sister from a newer Buddhist group in Japan felt that intrareligious dialogue was more difficult than interreligious dialogue. I believe this should not be the case. If Buddhists cannot communicate and respect each other, how can we hope to extend that understanding to others?



While interreligious dialogue is crucial, I also believe it is equally important to promote intrareligious dialogue within the Buddhist community. Strengthening this internal unity enables Buddhists to collectively address the challenges of the modern world while preserving the universal essence of the Dharma across different traditions. As practitioners of Buddhism, it is our shared responsibility to foster dialogue that builds bridges not only across faiths but also within our own.

## **X. PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS**

The philosophical frameworks guiding this journey are deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings. Indra's Net, as the *Avatamsaka Sutra* expounds and which most Mahayana Buddhists have embraced, is at the core of all my Dharma work. This cosmological vision, where every being is both a reflection of and reflected by all others, highlights the profound interdependence of all existence (Cook, 1977; Loy, 2018). *Zhong Dao*, the Middle Way, provides a dynamic and balanced approach to navigating diverse perspectives (Gethin, 1998). The Bodhisattva Path, as articulated by Shantideva (1996), emphasizes compassionate service, forming the ethical foundation of my interfaith and intrareligious engagements (Harvey, 2000).

Let me explore these themes in greater depth, drawing on my personal experiences and broader philosophical insights. Through these reflections, I aim to contribute to ongoing dialogues on how spiritual traditions can collaborate to address the pressing challenges of our time, fostering a world rooted in harmony and mutual respect.

## **XI. INDRA'S NET: A FOUNDATION FOR INTERCONNECTIVITY**

The Buddhist concept of Indra's Net, as described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, provides a profound philosophical foundation for understanding interconnectivity. Imagine a vast cosmic net with a multifaceted jewel at each knot. Each jewel reflects every other jewel, symbolizing the interconnectedness of all beings and phenomena. This metaphor underscores the principle that individual actions reverberate across the entire network, highlighting the interdependence that underpins existence (Cleary, 1993).

Indra's Net offers a compelling framework for interfaith and intrareligious dialogues. It encourages recognizing the intrinsic value and interconnected nature of all traditions. In Bhutan, for instance, teaching Dharma Chinese enabled me to witness the reflection of my Buddhist roots in the Vajrayana practices of my students. Similarly, engaging with Catholicism at the Vatican illuminated shared values of compassion and community, resonating deeply with Buddhist ethics. This understanding fosters mutual respect, dissolves barriers, and nurtures collaborative efforts toward global harmony.

The practical application of Indra's Net is evident in my interfaith dialogues. At Europe's largest Muslim gathering, the simple act of introducing Amitabha Buddha and chanting the Green Tara mantra reflected the jewels of my Buddhist practice to a receptive audience. Their enthusiastic responses exemplified the shared aspirations for peace and understanding that transcend

religious boundaries. By embracing the interconnectivity symbolized by Indra's Net, interfaith exchanges can transform into opportunities for mutual enrichment and collective growth.

## **XII. ZHONG DAO: NAVIGATING THE MIDDLE PATH**

Zhong Dao, often translated as the "Middle Way," is a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, advocating balance and moderation. The Chinese characters for Zhong Dao (中道) encapsulate profound wisdom. The character 中 (zhong) suggests centrality and equilibrium, while 道 (dao) represents the path or way, emphasizing action and movement. Together, they convey a dynamic process of staying centered amidst life's complexities.

This principle has been instrumental in my engagements with diverse traditions. In interfaith settings, Zhong Dao provides a framework for navigating differing perspectives with mindfulness and empathy. At the Presbyterian church in Taiwan, for example, this approach enabled me to bridge the doctrinal gap between Christianity and Buddhism, fostering meaningful exchanges rooted in mutual respect. Similarly, during the Guan Gong pilgrimage, the Middle Way guided my interactions with participants from various cultural and religious backgrounds, emphasizing common values over differences.

Zhong Dao also has practical implications for addressing global challenges. In a world increasingly polarized by ideological and cultural divides, the Middle Way offers a path toward reconciliation and unity. It encourages seeking common ground while honoring diversity, creating a foundation for sustainable peace and development. By embodying this principle, individuals and communities can contribute to a more harmonious and inclusive world.

## **XIII. THE BODHISATTVA PATH: COMPASSION IN ACTION**

The Bodhisattva Path, a central tenet of Mahayana Buddhism, exemplifies a commitment to compassion and altruism. A Bodhisattva aspires to attain enlightenment not for personal liberation alone but for the benefit of all sentient beings. This selfless dedication resonates deeply with the global need for collective action and shared responsibility in addressing pressing challenges like poverty, climate change, and social inequity.

Shantideva's *Bodhisattva Way of Life* offers a profound guide for embodying this path. His teachings emphasize cultivating a compassionate mindset and taking concrete actions to alleviate suffering. In interfaith dialogues, this principle manifests in the willingness to listen deeply, respect differing beliefs, and find common ground for cooperation. For example, at the Vatican's historic women's conference, I drew upon the Bodhisattva ideal when engaging with Catholic participants, focusing on shared values of compassion and service to humanity. The mutual respect fostered in such exchanges reinforces the interconnectedness celebrated in Indra's Net.

The Bodhisattva Path also finds practical expression in educational

initiatives. The Dharma Chinese course in Bhutan, for instance, was more than a language program; it was an opportunity to bridge cultural and doctrinal divides. By enabling students to understand Buddhist traditions beyond their own, the course embodied the Bodhisattva ideal of fostering wisdom and harmony for the benefit of all.

In intrareligious contexts, the Bodhisattva Path serves as a unifying framework for navigating doctrinal differences within Buddhism. As chair of the International Lay Buddhist Forum (ILBF), I witnessed the transformative power of this principle in fostering unity among diverse Buddhist traditions. Conferences in Japan, Indonesia, and Thailand provided platforms for dialogue and collaboration, emphasizing the shared aspiration of alleviating suffering and promoting peace. By embodying the Bodhisattva Path, these gatherings demonstrated the potential of intrareligious understanding to contribute to global harmony.

#### **XIV. UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY: LESSONS FROM INTERFAITH DIALOGUES**

Interfaith dialogue is a powerful tool for building bridges across religious and cultural divides. Each tradition offers unique insights into the human experience, enriching the collective understanding of our shared existence. My journey has revealed that such exchanges are not only about finding commonalities but also about embracing and celebrating differences as opportunities for growth.

For instance, participating in Europe's largest Muslim gathering illuminated the shared spiritual aspirations that transcend religious boundaries. Introducing Amitabha Buddha and chanting the Green Tara mantra to a predominantly Muslim audience was an act of mutual respect and curiosity. Their warm response underscored the potential of interfaith dialogue to dissolve stereotypes and foster genuine connections.

Similarly, engaging with Protestant Christianity in Taiwan deepened my appreciation for the universal values of love, compassion, and community. The dialogues at the Presbyterian church provided a platform to share Buddhist perspectives while learning from Christian teachings, creating a space for mutual enrichment. These experiences affirm that interfaith dialogue is not about compromise but about co-creating a richer tapestry of understanding and cooperation.

The Guan Gong pilgrimage further highlighted the unifying power of shared rituals and cultural heritage. Despite differing religious affiliations, participants came together to honor a common figure revered across Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions. Such experiences demonstrate that unity does not require uniformity; instead, it thrives on the recognition and celebration of diversity.

#### **XV. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FOSTERING GLOBAL HARMONY**

While interfaith and intrareligious dialogues hold immense potential, they are not without challenges. Misunderstandings, historical grievances, and

doctrinal differences can create barriers to meaningful engagement. However, these challenges also present opportunities for growth and transformation.

One of the key challenges is overcoming biases and stereotypes. Engaging with traditions different from one's own requires an open mind and a willingness to question preconceived notions. For example, at the Ahmadiyya Muslim gathering, I encountered questions about Buddhism that reflected common misconceptions. Addressing these questions with patience and clarity not only dispelled misunderstandings but also strengthened mutual respect and curiosity.

Another challenge is navigating power dynamics in interfaith settings. Ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly those from marginalized communities, is essential for creating equitable dialogues. This principle was evident in the ILBF conferences, where efforts were made to include diverse Buddhist voices, particularly lay practitioners and women, in shaping the agenda.

Despite these challenges, the opportunities for fostering global harmony are immense. By drawing on shared values and cultivating empathy, interfaith and intrareligious dialogues can transform conflict into collaboration. The principles of Indra's Net, Zhong Dao, and the Bodhisattva Path offer valuable frameworks for navigating these complexities, emphasizing interconnectedness, balance, and compassion.

## **XVI. CONCLUSION: TOWARD A WORLD OF PEACE AND INCLUSIVITY**

The journey of bridging faiths and traditions is not a linear path but a dynamic process of growth, learning, and mutual enrichment. Rooted in the Buddhist principles of Indra's Net, Zhong Dao, and the Bodhisattva Path, this paper has explored the potential of interfaith and intrareligious dialogues to foster global harmony and sustainable development.

From Hawai'i to Bhutan, the Vatican to Taiwan, England to Malaysia and Thailand, my experiences have illuminated the transformative power of dialogue in bridging cultural and spiritual divides. These encounters reaffirm that unity and inclusivity are not abstract ideals but practical imperatives for addressing the challenges of our interconnected world.

As we navigate an increasingly complex global landscape, the wisdom of ancient traditions offers valuable guidance. By embracing the principles of interconnectedness, balance, and compassion, we can co-create a world that honors diversity while striving for collective well-being. In doing so, we not only fulfill the aspirations of our respective traditions but also contribute to the shared goal of a peaceful, inclusive, and harmonious world.

## REFERENCES

- Chang, C. Y.-I. (2024). Smiling to foster a culture of encounter. In Dicastero per il Dialogo Interreligioso (Ed.), *Acta Pro Dialogo: Women building a culture of encounter* (No. 3, pp. 185–190). Vatican City: Dicastero per il Dialogo Interreligioso.
- Cleary, T. (1993). *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*. Shambhala Publications.
- Cook, F. (1977). *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*. Penn State University Press.
- Cornille, C. (2013). *The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue*. Crossroad Publishing.
- Dicastero per il Dialogo Interreligioso. (2024). *Acta Pro Dialogo: Women building a culture of encounter* (No. 3). Vatican City: Dicastero per il Dialogo Interreligioso.
- Francis. (2020). *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Vatican Press.
- Gethin, R. (1998). *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press.
- Gunaratana, B. (2002). *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Harvey, P. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion.
- Li, Y., & Hsieh, W. (2021). *AI and Education: Transformative Technologies in Learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Loy, D. (2018). *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. Wisdom Publications.
- Shantideva. (1996). *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (P. Crosby & A. Skilton, Trans.). Shambhala Publications. (Original work published 8th century).
- Thich Nhat Hanh. (1995). *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. Riverhead Books.
- Tsomo, K. L. (Ed.). (2004). *Bridging worlds: Buddhist women's voices across generations*. Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women.
- Williams, P. (2009). *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. Routledge.
- YouTube. (2024, January 1). *Amitabha Buddha and Green Tara mantra at Europe's largest Muslim gathering* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=4HwOmls9gYs>





# DHARMA AS CULTURE

Dr. Märt Läänemets\*

## Abstract:

In this paper, the meaning and understanding of the central concept of Buddhism -Dharma - will be discussed in light of contemporary humanities and cultural theories, with an emphasis on ethical and humanistic aspects. The author's position is that, despite the multitude of interpretations of Dharma in modern Buddhology and the lack of consensus on how to correctly and uniformly translate this word, we ought to follow the path of traditional Buddhism and strive to develop a comprehensive theory and understanding of Dharma that aligns well with our cultural concepts. Following the semiotic theory applied by the Estonian scholar Linnart Mäll in the 1970s-80s in Buddhist studies, a new approach is proposed. This approach suggests how the Western concepts of text and culture, with their multiple aspects yet a single core meaning, can be implemented to create a working model for better understanding and practicing Buddhist Dharma in modern times, particularly in traditionally non-Buddhist societies.

**Keywords:** *Dharma, text, culture, semiotic theory, Linnart Mäll, Buddhology.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dharma<sup>1</sup> is undoubtedly the central and most important concept of Buddhism - its core and foundation. We can even say that Dharma is Buddhism and Buddhism is Dharma - more precisely, BuddhaDharma or BauddhaDharma, meaning "the Dharma of Buddhists," as it is sometimes distinguished, in the broader Indian context, from other Dharmas or thought systems that originated and spread on Indian soil. Dharma is the central component in the Triratna and Trisharana formulas: Buddha - Dharma - Saṃgha.

The importance of Dharma dates back to the very beginning - the starting point of Buddhism. When the Buddha delivered his first sermon on the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the cessation of suffering, he declared

---

\* Research Fellow, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences; Board Member, Estonian Institute of Buddhism; Honorary Member, Estonian Oriental Society.

<sup>1</sup> Thorough the text, I use the Sanskrit form of the word - Dharma.

that everything he had taught pertained to entirely new, previously unheard Dharmas: “The eye arose, knowledge arose, understanding arose, cognition arose, light arose in me regarding these Dharmas not heard before. (*ti me ... dhammessu pubbe ananussutesu cakkhum udapādi, ñānaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*)”<sup>2</sup>

At that very moment, the first-ever transmission of the new Dharma took place when the disciple Koṇḍañña received it and immediately understood it, as described in the text:

And while this explanation was being given, the dustless, stainless Dharma eye arose in Venerable Koṇḍañña: “Whatever is subject (Dharma) to origination is also subject (Dharma) to cessation.” (*Imasmiṃ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmiṃ bhaññamāne āasmato Koṇḍaññassa virajaṃ vitamalaṃ dhammacakkhum udapādi: yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbam taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*)

In the Buddhist tradition, it is known as the act of setting in motion the Wheel of Dharma (*Dharmacakrapravartana*):

At Varanasi, in the Deer Grove at Isipatana, the Bhagavat set in motion the supreme Wheel of Dharma, which cannot be set in motion by any recluse, Brahmin, god, devil, God Brahma, or anyone else in the world. (*Etaṃ bhagavatā bārāṇasiyaṃ miga-dāye anuttaraṃ dhamma-cakkaṃ pavattitaṃ appaṭivattiyaṃ samaṇena vā brāhmaṇena vā devena vā māreṇa vā brahmunā vā kenaci vā lokasmiṃ ti.*)

The importance and fundamental meaning of Dharma were again emphasized by the Buddha in his very last teaching. According to Buddhist tradition and scripture, just before his passing into Parinirvāṇa, the Buddha gave his final instruction to Ānanda: “That, Ānanda, which I have taught and made known to you as the Dharma and the Vinaya will be your teacher after my passing (*Yo vo, Ānanda, mayā dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto, so vo mam-accayena satthā*).”<sup>3</sup>

These few excerpts from the Buddha’s very first and very last lessons are presented here to introduce the following discussion on how the concept of Dharma is understood, interpreted, and transmitted in modern Buddhological discourse, and to explore a possible approach that may contribute to further deepening and generalizing the understanding of this fundamental concept, which has no valid and generally accepted equivalent in Western thought and cultural tradition. In the author’s view, without the creation of such a universal and widely accepted interpretative model, we cannot be certain that the core message of Buddhist doctrine and its method of transmission will be realized in contemporary culture and thought in an adequate manner, free from distortion and misunderstanding.

When the Buddha began to proclaim his exploration of how the human

<sup>2</sup> SN 56. 11. Here and below, excerpts from the scripture are in my translation unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> DN 16.

mind and all of existence fundamentally work and how to eliminate existential distress, he had to make himself understood within his own time and cultural environment. In this situation, he had no choice but to use the philosophical and scientific vocabulary of ancient India that was in use at the time. He chose the word Dharma, which had long been widely used in Indian culture and society, bearing meanings such as “order,” “norm,” “law,” and “truth,” perhaps making it familiar and understandable to all, and made it the central concept of his teachings. By adopting Dharma, however, the Buddha infused the word with new content and meaning, allowing him to claim that the Dharmas he was exploring were new and previously unheard of. Everything he taught was the Dharma, or Dharmas in the plural - meaning that every word he uttered was a Dharma.

The Buddha himself probably did not consider it important to define what Dharma is or to philosophize about it. What mattered to him was using it to guide people on the path to freedom from distress and True Awakening. It was only later, in the abhidharmic systems, that Dharmas became subjects of definition, classification, systematization, and theorization regarding their meaning and nature. However, this also led to the diversification of the meanings of the concept of Dharma and its ambiguity. Nevertheless, this one central word and concept – Dharma – remained, and for Buddhists, there was apparently no contradiction in its multiple uses.

When Buddhism came to the West in modern times - first through casual contacts, then through academic research and translations, and eventually as a new (in the Western context) religious movement – intercultural dialogue became necessary to make Buddhism understandable to Western people through the conceptual system and mindset of Western culture.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, the same or a very similar process that had occurred during the arrival and adaptation of Buddhism in Asian cultures (Southeast Asia, China and the Far East, Tibet, and Inner Asia) was repeated. The crucial challenge then, as now in the West, was and still is how to translate the conceptual system of Buddhism into another language within a cultural environment vastly different from the original Buddhist one. In China, for example, the translation process took nearly a millennium; in Tibet, several hundred years. In this light, we can acknowledge that the cultural translation of Buddhism in the West is still at a relatively early stage, and a standardized conceptual system and terminology are still emerging. The problem is even more complex due to the linguistic diversity of the West. Although English is the dominant language - the *lingua franca* - in Western Buddhism, as it is in communication in general in the contemporary world, many other languages are also being used for Buddhist scripture translation. In each of these languages, conceptual systems must be developed that accurately convey the content and meaning of Buddhist teachings - the Dharma - while also being interlinguistically compatible.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> On this, see Batchelor (1994).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that Linnart Mäll (1938–2010), a Buddhist scholar from Estonia

All of this also applies to the translation and interpretation of the concept of Dharma and the understanding of its meaning and usage, both in the Western academic tradition of Buddhist studies and in Western Buddhism in general. For more than a century, Western scholars have sought a solution to the “mystery of Dharma”: how the same word and concept can appear in so many different contexts and meanings, and how to adequately translate it into English and other Western languages. Is it even possible to understand it in a single, unified way, or is such polysemy inherently encoded into it from the very beginning? If so, wouldn't it be entirely justified to translate this word in different ways, using various terms in our languages to convey its content and meaning? Yet the question remains: why does the same word, Dharma, appear in different contexts in the original Buddhist languages? Is it truly impossible to find an equivalent term - or if not a single word, at least a coherent interpretative model - to express and present what Dharma ultimately is?

This paper discusses these issues and attempts to introduce a possible solution to the question of the content and meaning of the concept of Dharma. The first part provides an overview of speculations on Dharma by a few authors from the last century. The second part presents the basic tenets of Linnart Mäll's semiotic theory of dharma, along with some elaborations by the author, which could serve as a roadmap for addressing the controversial question of whether the term and concept of dharma should be understood as plural or unified in meaning.

## II. OVERVIEW OF SOME COMMON THESES ON DHARMA IN MODERN BUDDHOLOGY

Apprehending the true meaning of the concept of dharma has been - and remains - a crucial issue in modern Buddhology. The generally accepted view today seems to be that dharma is an ambiguous, polysemantic term that must be understood differently in different contexts. This has led to a situation in which modern translations and studies present a multitude of different words to render the original Buddhist term dharma, such as “mental event,” “thing,” or “phenomenon” in the abhidharmic context, and “law,” “truth,” “doctrine,” or “religion” when referring to the Buddha's teachings and normative rules. The translation and interpretation of compound words where Dharma appears as the initial element - such as *dharmatā*, *dharmakāya*, and *dharmadhātu* - make the situation even more obscure. The unresolved question is whether this ambiguity of meaning is inherent in original Buddhism or whether it reflects modern interpreters' inability to grasp the true and singular meaning of dharma. The fact that ancient translators, such as the Chinese and Tibetans, strictly adhered to the rule of translating dharma consistently with a single word - 法 (*fǎ*) in

---

- whose thoughts on the understanding and interpretation of dharma will be explored later in this paper - strongly expressed in one of his last short papers that Buddhism in Europe should develop in multiple national languages, each with its own terminology. Despite English serving as a *lingua franca*, he argued that it should not be the sole or dominant language of Buddhism in the West (Mäll, 2012).

Chinese and མཐོག་ (chos) in Tibetan - further raises doubts about the correctness of understanding dharma as an inherently polysemantic entity.

Modern interpretations of Dharma vary greatly, depending firstly on the specific part of Buddhist doctrine or text being studied and secondly on the background and preferences of each scholar. As a result, contemporary Buddhology suffers from a lack of a comprehensive theory of Dharma. Although some attempts have been made to generalize the modern understanding of the concept, these efforts are still in their early stages, and a consensus on the matter has yet to be reached.

If any consensus can be found in the discourse of contemporary Buddhist studies, it lies in the recognition by most scholars that the word dharma has different meanings in various usages within the vast Buddhist text corpus, with each meaning strongly depending on the context in which Dharma appears - whether in a full text, a paragraph, or even a single sentence. Such an approach is justified by arguments that maintain that the polysemy of the word Dharma is inherent in original Buddhist thought and that the ancient Buddhist thinkers - both the authors and compilers of the texts - consciously employed this word to denote quite different things.

One of the earliest studies in which the polysemy of Dharma as a fundamental philosophical concept in Buddhist Abhidharma was identified is the seminal work *The Problems of Buddhist Philosophy* by Otto Rosenberg (1888–1919), a brilliant young Russian scholar of Baltic German origin who passed away at the early age of 31, soon after publishing his book.<sup>6</sup> Rosenberg distinguished seven principal meanings of Dharma: quality, attribute, predicate; substantial carrier, the transcendental substrate of a single element of conscious life; element, i.e., a component of conscious life; *nirvāṇa*, i.e., Dharma, the object of the Buddha's teaching; absolute, truly real, etc.; Buddha's teaching, religion; thing, object, or phenomenon.<sup>7</sup>

In his further analysis, however, he mainly focuses on the second and third meanings as the central ones in the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu, which was the primary source of his research. Although his study was largely based on this single text, such an understanding of dharma remained the orthodox one for decades, at least in Russian/ Soviet Buddhology. Rosenberg's division of the meanings of dharma circulated from work to work as a proven framework and was not subjected to further discussion.

Rosenberg's teacher, Fyodor (Theodore) Stcherbatsky (1866–1942), who outlived his student, continued the latter's research on the philosophical interpretation of the concept of dharma. In 1923, he published a seminal work, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma"*, in which he acknowledged the great variety of meanings attributed to dharma but concluded that only one truly mattered: Dharmas (in plural)

<sup>6</sup> On Rosenberg's life and work, see Kollmar-Paulenz (1998), p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Rosenberg (1918), p. 83.

as the “elements of existence” governed by strict causal relations. He stated: “Although the separate elements (Dharmas) are not connected, either by pervading stuff in space or by duration in time, there is, nevertheless, a connection between them; their manifestations in time, as well as in space, are subject to defined laws, the laws of causation. Thus, it is that the fundamental idea of Buddhism - the conception of a plurality of separate elements - includes the idea of the most strict causality controlling their operation in the world process.”<sup>8</sup> He understood Dharmas metaphysically as ultimate, indivisible elements, but ultimately, he was unable to fully define dharma, admitting: “What is Dharma? It is inconceivable! It is subtle! No one will ever be able to tell what its real nature is! It is transcendental.”<sup>9</sup>

In Western European Buddhist scholarship, from its early stages, the tendency to understand dharma as a multi-semantic and context-dependent concept took root. Following this approach, both early and contemporary scholars have developed various categories and lists of meanings for Dharma. Below, the key works on this topic are referenced.

In their 1920 study, Magdalene and Wilhelm Geiger categorized the meanings of Dharma or Dhamma in Pāli texts into four sections: Dhamma as “law” (*gesetz*), “teaching” (*lehre*), “truth” (*wahrheit*), and “thing” (*dinge*).<sup>10</sup>

One of the first attempts to establish a universal definition of the concept of Dharma was made by Walter Liebenthal (1886–1982). In a 1961 article, Liebenthal contributed to the modern understanding of Dharma, stating that it could be interpreted as “elements of image” and proposing the term “position” as a suitable equivalent in European languages. He explained: “Position is also a word in the Scripture (or image) of a Teacher and may be rejected by other Teachers when it does not fit in their Scripture. Thus, Gotama Buddha rejected the position of God (*Īśvara*), as it does not lead one to Liberation.”<sup>11</sup>

Ten years later, Anthony Warder, reflecting on a Pāli source, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, concludes: “It could, of course, be suggested that any Dhamma could be regarded as a thought-content insofar as it could be conceived as an idea or concept, including physical phenomena.”<sup>12</sup>

In 2004, Rupert Gethin summarized the scholarly consensus on the meanings of Dharma and provided a list of six fundamental interpretations: (1) the Buddha’s teaching; (2) good conduct or behavior aligned with the Buddha’s precepts and cultivated through meditation; (3) the truth realized through the Buddhist path; (4) the intrinsic nature or quality that something possesses; (5) the natural law or order of things as discerned by the Buddha; and (6) a fundamental mental or physical state or entity, the plurality of which -

<sup>8</sup> Stcherbatsky (1923), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Geiger and Geiger (1920), p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> Liebenthal (1961), p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Warder (1971), p. 280.



especially in *abhidhamma* texts - is conceived as constituting the “reality” of the world or experience.<sup>13</sup> He further defines Dhammas as follows: “We can define Dhammas in this final sense as basic qualities, both mental and physical. When we consider this particular understanding of what a Dhamma is alongside the definition of the world or experience in its entirety (*sabbam*) through the five aggregates or the twelve sense spheres, we can take this one step further and say that Dhammas are the fundamental qualities - both mental and physical - that, in some sense, constitute the totality of experience or reality.”<sup>14</sup>

Most recently, in 2011, Alf Hiltebeitel compiled a list of the most common translations of Dharma in the plural - though far from exhaustive - including: “truths,” “laws,” “states,” “merits,” “practices,” “phenomena,” “things,” “elements,” “conditions,” “factors,” “data,” “qualities,” “forces,” “regularities,” “identifiabls,” “noeta,” “irreducibles,” “mind objects,” and “ideas.”<sup>15</sup> He further notes that Dharma in the singular is typically translated as “truth,” “teaching,” or “doctrine.” Finally, he summarizes: “One of the more fundamental abhidharma classifications divides Dharmas into physical and mental categories. Some of these emphasize one dimension over the other, while others attempt to integrate both. A particularly useful translation that bridges these aspects is mental events, as it applies across all Buddhist schools in the examination and clarification of Dharmas (*plural*) during meditation.”<sup>16</sup>

The following conclusions can be drawn to summarize this section: (1) The ambiguity of the term Dharma in Buddhist doctrines and sources remains a widely accepted consensus among scholars. (2) In the context of *Abhidharma*, however, there is a tendency to identify a central or common meaning of Dharma, primarily related to the content of the mind and human cognition. Various scholars have proposed interpretations such as “a component of conscious life” (Rosenberg), “(transcendental) elements of existence with strict causal relations between them” (Stcherbatsky), “position” or “elements of image” (Liebenthal), “thought-content” (Warder), “basic qualities, both mental and physical, that in some sense constitute experience or reality in its entirety” (Gethin), and “mental event” (Hiltebeitel). (3) However, current scholarly approaches have yet to establish a conceptual “bridge” that connects the epistemological abhidharmic meaning of Dharma (Dharmas in plural) with its doctrinal and moral significance as the Buddha’s teaching (Dharma in singular).

### III. TOWARDS A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF DHARMA

In the late 1960s, Estonian Buddhist scholar Linnart Mäll (1938–2010) formulated his research credo in the field of Oriental studies in general and Buddhist studies in particular, which he believed should serve as a guiding principle for contemporary Oriental studies: “The dialogue between East

<sup>13</sup> Cited from Gethin (2009), p. 93 – 94.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> Hiltebeitel (2011), p. 126.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.,

and West that has reached synthesis leads us to understand what it is that the Orient can tell us, so that we can use its achievements as an important component of our own culture.” Furthermore, he emphasized, “Oriental studies should therefore attempt to create models enabling a new approach to the understanding of Western phenomena.”<sup>17</sup>

In Buddhist studies, he saw the primary concern as the creation of “central meta-concepts which can be used to describe Buddhism in strict compliance with original ideas of the East.”<sup>18</sup> In the same article, Mäll proposed two such meta-concepts - lysiology for the “doctrine of liberation” (*mokṣa* Dharma) and zerology for *śūnyavāda* - which, he assumed, could serve as key concepts in the descriptive language of future Buddhist studies. Although he rarely used these terms in his later works, his fundamental credo remained unchanged: to develop a working methodology for studying and explaining Buddhism, making it comprehensible to modern audiences, and integrating it into contemporary culture as a functional cultural factor.

Being in close contact and collaborating with the emerging Tartu-Moscow school of cultural semiotics - led by the distinguished literary and cultural scholar Yuri Lotman (1922 – 1993), a professor at the University of Tartu,<sup>19</sup> Mäll found the innovative semiotic approach, with its key concepts of “text,” “context,” and “secondary modeling system” as core elements of culture, to be highly suitable for Buddhist studies as well.

The main theoretical position and methodological foundation of the semiotic school is the assertion that “text is an operational basis of culture”<sup>20</sup> and that “text and context are mutually dependent.” This perspective is crucial for understanding how culture functions, how different cultures interconnect, and the mechanisms of intercultural translation and communication. As Lotman stated:

Context is co-text (con-text); it cannot exist before text, and just as every text depends on context, context is also dependent on text. The act of communication is an act of translation, an act of transformation: text transforms language and the addressee, it establishes contact between the addresser and the addressee, and it even transforms the addresser. Moreover, text transforms itself and ceases to be identical to itself.<sup>21</sup>

We can summarize the semiotic approach in the following way: A text, as understood and treated within the semiotic paradigm, is not merely a physical object with a limited scope (such as a paper or a book) and a fixed form (such as a written text), but rather any cultural phenomenon - a sign system arranged in

---

<sup>17</sup> Cited from Mäll (2005), p. 16 – 17. The original version of the paper was published in Russian in 1967.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> About the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, see, e.g. Velmezova (2015); Pilshchikov and Trunin (2016).

<sup>20</sup> Pilshchikov and Trunin (2016), p. 388.

<sup>21</sup> Pilshchikov and Trunin (2016), p. 388.

a particular way and continuously interacting with other texts and the human mind, which itself can only be expressed in the form of texts. Human culture as a whole is inherently a dynamic network of texts, with Buddhist Dharma being one among them. At certain times and in certain regions, an unexpected symbiosis of cultures may occur, creating entirely new conditions for further development. As Lotman stated:

An aggregate of cultures with certain common codes forms a cultural areal, where intra-areal exchange is always more intensive. Particularly significant for comparative studies are geographic regions where cultures of different types have coexisted and maintained close spatial communication over extended periods.<sup>22</sup>

In a later work, Yuri Lotman elaborated on the concept of the semiosphere and provided an extensive definition of it:

The fundamental unit of semiosis, the smallest operational mechanism, is not an individual language but the entire semiotic space of a given culture - what we refer to as the semiosphere. This semiosphere both results from and enables cultural development. At every stage of its evolution, it interacts with texts from external cultures that previously lay beyond its boundaries. These intrusions, whether individual texts or entire cultural layers, influence and reshape the internal structure of the culture's "world picture." Within any synchronic section of the semiosphere, different languages at varying stages of development come into conflict. Some texts exist within languages not their own, while the necessary codes for their interpretation may be absent. To illustrate, imagine a museum hall displaying exhibits from various historical periods, accompanied by inscriptions in both known and unknown languages, decoding instructions, curatorial explanations, tour plans, and visitor guidelines. In this hall, tour guides and visitors engage with these elements, forming a single interconnected system. This serves as a metaphor for the semiosphere. Crucially, all elements within the semiosphere exist in dynamic, ever-changing relationships rather than static ones. This is particularly evident in traditions that have persisted over time. Unlike biological evolution, cultural evolution does not follow a straightforward, linear trajectory; the term "evolution" itself can be misleading in this context.<sup>23</sup>

Building on semiotic theory, which adopts a broad and functional understanding of "text" as a central concept, Linnart Mäll proposed a new approach to the concept of Dharma in Buddhism. His model sought to unify the two fundamental meanings of Dharma - *Abhidharmic* (Dharmas as elements, qualities, or mental events) and doctrinal (Dharma as the Buddha's teaching, Truth, or Law) - while resolving the contradictions between different interpretations.

<sup>22</sup> Cited from Pilshchikov and Trunin (2016), p. 373.

<sup>23</sup> Lotman (1990), p. 125 – 127.

He found that, much like how semiotic theory redefined the interaction between culture and text - viewing culture as a compendium of interacting texts of varying scope, level, and modality that integrate human consciousness and its content - the Buddhist theory of Dharma could be interpreted similarly. The semiotic approach aligns well with the *Abhidharmic* understanding of Dharmas as intertwined elements within the mind-reality continuum, as well as with Dharma as the Buddhist doctrine, which is represented in individual texts and, collectively, in all Buddhist texts. Together, these texts shape Buddhist culture, which, in turn, influences the adept's mind and its content.

Mäll stated:

If a term that has had a specific meaning in a particular cultural context cannot be interpreted unambiguously - meaning, we cannot find an adequate equivalent to translate it - one possible explanation is that our culture has never possessed a word corresponding to it. However, another explanation is also possible: while the word may exist, the cultural context necessary for transforming it into a precise term does not. We believe that, as a result of the work of the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, such a context has now been established, and within this framework, there exists a term that functions in a way similar to Dharma in Buddhist texts. That term is text. A Buddhist teaching is a text, which may manifest in written form, as speech, an inner monologue, gestures, facial expressions, or even objects in nature. However, a phenomenon in itself is not a text; for instance, a book only becomes a text when someone reads it.<sup>24</sup>

Mäll's early research and analysis of Buddhist terminology were rooted in an in-depth study of the *Mahāyāna* foundational text, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, which provided the basis for his later discoveries in this field and shaped his new integrated approach to the concept of Dharma.<sup>25</sup> In essence, according to his refined interpretation, Dharma is both an element of consciousness and a word of scripture - an element of a text. The following is Mäll's elaborated definition:

In my view, Dharma is both a text and an element of a text, which, in turn, is also an element of the mind - since the mind manifests itself solely through acts of text generation. This idea can be extended even further: Dharma can be regarded as a text of any length, ranging from a single sound or letter (such as "a"), a pause, major *sūtras* like the *Avatamsaka* or *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, to the entire body of Buddhist literature, encompassing the Buddha's teaching as a whole.<sup>26</sup>

According to Linnart Mäll's approach, a defining characteristic of Dharma-as-text is its ability to generate new texts, a tendency he describes as a text-

<sup>24</sup> Mäll (2005), p. 172 – 173.

<sup>25</sup> See: Mäll (2005), p. 30–53; Läänemets (2012), 67 – 8.

<sup>26</sup> Mäll (2005), p. 9.

generating mechanism. This inherent mechanism is also reflected in the title of the Buddha's first recorded sermon - *Dharmacakrapravartana*, which Mäll interprets as follows:

The title *Dharmacakrapravartana* is a compound word consisting of three stems: *Dharma* (Pāli: *Dhamma*), *cakra* (*cakka*), and *pravartana* (*pavattana*). One possible translation is "Putting the Dharma wheel into motion" or "Starting up the Dharma wheel." However, given that the word "wheel" in many languages - including Pāli and Sanskrit - also signifies a moving mechanism, and considering that Dharma can also mean "text," the title of the *sūtra* could alternatively be translated as "Starting up a text-generating mechanism."<sup>27</sup>

In this context, Mäll highlights two aspects of Dharma-as-text: the external text, which refers to a text fixed in some written form (e.g., a book), and the internal text, which represents a state of mind.

Since the mind in Buddhism - more precisely, states of mind, as the "pure" mind is considered indescribable - is also regarded as a text, an "internal text," the formation of a new state of mind can be understood as the creation of a new internal text. In this process, the external text - which encompasses not only written texts but also oral teachings, gestures, and facial expressions of the Teacher - serves as a stimulus that activates the text-generation mechanism of the internal text. Occasionally, an internal text becomes fixed, either through mnemonic techniques or in written form, leading to the creation of a new external text.<sup>28</sup>

He summarizes his reasoning as follows: Interpreting Dharma as both a text and a text-generating mechanism allows for the integration of all its meanings, which have traditionally been considered separately - such as an element of existence, *nirvāṇa*, or the Buddha.<sup>29</sup>

In the final stage of his interpretation of Dharma, Mäll reaches an even higher level of generalization, viewing Dharma as culture. He asserts that this new interpretation does not exclude or invalidate previous definitions, stating, "...because culture can also be considered as a text in its broadest sense."<sup>30</sup> To further support this claim, it is necessary to reproduce a longer passage from Mäll's original text:

Everything that I previously interpreted as the smallest element of a text - and that most Buddhist scholars after Stcherbatsky still regard as an element of existence - can now also be understood, simply put, as an element of culture. Modern psychology has widely recognized that a person's outer shape (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), and consciousness (*viññāna*) are, to some extent, shaped by a specific cultural state. When

<sup>27</sup> Mäll(2006), p. 181.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>29</sup> Mäll (2005), p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

influenced by Buddhist culture (buddhaDharma), these aspects manifest differently than when shaped by another culture (Dharma). If a person grows up in an environment entirely devoid of culture (*adharmika*), such as among wild animals, it would not be logical (*yukti*) to refer to their rūpa, vedanā, etc., as Dharmas, meaning elements of culture.<sup>31</sup>

Linnart Mäll's final analysis finds strong support in a stanza from Nāgārjuna's well-known verse treatise, The Staff of Wisdom (*Prajñādaṇḍa*): Eating, sleeping, fear and sexual intercourse/ are common to men and animals./ *Dharma* is the distinguishing feature of men,/ without *Dharma* they would equal animals. (*āhāranidrābhayamaithunaṃ ca/ sāmānyam etat paśubhir narāṇām/ dharmo narāṇām adhiko viśeṣo/ dharmena hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ*).<sup>32</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we can distinguish three levels of Dharma as a text: (1) Dharma as an element of a text (such as a word, concept, or symbol); (2) Dharma as a structured text in a specific form and scope (such as a letter, book, or speech); and (3) Dharma as a system of texts or as culture itself. At the first level, Dharma corresponds to the abhidharmic presentation of lists and definitions of fundamental terms in the Buddha's teaching. At the second level, Dharma refers to Buddhist texts and scriptures, including *sūtras* and other writings. At the third level, Dharma represents Buddhist culture as a whole or Buddhist discourse - Buddha-Dharma in its entirety - embodied in the *Dharmakāya*, the body of texts (corpus scriptorum).

*Dharma(s)* can be understood as both an external text, represented through signs and symbols, and an internal text, manifesting as states of consciousness, thoughts, or mental events. Furthermore, Dharma can be defined as both a text and a text-generating mechanism - *Dharmacakrapravartana* - signifying the setting in motion of the wheel of *Dharma* or the activation of its functioning.

We can also trace the evolution of the meaning(s) of *Dharma* as follows:

Buddhist discourse (Buddha's gospel, *buddhavacana*); Every particular discourse (*sūtra*); Every significant word within the discourse (Abhidharmic usage); Thoughts (on Dharma), mental events arising from contemplation of Buddhist Dharma(s); *Dharmatā* - "Dharmaness" - the perception of all existence as Dharma (Buddhist semiosis); *Dharmakāya* - the collective body of all Buddhist Dharmas (texts, elements of Buddhist culture); *Dharmadhātu* - the sphere of Dharma (Buddhist semiosphere); The contrast between *Dharmadhātu* (realm of Dharma) and *lokadhātu* (realm of phenomena) - not as objective realities but as different states of consciousness and levels of understanding.

In the Buddhist system, we find a comprehensive and functional theory and method - closely analogous to modern semiotic theory and method - for describing culture through its elements, or Dharmas. Thus, Dharma can

<sup>31</sup> Mäll (2005), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Prajñādaṇḍa*, p. 98.



be understood and applied universally as an “element of culture,” bearing a certain resemblance to Lotman’s theory of the semiosphere. Within Buddhism (Buddhist culture), this system was fully developed, with its elements (Dharmas) clearly defined, described, evaluated, and classified. Moreover, universal guidelines were established on how to apply them in Buddhist training (meditation) and education for soteriological or lysiological purposes.

The question remains open: Could modern semiotics and cultural theory also evolve - or be developed - in a direction similar to the Buddhist Dharma theory, incorporating the element of awakening or liberation?

Buddhas appear from the Dharmaness;/ And the Dharma bodies (text corpora) are the guides./ But the Dharmaness is not comprehensible;/ It is not possible to comprehend it. (*Dharmato buddhā draṣṭavyā Dharmakāyā hi nāyakāḥ/ Dharmatā ca na vijñeyā na sā śakyā vijānitum*).<sup>33</sup>

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

*Āṅguttara Nikāya*, Ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1885 - 1900. Tr. F.L.Woodward and E.M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1932 - 1995.

*Dhammapada*, Ed. S.Sumangala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K. R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.

*Dīgha Nikāya*, Ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J.E.Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.

*Khuddakapāṭha*, Ed. Ven. Ñāṇamoli, *The Minor Readings and the Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, PTS, London, 2015.

Batchelor, Stephen (1994), *The Awakening of the West*. Berkeley (California): Parallax Press.

Geiger, Wilhelm & Geiger, Magdalene (1920), *Pāli Dhamma vornehmlich in der kanonischen Literatur*, München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Gethin, Rupert (2009), *He Who Sees Dhamma Sees Dhammas: Dhamma in Early Buddhism*, in *Dharma. Studies in its Semantic, Cultural and Religious History*, ed. by Patric Olivell, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Hiltebeitel, Alf (2011), *Dharma. Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative*. Oxford University Press.

Kollmar-Paulenz, Karenina (ed.) (1998), *Otto Ottonovich Rosenberg and his Contribution to Buddhology in Russia*, Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 41.

Läänemets, Märt (2012), *Linnart Mäll’s Contribution to Mahāyāna Studies*,

<sup>33</sup> The *Diamond Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*).

in Märt Läänemets and Teet Toome (eds.), *Studies in Early Mahāyāna Literature and Art*. - Studia Orientalia Tartuensia, Series Nova, Vol. 5, p. 11–31.

Liebenthal, Walther (1961), *Ding und Dharma*, Asiatische Studien, Bd. XIV, p. 3–25.

Lotman, Yuri (1990), *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. (Shukman, Ann, trans.; Eco, Umberto, intr.) London, New York: I. B. Tauris.

Mäll, Linnart (2005), *Studies in Aṣṭasārikā Prajñāpāramitā and Other Essays*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Mäll, Linnart (2006), *Thus Began New Dharma*, in Manfred L. G. Dietrich and Tarmo Kulmar (eds.), *The Significance of Base Texts for the Religious Identity* - Forschungen zur Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte, B. 40, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, p. 181–185.

Mäll, Linnart (2012), *Perspectives of Buddhism in the European Union and Especially in Estonia*, in Märt Läänemets and Teet Toome (eds.), *Studies in Early Mahāyāna Literature and Art*. - Studia Orientalia Tartuensia, Series Nova, vol. 5, p. 47–51.

Pilshchikov, Igor and Trunin, Mikhail (2016), *The Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics: A Transnational Perspective*. *Sign Systems Studies*, 44(3), p. 368–401.

Rosenberg, Otto (1918), = Розенберг, О. О. *Проблемы буддийской философии* (*The Problems of Buddhist Philosophy*). Петроград (Petrograd), 1918.

Stcherbatsky, Theodor (1923), *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma"*, London, 1923.

Velmezova, Ekaterina (ed.) (2015), *L'école sémiotique de Moscou-Tartu / Tartu-Moscou: Histoire, épistémologie, actualité* (*Revue Slavica Occitania* 40). Toulouse: LLA-CRÉATIS.

Warder, Anthony K. (1971), *Dharmas and Data*, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 272–295.

# UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Ang Choo Hong\*

## Abstract:

In a world fraught with division and environmental crises, fostering unity and inclusivity is essential for safeguarding human dignity and achieving sustainability. The Buddha Dhamma, particularly its emphasis on interconnectedness, provides transformative insights to address these challenges. This article explores the foundational principle of Buddhist interconnectedness and its relevance to inclusivity and unity. Some practical applications, such as eco-temples, ESG-compliant events like the Vesak celebrations in Malaysia, and the recognition of Vesak as a public holiday, are shown to illustrate the merger of the Buddha's teaching with modern societal demand. Additionally, this article articulates how the Buddha's teaching could serve as an alternative or complementary civilisational force that can mend a world torn by the clash of civilisations.

**Keywords:** *Interconnectedness, inclusiveness, ESG compliance, eco-temples, Vesak, clash of civilisations.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Humanity faces pressing challenges in the 21st century, including deep social divisions, growing inequality, and the escalating climate crisis. These issues not only threaten peace and sustainability but also undermine human dignity. To address these interconnected challenges, we must embrace inclusive frameworks that recognise our shared humanity and ecological interdependence.

Buddhism, with its timeless teachings on interconnectedness, offers profound guidance for achieving unity and inclusivity. Central to the Buddha Dhamma is the understanding that all beings are interdependent, as

---

\* Malaysia – Chairman of YBBM, President of BRSM, Advisor of BMSM, Executive Board Member of WFB, and Advisory Panel Member of INEB.

encapsulated in the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*). This realisation transcends individual ego and fosters a worldview of compassion, mutual respect, and shared responsibility.

This article explores how interconnectedness underpins unity and inclusivity, presents some tangible efforts, such as ESG-compliant events, eco-temples, and Vesak as a public holiday, as examples that illustrate the application of the Buddha's teaching in modern society, thus highlighting the transformative potential of Buddhist principles in promoting world peace and sustainability.

This article further examines the relevance of Buddhist insights to contemporary global challenges. It articulates the plausibility of Buddhism as an alternative or complementary civilisational force that can mend a world torn by the clash of civilisations.

## II. BUDDHIST PRINCIPLE OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS

### 2.1. Central position of the principle of interconnectedness

The central position of the principle of interconnectedness is best illustrated by an encounter between Sāriputta and the Ven. Assaji. The story took place before Sāriputta became one of the Buddha's disciples. At that time, Sāriputta and his close friend Moggallāna were wandering ascetics, searching for the truth. They had heard about the Buddha but had not yet met him. One day, Sāriputta encountered Ven. Assaji, one of the Buddha's first five disciples, and this encounter became a turning point in his spiritual journey.

Sāriputta, upon seeing Ven. Assaji was struck by the serenity and peaceful demeanour of the monk. Being an experienced seeker of truth, Sāriputta felt an immediate recognition of something profound in Assaji's presence. He approached Ven. Assaji, with great respect and inquired about the teachings that had led him to such peace.

Ven. Assaji, instead of giving a lengthy discourse, simply replied with a brief but powerful statement that encapsulated the essence of the Buddha's teaching. He said: "Of things that arise from a cause, that cause the Tathāgata has told; and how they cease to be, so said the great *Samana*".<sup>1</sup>

Upon hearing these verses, Sāriputta gained the first stage of sainthood, *Sotāpanna*. Herein, Ven. Assaji aptly summarised the Buddha's teaching into this simple yet profound statement of Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*).

### 2.2. Understanding interconnectedness

According to this teaching, all phenomena arise due to specific causes and conditions, and just as they arise, they also cease when their causes and conditions are no longer present.

Since all phenomena are interdependent and do not exist by themselves, there is, in reality, no self or "I". This concept of no-self, or *Anattā*, challenges the notion of a fixed, independent self. Instead, it emphasises that our

<sup>1</sup> *Mahā-Vagga* 1.23.1.

existence is shaped by our interactions with others and the environment. This understanding encourages individuals to transcend egoistic tendencies and embrace the interconnectedness of all life. This principle thus dismantles the illusion of separateness, fostering a sense of unity and mutual dependence among all beings. This concept of Anattā thus reinforces inclusivity by dismantling the barriers created by the delusion of “I” or ego and identity. By realising that all beings are interconnected, individuals are encouraged to treat each other with respect and compassion, irrespective of differences.

Furthermore, by understanding that the so-called “I” is dependent on others, we come to realise that in “I” there are “others”, and in “others” there is “I”, (much like the Yin-Yang symbol in Taoism, in which the black fish has a white eye, and the white fish has a black eye, and both hugging or complementing each other), we begin to see each other with greater empathy.

Furthermore, interconnectedness is not a metaphysical principle or a speculative theory but a practical foundation of Buddhist ethics. In spiritual practice, the recognition of how things arise and cease helps practitioners to understand the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), how it arises (*samudaya*), how it can cease (*nirodha*), and how to overcome it (*magga*) through ethical conduct (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). This teaching thus encourages actions that promote harmony and well-being.

The practice of Sila, for instance, emphasizes the concept of non-violence and the precept of no killing. The Buddha, in advising Rahula, said, “Do you feel pain and regard it as unpleasant for you? If you do, you should not commit any wrong act in secret or in open. If you do, you cannot escape from pain.”<sup>2</sup> This teaching is of great significance as it establishes the basic principle of morality based on reciprocity—which is but another ramification of the law of interconnectedness. (This is unlike morality based on some external authoritarian dictate). When the Buddha saw a group of children beating a snake, he admonished them: “Whosoever, seeking his happiness, harms with rods other beings, experiences no happiness hereafter.”<sup>3</sup> This is a basic concept of building peace.

Likewise, practices such as cultivating loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) arise from the recognition that one’s happiness is intertwined with the happiness of others. The cultivation of *mettā* and *karuṇā* plays a vital role in promoting inclusivity, as it nurtures empathy and goodwill toward all.

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*,<sup>4</sup> for instance, exhorts practitioners to extend loving-kindness to all beings, regardless of their differences: “Whatever beings there are — weak or strong, long or short, big, medium-sized or small, subtle or gross, (*Ye keci pāna bhūtatthi Tasāvā thāvarā vā anavasesā Dighā vā ye mahantā*

<sup>2</sup> MN 61.

<sup>3</sup> Dhṛp 131.

<sup>4</sup> Sn 1.8.

*vā Majjhimā-rassakānuka thūlā*), those visible or invisible, residing near or far, those that have come to be or have yet to come, (without exceptions) may all beings be joyful (*Ditthā vā yeva aditthā Ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre Bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhi-tattā*). Such teachings are profoundly inclusive, breaking down barriers of race, class, and religion, and even extended to beings yet to be born, thus bearing in mind our responsibility to the future generation.

In the modern context, the understanding of interconnectedness has profound implications. It can bridge cultural and social divides, creating a foundation for dialogue and collaboration. For instance, recognising shared humanity encourages efforts to address global challenges, such as climate change and inequality, which require collective action.

### 2.3 Interconnectedness, unity, and inclusivity

From its inception, Buddhism has exemplified unity and inclusivity. However, at a glance, it may seem that the Buddha advocated exclusiveness for his teachings, as the Buddha mentioned:

Of paths, the Path of Eight Constituents is the noblest; of truths, the Four Noble Truths are the noblest; of the *Dhammas*, the absence of craving (i.e., *Nibbana*) is the noblest; of the two-legged beings, the All-Seeing Buddha is the noblest.”<sup>5</sup> This is the only Path, and there is none other for the purity of vision. Follow this Path, it will bewilder *Mara*.<sup>6</sup> Following this Path, you will make an end of *Dukkha*. Having myself known the Path which can lead to the removal of the thorns of moral defilements, I have shown you the Path.<sup>7</sup>

The Buddha’s assertion on the exclusivity of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path as the path to liberation is an assertion based on His personal experience. If He experienced it as such, it must be stated as such. His assertion means the Buddhist approach to inclusivity does not go to the extent of compromising the Truth he discovered.

However, the Buddha reminded us in *Majjima Nikāya* 95: “If a person has conviction, his statement is my conviction ‘upholds the truth. But he hasn’t yet come to the definite conclusion that ‘Only this is true; anything else is worthless.’ To this extent, Bharadvaja, there is the upholding of the truth. To this extent, one upholds the truth.”<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, for an ordinary worldling (*puthujjana*) who has yet to realise the truth, he/ she should hold on to the conviction that the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path are the truths, without further stating that anything else is useless. The Buddha had exemplified His approach to inclusivity in various ways, without compromising the Truth he discovered.

<sup>5</sup> *Dhp* 273.

<sup>6</sup> *Dhp* 274.

<sup>7</sup> *Dhp* 275.

<sup>8</sup> *Majjima Nikāya* 95, Caṅkīssutta available on <https://suttacentral.net/mn95/en/bodhi>



For example, He debated with Upāli, a well-known lay disciple of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, over the subject of *Kamma*. This was to uphold the truth. Later, when Upāli decided to become a disciple of Him after being defeated in the debate, the Buddha advised him to continue to support his old religious teachers as he used to.<sup>9</sup> This was a show of respect, a demonstration of inclusivity.

The Buddha's establishment of the Saṅgha (monastic community) was another revolutionary example. The Saṅgha welcomed people from all castes, genders, and social backgrounds. In an era when caste hierarchies dominated social structures, the Buddha's egalitarian principles were ground-breaking, reflecting a profound commitment to unity and inclusivity.

This is further exemplified by historical figures like Emperor Ashoka, who embodied the Buddhist ethos of inclusivity. After embracing Buddhism, Ashoka promoted policies of religious tolerance, social welfare, and nonviolence. His edicts reflected a commitment to unity, encouraging mutual respect among diverse communities,<sup>10</sup> thus laying the foundation for a harmonious and inclusive society.

In Southeast Asia, Buddhist kings often used Buddhist principles to govern inclusively, fostering harmony among multi-ethnic and multi-religious populations. For example, King Rama I (1737 - 1809) granted land for the construction of mosques<sup>11</sup> and allowed Muslims to govern their communities based on Islamic laws. King Narai (1656 - 1688) welcomed French Catholic missionaries to build churches and spread Christianity in Ayutthaya.<sup>12</sup> These historical precedents demonstrate the practical application of Buddhist inclusivity in fostering social cohesion.

These historical precedents continue to resonate in contemporary efforts to build unity and inclusivity on a global scale. For instance, in contemporary times, Buddhist organizations have actively promoted inclusivity and social justice. Initiatives like interfaith dialogues that emphasise the shared values of compassion and mutual respect across religious traditions are often held. The World Fellowship of Buddhists has a standing committee on Interfaith Dialogue<sup>13</sup> that actively promotes such dialogue and interactions. Such efforts highlight the relevance of Buddhist insights in addressing modern challenges.

It may thus be seen that the teachings of the Buddha remain relevant today, especially in addressing societal divisions and fostering human dignity. By advocating for inclusivity and emphasizing the shared nature of suffering,

<sup>9</sup> *Majjima Nikāya* 56, Upālisutta available on <https://suttacentral.net/mn56/en/bodhi>

<sup>10</sup> Walpola Rahula (1967), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Kudi Charoenphat in Bangkok is a mosque of the Muslim Shia sect or Chao Sen, built during King Rama I's reign,

<sup>12</sup> Alan Strathern, *Tensions and Experimentations of Kingship: King Narai and his response to missionary overtures in the 1680s*. accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2025, available on <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid>

<sup>13</sup> World Fellowship of Buddhists, accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2025, available on <https://www.wfbhq.org/about-office-bearers.php>

Buddhism offers a transformative perspective that encourages individuals and communities to work together for the common good.

### III. PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Apart from the above historical and contemporary examples, this section will show a few further practical examples of modern times. It is hoped that these tangible efforts inspired by Buddhist principles, as well as meeting the demands of our modern times, would inspire more Buddhist organisations to emulate.

#### 3.1. ESG compliance in organising events

On May 6, 2023, the Selangor state government in Malaysia, together with the Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia (Young Buddhist Foundation of Malaysia), the Buddhist Missionary Society of Malaysia, and 45 Buddhist groups, held the Selangor Vesak Day celebration at the Bodhi Park–Samadhi Vihara complex. There was a huge crowd that day, and there was an endless stream of people. When people came through the gate of Bodhi Park, they immediately saw a small truck. It was placed in a conspicuous position and attracted attention. People couldn't help but wonder what was that truck?

It turned out that this truck was a compost truck, carrying an electric composter – specifically turning food waste into fertilizer. The organiser deliberately placed it in a conspicuous position to convey an important message and commitment – environmental protection and protection of all living beings.<sup>14</sup>

It is not uncommon for Buddhist organisations to adopt environmentally friendly practices when organising events, but to adopt a complete environmental protection concept in a large scale event, complying with ESG (Environment, Social, Governance)<sup>15</sup> and applying ISO14067: 2018<sup>16</sup> to calculate the amount of carbon emitted during the event, is a first for the Buddhist community and even a first for the Selangor state government.

While we are all proud to host events, people are now increasingly aware that events themselves spread carbon that causes global warming and climate change. According to the Malaysian Green Technology Agency report, in an event, transportation will account for 54% of carbon emissions, energy use will account for 35% of carbon emissions, and according to the United Nations Development Program, food waste will account for 5% of greenhouse gas emissions.”<sup>17</sup> said Ang Choo Hong,

<sup>14</sup> Ang, Choo Hong (2023).

<sup>15</sup> Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) sets standards for a company's impact on the planet and people. Investors use ESG criteria to evaluate potential investments. It covers environmental responsibility, social relationships (employees, suppliers, and communities), and governance, which ensures ethical management and control.

<sup>16</sup> ISO 14076:2018. *Green House Gases, Carbon Footprints of Products, Requirements and Guidelines for Quantification*, accessed on 26th Jan 2025, available on <https://www.iso.org/standard/71206.html>

<sup>17</sup> UNDP Food Waste Index Report (2021).

the chairman of Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia. “Therefore, we should be more sensitive and cautious when preparing for such events, and this time, we have adopted the concept of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) in preparing for the Vesak Day celebrations.

By the ESG concept, the organiser used cost subsidies to encourage the public to use public transportation, including buses, minibuses, or shared private cars; used compostable paper tableware; used LED light bulbs; used Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) papers; did not use staples on papers; the souvenirs were rice packed in cloth bags, and the opening ceremony was planting of trees by distinguished, etc.

Also, the organiser offered vegetarian food throughout the event. Today, 52% of greenhouse gases come from the livestock industry. Reducing meat consumption is equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from animal husbandry, which also reduces global warming and achieves environmental protection effects.

After the event, an expert consultant<sup>18</sup> calculated that the event emitted 12450.51 kgCO<sub>2</sub>e. The largest emission comes from transportation, reaching 6619.7 kgCO<sub>2</sub>e, followed by food, reaching 2093 kgCO<sub>2</sub>e. After dividing the total carbon emissions by the number of attendees, 4090, the carbon emission per person was 3.044 kgCO<sub>2</sub>e. (Ang, Choo Hong, 2023.)

The carbon-reduction function of the composting machine in this event was to turn food waste into compost. This event produced 10 kg of compost. This compost was later used to fertilise trees planted by distinguished guests. This was just one of the carbon reduction efforts of the entire event. The main purpose of placing the composting machine at the entrance was to attract attention and arouse people’s awareness of environmental protection.

ESG is not limited to environmental concerns but covers social and governance as well. In this event, food was purchased from nearby Muslim-Malay vendors. It is a social concept that whatever we do, we want it to be beneficial to the neighbourhood as well.

The inclusivity of Vesak celebrations in Selangor was further evident in their outreach to diverse communities where people of different faiths and racial origins were invited. By inviting people of different religious and cultural backgrounds to participate, these events embodied the spirit of unity that lies at the heart of Buddhist teachings. Such initiatives not only celebrate the Buddha’s life and teachings but also foster mutual respect and collaboration among diverse groups, promoting human dignity and societal harmony.

The above initiative serves as an example of how the Buddhist community could contribute to human welfare and environmental protection by embedding its philosophy of interconnectedness in ESG. As more and more international events are organized, it is time that the global Buddhist community seriously consider the adoption of ESG in event organization.

<sup>18</sup> Netseco Report 2023. Unpublished.

### 3.2. Transforming temples into eco-temples

The Buddha had taught about the relationship between humans and the environment. When human beings are obsessed with wrongdoing, the environment will deteriorate. He said, “Since folks are ablazed with illicit lust, overwhelmed by unrighteous greed, obsessed by wrong doctrines, on such as these the sky rains not steadily. It is hard to get a meal. The crops are bad. Accordingly, many come by their ends.”<sup>19</sup>

The Buddha further demonstrated how to live in harmony with nature. Once, the Buddha stayed at Palelai forest, with no monk or layman in attendance. There, the Buddha lived happily with food and water offered by an elephant and honey by a monkey.<sup>20</sup> This story is still celebrated today by the Barua and Chakma people of Bangladesh<sup>21</sup> as the *Madhu Purnima* (honey full moon) festival.

Since temples (including Buddhist establishments with temple-like buildings) are important spiritual and cultural hubs in Buddhist communities, transforming these sacred spaces into eco-temples would reflect the Buddhist commitment to living in harmony with nature. Present-day eco-temples can incorporate sustainable practices such as solar energy, rainwater harvesting, and organic gardening. They can also educate visitors about environmental stewardship, linking ecological consciousness with spiritual development.

For example, the Bodhi Park in Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, had a green policy in place, educating and guiding the public on how to use the Bodhi Park, such as saving water and electricity and practicing recycling. It has a solar energy system, a rainwater harvesting installation, and a relatively large garden of trees and plants to enhance the environment. Its solar energy initiative was honoured by the Sustainable Energy Commission of Malaysia (SEDA) as an example for others to follow.<sup>22</sup>

Another example is the Wat Pa Maha Chedi Kaew temple in Thailand, also known as the “Temple of a Million Bottles”. The temple is constructed from recycled glass bottles, highlighting the Buddhist commitment to sustainability and interconnectedness.<sup>23</sup> The International Network of Engaged Buddhists has an initiative that promotes the concept and application of ecology in temples.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. David Loy, a renowned Buddhist scholar, has produced a book on Eco-Dhamma, laying the doctrinal foundation for temples to adopt ecology in their operation.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> AN 56.

<sup>20</sup> Buddhist Scripture Retrieval, Mahidol University. Accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2024. Available on [https://mahidol.ac.th/budsir/E\\_hist66.htm](https://mahidol.ac.th/budsir/E_hist66.htm)

<sup>21</sup> Wisdom Quarterly (2010).

<sup>22</sup> Sustainable Energy Malaysia (2018).

<sup>23</sup> Thai PBS World, (2022), p.11.

<sup>24</sup> Seeds of Peace, (2024), p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Loy, David, (2019), p. 22.

The above cases resonate with what was taught by the Buddha more than 2500 years ago. The Buddha was particularly conscious about preserving the natural environment, particularly trees and water. His association with trees throughout His life is a testimony of his close affinity to the natural environment. It is well known that He was born under an Asoka tree in Lumbini, His first meditation during the ploughing festival was under a Jambu tree, he attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and entered into *Mahāparinibbāna* in between two Sala trees. And for most of his ministry he stayed in groves such as Jetavana and Veluvana. He set rules for monks not to destroy vegetable growth,<sup>26</sup> to eat only seedless fruits<sup>27</sup> (eat with respect and preservation), and not to wear sandals made from palm leaves or young bamboo.<sup>28</sup> He advised on gratitude to the natural environment: “The tree that gives you pleasant shade, to sit and lie at ease, you should not tear its branches down.”<sup>29</sup>

On the conservation of water, the Buddha made rules to prevent the contamination of water. For example, He forbids excrement or urine into water<sup>30</sup> or spit into water.<sup>31</sup> He advised on proper upkeep of wells and toilets, to be lined with stones or bricks, and to cover wells and to clean and turn upside down bowls after use.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, these eco-temples can serve as living reminders of the interdependence between humans and the environment, as taught by the Buddha. They not only reduce environmental impact but also educate communities about sustainable practices.

### 3.3. Vesak as a Public Holiday

The celebration of Vesak, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, can serve as a powerful example of inclusivity and peaceful co-existence.

Recognising Vesak as a public holiday can be a significant step toward fostering inclusivity and promoting mutual respect among diverse communities. By making Vesak a public holiday, governments would send a powerful message about the importance of acknowledging and respecting cultural and religious diversity. This fosters a sense of unity and shared humanity, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and harmonious society.

The importance of Vesak as a public holiday cannot be underestimated. From the social psychological perspective, Vesak as a public holiday would enhance and expand the collective memory of all citizens, as exemplified in the case of Malaysia.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Pacittiya* rule 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Cullavagga*. (V.5.2)

<sup>28</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Culla-vagga*.

<sup>29</sup> *Rukkhadhamma Jataka* (*Jataka* 74)

<sup>30</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Sekiya* 74.

<sup>31</sup> *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Sekiya* 75.

<sup>32</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Culla-vagga*.

<sup>33</sup> Ang, Choo Hong, 2021, p. 62.



Collective memory is often maintained through tangible rituals, and Vesak celebration itself is such a ritual. Further classifying Vesak Day as a public holiday would expand this collective memory, that is, extend it to all Malaysians, Buddhists or otherwise, and also enhance the collective memory of all communities. On this public holiday, whether you are a Buddhist or not, you would remember this day and live a different life on this day. Whether one joins the celebration, takes a holiday abroad, or simply lazes at home, it would be a day different from other days that one would likely remember.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the recognition of Vesak as a public holiday would also accelerate the development of Buddhism. In the case of Malaysia, Vesak as a public holiday reminds the majority of Chinese Buddhists of their identity as Buddhists and inspires them to learn about Buddhism. In 1949, there was no distinction between gods and Buddhas. (At that time, those who signed the petition calling for Vesak Day to be a public holiday also included some syncretic form of Chinese temples). After Vesak Day became a public holiday in some states in 1949, traditional Chinese religious believers generally identified themselves as Buddhists.<sup>35</sup> This identification as Buddhists certainly helps in the promotion of Buddhism.

Perhaps it is worth noting that the Singapore Select Committee 1950, in rejecting an appeal for Vesak as a public holiday in the island, said, “Vesak as a public holiday should await the expected revival of orthodox Buddhism and should not be used as a means to accelerate that revival.”<sup>36</sup> This message implied that Buddhism had not revived to a considerable scale, and the declaration of Vesak as a public holiday would become a means of accelerating that revival, which the government was not obliged to do. Interestingly, the declaration of Vesak as a public holiday in Penang, Kedah, Perak, and Malacca in 1949 proved the validity of the above point as it had motivated the Singapore Buddhists to work harder and, hence, accelerate the revival of Buddhism in Singapore.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, after becoming a public holiday, Vesak Day has become the most appealing “totem” in the Buddhist movement. Every year on Vesak Day, Buddhist temples and organisations would decorate with lights and launch various programmes to attract the attention of the masses to Buddhism, strengthen people’s identity with Buddhism, and directly promote the development of Buddhism.<sup>38</sup>

It is noteworthy that the following countries or territories have declared Vesak (or the Buddha’s birthday on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> lunar month) as a public holiday: Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan (Nirvana day), India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, South Korea, Hong

---

<sup>34</sup> Ang, Choo Hong, 2021, p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> Ang, Choo Hong, 2024, 70.

<sup>36</sup> The Straits Times, 19 July 1950, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Ang, Choo Hong (2021), p.46.

<sup>38</sup> Ang, Choo Hong (2024), 65.



Kong, Macao, and Indonesia.<sup>39</sup> It is most heartening to know that even Muslim-majority countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia have Vesak as a public holiday.

However, there are countries, including countries with substantial Buddhist populations, that do not have Vesak as a public holiday. The global Buddhist community and the International Council of Vesak Day as well as other stakeholders, should petition the governments of those countries to declare Vesak as a public holiday in those countries. This will foster a sense of shared heritage and underscore the value of tolerance, inclusivity, and harmonious co-existence.

#### **IV. PRINCIPLE OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS: AN ALTERNATIVE PATH TOWARD GLOBAL PEACE AND SUSTAINABILITY?**

While acknowledging that the teachings of the Buddha remain relevant today, especially in addressing societal divisions and upholding human dignity, one should not overlook the bigger forces that are tearing the world apart and creating enormous suffering for all beings. I am referring to the clash of civilizations in global politics.

##### **4.1. Clash of civilisations**

The end of the Cold War marked a pivotal moment in history, with global power dynamics shifting and new ideological battles emerging. Samuel P. Huntington famously argued that this new world order ushered in the “clash of civilisations,” primarily between Western and Islamic civilisations.<sup>40</sup> Huntington’s thesis contends that cultural and religious differences, rather than ideological or economic ones, would become the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. These two civilisations dominate global affairs today, not only through geopolitical influence but also through the shaping of cultural and social structures. While both Western and Islamic civilisations are rich in historical, intellectual, and social strengths, they also have profound weaknesses that contribute to global unrest and dehumanisation.

The concept of the “self” or “I” arising from monotheistic beliefs is a central tenet in both Western and Islamic thought. The affirmation of the self in these belief systems has led to exclusiveness, dualistic thinking, and, in some cases, extremism. Monotheism, by definition, stresses the worship of a single, all-powerful God, which, while promoting unity within a specific faith community, can also lead to a sense of superiority, exclusiveness, and isolation from others. The emphasis on the individual, or “I,” has reinforced notions of identity that are rigid and self-contained, further entrenched by the language of moral absolutism that often accompanies religious discourse. This is particularly obvious when each tried to project its own identity and symbolism. These attitudes have fostered ideological polarisation and conflict, as different “I” or groups clash over their beliefs, resulting in societal fractures

<sup>39</sup> Ang, Choo Hong (2021), p.70.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, (1996), p. 201.

and, at times, violent extremism.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4.2. Consumerism, Dehumanisation

Furthermore, consumerism has permeated the whole world, Western and Islamic civilisations not excluded, contributing to the dehumanisation of individuals and communities. The materialism that characterises modern society places a disproportionate focus on wealth, power, and personal consumption, often at the expense of spiritual and social well-being. The rapid spread of consumerist ideologies has led to an erosion of personal and communal values, as individuals increasingly define themselves by their possessions and consumption habits rather than by their relationships or shared ethical values. This dehumanisation of individuals – reducing them to mere consumers – has perpetuated a global system that prioritises economic growth over social and environmental sustainability, often neglecting the issues like poverty and inequality that it created.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4.3. The alternative path

In stark contrast to the individualism and consumerism that dominate the world today, the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness and “No-self” offers an alternative worldview that stands in opposition to the self-affirmation found in monotheistic belief systems. This Buddhist insight of interconnectedness and “No-Self”, had already been discussed under Sections 2.2 and 2.3.

However, it is deemed appropriate to reemphasise here certain points of interconnectedness and “No-self” that are relevant in global politics. The idea of “No-self” does not deny individual existence but rather rejects the notion of a permanent, unchanging self that exists independently of others. This understanding fosters a sense of inclusiveness, pluralism, and mutual respect, as individuals recognise that their identity is shaped by their relationships with others and the environment. The interconnectedness of all beings implies that the well-being of one is inherently linked to the well-being of others, creating a foundation for empathy, compassion, and cooperation. These are important values in global politics.

Further, the principle of interconnectedness offers a pathway toward greater peace and harmony. The concept of No-self helps dismantle the walls of exclusivism that often arise from the affirmation of a singular identity. If individuals and civilisations can embrace the notion that all people are interconnected, there is potential for greater social harmony and collective action to address global challenges.

Arising from the principle of interconnectedness is the Buddhist “Middle Path – *Majjhima patipadā*”, a key element of the Buddhist worldview that advocates for a balanced approach to life that avoids extremes of sensual pleasure and extreme deprivation.<sup>43</sup> In the context of world affairs, this principle

<sup>41</sup> Ang, Choo Hong (2019), p. 270.

<sup>42</sup> Dieynaba Gabrielle Ndiaye (2022), p. 80.

<sup>43</sup> MN 13.

can guide international relations, encouraging diplomacy and dialogue rather than polarisation and conflict. The Middle Path fosters a mindset that seeks understanding and compromise, rejecting the dualistic thinking that often characterises political and ideological disputes. This approach can lead to a more peaceful world order, where cooperation between civilizations is prioritised over competition and rivalry.

One of the root causes of global political conflicts is the struggle to control the limited global resources (which is now aggravated by climate change and environmental degradation). The principle of interconnectedness can contribute to sustainable development efforts by encouraging a shift in values from wanton consumption to spiritual and communal well-being. This would entail upholding the Buddhist concept of moderate or sufficiency consumption, as elaborated in *bhojane mattaññutā* (moderation in eating): “When a noble disciple is moderate in eating, he reflects carefully: I eat this food not for fun, not for taste, not for pleasure, not for beautification, not for decoration, but only for the maintenance and continuance of this body<sup>44</sup>...” This teaching of sufficiency consumption is further reinforced by the Buddha’s advice that “contentment is the greatest wealth.”<sup>45</sup>

Buddhist teachings emphasize the impermanence of material wealth and the importance of living in harmony with nature. If the world were to adopt this perspective, it could lead to a fundamental rethinking of how resources are managed and shared, creating a more equitable and environmentally responsible global system. Rather than pursuing growth for the sake of growth, societies would focus on meeting the needs of all people while maintaining the health of the planet, thus reducing conflicts.

While the idea of interconnectedness may seem idealistic in a world dominated by powerful states and competing ideologies, it offers a necessary counterbalance to the destructive tendencies of monotheistic absolutism and consumerism. By embracing the interconnectedness of all life, individuals and nations can move beyond the narrow confines of self-interest and work toward a global community characterised by mutual respect, compassion, and shared responsibility. In this way, the Buddhist principle of No-self can contribute to a more peaceful and sustainable world order, where the needs of the many are prioritised over the desires of the few.

In brief, in the “clash of civilisations”, it is important to recognise the weaknesses within both civilisations that contribute to conflict and dehumanization. The affirmation of the self and the exclusivism inherent in monotheistic belief systems, coupled with the rise of consumerism, have created a world order that is increasingly polarised and unsustainable. In contrast, the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness, with its emphasis on No-self, inclusiveness, and the Middle Path, would well offer a viable alternative that could contribute to global peace and sustainability. By embracing these

---

<sup>44</sup> AN 7.64.

<sup>45</sup> Dhṛp 204.

values, humanity may find a way to transcend the divisions that define current global conflicts and move toward a future of greater cooperation and harmony.

#### 4.4. The challenges and opportunities

While advocating that Buddhist insights could offer a plausible solution to the problems of the world today, one must also acknowledge that Buddhism by itself, at least at the present stage, is not a civilizational force to be reckoned with. Huntington contended that Buddhism is not a civilisational force, despite its great influence over China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. He acknowledged that Theravada Buddhist civilisation is alive in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia but contended that Buddhism does not form the foundation of a great civilisation.<sup>46</sup> Alfred Toynbee further classified Theravada Buddhism and Lamaism as fossil civilisations.<sup>47</sup>

The Catholic Encyclopaedia published in 1910 describes Buddhism thus: “In short, Buddhism is all but dead. In its huge organisation, the faint pulsations of life are still discernible, but its power of activity is gone. The spread of European civilisation over the east will inevitably bring about its extinction.”<sup>48</sup> Of course, this description might not be true given the facts of the present day, but it is clear that, from a macro perspective, Buddhism does have its problems.

Hence, as a civilisation, Buddhism itself is at a critical juncture. If Buddhism fails to make a positive contribution to the survival of humanity at this time, then its relevance to the world will disappear, and it will truly qualify as a fossil civilization. But if Buddhism can overcome its challenges and make a contribution in the nick of time, it will meet the principle of historical development as noted by Toynbee: when civilisation responds correctly, it grows.

Fortunately, time offered an unprecedented opportunity for Buddhism. This is the time for Buddhism to overcome its challenges and contribute to all humanity. The advent of globalisation means that all civilisations, religions, cultures, and ideas have the opportunity (albeit not necessarily equally) to exert their influence on all of humanity. Although Buddhism is at a disadvantage in terms of organisational structure (including political and economic disadvantages), the potential for the globalisation of Buddhist thought cannot be ignored. In a conversation with Ikeda, Toynbee said, “The greatest event in present history, and one that is often neglected by the West, is the meeting of Buddhism in the West.”<sup>49</sup> This shows that Buddhism can be a force to be reckoned with in the West.

The world is in a state of flux, and the focus of international order is gradually shifting eastward. Futurist John Naisbitt says that the twenty-first century is an

---

<sup>46</sup> Samuel P Huntington (1996), p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> Alfred Toynbee (1988), p. 34.

<sup>48</sup> The Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. II, 1910 – Buddhism, accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2025, available on <https://www.newadvent.org/>

<sup>49</sup> Daisaku Ikeda (2007), p. 139.

era of Asian renaissance.<sup>50</sup> This renaissance encompassed economics, politics, and culture. This means Buddhism, which has been nurturing Asia for 2,500 years, will follow the megatrend and re-emerge on the global stage, a trend that was accidentally accelerated by the events of 9/11.

After the 9/11 incident, the West suddenly became Islamophobic and was looking for countermeasures. The response included exploring Islam and dialoguing with Islam. In this process, Buddhism was naturally included. Nowadays, Buddhism is almost invariably involved in religious dialogues around the world. This is because thinkers and academicians are seriously considering whether there is any other doctrine or idea, apart from Christianity and Islam, that can save the suffering world. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Hinduism have all been considered.

The American sociologist P. Berger classified religions into “religion of confrontation” (referring to divinely inspired religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and “religion of interiority”<sup>51</sup> (referring to mystical religions). People began to realise that among the many religions of interiority, Buddhism seemed to be the one best equipped to offer a solution to this world. Confucianism and Hinduism, though strong, lacked the transnational and tran-ethnic elements.

The advent of the information age has further facilitated the globalisation of Buddhism. The emergence of 5G and AI further accelerated this process. With geographical and language barriers dismantled and the world becoming borderless, an instantaneous and voluminous flow of information is already happening. This means that as long as Buddhists are willing to make an effort, a great deal of Buddhist information, including Buddhist teachings and ideas, will be transmitted to the world.

From the above analysis, it appears that although Buddhism is not the foundation of any major civilisation, time has provided an opportunity for it to grow. Although it is weak in organisational structure, it is strong in ideology. To sum up, Buddhism can contribute to the happiness and benefit of the world through its ideological approach.

#### **4.5. Advocacy, implementation, dialogue**

Political reforms can come from the top down or from the bottom up, but the promotion of ideas often comes from the top down, led by intellectuals with vision, knowledge, and courage, and cascaded to the grassroots. Sakyamuni Buddha and the 60 Arhats, who were the “intellectuals” of India at that time, were examples of those who promoted the truth they had realised to the world, and that has now spread all over the world.

Today, if we want to promote Buddhist thought, we can follow the above example and start with tertiary institutions and research institutes. If Buddhist colleges and institutes have already made efforts in this direction, they should

<sup>50</sup> John Naisbitt (1995), p. 120.

<sup>51</sup> Berger (1981), p. 14.

step up their efforts. If they have not yet done so, they should begin to develop talents in Buddhist thought. Only when there is a sufficiently large pool of people well versed in Buddhist thoughts can we truly promote it. At the same time, it is necessary to actively organise academic seminars in this field to create a climate for the study and promotion of Buddhist thought.

In this regard, it is also necessary to enter into the academic institutions of the West, which is still the centre of the world. The Buddhist community can make use of the convenience of information technology to promote Buddhist thought, riding on the trend of globalisation.

However, if Buddhist thought remains in the academic or research institutes, it will not be of much use to mankind. Therefore, it is important for Buddhist thought to reach out to the people and be internalised in their daily lives. Buddhist organisations can play an active role in this regard, including engaging the services of highly qualified monks and laypeople who can play a leading role in applying Buddhist thought in various fields such as politics, economics, culture, education, science, and medicine.

This work should include providing alternative thinking in these areas: awakening and encouraging people to correct social injustices and upholding human dignity. In recent years, Buddhism has done well in looking after the welfare of the community. This is commendable; however, it is weak in providing alternative thoughts to address the structured ills of the world.

Buddhism will not survive if it stays at the level of personal practice and does not address the structural ills of society. Buddhists' preference for life-releasing, giving alms, and recycling resources is admirable and is an important facet of Buddhist thought. However, Buddhists should also actively reform and provide alternative thoughts for the structural ills of politics, economics, and culture. Buddhists should not only release and protect life; they should participate in peace movements and defend human rights; they should not only give alms but also advocate an economic system that is in line with Buddhist thinking. Today, 8.5% of the world's population, or about 700 million people, live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$2.15 a day,<sup>52</sup> as a result of the capitalist economic structure. Buddhists should endeavour to solve this problem at its root. Thai scholar Sulak Sivaraksa, speaking at a Buddhist - Muslim dialogue on Buddhists and Muslims Working Together in Southeast Asia, Bangkok, 26th-28th June, 2006, said: "When you use the money you earn from the capitalist economy to give relief to the poor, you should ask yourself, are you doing good or are you contributing to the economic system that exploits the weak?"

Buddhist ideals cannot be truly accomplished if they are confined to Buddhist circles. Buddhist thought must play a part in the major civilisations of the world, bringing itself into the mainstream of world thought to truly benefit all beings. In this era of globalisation and dialogue, Buddhist ideas could be

---

<sup>52</sup> World Bank Group (2024).



disseminated through the dialogue of religions and civilisations. The natural result of dialogue between religions or civilisations is that each school of thought will spread freely on the earth, and each school of thought will be able to draw nourishment from other schools of thought and thus grow stronger. In other words, the new civilisation of mankind will be a civilisation that is the result of the convergence of many human ideas.

In the area of religious dialogue, the efforts of the Buddhist community still leave much to be desired. It can be said that the Buddhist community does not have a deep understanding of the theoretical foundations of dialogue (including objectives, goals, limits, conditions, formulations, techniques, models, rules, etc). The Buddhist literature on this subject is less extensive and less in-depth than that of other religions. Dialogue requires specialised knowledge, and Buddhist knowledge or practice alone is not enough. Therefore, the Buddhist community can nurture dialogue talents so that they can effectively disseminate Buddhist ideas to the world.

## V. CONCLUSION

Buddhist teachings on interconnectedness, unity, and inclusivity offer profound insights into the challenges facing the modern world. By fostering a sense of shared humanity and mutual responsibility, these principles contribute to human dignity, world peace, and sustainability. Practical initiatives such as ESG-compliant events, eco-temples, and the recognition of Vesak as a public holiday demonstrate the transformative potential of Buddhist thought.

In an era when the world is threatened by wars and environmental degradation, the Buddhist teaching of interconnectedness could serve as an alternative or complementary civilizational force in a world torn by the clash of civilizations, thus offering the world a pathway for greater peace and sustainability.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Āṅguttara Nikāya*. The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2012.
- Suttanipāṭa*. The Buddha's Words on Loving-Kindness, translated from the Pali by The Amaravati Saṅgha, 2004.

### Secondary sources

- Anālayo, Bhikkhu, *Dependent Arising and Interdependence*, Springer Science + Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2020.
- Ang, Choo Hong, 2019: *Rowing in the Dhamma Sea*, Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia. (original in Chinese, 洪祖丰, 2019: 法海泛舟, 佛教的革新与未来, 马佛教发展基金会。)
- Ang, Choo Hong, 2021: *Wesak as a Public Holiday and its Social Psychological*

- Significance, Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia.
- Ang, Choo Hong, 2022: Significance of Vesak as a Public Holiday? Nanyang Press. (Original in Chinese, 洪祖丰, 2022: 卫塞节公假有何意义? 南洋商报, 登彼岸, 丰子饶舌, 28-4-2022。)
- Ang, Choo Hong, 2023: Composter for Vesak Celebration, Nanyang Press. (Original in Chinese, 洪祖丰, 2023: 推肥卡车庆卫塞, 南洋商报, 登彼岸, 丰子饶舌, 06-06-2023。)
- Ang, Choo Hong, 2024: Remembering History and Grateful to Predecessors, Nanyang Press. (Original in Chinese, 洪祖丰, 2024: 铭记历史感恩前人 - 记卫塞节公假75周年, 各大华文报章, 22-5-2024。)
- Berger, P. L., *The other Side of God: A Polarity in World Religions*, Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Press/ Doubleday.1981.
- Daisaku Ikeda, *Choose Life: A Dialogue with Arnold J. Toynbee*, I.B. Tauris. 2007.
- Dieynaba Gabrielle Ndiaye, *Buying Our Way into Humanness: Consumerism and the Dehumanisation of the Poor*, *The Journal of Law, Social Justice & Global Development*.2022
- ISO 14076:2018 Greenhouse Gases, Carbon Footprints of Products, Requirements and Guidelines for Quantification, accessed on 26th Jan 2025, available on <https://www.iso.org/standard/71206.html>
- John Naisbitt, 1995: *Megatrends Asia*, Nicolas Breakey Publishing Limited.
- Loy, David R, *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. Wisdom Publications. 2019.
- Samuel P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon &Schuster UK Ltd. 1996.
- Seeds of Peace, 2024, *Seeds of Peace*, Vol.40, No.2, International Network of Engaged Buddhists 2024.
- Sustainable Energy Malaysia, 2018, Volume 2, Issue, 5, 2018, Sustainable Energy Commission of Malaysia 2018.
- Thai PBS World, 2022, "Temple of a Million Bottles: Wat Pa Maha Chedi Kaew." Thai PBS World, 15 Sept. 2022, [www.thaipbsworld.com](http://www.thaipbsworld.com).
- UNDP Food Waste Index Report (2021), accessed on 1st June 2023, available on <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/unep-food-waste-index-report-2021>
- Walpola Rahula (1967): *What the Buddha Taught*, The Golden Fraser Gallery Ltd., London. 1967.
- Wisdom Quarterly (September 22, 2010). "Wisdom Quarterly: American Buddhist Journal: The Full-Moon Honey Offering".2010.
- World Bank Group, 2024, *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024*, accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> Feb.2025, available on <https://www.worldbank.org>

# THE ROLE OF INTERFAITH COLLABORATION IN PROMOTING GLOBAL HARMONY, WITH A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON MUSLIM MAJORITY NATION, EFFORTS OF PRESERVING BUDDHIST HERITAGE SITES

Dr. Numan Anwar<sup>\*</sup>

## Abstract:

In an era marked by geopolitical tensions, cultural fragmentation, and growing mistrust among communities, fostering unity has become a global imperative. This research paper explores the role of interfaith collaboration in promoting global harmony, with a specific focus on Muslim-majority nations' efforts to preserve Buddhist heritage sites. These efforts transcend religious and cultural boundaries, demonstrating a commitment to shared human values and collective history. The paper delves into historical precedents, contemporary case studies, and philosophical commonalities between Islam and Buddhism that underpin these collaborative endeavors. From Pakistan's meticulous preservation of Gandhāra civilization artifacts to Indonesia's efforts in maintaining Buddhist temples like Borobudur, these examples illuminate how cultural preservation can catalyze unity. Challenges such as political instability, resource constraints, and extremism are examined alongside opportunities for partnership and cooperation through platforms like UNESCO. Finally, actionable recommendations are presented, advocating for policies that institutionalize heritage preservation and promote interfaith understanding as pathways to peace. Aligning with the UNDV 2025 theme of fostering unity, this paper underscores the transformative power of cultural preservation in bridging divides and advancing global harmony.

**Keywords:** *Interfaith collaboration, Borobudur, global harmony, cultural preservation, Gandhāra civilization, extremism.*

---

<sup>\*</sup> Field Supervisor, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Context and importance

The globalized world has witnessed unprecedented interconnectivity, yet this progress comes with increasing cultural and ideological divides. Misunderstandings and mistrust among different religious and cultural communities have often sparked conflicts, undermining global efforts for peace and stability. Within this context, the preservation of cultural heritage has emerged as a universal endeavor, bridging divides and fostering mutual respect. Religious heritage sites, in particular, serve as powerful symbols of shared humanity and history. They remind us of the interconnectedness of civilizations and the importance of collective stewardship of our shared past.

Muslim-majority countries, with their rich histories of interfaith engagement, have played a vital role in preserving Buddhist heritage. These efforts not only highlight the spirit of coexistence but also challenge stereotypes, showcasing Islam's emphasis on protecting cultural and religious diversity. The preservation of Buddhist sites such as Pakistan's Taxila and Takht-i-Bhai or Indonesia's Borobudur exemplifies the potential of cultural preservation as a tool for global harmony. Such initiatives align perfectly with the overarching theme of the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) 2025, which emphasizes fostering unity across cultures and faiths.

#### Scope and Objectives

This research focuses on the intersection of interfaith collaboration and heritage preservation, using Buddhist heritage conservation in Muslim-majority countries as a case study. Specifically, it aims to:

Highlight the historical and philosophical foundations of interfaith respect in Islam and Buddhism. Examine contemporary examples of cultural preservation efforts undertaken by Muslim countries. Analyze challenges and identify opportunities for enhanced collaboration in heritage conservation. Offer actionable recommendations for institutionalizing interfaith efforts in heritage preservation policies.

By addressing these objectives, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on cultural preservation as a mechanism for peacebuilding. Furthermore, it aspires to inspire policymakers, religious leaders, and international organizations to embrace heritage preservation as a pathway to fostering unity in diversity.

### 1.2. Interfaith interactions in history

The interaction between Islam and Buddhism spans centuries, marked by periods of conflict interwoven with profound cultural and intellectual exchange. These encounters were particularly significant in regions such as South Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, where Buddhist communities flourished alongside expanding Islamic empires.

In the 8th and 9th centuries, as Islam spread into the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia, Muslim rulers and scholars encountered Buddhist traditions,

art, and architecture.<sup>1</sup> While some conflicts arose during conquests, historical accounts also highlight episodes of mutual respect. For instance, early Islamic scholars translated Buddhist texts into Arabic and Persian, contributing to a shared pool of philosophical and scientific knowledge. During the Abbasid Caliphate, the translation of Buddhist texts into Arabic was part of a broader movement of knowledge transfer, demonstrating respect for intellectual heritage beyond religious boundaries.<sup>2</sup>

Buddhist communities in regions spanning Central Asia to South Asia, including Pakistan and Afghanistan, coexisted with Islamic populations for centuries. Buddhist monasteries in these areas were not only spiritual hubs but also centers of art and learning, influencing Islamic art and architecture. The fusion of Buddhist and Islamic motifs is evident in architectural designs, such as those of the Seljuk Empire, which incorporated floral and geometric patterns reminiscent of Buddhist art.

### 1.3. Preservation of cultural heritage in Islamic traditions

Islamic principles emphasize the protection of cultural and religious heritage as a divine responsibility. The Quran underscores the sanctity of diversity in creation, stating, “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and ...” (Haleem, 2004). This verse reflects a universal message of coexistence and respect for diversity, which extends to cultural and religious artifacts.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Buddhist scriptures emphasize the importance of preserving cultural heritage. The *Dhammapada*, a Buddhist scripture, states, “Hatred will never cease by hatred, but by love alone is healed.”<sup>4</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) teachings further reinforce this ethos. In one of his sayings, he warned against the destruction of places of worship and cultural symbols, even during times of war. This principle was upheld by early Muslim leaders, who ensured that non-Islamic religious sites remained protected under Islamic rule. For example, during the conquest of Sindh in the 8th century, Islamic rulers respected and preserved the Buddhist *stupas* and monasteries in the region, recognizing their historical and cultural significance.

The tradition of protecting non-Islamic heritage continued in subsequent Islamic empires. The Mughal Empire, which ruled over a predominantly Hindu and Buddhist population, adopted policies of tolerance and preservation. Akbar, one of the most notable Mughal emperors, not only promoted interfaith dialogue but also supported the restoration of Buddhist and Hindu monuments. His approach to governance exemplified the Islamic principle of

<sup>1</sup> Eaton, R. M. (1993). *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*. University of California Press. e.g., Eaton, 1993, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed, A. S. (2002). *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*. Routledge. (e.g., Ahmed, 2002, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> Abdel Haleem, M.A.S. Trans. (2004). *The Qur’an*. Oxford University Press. e.g., Qur’an 2:143, as cited in Abdel Haleem, 2004, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Dhammapada (2007), 1.5, as cited in Easwaran, p. 45.

preserving the cultural diversity of the lands under Muslim rule.

#### 1.4. Buddhist - Muslim collaboration in preserving heritage

The historical coexistence of Muslim and Buddhist communities provided fertile ground for collaborative preservation efforts. In regions such as modern-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indonesia, Islamic rulers and communities played a direct role in maintaining Buddhist sites, recognizing their cultural and historical value.<sup>5</sup> “Do not go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views”<sup>6</sup> (*Kālāma Sutta*, 2005). This spirit of critical inquiry and respect for diverse traditions facilitated the preservation of Buddhist heritage sites.

Pakistan: The Gandhāra region, renowned for its Buddhist heritage, thrived under Islamic governance. The preservation of ancient Buddhist *stupas* and monasteries, such as Taxila and Takht-i-Bahi, reflects the enduring legacy of Muslim stewardship. Islamic rulers in the region often collaborated with local communities to ensure that these sites remained integral to the region’s cultural identity.<sup>7</sup>

Indonesia: As Islam became the dominant religion in Indonesia, it coexisted with Buddhism and Hinduism, both of which had deep roots in the region. The preservation of Buddhist temples like Borobudur highlights the Islamic community’s respect for its shared cultural heritage. Today, Indonesia’s government and its Muslim-majority population actively support the conservation of these sites, recognizing their significance as national and global treasures.

Afghanistan: In pre-Taliban Afghanistan, Buddhist heritage sites such as the Bamiyan Buddhas stood as symbols of the country’s rich cultural history. Despite the tragic destruction of these statues in 2001, efforts to restore the Bamiyan Valley’s cultural heritage have been led by both local Muslim communities and international organizations, underscoring the potential for reconciliation and collaboration.

These historical examples demonstrate that interfaith collaboration in heritage preservation is not a new phenomenon but rather one deeply rooted in the values of mutual respect and coexistence that have characterized Islamic and Buddhist interactions for centuries.

## II. CASE STUDIES: PRESERVATION OF BUDDHIST HERITAGE IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES

### 2.1. Pakistan: Guardians of Gandhāra Civilization

Pakistan, historically home to the Gandhāra civilization, possesses one of the richest collections of Buddhist heritage sites globally. This region,

---

<sup>5</sup> Ali, M. (2018). Historical Interaction between Islam and Buddhism in South Asia. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 39(1), p. 1 - 15. e.g., Ali, 2018, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> AN 3.65, as cited in Bodhi, 2005, p. 365.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall, J. (1960). *The Buddhist Art of Gandhāra*. Cambridge University Press. e.g., Marshall, p. 45.



encompassing modern-day Taxila, Swat Valley, and Peshawar, was a prominent center of Buddhist art, culture, and education between the 1st and 7th centuries CE. Despite becoming a Muslim-majority nation after the partition of India in 1947, Pakistan has remained committed to preserving its Buddhist heritage.

**Taxila and Takht-i-Bahi:** Taxila, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, contains remnants of *stupas*, monasteries, and temples that exemplify the pinnacle of Buddhist architectural and artistic achievements. Similarly, Takht-i-Bahi, another UNESCO site, is a monastic complex that remains one of the best-preserved examples of Buddhist architecture. Successive Pakistani governments have collaborated with international organizations such as UNESCO to restore these sites, ensuring their global recognition and accessibility.<sup>8</sup>

**Tourism and Education:** The Pakistani government and the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have actively promoted Buddhist heritage sites as part of their cultural tourism initiatives. Events such as the Gandhāra Festival and exhibitions of Buddhist artifacts have attracted Buddhist pilgrims from countries like Sri Lanka, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Thailand, fostering interfaith understanding and economic development.

**Conservation Challenges:** Despite these efforts, challenges such as funding limitations, political instability, and the threat of extremism persist. However, the commitment of local Muslim communities to protecting these sites underscores the spirit of coexistence. For instance, communities near Takht-i-Bahi have resisted encroachments and collaborated with authorities to maintain the site's integrity.

## 2.2. Afghanistan: Reviving the legacy of *Bamiyan Buddhas*

Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley, once a thriving center of Buddhist culture, is renowned for its monumental Buddha statues carved into the cliffs. These statues, standing 55 and 37 meters tall, symbolized the region's Buddhist heritage until their tragic destruction by the Taliban in 2001. The loss of these iconic statues was met with global condemnation and also sparked efforts to preserve and revive Afghanistan's cultural heritage.

**Post-Taliban Reconstruction Efforts:** Since 2002, initiatives to restore the Bamiyan Valley's cultural significance have been led by UNESCO with support from the Afghan government. Local Muslim communities have played a vital role in these efforts, participating in educational campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of preserving the region's heritage. Restoration efforts have also focused on preserving murals in the surrounding caves, which depict Buddhist themes and reflect the artistic synthesis of Greco-Buddhist styles.<sup>9</sup>

**Symbol of Reconciliation:** The restoration of the Bamiyan Valley is not just about rebuilding monuments; it is a symbolic act of reconciliation. It

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). Taxila. Retrieved from UNESCO official website. (e.g., see UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d., p. 3)

<sup>9</sup> Dalrymple, W. (2013). *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan, 1839-1842*. Bloomsbury. (e.g., Dalrymple, 2013, p. 234)

demonstrates Afghanistan's willingness to embrace its multicultural past and underscores the potential for interfaith harmony. By involving local Muslim leaders and international Buddhist organizations, these initiatives serve as a model for collaborative heritage preservation. The Bamiyan Buddha statues were not only artistic marvels but also deeply tied to Buddhist teachings. The *Lalitavistara Sūtra*, a *Mahāyāna* Buddhist text, describes the Buddha's life and his past incarnations, some of which are believed to have influenced the artistic representation of these colossal figures.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the *Mahāvastu*, an early Buddhist text, references the importance of Buddhist relics and their veneration, emphasizing the spiritual significance of such monuments. The Bamiyan Valley is also linked to the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*), which were widely studied in Buddhist centers along the Silk Road, including Gandhāra and Bamiyan.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3. Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia

Southeast Asia, with its deep Buddhist roots, has witnessed a remarkable evolution as predominantly Muslim nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia continue to preserve and honor their Buddhist heritage.

Indonesia: Borobudur Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the largest and most magnificent Buddhist temples in the world. Built in the 9th century, it represents the pinnacle of Buddhist architectural achievement in Southeast Asia. After the arrival of Islam in the archipelago, Borobudur was abandoned but not destroyed, demonstrating respect for the cultural artifacts of prior civilizations.<sup>12</sup>

Preservation Initiatives: Modern Indonesia, despite being the largest Muslim-majority country, invests heavily in the preservation of Borobudur. Restoration projects funded by the Indonesian government, UNESCO, and international partners have ensured that the temple remains a globally recognized heritage symbol.

Borobudur is deeply connected to Buddhist teachings, as its architectural design reflects the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist path to enlightenment. The temple is structured in three levels - *Kāmadhātu* (the world of desire), *Rūpadhātu* (the world of form), and *Arūpadhātu* (the formless world) - mirroring the Buddhist cosmology found in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*.<sup>13</sup>

Interfaith Pilgrimage and Tourism: Borobudur attracts millions of visitors annually, including Buddhist pilgrims from around the world. Events such as

<sup>10</sup> Lefèvre, V. (2011). *The Lalitavistara and the early Buddhist art of Gandhāra and Central Asia*. *Arts Asiatiques*, 66, p. 3 - 21.

<sup>11</sup> Conze, E. (1973). *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its verse summary*. *Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation*, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). *Borobudur Temple Compounds*. Retrieved from UNESCO official website. e.g., see UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d., p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Cleary, T. (1993). *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*. Shambhala Publications, p. 67.

Vesak celebrations, supported by local Muslim authorities, highlight the spirit of coexistence.

Malaysia: Wat Chayamangkalaram, though predominantly Muslim, is home to several Buddhist temples, reflecting its multicultural heritage. Wat Chayamangkalaram, a Thai Buddhist temple in Penang, houses a 33-meter reclining Buddha statue, one of the largest in the world.

Community-Led Preservation: Local Muslim-majority authorities collaborate with Buddhist communities to maintain and promote these temples as cultural landmarks. This collaboration exemplifies Malaysia's pluralistic society and its commitment to safeguarding religious and cultural diversity.

#### 2.4. Lessons from the case studies

These examples from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia highlight the critical role of Muslim-majority countries in preserving Buddhist heritage. Key lessons include:

Collaborative Leadership: Successful preservation efforts often involve partnerships between governments, local communities, and international organizations. Cultural Tourism as a Bridge: Promoting Buddhist heritage sites as cultural tourism destinations fosters economic growth and interfaith dialogue. Educational Campaigns: Raising awareness about the historical and cultural significance of these sites among local communities ensures long-term sustainability.

### III. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HARMONY

#### 3.1. Shared values in Buddhism and Islam

Both Buddhism and Islam share fundamental values that provide a philosophical foundation for interfaith harmony. Despite differences in theology, their teachings converge on principles such as compassion, respect for all beings, and the pursuit of peace - values that underpin the spirit of coexistence.

Compassion and Mercy: In Buddhism, compassion (*karuṇā*) is a central tenet, urging individuals to alleviate the suffering of others. The *Mettā Sutta* (Loving-Kindness Discourse) teaches that one should radiate boundless love to all beings, just as a mother loves and protects her only child.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Islam emphasizes mercy (*rahma*), with the Quran frequently describing Allah as "the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate" (Quran 1:1). These shared values encourage adherents of both faiths to embrace kindness and mutual respect.

On-Violence and Justice: The Buddhist concept of non-violence (*ahimsā*) aligns with Islamic principles of justice ('adl) and peace (*salaam*). Both religions advocate resolving conflicts through dialogue and understanding rather than aggression. This shared emphasis on peaceful coexistence provides a strong ethical framework for interfaith collaboration.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Bodhi, B. (2017). *The Buddha's teachings on loving-kindness: A study of the Mettā Sutta*. Wisdom Publications, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Gombrich, R. F. (2009). *What the Buddha Thought*. Equinox Publishing, 2009, p. 145.

Stewardship of the Earth: Buddhism promotes mindfulness and interdependence, encouraging followers to live in harmony with nature. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life and the duty of humans to care for their surroundings.<sup>16</sup> In Islam, the concept of stewardship (khalifa) calls on humans to protect the earth and its resources. These parallel teachings support the preservation of cultural and environmental heritage as a shared responsibility.

### 3.2. Ethical frameworks for preservation

Cultural preservation is deeply rooted in the ethical teachings of both Islam and Buddhism. Protecting heritage sites is not merely a logistical or financial endeavor but a moral obligation that reflects broader values of interconnectedness and respect for diversity.

Islamic Ethics on Heritage Preservation: Islamic teachings emphasize the protection of sacred spaces, art, and knowledge. This extends to non-Islamic heritage, as exemplified by the preservation of ancient libraries, temples, and monasteries during Islamic rule. The Quran states, “And do not cause corruption upon the earth after its reformation” (Quran 7:56), which is interpreted as a call to protect cultural treasures from destruction.

Buddhist Ethics on Heritage Preservation: Buddhism encourages the safeguarding of physical manifestations of the Dharma, such as stupas, temples, and statues. These sites are seen as vehicles for spiritual reflection and communal harmony, making their preservation an ethical imperative.

Interfaith Perspectives: Both faiths recognize the value of cultural heritage as a bridge between generations and communities. Preserving Buddhist heritage in Muslim-majority countries reflects a commitment to these shared ethical principles, demonstrating respect for humanity’s collective history.

### 3.3. Contributions of Sufi and Buddhist philosophies to unity

The mystical traditions within Islam and Buddhism, Sufism and Zen Buddhism, offer profound insights into the pursuit of unity and peace. These philosophies emphasize inner transformation and universal love, transcending religious and cultural boundaries.

Sufi Universalism: Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, focuses on the oneness of humanity and divine love. Sufi poets like Rumi and Ibn Arabi often spoke of transcending religious labels to embrace a universal spiritual truth. Rumi’s famous verse, “I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Muslim. I am of no religion” (Rumi, 1995) reflects the Sufi ideal of unity through love and understanding.<sup>17</sup>

Buddhist Interconnectedness: Zen Buddhism and Mahayana teachings highlight the interconnectedness of all beings (*pratityasamutpāda*). Zen

<sup>16</sup> Walshe, M. (1995). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Rumi, J. al-D. (13th Century). *The Essential Rumi* (C. Barks, Trans.). HarperOne. (1995), p. 123.

Buddhism similarly teaches the direct experience of reality beyond conceptual distinctions. Rooted in Mahayana thought, Zen emphasizes *satori* (sudden awakening) as the realization of one's intrinsic Buddha-nature.<sup>18</sup> This is echoed in The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, where Huineng states, "Look within! The Buddha is not outside of you."<sup>19</sup> This philosophy fosters a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others and the preservation of shared spaces.<sup>20</sup> Zen masters often employ paradoxical *koans* (riddles) to transcend dualistic thinking, mirroring the Sufi practice of *dhikr* (remembrance) to dissolve the ego and awaken to divine unity.

**Common Ground:** Both traditions advocate for meditation, self-discipline, and mindfulness as paths to inner peace and societal harmony. The convergence of these ideas creates fertile ground for interfaith dialogue and collaboration. For example, initiatives that bring together Sufi and Buddhist leaders for discussions on compassion and peacebuilding have yielded practical models for fostering unity.

## IV. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### 4.1. Challenges in preserving heritage

Preserving cultural heritage, particularly Buddhist sites in Muslim-majority countries, faces several challenges, including political instability, economic limitations, ideological conflicts, and environmental degradation.

**Political Instability and Conflict:** In regions affected by war and political unrest, heritage sites often become collateral damage. For instance, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan highlighted the vulnerability of cultural landmarks during times of conflict.<sup>21</sup> Governments in conflict zones often struggle to prioritize heritage preservation amid pressing humanitarian concerns.<sup>22</sup>

**Economic and Resource Limitations:** Heritage conservation is a resource-intensive process. Many Muslim-majority countries, particularly in the developing world, face budget constraints that limit their ability to invest in the restoration and maintenance of heritage sites. While international funding can be helpful, it is often insufficient to address the scale of the challenge.

**Extremist Ideologies:** Extremist groups sometimes target heritage sites as symbols of cultural identity, seeking to erase histories that conflict with their ideological narratives. This threat complicates efforts to protect and preserve

<sup>18</sup> Suzuki, D. T. (1953). *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings*. Doubleday, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Huineng. (1999). *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (P. Yampolsky, Trans.). Columbia University Press, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Hirakawa, A. (1993). *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*. Motilal Banarsidass, p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> Abu-Nimer, M. (2001). *Conflict Resolution in Islamic Contexts: Principles, Training, and Experiences*. *Peace and Conflict Studies Journal*, 8(1), p. 12 - 35.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmed, A. S. (2002). *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*. Routledge, p. 156.



Buddhist heritage in regions where such groups operate.

**Environmental Degradation:** Natural disasters, climate change, and pollution pose significant threats to ancient structures. For example, rising humidity levels and acid rain have accelerated the deterioration of stone carvings and frescoes at sites like Borobudur in Indonesia.

**Cultural and Social Sensitivities:** Preserving Buddhist sites in Muslim-majority countries requires navigating complex cultural dynamics. Misinterpretations and mistrust between religious communities can hinder collaborative efforts, emphasizing the need for inclusive and transparent approaches.

#### **4.2. Opportunities for collaboration**

Despite these challenges, Muslim-majority countries have significant opportunities to take the lead in cultural preservation and foster interfaith harmony.

**Leveraging International Platforms:** Organizations like UNESCO provide frameworks and funding for heritage preservation. Muslim-majority nations can strengthen partnerships with such organizations to ensure sustainable conservation efforts. For example, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee has successfully collaborated with Pakistan to preserve Gandhāran sites and with Indonesia to protect Borobudur.

**Cultural Diplomacy:** Highlighting the preservation of Buddhist heritage can enhance the global image of Muslim-majority countries as advocates for interfaith harmony. Initiatives such as hosting Buddhist festivals, exhibitions, and academic conferences foster goodwill and mutual respect.

**Community-Driven Preservation:** Engaging local communities in preservation projects not only ensures the sustainability of these efforts but also builds trust between Muslim and Buddhist populations. Examples from Malaysia and Pakistan show that involving local stakeholders helps foster a sense of shared ownership and responsibility.

**Educational and Awareness Campaigns:** Raising awareness about the historical and cultural significance of Buddhist sites among Muslim-majority populations can help combat stereotypes and foster a culture of respect. Educational programs in schools and universities play a pivotal role in promoting interfaith understanding.

#### **4.3. Role of Muslim countries in global harmony**

Muslim-majority nations are uniquely positioned to lead global efforts in fostering unity through cultural preservation. Their involvement in protecting Buddhist heritage sends a powerful message about Islam's compatibility with diversity and coexistence.

**Setting Examples of Interfaith Collaboration:** By preserving Buddhist sites, Muslim-majority countries demonstrate that protecting cultural heritage transcends religious boundaries. This serves as an inspiration for other nations to prioritize heritage conservation as a means of peacebuilding.

**Strengthening Interfaith Dialogue:** Cultural preservation projects provide opportunities for dialogue between Muslim and Buddhist communities.



Platforms that bring together religious leaders, scholars, and policymakers help address misconceptions and build bridges of understanding.

**Economic Benefits of Cultural Tourism:** Buddhist heritage sites in Muslim-majority countries attract millions of tourists and pilgrims annually. Investing in these sites not only preserves history but also boosts local economies, creates jobs, and fosters cross-cultural interactions.<sup>23</sup>

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE COLLABORATION**

### **5.1. Policy recommendations**

To institutionalize the preservation of Buddhist heritage as a tool for interfaith harmony, governments, organizations, and international bodies must adopt specific policy measures.

**Integrating Heritage Preservation into National Policies:** Governments of Muslim-majority countries should create robust frameworks that prioritize cultural preservation as part of their national agendas. This includes allocating dedicated budgets, enacting heritage protection laws, and establishing specialized agencies to oversee conservation efforts.

**Promoting Interfaith Heritage Preservation in International Agreements:** Cultural preservation should be included as a key component of global peacebuilding efforts. Through organizations like UNESCO and the United Nations, Muslim-majority nations can advocate for binding agreements that mandate the protection of religious heritage sites worldwide.

**Enforcing Stronger Protections in Conflict Zones:** The international community, with active support from Muslim-majority countries, should develop stronger protocols to safeguard heritage sites in conflict areas. These could include peacekeeping measures specifically aimed at protecting cultural landmarks or post-conflict restoration programs funded by multilateral agencies.

### **5.2. Expanding cultural and academic exchanges**

Educational initiatives and academic partnerships can foster a deeper understanding of shared histories and interfaith values, paving the way for sustainable collaboration.

**Interfaith Education Programs:** Schools and universities should incorporate curricula that highlight the interconnected histories of Buddhism and Islam, emphasizing shared values such as compassion and coexistence. This approach can help future generations appreciate the significance of preserving cultural heritage.

**Joint Research Initiatives:** Scholars and researchers from Muslim and Buddhist communities can collaborate on studies about heritage conservation and interfaith dialogue. Such projects can yield valuable insights into best practices for preservation and inspire future initiatives.

**Cultural Exchange Programs:** Exchange programs that bring together students, artists, and community leaders from Muslim and Buddhist

---

<sup>23</sup> World Tourism Organization (WTO). (2020). *Cultural Tourism and Heritage Preservation*. Retrieved from WTO official website , p. 5.

backgrounds can foster mutual respect and understanding. These programs can include workshops, exhibitions, and visits to heritage sites.

### **5.3. Collaborative models for sustainable heritage preservation**

To ensure the long-term preservation of Buddhist heritage in Muslim-majority countries, innovative and inclusive models of collaboration should be adopted.

**Public-Private Partnerships:** Governments can partner with private organizations, including businesses, NGOs, and philanthropic foundations, to fund and manage heritage conservation projects. These partnerships can mobilize resources and expertise that are often unavailable in the public sector.

**Regional Cooperation:** Neighboring countries with shared cultural histories can work together on cross-border heritage preservation projects. For example, Pakistan and Afghanistan could collaborate on initiatives to restore Gandhāran Buddhist sites.

**Community-Led Conservation:** Engaging local communities in preservation efforts ensures that heritage sites are maintained sustainably. This model has been successful in regions like Malaysia, where local stakeholders are involved in the upkeep and promotion of Buddhist temples.

**Technology-Driven Solutions:** Advances in technology, such as 3D scanning and digital archiving, can be leveraged to document and restore heritage sites. Muslim-majority countries can invest in these technologies to preserve Buddhist relics for future generations.

### **5.4. Promoting heritage tourism for unity**

Cultural tourism has the potential to serve as a bridge between different faiths and communities. By promoting Buddhist heritage sites as tourist destinations, Muslim-majority countries can foster interfaith understanding while supporting economic development.

**Developing Inclusive Tourism Policies:** Tourism strategies should focus on inclusivity, ensuring that Buddhist pilgrims and visitors from all backgrounds feel welcome. Facilities at heritage sites should cater to diverse needs, including multilingual guides and interpretive centers.

**Hosting Interfaith Festivals and Events:** Festivals celebrating Buddhist heritage can serve as platforms for interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange. For instance, Vesak celebrations at sites like Borobudur or Takht-i-Bahi could involve both Buddhist and Muslim communities.

**Collaborating with Global Tourism Platforms:** Partnering with international tourism organizations can enhance the visibility of Buddhist heritage sites in Muslim-majority countries. This includes participation in global travel expos and the creation of digital campaigns highlighting these sites.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

### **6.1. Reflections on the theme of unity**

In an increasingly polarized world, fostering unity through collaborative efforts holds immense potential to heal divides and build bridges across cultures and faiths. The preservation of Buddhist heritage by Muslim-majority

countries exemplifies this ethos, demonstrating how cultural and historical preservation can transcend religious and ideological boundaries. From Pakistan's guardianship of the Gandhāra civilization to Indonesia's meticulous care of Borobudur, these efforts underscore a universal commitment to protecting humanity's shared legacy. By actively participating in heritage conservation, Muslim-majority nations affirm their role as stewards of peace and coexistence, rooted in the shared values of Islam and Buddhism.

This paper has shown that the philosophical principles of compassion, respect, and interconnectedness inherent in both Islam and Buddhism provide a strong foundation for interfaith collaboration. Historical precedents and contemporary examples illustrate how these principles translate into tangible actions, fostering unity through cultural preservation.

## 6.2. Call to action

As the world gathers for the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) 2025, it is imperative to recognize the transformative power of cultural preservation in fostering unity. Muslim-majority countries have demonstrated that interfaith collaboration is not only possible but essential for global peacebuilding. The preservation of Buddhist heritage offers a pathway to mutual respect, understanding, and coexistence - a legacy that transcends religious affiliations and geographical boundaries.

The international community must prioritize heritage preservation as a means of fostering interfaith dialogue and global harmony. Governments, organizations, and communities should embrace this opportunity to create policies and initiatives that safeguard our shared cultural treasures for future generations. Let the UNDV 2025 conference in Vietnam serve as a call to action, inspiring nations to work together in the spirit of unity, compassion, and respect.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Dhammapada* (Easwaran, E., Trans.). (2007). Nilgiri Press.  
*In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*. Bodhi, B. (2005). Wisdom Publications.

### Secondary sources

- Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. (Trans.). (2004). *The Quran*. Oxford University Press.  
 Ahmed, A. S. (2002). *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*. Routledge.  
 Ali, M. (2018). *Historical Interaction between Islam and Buddhism in South Asia*. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 39 (1), p. 1-15.  
 Cleary, T. (1993). *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the*

*Avatamsaka Sutra*. Shambhala Publications.

Conze, E. (1973). *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary*. Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation.

Dalrymple, W. (2013). *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan, 1839-1842*. Bloomsbury.

Eaton, R. M. (1993). *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*. University of California Press.

Gombrich, R. F. (2009). *What the Buddha Thought*. Equinox Publishing.

Hirakawa, A. (1993). *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*. Motilal Banarsidass.

Lefèvre, V. (2011). *The Lalitavistara and the Early Buddhist Art of Gandhāra and Central Asia*. *Arts Asiatiques*, 66, p. 3-21.

Marshall, J. (1960). *The Buddhist Art of Gandhāra*. Cambridge University Press.

Rumi, J. al-D. (13th Century/1995). *The Essential Rumi* (C. Barks, Trans.). HarperOne.

Suzuki, D. T. (1953). *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings*. Doubleday.

Walshe, M. (1995). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications.

#### **Websites:**

UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). *Taxila*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3077/>

UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). *Borobudur Temple Compounds*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/592/>

World Tourism Organization (WTO). (2020). *Cultural Tourism and Heritage Preservation*. World Tourism Organization. <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-culture>

# WHAT THE BUDDHA TAUGHT FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN THE WORLD

Most. Ven. Bhante Jinalankara\*

## Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to show how the teachings of the Buddha can contribute to the maintenance of sustainable peace in the world. The paper details the positive mind states that all can achieve by following the ancient Buddhist path of practice: both individuals and, in particular, leaders of communities and countries. Since war does not originate on the battlefield but in minds troubled by greed, hatred, and delusion, the paper sets out the Buddha's teaching on inner transformation. It seeks to show that the Buddhist path is not merely aspirational but specific, practical, and achievable and is thus able to contribute to world peace.

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, sustainable peace, world peace.*

\*\*\*

## I. THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING TO FIND PEACE WITHIN

It is significant to discuss how peace can be achieved for the world from the Buddhist perspective, on Vesak Day on which the Buddha's birth, Enlightenment, and Passing Away are auspiciously celebrated.

At the beginning of the Buddha's Dhamma mission, the Buddha advised a group of sixty monks not to walk in a group of two or more to any village or town but to walk individually and travel by oneself, taking the *Dhamma* message for the well-being and happiness of many.<sup>1</sup> The Buddha wanted to reveal His newly discovered noble Dhamma to the world. That is the real mark of a great and compassionate teacher. The distinct attribute of the Buddha's teaching is to find peace within oneself and not outside. The Buddha gave many hundreds of examples to people to find peace within themselves.

Establishing the well-being and happiness of the mundane world is one approach. Beyond this worldly comfort, Buddhism offers a higher recommendation for another kind of peace called ultimate peace. The Buddha

---

\* President of the Dhamma Gavesi Meditation Centre in Wellington, New Zealand.

<sup>1</sup> Mahavagga Pāli (2006): 156.

wanted to direct all human beings and celestial beings to attain higher peace or ultimate happiness.<sup>2</sup>

Buddhism has a noble and realistic path for achieving higher peace based on one's morality, concentration, and wisdom development. Morality, concentration, and wisdom (*sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*) bring forth both internal peace and safety directly related to the inner mind. At one time, a brahmin named Bhāradvāja approached the Buddha and asked: "Tangle inside, tangle outside this generation is entangled in a tangle/I ask you, venerable Gotama, who can disentangle these tangles."<sup>3</sup>

The Buddha replied to the brahmin, "A man established in virtue, wisely developing the mind and wisdom, a monk ardent and discreet, can disentangle this tangle."<sup>4</sup> This statement of the Buddha clearly emphasizes that peace and happiness in this complicated world are possible by cultivating and developing the threefold spiritual training, which is known as training oneself in morality (*sīla*), developing concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). As advised by the Buddha, one should think about oneself before focusing on peace for the world. Let one first establish oneself in what is proper and then instruct others. Such a wise man will not be defiled: "*Attanameva pathamam - Patirūpe nivesaye / Athannamanusaseyya - Na kilisseyya pandito.*"<sup>5</sup>

Everyone indeed likes peace and happiness. Everyone wishes to be successful in various ways and advance in society. Thus, the main themes of the Buddha's teachings are truth, freedom, justice, loving-kindness, compassion, love, happiness, and emancipation. The fundamental teachings, such as the four noble truths, causality, *kamma* and rebirth, the three characteristics, and so forth, were preached by the Buddha to achieve the above spiritual objectives. Once, the Buddha advised the monks: The achievement of the above goals depends on oneself; the Buddha shows only the path and avenues to reach them.<sup>6</sup> The path is practical and realistic since, without practicing, one can never achieve peace and freedom by merely praying or doing sacrifices or rituals.

Unconditional and unselfish Love, freedom, liberation, happiness, comfort, and peace are highly spoken of in Buddhism. However, these topics are very familiar to other faiths worldwide as well. Many teachers, religious leaders, and saints preached their doctrines for the well-being and happiness of all humankind. However, the doctrine of peace in Buddhism has unique features that distinguish it from other religions. One of such cardinal teachings of Buddhism is causality (*hetu-phala-vāda*). According to the Buddha's teaching, all conflicts and problems arise conditionally. Conflicts, disputes, issues, and other physical and psychological phenomena are dependently originated on conditions. The following formula emphasizes the conditionality of arising

<sup>2</sup> Dhṛp 203.

<sup>3</sup> SN 7.6.

<sup>4</sup> SN 7. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Dhṛp 158.

<sup>6</sup> Dhṛp 276; *Tumhehi kiccam ātappam, akkhātāraro tathāgatā.*



and cessation of disputes and all other phenomena. “Thus, when this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.”<sup>7</sup> This doctrine or formulation is the core part of the teaching of the Buddha. It was explained clearly in the first sermon of the Buddha when he was describing the four noble truths. In the discourse on the four noble truths, the Buddha clarified how problems and conflicts arise while showing the cessation of all such disputes.

## II. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD FRIENDSHIP FOR PEACE

In this paper I hope to discuss how we should focus on building sustainable peace in the world through Buddhism. When considering this point from the actual perspective, it is clear that the Buddhism always aims to foster peace among all living beings, not only humans but also towards animals.

The good friends’ association is a fundamental recommendation in Buddhism. It is described as a primary root of mental development and a leading cause of the noble path to ultimate peace.<sup>8</sup>

Once, Venerable Ānanda said to the Buddha that half of the holy life (spiritual practice) is spiritual friendship. But the Buddha advised Ven Ananda not to say so and told him that the whole of the spiritual life depends on the blossoming of good friendship. The whole of the Buddha’s dispensation depends on the blossoming of good friendship. Spiritual friendship is the ground for peace to spring up and spread in the world. “Not so, Ānanda, not so, Ānanda! This entire holy life is dependent on good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship. When a monk has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path.”<sup>9</sup>

On every occasion, the Buddha stressed the importance of building friendship among monks, devotees, and all people since it is the direct cause for building sustainable peace among all living beings. Even adherents of other faiths who were given to chatting and noisy conduct quickly became silent when the Buddha visited them.

The leaders of those groups asked their disciples and followers to keep quiet since the Buddha appreciated peace and silence.

## III. ETYMOLOGICAL EXPLANATION OF PEACE

When talking about bringing sustainable peace to the world, it is essential to know what peace is. This is because the word ‘peace’ has been interpreted and used in different ways in different contexts. Since this article is about peace as a

<sup>7</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom publication, (2000): “*Imasmim sati idam hoti, imasmim asati idam na hoti, Imassa uppāda idam uppajjati, imassa nirodha idam nirujjhati.*”

<sup>8</sup>AN 6: 11: “*Mā hevam, ānanda, mā hevam, ānanda! Sakalamevidam, ānanda, brahmacariyam, yadidam – Kalyānamittatā kalyānasahāyatā kalyānasampavankatā. Kalyānamittasetaṃ, ānanda, bhikkhuno pātikankham kalyānasahāyassa kalyānasampavankassa – ariyam atthangikam maggam bhāvēssati, ariyam atthangikam maggam bahulīkarissati.*”

<sup>9</sup> SN 45. 2.

Buddhist concept, it is important to know what the relevant Buddhist concept is. Also, knowing how the word ‘peace’ has emerged and how it has been used will clarify its meaning to the reader and help the reader to understand peace from a Buddhist perspective.

The word ‘peace’ is used in today’s world to indicate a state of harmony and an absence of war. Since this article is presented in English, it is essential to know how the word ‘peace’ has been used in the English language. The word peace came from the Anglo-French word, *Pes* around the eleventh century. It was in the Old French term *Pais*.<sup>10</sup> Even earlier, when looking for the place of origin, it shows a connection to the Latin language. That is, the word *pax* in the Latin language is cited as the source. The word ‘*pax*’ is used to convey the ideas of peace, compact, agreement, treaty of peace, tranquillity, absence of hostility, and harmony. It specifically refers to the absence of hostility.

The Buddha used the *Pāli* language, or a similar language, to preach the *Dhamma*. Therefore, it is important to understand how the word ‘peace’ is used in the *Pāli* language. The Buddhist concept of peace and its interpretation should also be considered. In this *Sāsana*, the monk who has attained the path and the fruition of *Arahantship*, free from desire and delusion, reaches the state of noble peace and liberation called *Amata*.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage, *Nibbāna* is interpreted as the highest and noblest peace (*Santin*) and the path leading to the attainment of this highest peace (*Santin*) is also called peaceful path because it is endowed with peace. The peaceful path leads to a peaceful state. Hence, the Buddha’s teaching is said to be pure at the start, pure in the middle, and pure at the end. The entire *Dhamma* path to *Nibbāna* is peaceful.

Another helpful passage that speaks about peace (*Santin*) appears in the following stanza of the *Salla Sutta*: “*Na hi runnena sokena, santin pappoti cetaso;/ Bhiyyassuppajjate Dukkham, sariram cupahannati.*”<sup>12</sup>

Crying or mourning does not bring peace to the mind. The person who cries only becomes more sorrowful and the body is also exhausted. This stanza speaks about how mental peace cannot be gained from being sorrowful or crying.

The *Dhotaka Sutta* in the *Sutta Nipāta* provides a point of reference for peace (*Santi*) to be understood as follows: “*Dhotaka, I will teach you the peaceful path which is seeing the truth, living your life mindfully, realizing the Dhamma in this very life, and being free from craving.*”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Etymology Dictionary, *Peace*, [February 7, 2025] (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/peace>).

<sup>11</sup> Sn 11: “*Candarāgaviratto so, bhikkhu pannaānavā idha,/ Ajjhagā amatam santin, nibbānam padamaccutam.*”

<sup>12</sup> Sn 34.

<sup>13</sup> Sn 59: “*Kittayissāmi te santin, ditthe Dhamme anittham;/ Yam viditvā sato caram, tare loka visattikam.*”

The Buddhist concept ‘santi’ thus designates the peace of *Nibbāna*. It is referred to as ‘*Nibbānam paramam santim*.’ There is also the holy path for the attainment of ultimate peace. This is called the sacred path.

The word peace in English and the word *Santi* in *Pāli* are thus used in distinct contexts, and yet there is clear overlap in meaning, which will be explored in this paper.

#### IV. HOW PEACE IS IDENTIFIED IN THE MODERN WORLD

According to the actions recommended in a Culture of Peace adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, peace-building dialogue between societies is required. “Not only is the absence of conflict but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation.”<sup>14</sup>

The above statement encourages mutual understanding in building peace in the world. The world is formed by many different societies and cultures. Mutual appreciation, discussions, and dialogue will help to solve conflicts between groups, societies, and countries.

“The UN General Assembly lays out the values needed for a culture of peace. These include: respect for life, human rights and fundamental freedoms; the promotion of nonviolence through education, dialogue and cooperation; commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts; and adherence to freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations.

The General Assembly has also recognized the importance of choosing negotiations over confrontation and of working together and not against each other.

Again, the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization states that “wars begin in the minds of men so it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.

It is this notion that framed the theme and logo of this year’s observance of the International Day of Peace. The ideas of peace, the culture of peace, need to be cultivated in the minds of children and communities through formal and informal education, across countries and generations.

The International Day of Peace has always been a time to lay down weapons and observe ceasefires. But it now must also be a time for people to see each other’s humanity. Our survival as a global community depends on that.

#### V. PRACTICAL EXAMPLES FROM THE BUDDHIST SUTTAS FOR WORLD PEACE

The *Pātama Sārāṇīyasutta Sutta* stresses the importance of mutual understanding and lists the ways that monks should follow virtuous principles wholeheartedly to resolve any contentious points in the monks’ community.

---

<sup>14</sup>UN General Assembly, *Cultivation a Culture of Peace*, [February 7, 2025] <https://www.un.org/en/observances/international-day-peace>

Monks, there are these six principles of cordiality.

- (1) A monk maintains bodily acts of loving kindness toward his fellow monks both openly and privately.
- (2) Again, a monk maintains verbal acts of loving kindness toward his fellow monks openly and privately.
- (3) A bhikkhu maintains mental acts of loving kindness toward his fellow monks openly and privately.
- (4) A bhikkhu shares without reservation any righteous gains that have been righteously obtained, including even the contents of his alms bowl, and uses such things in common with his virtuous fellow monks.
- (5) A bhikkhu dwells both openly and privately, possessing in common with his fellow monks virtuous behavior that is unbroken, flawless, unblemished, unblotched, freeing, praised by the wise, ungrasped, leading to concentration.
- (6) A bhikkhu dwells both openly and privately, possessing in common with his fellow monks a view that is noble and emancipating, which leads out, for one who acts upon it, to the destruction of suffering.<sup>15</sup>

The Buddha's kindness in laying out this cordial basis for the community of monks is apparent and can also be seen as a unique model for other communities. But the Buddha did not limit himself to setting down precepts, but always set an example of right conduct for all to follow. Examples are better and stronger in reaching out to other communities. This can be seen in the case of little children who follow the conduct of adults. Even some animals tend to copy and do what human beings do. The Buddha was clear that instructions had to be initiated by righteous conduct. This truth was formulated by the Buddha when he said: One should first establish oneself in what is right and appropriate and then instruct others.<sup>16</sup> As we attempt to bring peace to the world, this advice of the Buddha is unique and truly practical.

By way of acts, the first step of peace building in the world through Buddhism is the first precept of abstaining from harming or killing other living beings. "I undertake abstaining from killing living beings".<sup>17</sup> It guides people to be harmless and loving and to build up kindness for every living being in every nook and cranny in the world. All beings tremble at the rod. All beings fear death. Comparing oneself with others, one should neither strike nor cause to strike.<sup>18</sup>

This is another characteristic piece of advice to his disciples from the Buddha. We all know that we fear punishments, assaults and any kind of physical harassment. See yourself as an example and do not even think about harming others. Though this *Pāli* verse mainly speaks about physical harassment, it is

<sup>15</sup> AN 8.55

<sup>16</sup> Dhṛp 158; *Attānameva pathamam, patirūpe nivesaye.*

<sup>17</sup> AN 4.21; "*Pānātipātā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*".

<sup>18</sup> Dhṛp 129: "*Sabbe tasanti dandassa – sabbe bhāyanti macchuno / Attānam upamam katvā – na haneyya na ghataye.*"

applicable to verbal harassment too.

The Buddha's teaching discourages its followers from harming others either physically or verbally, or even in thought. Just as we do not like to be blamed or criticized, others are in the same position regarding blame. When one hurts anyone else, the negative karmic force in hurting others will return to oneself.

Some religions in the world, encourage their followers to destroy other religions and religious objects venerated by the followers of other religions. By contrast, Buddhism encourages its followers and disciples to respect others of other faiths and to live with them harmoniously.

The Buddha revealed his newly discovered teaching to the world at a time when sixty-two religions or views were adhered to in India. However, neither the Buddha nor any of his monks ever insulted any religious leaders. The Buddhist position is that everyone can follow any belief they wish. What the Buddha and his disciples did was to encourage followers of other faiths to think about what the Buddha taught.

The discussion between the Buddha and Upāli, the householder, is another example of this point of harmlessness. At that time, Upāli was a follower of the Jain Mahāvīra. Every day, he offered food to Jain sādhu. Once, he met the Buddha and had a very deep conversation with Him about the elements of human life. After listening to the profound *Dhamma* factors explained by the Buddha, he was converted to Buddhism. He became a follower of the Buddha. Then, the householder Upāli changed his mind about offering food to Jain sādhu. However, the Buddha advised him not to stop offering food to Jain monks because they, too, were beings living on food. It is very rare to find such a compassionate teacher in the world.<sup>19</sup>

When the Sākyaans and the Koliyaans, the two royal clans. Got very close to war because they could not skillfully manage and share the waters of the river Rohini. the Buddha went to them and explained the danger of the quarrel and the benefits of friendship and unity. Teaching *Dhamma* to them, the Buddha emphatically stressed the importance and value of peace and the danger of the bitterness of war. Then, the Buddha advised them not to quarrel with each other and to stop the war.

On another occasion, when King Vidudabha went to the Śākya kingdom with an army to kill Śākyaans and ruin the country, the Buddha intervened three times and stopped them going to killing his relatives. The Buddha advised the king not to go to war by explaining to him the danger of war and the serenity of sustainable peace. This is an example of one of the notable preachings of the Buddha, encouraging those who act to bring peace to the world.

Similarly, there are many notable Suttas which speak highly about loving-kindness, such as the *Metta Sutta*, the *Mettānisamsa Sutta*, the *Dhajaḡga Sutta*, the *Bharaadvāja Sutta*, and others, where the Buddha emphasized the value of peace.

---

<sup>19</sup> MN 56.

## VI. ROOT CAUSES THAT BLOCK THE ARISING OF PEACE

When talking about sustainable peace in the world, it is necessary to consider the opposite of peace. Therefore, the following factors should be considered.

Three major root causes are directly responsible for causing inner conflicts and conflicts with others. These root causes are known as desire, hatred and delusion. (*lobha, dosa moha*). The latent disposition of these three unwholesome roots is submerged in the mind. With contact of external objects desire (*lobha*) becomes covetousness (*abhijjha*), hatred (*dosa*) turns into ill-will (*vyāpāda*), and delusion (*moha*) becomes wrong view (*micchaditthi*). Thus, covetousness, ill-will, and wrong views are the dynamic positions of the mind that reinforce the individual in making conflicts or problems in the outside world.

Thus, the psychological processes of the individual cause the arising of physical actions in the external world. However, external conflicts do not entirely originate within the mind itself because the mind is intrinsically pure and becomes impure through external contact. Luminous, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements.<sup>20</sup> Thus, according to the Buddha, the causes of internal or external conflicts are to be found both within the person and the outer world, arising due to the interrelation of the internal mind and the external world. This is the Buddhist theory of cause and effect.

The *Mahanidāna Sutta* is one of the great discourses that makes this point clear. It sets out the law of causation for the origin of different forms of conflicts. The Buddha, addressing Venerable Ananda, said, “Feeling conditions craving, craving conditions seeking, seeking conditions acquisition, acquisition conditions decision-making, decision-making conditions lustful desire, lustful desire conditions attachment, attachment conditions appropriation, appropriation conditions avarice, avarice conditions guarding of possessions. Because of the guarding of possessions there arise the taking up of stick and sword, quarrels, disputes arguments, strife, abuses, lying and other evil unskilled states.”<sup>21</sup> This explanation of the Buddha stresses how internal mental defilements interact with the dynamic circumstances of the external world. Thus, in Buddhism, the origin and cessation of all forms of conflicts and problems are analyzed about causal conditions.

## VII. THE BUDDHA’S ADVICE TO HIS DISCIPLES FOR WORLD PEACE

Peace is the main focus of many societies as it is essential for the survival of humans on this planet. The peaceful atmosphere of a society may degenerate because of the waging of conflicts that originate from religious, political,

<sup>20</sup> AN 1.49: “*pabhassaramidaṃ bhikkhve cittaṃ, taṃ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkilittan.*”

<sup>21</sup> *The Great Discourse on Causation*, Bhikkhu Bodhi. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 1984, p. 196.



cultural, and ethnic differences. Conflict appears to be an inevitable feature in human societies; therefore, the establishment of peace is vital for society. In the process of building peace, some important Buddhist discourses provide theoretical and practical advice. A prominent example of this is the advice given by the Buddha to his first sixty disciples.

Monks travel forth for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans. Let not two monks go the same way. Teach O bhikkhus, the Dhamma, that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, with the correct meaning and phrasing. Reveal the perfectly complete and purified holy life.<sup>22</sup>

The above advice clearly shows the main objective of the supreme Buddha and how the Buddha advises His disciples to walk carrying the precious Dhamma message to the world. The clear aim of the Buddha's teaching is to bring peace, harmony, and well-being to humankind.<sup>23</sup> "For the well-being and happiness of mankind." One of the main purposes of the Buddha and his disciples was to establish peace and happiness for society. Therefore, the Buddha is said to have been born for the goodness and happiness of the human world.

In the *Nālaka Sutta*, the Devas make this joyful utterance. "That Bodhisatva has been born in the Sākya's city, in lands along Lumbini. Precious gem beyond comparison, for the weal and welfare of those in the human realm. That is why we are delighted and completely overjoyed."<sup>24</sup>

This verse proves how the birth of the Bodhisatva brought joy and peace not only to the human realm but also to the celestial worlds. Every step trodden, every word uttered, and every thought in the mind of the Buddha is solely for other beings' sake.

The real compassionate attributes of the "Great Compassionate One"

By precept and example, the Buddha was the Great Compassionate One (*Mahā Kārunika*). He radiated his great compassion towards all living beings. His actions were never divorced from compassion. The entire Dispensation of the Buddha is permeated with this sublime quality of *karunā*. Goodness and violence cannot co-exist; goodness constructs while violence destroys. Compassion cannot be cultivated by one who is obsessed with thoughts of selfishness. It is the self-sacrificing man who fills his heart with pure thoughts of pity and wishes to help and serve others. The selfish cannot be of genuine service to others, for their selfish motives prevent them from doing good. No

<sup>22</sup> Caratha, bhikkhave, cārikam bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam. Mā ekena dve agamittha. Desetha, bhikkhave, dhammam ādikalyānam majjhakalyānam pariyośanakalyānam sāttham sabyañjanam kevalaparipunnam parisuddham brahmacariyam pakāsetha

<sup>23</sup> bahujana hithāya, bahujana sukhāya.

<sup>24</sup> Sn 37: "So bodhisatto ratanavaro atulyo, manussaloke hitasukhatthāya jāto;/Sakyāna gāme janapade lumbineyye, tenamha tutthā atiriva kalyarūpā."

sooner do they become selfish and self-possessed than they fail to soften their hearts. Hard-heartedness is overcome by pity, by sympathy. If you remove *karunā* from the teachings of the Buddha, you remove the heart of Buddhism; for all virtues, all goodness and righteousness have *karunā* as their basis, as their matrix. All the virtues (*pārami*) that a Bodhisatta or one bent on enlightenment cultivates are initiated by compassion. Compassion is tenderness, a quality of the heart, while understanding or wisdom is hard and penetrative. Compassion should be guided by understanding and understanding by compassion. They go hand in hand and are the backbone of Buddhism.”<sup>25</sup>

He attained this irreversible, strong, and stable peaceful position by himself through the realization of the true nature of the world. Then the Buddha declared as follows: “There arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, comprehension and light regarding things unheard before.”<sup>26</sup> Not only does the Buddha possess conceptual attributes of peace, but he was such a great human being who never physically, verbally even mentally caused any harm to himself or anyone else in the world. Every single word that the Buddha uttered is to establish the peace in oneself that flows out to society.

### VIII. REAL PEACE SPRINGS FROM ONE’S HEART

People in modern society seek peace in the world by organizing different types of programs and conferences to discuss such matters as peace building and protecting human rights. However, any program organized on the matter of peace building will be ineffective without focusing on the necessity of building inner peace. Before establishing peace in the external world, one should establish inner peace first. Once, the Buddha said, “It is not possible, Cunda, for him who is stuck in the mud to pull out another person who is stuck in the mud. But, Cunda, it is possible for one who is himself not stuck in the mud to pull out another person who is stuck in the mud. In the same way, the person who is not established in discipline and peace himself cannot bring peace to others but a person who himself is established in inner peace can lead others to inner peace.”<sup>27</sup>

The Buddha is the most excellent example of one who, first of all, developed and cultivated peace and calm within himself and then led others to gain peace. A person who expects to develop inner peace should practice self-effacement (*Sallekha karaniyo*). There are two methods of cultivating self-control and achieving peace of mind. One method is to remember any wrong things that one committed in the past and ponder upon their danger and resolve not to repeat them. The other method is to observe others who do wrong and unwholesome things and make a firm determination not to commit such unwholesome things by oneself. The *Sallekha Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya* points out how one should observe others to abstain from unwholesome deeds and

<sup>25</sup> *The Buddha’s Ancient Path*, Piyadassi Thera. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy. 1979, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> SN 56. 11.

<sup>27</sup> MN 45.

develop inner peace.

Others will be cruel; we shall not be cruel here. Others will kill living beings, and we shall abstain from killing living beings.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, his mind should be inclined (*cittam uppadetabbam*) thus, “Others will be cruel, we shall not be cruel here, and others will kill living beings we shall abstain from killing living beings.” Thus, whoever mental practices peace and harmony must have an ability to tolerate any kind of violent situation.

As an example, the Buddha said to the Venerable Phagguna, “If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a clod, with a stick, with a knife, you should abandon any desire and any thought based on the household life. And here you should train thus, my mind will be unaffected and I shall utter no evil words. I shall abide compassionate for his welfare, with mind of loving kindness, (*mettacitta*) without inner hate.”<sup>29</sup> This is stable and unswerving inner compassion and loving kindness that should be developed by oneself to keep the peace in the world. As mentioned above, peace building in society can never be achieved without building peace in one’s own mind. Buddhism always emphasizes establishing inner peace rather than peace in society. It should be easy to understand that after establishing stable inner peace in individuals, it will not be hard to establish peace in society.

The most important doctrine that the Buddha has elaborated to create a peaceful atmosphere is the cultivation of *metta* or loving-kindness. This single word has a very broad meaning in the context of bringing about peace and harmony, not only in the human world but also in the whole universe including even unseen beasts, flora and fauna.

The word *mettā* means “friendliness”. The friendliness or loving kindness that Buddhism emphasizes is not just friendliness but that is the kind of friendliness that should extend towards all living creatures in the human world and non-human world. The *Metta Sutta* explains the way of cultivating loving kindness towards all creatures.<sup>30</sup>

One who wishes to enjoy inner peace from practicing loving-kindness and attain the highest blessing, which is the ultimate peace, one should establish the following virtues in oneself and act accordingly so that a very serene ground is created for one’s practice.

The knowledge of loving-kindness meditation and to be able to follow it skillfully.

To be straight in doing wholesome deeds skilfully.

To be highly upright in the practice of loving-kindness meditation and other deeds.

One should be obedient and flexible to parents, teachers, and elders. One’s

---

<sup>28</sup> MN 41.

<sup>29</sup> MN 21.

<sup>30</sup> Sn 1. 9.

malleable behavior will create a serene atmosphere for the advancement of loving-kindness.

To be gentle and open-minded with others will help one to win the hearts of others.

Beneing humble and not conceited, and not showing others one's status will prevent any negative words from others. It will soften the heart of the practitioner removing ego from one's mind.

To be contented with little things and easily satisfied is a great quality to generate loving-kindness without difficulty.

One must be skilful to maintain one's life with few duties and unburdened by duties.

One's simple and frugal life style avoids any burden and gives rise to a softness of the mind.

To keep one's senses calm and restrained to prevent any disturbances to one's practice.

To be discreet, diplomatic and prudent in daily practice avoid one's being regression from mistakes.

Not being a stubborn, harsh, or rude person is a source of joy for everyone.

One who practices loving-kindness meditation should not be attached to any families.

One should not do any slightest wrong thing that the wise would later reprove.<sup>31</sup>

When establishing these serene qualities in oneself by way of contemplation, one is able to focus on sending forth loving thoughts to others for their well-being and happiness as follows:

Whatsoever living creatures there are, moving or still (*tasā vā thāvarā vā*) without exception, whatever are long or large, or middle-sized or short, small or great, whatever are seen or unseen, whichever live far or near, whether they already exist or are going to be, may all creatures be happy.<sup>32</sup> May all beings enjoy happiness.

One who seeks peace within should not humiliate another and should not despise anyone anywhere. One who wishes to bring peace to the world should not wish harm or misery to anyone because of anger or repugnance. Just as a mother who protects with her life, her son, her only son, so one should cultivate boundless loving kindness towards all beings, and loving kindness towards the entire world.

One should methodically cultivate boundless loving-kindness above and below, and across, without obstruction, without enmity, without rivalry.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Metta Sutta Commentary Pāli.

<sup>32</sup> *sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā.*

<sup>33</sup> SN 46. 54

If any confronted party in a conflict can transform their mental attitudes in accordance with the above level of loving kindness and forget all past bad experiences and agitation, peace will cease to be only a concept that cannot be put into practice.

The loving kindness or friendliness (*mettā*) to be spread towards all creatures is also mentioned in the Four Sublime Abodes (*brahma vihāra*). *Mettā* here means friendly feelings towards others. *Karunā* is the compassionate feelings that arises when one sees the misery and distress of others and responds to this distress with the purpose of assisting or helping them. *Karunā* is described as follows: *karunā* is that one's heart is melted or softened by kindness when one sees the misery of others.<sup>34</sup>

In cultivating compassion properly, one should not think of others as people from a different country, a different race, a different religion, or as people who are not related to oneself. With such notions, one cannot develop genuine compassion. Compassion should apply to everyone.

Mudita comes as the third sublime practice. Mudita is sympathetic joy, which means the ability to accept and rejoice in others' happiness and success without any jealousy. One who bears such Mudita thoughts will never suffer from anyone else's greatness, achievements and successes of any kind.

*Upekkhā* means the equanimity or the ability to tolerate any happy or distressful conditions neutrally.

Loving kindness is the opposite of anger, enmity or ill will (*mettā*). Therefore, to overcome such evil negative thoughts of an individual, one must cultivate loving-kindness or compassion. The Buddha said that friendliness should be cultivated to eradicate ill will.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned accounts, other important points are found in the *Sallekha Sutta*.<sup>36</sup> In the Sutta, the Buddha said to Cunda that a person who is cruel must practice non-cruelty to abstain from it; the person who engages in killing must abstain from killing to avoid it. Again, it is not enough only to refrain from killing living beings; one must cultivate the practice of loving-kindness to keep a sustainable peace from loving-kindness in the mind.

## IX. RESTRAIN FROM FIVEFOLD TRADES FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD

To establish peace and harmony in society, the Buddha recommended the right livelihood for both (*Bhikkhus*) monastic disciples and (*Sammā ājiva*) lay people.<sup>37</sup> Human life is dependent on earning a living through hard work. People should pursue various occupations for their livelihood. According to the Buddha, that method should be righteous. Encouraging people to pursue

<sup>34</sup> *Patisambhidhā Magga commentary*: Ch: 1. The knowledge of the Great Compassion; *paradukkhe sati sādhanam hadaya kampanam karotiti karunā*.

<sup>35</sup> *Udāna Pāli*, (1960): 4: 31; *mettā bhavetabbā byapāda pahānāya*.

<sup>36</sup> *MN* 8.

<sup>37</sup> *MN* 17.

righteous occupations, the Buddha taught that all kinds of wrong livelihoods that cause harm and violation of peace in society should be avoided. Therefore, the Buddha recommended abstaining from five trades that are thoroughly harmful to the peace of society.<sup>38</sup> They are:

- The sale of arms (*sattha vanijjā*),
- The sale of human beings or animals (*satta vanijjā*).
- The sale of flesh (*mānsa vanijjā*).
- The sale of intoxicating drinks (*majja vanijjā*).
- And the sale of dangerous or poisonous drugs (*visa vanijjā*).

It is not hidden news that many countries experience human rights violations due to the fact of the drug trade. Crime rates are also very high in many countries because of drug dealings. It is hard to find any single country in which there are no drug sales or related businesses.

Economically developed countries may speak much about the peace of their people and the world and may organize peace programs and seminars to bring and establish peace. However, they are nevertheless directly or indirectly engaged in the trade of weapons and drug sales. It is the duty and responsibility of the leaders and rulers of a country to work for the welfare and protection of its people. The leaders must provide for the safety and welfare of their country's population. This duty is reinforced by the fact that the country's people regard their leaders as their protectors.

## **X. RULERS SHOULD BE AN EXAMPLE TO A COUNTRY'S PEOPLE FOR PEACE-BUILDING**

The householder has a role to play in maintaining peace in a household. The head of the home must take it. Similarly, the village leader has a particular role in maintaining peace in a village. To keep peace in a society, a significant role needs to be played by prominent members of that society. Similarly, the leader of a country must follow well-defined roles and functions to maintain peace and harmony within a country. Thoughtful leaders who appreciate this can bring peace to their domain and maintain peace so that every house, village, society, and country is permeated with peace.

There are ten duties that a leader of a country should abide by. These are as follows: charity or generous contributions, virtuous character, ability to sacrifice oneself for the welfare and happiness of the population, integrity, kindness, austerity, freedom from ill will and nonviolence, patience, and opposing the will of people. A skillful leader should, therefore, have these ten qualities: generosity, morality, dedication, straightness, gentleness, austerity, non-hatred, non-violence, patience, and non-conflict.<sup>39</sup>

- Generosity, morality, donation, straightness, gentleness, austerity,
- Non-hatred, nonviolence, patience, and non-conflict.

<sup>38</sup> AN 5. 177.

<sup>39</sup> Jā 534.



I find these wholesome qualities are found in me,  
So, I enjoy great pleasure and happiness from that.<sup>40</sup>

**Generosity:** Generosity is the generous contribution of proper and beneficial goods to others, such as food, clothes, houses, and medication, when required, without expectation of reciprocal benefits. Generosity is expected to provide capital, money, and aid to people within industry, agriculture, and business for the development of such activities. As a result of a leader's generous practice, he can have an honest and trustworthy group of people around him who will help him in successfully achieving his goals. Also, the leader can find wise and intelligent guides and instructors.

**Morality:** means to restrain oneself from wrong physical and verbal actions. The Buddhist lay follower should observe and keep the five precepts, known as Āryan Sila, as his daily practice. The country's ruler must also be dedicated to observing this Āryan morality. There may be a question of how a ruler who completely abstains from killing and harming others can solve a problem such as an enemy who is about to invade his country. In such cases, the king or the ruler can tactfully and skilfully face the bitter reality, still not harming anyone on both sides, but helping the country and protecting his people. Some valuable accounts about such situations can be found in historical accounts.

**Donation:** Here, donation means dedication of the ruler's time, energy, and comfort for the benefit and good of others. It is a core attribute of leadership regarding the bond between the leader and his followers. It is a most valuable attribute that a goodhearted leader should continue to display throughout his life. The Apannaka Jātaka, the birth story of the Bodhisattva, is an example of how a leader should courageously dedicate his life, time and energy to the welfare and betterment of others. As the leader of a business group, the Bodhisattva traveled through a waterless desert, carrying carts full of goods. Being tired, and hopeless, they stopped at one place. The Bodhisattva found grass nearby and started to dig the ground, hoping to find water there. Though other people were discouraged and gave up, the Bodhisattva continued digging. Ultimately, He saw water. A leader should be heroic like this and dedicate his life to the benefit and comfort of others.

**Straightness:** Preserving truthfulness is what is meant by straightness. The ruler's significant role is straightness and fearlessness, without compromising his sincere principles due to bribes, cheap gifts, praise, and fame. He acts timely with good discipline and planning. He is busy and diligently engaged in his appointed role. He does not break promises even at the cost of his life.

He keeps the promises he has given to others. He impresses others and acts in such a way as to enhance the reputation and loyalty of his close ones. He is soft-hearted, like a flower, in the face of truthfulness. He is tough as a stone in the face of falsehoods and unrighteousness. He moves forward with

---

<sup>40</sup> *Dānam silam pariccāgam, ajjavam maddavam tapam;/Akkodham avihimsaṇca, khantiṇca avirodhanam./Iccete kusale dhamme, thite passāmi attani;/Tato me jāyate pīti, somanassaṇcanappakam.*

unwavering determination and mindfulness, not backing down in adversity. Such a ruler can win this world and bring peace to his country and the people. His country becomes prosperous, and the population enjoys peace and happiness with such a ruler.

**Gentleness:** Gentleness is keeping the mind soft, mild, and gentle in the face of the suffering of others. A gentle-minded person is endowed with love, compassion, and empathy. He is free from attachment and impartial to everyone. His mind is not shaken in the face of the eightfold worldly conditions. His mind does not rise with ego in happiness or fall in sorrow. A gentle mind, which has the four sublime qualities known as loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity, is like a still surface of water in a deep lake. A complex mind with ego and hatred is easily shaken. A gentle mind is not easily shaken.

**Austerity:** Self-control is an ascetic practice. Those who practice generosity are not slaves to greediness. They live a pleasant life with what they have righteously earned from good works such as farming, business, and so on. They highly regard their simple and light life. The peaceful life of the leader advances day by day, and they are inclined to practice asceticism as well. The simplicity of life leads them to lead a self-controlled, mindful life. It is a valuable power for a ruler to have and an example for others.

An example is more effective than advice. Thus, a Buddhist leader is living for others but not for himself. Such a leader thinks much of his people and the country. The happiness and comfort of others are the aim of the life of such a peaceful, dedicated leader.

**Non-hatred:** The avoidance of thoughts of hatred, jealousy, anger, and ego. A ruler must possess the quality of happiness derived from seeing the happiness and success of others. He should also maintain the quality of dedication, speak gentle words, provide what others need for their development, and be impartial to all others.

**Nonviolence:** The practice of nonviolence is the development of harmlessness. For this purpose, the leader should practice positive thoughts such as loving-kindness, compassion, kindness, and so on. In loving-kindness, the leader should spread loving thoughts equally towards all beings, big or small creatures, just like a mother loves her only child.

Kindness or compassion is the sincere thought that arises in a mind which aims to free itself from suffering. It is a calm and gentle mind. This noble mind of kindness also causes thoughts of generosity and sacrifice to emerge. A righteous leader must practice loving-kindness to help the leader forgive others.

**Patience:** Patience is an essential quality for a leader. 'Patience is the highest austerity' as said by the Buddha.<sup>41</sup> '*Khanti paramam tapo tithikkhā*'. The Bodhisattva was full of patience and forbearance. He went far beyond enduring suffering. The Buddhist ruler is also like a Bodhisattva. He can reach his goal

---

<sup>41</sup> *Dhp* 184.

with great patience and endurance.

**Truthfulness:** It is essential to avoid lying and to be truthful to others. Truthfulness helps a leader to govern the country properly, enhance the ruler's image, and increase his fame by avoiding speaking harsh words, derogative words, meaningless words, and gossip. When the ruler practices truthfulness, it gives him a wide range of good results. He gains the skilful ability to initiate wholesome activities. His reputation spreads far and wide, and he is naturally respectfully welcomed by everyone. He can end his life mindfully and is reborn in a happy world due to it.

**Non-Conflict:** Non-conflict is the art of avoiding conflict. It is an essential quality for maintaining harmony among rulers.<sup>42</sup> Also, as explained in the *Ummagga Jātaka*, one should establish a good, friendly relationship with neighboring rulers through skilful ambassadors and the implementation of an effective foreign policy.

Non-conflict is one of the main methods of defeating enemies. The republican system practised under seven *Aparihāna Dhamma* by Liccavis was appreciated by the Buddha.<sup>43</sup> Also, the Buddha preached and appreciated their seven undefeatable factors (*Aparihāna Dhamma*) maintained to govern the country and which were very important in maintaining harmony among the nations. It is one of the ways to avoid enemies. As stated in the *Satta Aparihāniya Dhamma*, that the Buddha preached to the Licchavi, non-conflict is essential for harmony.

Leadership should not be regarded as a status or a position given to a person. The leader and his followers should have a strong and friendly connection. Only then can the influence of the leadership on followers be possible. A close relationship with people is the foundation of leadership. For this, the Buddha has pointed out four means of sustaining a good relationship. "Bhikkhus, there are these four means of sustaining a favourable relationship./ Generosity, endearing speech, beneficent conduct, and impartiality."<sup>44</sup>

These four factors can bring people together, creating love and peace. The Buddha's teachings always emphatically explained the importance of a moral life and spiritual practice for the betterment of a worldly life permeated with peace and happiness. These are some of the unique features that a leader should possess to bring peace to the country.

**Generosity** has a strong force in itself to please others and make them friends. It creates a sense of happiness and willingness in others while still making the generous person light-minded and filled with pleasure.

**Endearing speech** has the ability to soften the hearts of others and make them come willingly close to the speaker.

**The beneficial conduct** of a person has the effect of making people trust

---

<sup>42</sup> *Jā* 542.

<sup>43</sup> *AN* 7. 21.

<sup>44</sup> *AN* 4. 32.

the person and rely on him because security is found in him.

**Impartiality** can destroy any doubts in others. When others are distressed, one feels empathy; when others are successful, one can impartially share one's feelings.

### **Leaders should first follow the rules**

To build peace in a country, leaders and rulers should set an example for the country's people. Righteous behavior has a beneficial effect on a country's people; thereby bringing peace and harmony. Ordinary people follow leaders and distinguished people.<sup>45</sup> The Rajovāda Jātaka shines a light on how a ruler of a country or a king should act in order to be an example to the country folk.

When the cattle are crossing a ford  
If the chief bull goes straight across,  
All the others go straight across  
Because their leader has gone straight.  
So, too, among human beings,  
When the one considered the chief  
Conducts himself righteously,  
Other people do so as well.  
The entire kingdom rejoices,  
If the king is righteous.<sup>46</sup>

## **XI. NEGATIVE IMPACT AFTER WARS AND CONFLICTS**

After a war, words are not enough to describe the devastation that has befallen a country and its people. Even little children can see it. It is very terrible. People are very sad in terms of illness and suffering. Food and drink are not available. Travel facilities are also difficult. The devastation caused by war is to be seen in every corner. Though the winning side celebrates a victory in a war, they have also created enemies.

After a war, words are not enough to describe the devastation that has befallen a country and its people. Even a little child can see it. It is very terrible. People are very sad in terms of illness and suffering. Food and drink are not available. Travel facilities are also difficult. The devastation caused by war is seen everywhere. Though one side celebrates the victory of a war, they have created enemies as well.

The victor creates enmity in the defeated,  
The defeated live in distress,  
The peaceful live happily,

<sup>45</sup> Jā 334.

<sup>46</sup> *Gavam ce taramānānam, ujum gacchati pungavo;/Sabbā gāvī ujum yanti, nette ujum gate sati./Evameva manussesu, yo hoti settha sammato;/So sace dhammam carati, pageva itarā pajā;/Sabbam rattham sukham seti, rājā ce hoti dhammikoti.*

Giving up both victory and defeat.<sup>47</sup>

Conflicts and wars first begin in the minds of men. As humans living in the modern world, we should remember that we live on a speck of the universe called the Earth. We have everything that we need to live happily today. People in the modern era have even gone to the moon. They have brought almost everything under their sway and have material wealth, facilities, and comforts to gratify their senses. But why do we still bother about peace?

Even if material success is to be seen from outside, the human mind may lack the most important thing to enjoy: peace. What is the point of achieving material success when there is no peace and harmony in people's minds? sometimes, weak and feeble men affected by fear of struggle and war run to their leaders, asking for help, solace and satisfaction. The rulers should carefully consider such occasions because it is preferable that they should act in such a way that will avoid war. In its place, peace should be shared with everyone.

Love rests not on strife but on sympathy. The principle of love should be appreciated and applied in all spheres of human activity in order to bring about an increase in human happiness. Peace is not a negative phrase. It is something very positive. It consists of mutual understanding, cooperation and love. In an atmosphere of mutual understanding, true peace can arise. Peace has to be acquired by a sincere effort and struggle, but not by using weapons or rods. Also, it cannot be won by merely speaking about it. We should think peace, speak peace and act in peace. The leaders of a country will be successful when they understand these elements.

When the ruler and leaders of the country become unrighteous, the country's people also follow the same path. Therefore, rulers must be ideal examples to society by practising righteous things.

The accounts of ideal Buddhist concepts for rulers to build peace in the country are found in the *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*.<sup>48</sup> “*So, imam pathavim sāgarapariyantam adandena asatthena dhammena abhivijjiya ajjhāvasati.*”

The Universal Monarch (*Cakkavatti Rāja*) rules his country meting out punishment for offences, but without using sticks and swords. (*adandena asatthena abhivijjiya ajjhāvasati*).

He is a good ruler who practices moral virtue and righteousness. This ideal king advises his fellow men not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to tell lies, not to use intoxicants.

This fantastic concept of the ideal king in Buddhism was practically employed by some Buddhist rulers like King Dharmasoka for the purpose of establishing peace in society after war.

The Buddha was an ideal leader who engaged in the spreading of loving

<sup>47</sup> Dh 201: “*Jayam veram pasavati, dukkham seti parājito;/Upasanto sukham seti, hitvā jayaparājajyam.*”

<sup>48</sup> DN 3.

kindness and compassion towards all living beings without any discrimination. In His daily routine, a few hours were spent devoted to his own practice but during the remaining periods of the day, he assisted people who wanted help. A few such people he assisted with Dhamma are found in Buddhist scriptures, such as Angulimāla, who was first an obedient pupil and later misguided by his own teacher for his ruin. Patācārā, a woman who lost her own children and relatives within a few days. Kisāgotami, who lost her son and went from house to house asking for medicine to cure her dead son. Sunita, who was a scavenger. Sopāka, an innocent child tied to a dead corpse by his step-father. Further examples are Radha Brahmana, and Cūlapantaka, as well as animals like snakes and elephants. These characters and others were held in the net of the compassion of the Buddha.

The concept of Buddhist peace has a very important practical value. The Buddha disapproved of any human or animal slaughter as he spread his non-violent teaching for the good of society. Nor did he allow fighting with another group of people. Nor did the Buddha ever recommend a holy war against any religion or nation. The Buddha followed a practical way by which His non-violent teaching was spread among the people in a non-violent manner. That noble example remains intact even today. Therefore, in establishing world peace, it is essential to point out Buddhist principles, and by following those Buddhist principles, peace can be guaranteed.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

The Buddhist path is ancient and yet it continues to be relevant to contemporary concerns, of which the maintenance of peace is one of the most pressing. I have attempted to show the ways in which it can contribute to the maintenance of peace.

The Buddhist teaching proceeds from the premise that human beings can change for the better through the training and cultivation of the mind. All individuals can attain inner peace and achieve the ideal of loving kindness towards all other beings.

While detailed training is set down in instruction for individuals, the Buddha also laid down guidelines for harmonious communal interactions. He also gave specific instructions for leaders on how to lead, encouraging them to set examples of virtuous conduct for their subjects.

The Buddhist path is characterised by tolerance of differences and encourages a culture of non-violence in a practical, sensible, and inspiring manner. It deserves careful consideration in the pursuit of peace.



## REFERENCES

- Anguttara Nikāya*, Ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1885 - 1900. Tr. F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols. PTS. London, 1932 - 1995.
- Dhammapada*, Ed. S. Sumamgala Thera, PTS. London, 1914. Tr. K. R. Norman, *Word of the Doctrine*, PTS. London, 1997.
- Dīgha Nikāya*, Ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter, 3 vols. PTS. London, 1890 - 1911. Tr. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols, PTS. London, 1899 - 2017.
- Khuddakapāṭha*, Ed. Ven. Ñānamoli, *The Minor Readings and the Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning*, PTS, London, 2015.
- Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed. V. Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, 1888 - 2017. Tr. I. B. Horner, *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1954 - 1995. 2nd ed., tr. Tỳ-kheo Ñānamoli, Tỳ-kheo Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, PTS. London, 2002, repr. 2023.

## Web sources:

- <https://www.un.org/observances/international-day-peace>
- Etymology Dictionary, *Peace*, [February 7, 2025] (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/peace>)



# ENGAGED BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM: COMPASSION IN ACTION AND THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF BHIKSUNI NHƯ THANH (1911 - 1999)

Dr. Ninh Thi Sinh\*

## Abstract:

Engaged Buddhism has played a crucial role in the modern history of Vietnamese Buddhism, emphasizing the integration of spiritual practice with social responsibility. This paper examines the contributions of Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911 – 1999) as a pioneer of Engaged Buddhism, particularly in the education of Buddhist nuns, social welfare, and charitable initiatives. Through a systematic analysis of her life and work, this study explores how she transformed the principle of compassion in action into concrete efforts that reshaped the role of Vietnamese Buddhist nuns in the 20th century. Unlike traditional Buddhist approaches that primarily focused on monastic discipline and meditation, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was instrumental in advancing Buddhist education, founding the Huế Lâm Buddhist Institute, and leading the establishment of the Southern Vietnam Buddhist Nuns' Sangha (Ni bộ Nam Việt). She further contributed to social engagement by establishing schools, orphanages, free medical clinics, and vocational training centers to support disadvantaged groups, particularly women and children. Additionally, she developed a self-sustaining economic model that ensured the long-term viability of these initiatives. By analyzing Bhiksuni Như Thanh's work through the lens of Engaged Buddhism, this paper highlights three key aspects of her legacy: (1) the transformation of compassion into social action, (2) the integration of Buddhist education with philanthropy, and (3) the establishment of sustainable Buddhist economic models. Her contributions continue to serve as a foundation for the evolution of Buddhist social engagement in contemporary Vietnam. This study not only contributes to the academic discourse on Engaged Buddhism but also provides insights into the enduring relevance of Buddhist nuns in modern society.

---

\* Trần Nhân Tông Institute, VNU, HN.

**Keywords:** *Engaged Buddhism, Bhiksuni leadership, compassion in action, Buddhist education, social responsibility, charitable work, sustainable dharma.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Engaged Buddhism is a significant movement in the history of modern Buddhism, particularly in Vietnam, where the principle of compassion has always been closely linked to practical actions aimed at serving people and society. This trend is not only reflected in the Buddhist revival movements of the early 20th century but has also been strongly continued in various charitable, educational, and social justice initiatives, embodying the true spirit of “Dharma is not separate from worldly affairs.” Within this movement, Vietnamese Buddhist nuns have played an essential role, not only in spiritual practice and propagation of the Dharma but also through contributions to education, humanitarian aid, and community support. Outstanding Bhiksunis are not only symbols of wisdom and virtue but also pioneers in transforming the teachings of compassion into concrete actions to improve social well-being. One of the most remarkable figures representing Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam is Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911 - 1999), who devoted her entire life to the education of Buddhist nuns and social charity work.

Unlike traditional Buddhist approaches that emphasize meditation or theoretical teachings, Engaged Buddhism focuses on the application of Buddhist principles in practical life, particularly through active participation in initiatives that benefit society. Bhiksuni Như Thanh was not only a respected Dharma teacher but also an exemplary Engaged Buddhist leader who embodied the spirit of compassion through concrete actions in education, social work, and Dharma propagation. Through her life and work, she demonstrated a profound sense of social responsibility, with a dedicated aspiration to train generations of capable and virtuous Buddhist nuns, establish a strong Buddhist educational foundation, and engage in humanitarian activities such as assisting the poor, supporting patients, and caring for orphans. All of these efforts reflect the essence of “Compassion in Action,” a core principle of Engaged Buddhism that she upheld throughout her lifetime.

This paper does not simply present the biography or career of Bhiksuni Như Thanh but instead focuses on analyzing her concrete activities to highlight the spirit of compassion linked with social responsibility. Rather than viewing her solely as a historical figure, this study adopts the perspective of Engaged Buddhism, placing her within the broader context of the Bhikkhuni movement in Vietnamese Buddhism, and aims to extract key values that can be inherited and applied in the contemporary era.

## II. OVERVIEW OF ENGAGED BUDDHISM AND THE CONCEPT OF COMPASSION IN ACTION

### 2.1. Engaged Buddhism: Concept and development in Vietnam

Engaged Buddhism is a concept introduced by Master Thích Nhất Hạnh

in the 1960s, emphasizing that Buddhism should not be confined to personal spiritual practice but must actively participate in social life, contributing to addressing community issues. According to Thích Nhất Hạnh, Buddhism cannot be separated from the realities of society but must be actively engaged to bring about positive transformation for individuals and the world.<sup>1</sup> However, the concept of Engaged Buddhism is not entirely new but has its roots in the time of the Buddha. In Buddhist scriptures such as the *Anguttara Nikaya* (The Gradual Discourses) and the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha encouraged his disciples not only to cultivate personal virtue but also to support the community through compassionate actions. This demonstrates that Buddhism, from its very beginning, has been inherently engaged with society and focused on alleviating suffering in real life<sup>2</sup>.

Vietnamese Buddhism, since the Lý – Trần dynasties (11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries), has strongly embodied the spirit of social engagement through various community-serving activities. Eminent Zen masters such as Vạn Hạnh and Trần Nhân Tông were not only dedicated practitioners but also actively participated in politics, education, and national defense. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Engaged Buddhism became even more pronounced through the Buddhist Revival Movement, particularly in educational initiatives, Buddhist text printing, and social welfare activities organized by Buddhist associations<sup>3</sup>.

One of the most significant aspects of Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam is the role of Bhiksunis (female monastics), who have not only participated in spiritual training but also dedicated themselves to charitable work, education, and social reform. This laid the foundation for the emergence of figures such as Bhiksuni Như Thanh, who actualized the philosophy of compassion through action in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2.2. The concept of compassion in Buddhism and its transformation into social responsibility**

Compassion (*karunā* and *metta*) is one of the core principles of Buddhism, expressed through the act of sharing the suffering of sentient beings and taking concrete actions to help them overcome hardships. The spirit of compassion and the commitment of a Bodhisattva to liberate sentient beings are clearly emphasized in many Mahāyāna scriptures. For instance, in the *Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā and the Perfection of Wisdom), the Buddha states:

“A great Bodhisattva contemplates all phenomena but perceives no increase or decrease in them. Why is that so? Because they have realized the profound nature of equality in all things. The Great Compassion and Great Strength of a Bodhisattva never contradict their fundamental vow – this is the refuge of all noble beings. For the sake of sentient beings, a Bodhisattva preaches the

<sup>1</sup> Thích Nhất Hạnh (1993): 3.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey (2000): 131.

<sup>3</sup> Nguyễn Lang (2000): 245.

Dharma throughout their lifetime without ever ceasing.”<sup>4</sup>

This passage underscores that a Bodhisattva, endowed with boundless compassion (*Mahākaruṇā*) and great strength (*Mahāvīrya*), does not merely remain in meditative absorption but actively engages in teaching the *Dharma* and assisting sentient beings, bringing peace and well-being to all.

Furthermore, the *Bodhicitta Śāstra* (Treatise on the Mind of Awakening) also states:

“A Bodhisattva must cultivate ten reflections before they can arouse the determination to practice with diligence... They must cultivate great loving-kindness (*Maitrī*) to establish the welfare of sentient beings. They must cultivate great compassion (*Karuṇā*) to alleviate suffering.”<sup>5</sup>

This passage illustrates that a Bodhisattva is not only dedicated to meditative practice but must also embody compassion through concrete actions, offering assistance and bringing true happiness to all sentient beings. In Engaged Buddhism, compassion does not stop at empathy or sympathy but becomes a driving force for active participation in education, healthcare, social justice, and assistance to the underprivileged. This distinction marks the difference between theoretical compassion and compassion in action.

The idea that compassion must be accompanied by action is a central theme frequently emphasized by Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh in many of his writings and lectures. For example, in his essay “*Compassion as a Liberating Force*,” he writes:

“Our practice is to cultivate compassion in daily life. With this practice, we open our hearts to one person, then to another... and eventually, when compassion is fully expressed, we can live freely and joyfully anywhere.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, Engaged Buddhism highlights the responsibility of each individual in improving social conditions. This guiding principle was deeply embedded in the life and work of Bhikkhuni Nhu Thanh, who realized the teachings of compassion through her dedication to education, charity, and community relief efforts.

### **2.3. The role of *bhiksunis* in practicing compassion and social responsibility**

Throughout the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, *Bhiksunis* (female monastics) have played a crucial role in education and charitable activities. Since the Lý – Trần dynasties (11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries), Buddhist nuns such as Diệu Nhân (12<sup>th</sup> century) were not only devoted practitioners but also actively engaged in teaching the *Dharma*, providing relief to the poor, and constructing

<sup>4</sup> <https://viengiac.info/2020/01/kinh-thang-thien-vuong-bat-nha-ba-la-mat-q3>. Accessed on February 20, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> <https://viengiac.info/2015/01/phat-bo-de-tam-kinh-luan-quyen-ha/>. Accessed on February 20, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> <https://langmai.org/tang-kinh-cac/bai-viet/tu-bi-la-yeu-to-giai-phong>. Accessed on February 8, 2025.



temples as centers for community activities<sup>7</sup> (*Central Committee of Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha*, 2019). By the 20th century, the role of Bhiksunis in Engaged Buddhism became increasingly prominent. Many senior Bhiksunis led educational programs for female monastics, established schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations to serve society. Among them, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was one of the most outstanding figures, making significant contributions to training Buddhist nuns and implementing Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam.

Bhiksuni Như Thanh was not only an exceptional Buddhist educator but also a dedicated social activist, committed to supporting the poor, orphans, and women in need. She founded educational institutions to train young Bhiksunis with both academic knowledge and moral integrity, inspiring them to actively participate in charitable movements and assist disadvantaged families in alignment with the spirit of “boundless compassion.” Her compassion was not merely a theoretical doctrine but was transformed into concrete actions, helping reshape societal perceptions of the role of Bhiksunis. This is why she is regarded as a remarkable symbol of Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam in the 20th century.

### III. BHIKSUNINHƯ THANH – A MODEL OF ENGAGED BUDDHISM

#### 3.1. Life and path of engagement

Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911 – 1999), Dharma name Như Thanh, birth name Nguyễn Thị Thao, also known as Hồng Ẩn and Diệu Tánh, was born on February 8, 1911, in Tăng Nhơn Phú Village, Thủ Đức District (now part of Ho Chi Minh City) into a family with a strong tradition of Confucian scholarship and administrative service. Her father, Nguyễn Minh Giác, was a district chief, and her mother, Đỗ Thị Gân, was a devoted homemaker. She was the second child in a family of ten siblings, raised in an educational environment that combined traditional Confucian learning with French colonial education.

From an early age, she was taught Classical Chinese (Hán văn) and exposed to traditional Buddhist scriptures, later continuing her education under the French curriculum. This diverse intellectual background provided her with a broad knowledge base, not only in Buddhist teachings but also in culture, philosophy, and Western sciences. Her ability to integrate multiple streams of knowledge shaped her approach to Buddhist studies and social engagement in the years to come.

In 1932, at the age of 22, she made the momentous decision to ordain as a Buddhist nun at Phước Tường Temple (Thủ Đức), becoming a disciple of Most Venerable Pháp Ấn. This marked a pivotal turning point in her life, initiating her rigorous journey of Buddhist study and social engagement.

After completing her initial monastic training at Phước Tường Temple,

---

<sup>7</sup> Reading more Đại lễ Tưởng niệm và hội thảo khoa học Kỷ niệm 906 năm ni sư Diệu Nhân viên tịch cùng chư vị tổ sư Ni tiền bối hữu công (2019) [Grand Memorial Ceremony and Scientific Conference Commemorating the 906th Anniversary of Bhikkhuni Diệu Nhân's Passing and the Meritorious Predecessor Bhikkhunis]. Hanoi. 861 pages.

she continued her education by enrolling in a Buddhist academy at Viên Giác Temple (Bến Tre), where she deepened her knowledge of Buddhist scriptures under Zen Master Khánh Thuyên at Thiên Phước Temple.

With her diligence in Buddhist studies and practice, by 1935, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was entrusted with the management of Hội Sơn Temple (Long Bình Commune, Thủ Đức District) – a significant milestone that reflected her reputation and virtue despite her young age. However, instead of settling permanently in one temple, she continued her journey in search of the Dharma, expanding her knowledge of Buddhist studies and practicing Engaged Buddhism.

In 1938, she traveled to Huế with Bhiksuni Diệu Hường to study Buddhism under renowned masters. Under the guidance of Most Venerable Mật Hiển, she studied important Buddhist scriptures, including Lăng Nghiêm Trực Chỉ (Direct Instructions on the Śūraṅgama Sūtra) and the Prajñāpāramitā teachings, and quickly demonstrated exceptional academic ability. Most Venerable Mật Hiển praised her as an outstandingly intelligent individual with a solid academic foundation and an unwavering commitment to seeking the Dharma.

Not stopping in Huế, in 1939, she continued her journey to Hà Nội to study Vinaya (Buddhist monastic discipline) – a field that, at the time, had very few systematic studies among Bhiksunis. Before delving deeper into Vinaya studies, she was fully ordained as a Bhikkhuni, receiving the Dharma name Đàm Thanh, officially becoming a fully ordained nun, and continuing the tradition of the Bhiksuni Sangha.

In Northern Vietnam, she pursued the study of two fundamental Vinaya texts for Bhiksunis. The *Tứ Phần Tỳ-kheo-ni Lược Ký* (Abridged Commentary on the Four-Part Vinaya for Bhiksunis) with Most Venerable Thích Tâm An, abbot of Quốc Temple, Hưng Yên Province. The *Tỳ-kheo-ni Sao* (Commentary on the Bhiksuni Vinaya) with Most Venerable Phan Trung Thứ, abbot of Bằng Sở Temple, Hà Nội, who was also the Editor-in-Chief of *Đuốc Tuệ* (Wisdom Torch) journal, the official publication of the Northern Buddhist Association (1935 – 1945).

Her in-depth studies of Vinaya provided her with a strong foundation in monastic administration, Bhiksuni training, and Dharma propagation in the community. This significantly contributed to the development of the Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha in the 20th century.

After completing her Vinaya studies, Bhiksuni Như Thanh devoted time to pilgrimage and exploration of Buddhist sacred sites in Northern Vietnam, gaining deeper insights into Buddhist practices across different regions. Her spiritual journey was not merely academic; it also reflected an unwavering commitment to seeking the Dharma, embodying the vision and responsibility of a dedicated Bhikkhuni leader toward her community.

At the end of 1941, after more than three years of studying and researching Buddhism in the North, she decided to return to the South to continue her mission of education and Dharma propagation. On her way back, she stopped

in Bình Định Province to study the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* under National Master Venerable Phước Huệ at Thập Tháp Temple, where she remained for five months of intensive training. This scripture is one of the most significant texts in Mahāyāna Buddhism, offering profound insights into consciousness and the path to liberation.

The spiritual journey of Bhiksuni Như Thanh not only demonstrated her unwavering determination to seek the Dharma but also exemplified the spirit of Engaged Buddhism from the early stages of her life. Instead of remaining in a secluded environment, she actively sought knowledge, engaged in research, and accessed diverse sources of learning, all in preparation for her lifelong mission of Dharma propagation, Bhiksuni education, and social service.

### **3.2. The educational, charitable, and social activities of bhiksuni Như Thanh**

#### **3.2.1. Educational efforts: Training bhiksunis and promoting Buddhist teachings**

After completing her Buddhist studies and Vinaya research in Northern Vietnam, Bhiksuni Như Thanh returned to Southern Vietnam in early 1942 and immediately dedicated herself to the education of Bhiksunis, intending to enhance their knowledge of Buddhist teachings and monastic discipline. She was not only a deeply learned Buddhist practitioner but also a pioneering educator, playing a crucial role in establishing a formal educational system for Bhikkhunis in Southern Vietnam during the 20th century.

#### **3.2.2. Early contributions to Buddhist education (1942 – 1945)**

Upon her return to the South, Bhiksuni Như Thanh initiated Vinaya classes for Bhiksunis. Recognizing that most female monastics at the time had limited access to in-depth Vinaya studies, she decided to focus on teaching the *Tứ Phần Tỳ-kheo-ni Lược Ký* (Abridged Commentary on the Four-Part Vinaya for Bhiksunis). Her efforts provided Bhikkhunis with a solid foundation in monastic discipline, enabling them to guide and instruct their fellow monastics within their temples. In 1942, she was invited to serve as Meditation Master (Thiền chủ) and Dharma teacher for over 80 Bhiksunis at the Kim Sơn Summer Retreat (Phú Nhuận), which was founded by Bhiksuni Diệu Tấn. That same year, she conducted a three-month Vinaya course on the Four-Part Vinaya Commentary for Bhiksunis at the Hội Sơn Summer Retreat, equipping her students with a structured understanding of Buddhist law. In 1944, she established a summer retreat at Hội Sơn Temple and continued to teach the Vinaya Commentary for Bhiksunis for three months.

Thanks to her relentless efforts, Bhiksuni Như Thanh created opportunities for female monastics to receive systematic education, empowering them to practice and uphold the monastic precepts with confidence and to lead their respective monastic communities effectively.

#### **3.2.3. Establishing an educational center for bhiksunis at Huệ Lâm temple (1945 – 1952)**

In 1945, Bhiksuni Như Thanh assumed the position of abbess of Huệ Lâm Temple at the invitation of District Chief Nguyễn Kỳ Sắc and his wife. Upon

taking charge, she began renovating the temple and transforming it into a dedicated training center for Bhiksunis.

In 1947, she established the Huê Lâm Bhiksuni Buddhist Institute, marking a milestone in the history of Bhiksuni education in Vietnam. This institute was not only a place for Bhiksunis to study Buddhist scriptures and Vinaya but also a center where they could practice Buddhism through social charity initiatives.

To expand educational opportunities, she also organized summer retreat programs (An cư kiết hạ) at the temple, attracting a large number of Bhiksunis to participate in intensive study and practice.

### **3.2.4. Founding the Ni bộ Nam Việt – Expanding bhiksuni education (1956 – 1972)**

Recognizing the need for a structured organization to manage Bhiksuni education and monastic training, Bhiksuni Như Thanh took the initiative to mobilize Bhiksuni communities across Eastern and Southwestern Vietnam to establish a unified Bhiksuni organization. On October 6–7, 1956, Bhiksunis from across Southern Vietnam gathered at Huê Lâm Temple, where they officially established the Southern Vietnam Buddhist Nuns' Sangha (*Ni bộ Nam Việt*)<sup>8</sup>. Bhiksuni Như Thanh was elected as the Head of the Administrative Committee of Ni Bộ Nam Việt, which operated under its own regulations and independent administrative structure, with its headquarters based at Huê Lâm Temple.

In 1956, Bhiksuni Như Thanh and the Administrative Committee of Ni Bộ assumed responsibility for Dược Sư Temple, which served as a temporary headquarters. In 1957, she led efforts to raise funds for the construction of Từ Nghiêm Temple, which later became the official headquarters of *Ni bộ Nam Việt* upon its completion in 1962. Từ Nghiêm Temple was not only the administrative center of *Ni bộ* but also an important educational hub. After its completion, Bhiksuni Như Thanh established a Buddhist Studies Institute at the temple, continuing her mission of training talented Bhiksunis for the Buddhist community in Southern Vietnam.

### **3.2.5. Strengthening and expanding bhiksuni education in the modern era (1972 – 1999)**

In 1972, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was appointed Head of the Mahayana Nuns' Sangha (*Vụ trưởng Ni Bộ Bắc Tông*), overseeing the entire Bhiksuni system of the Mahāyāna tradition in Southern Vietnam. That same year, she organized the Bhiksuni Congress at Từ Nghiêm Temple, with the following objectives: Strengthening unity among Bhikkhunis; Reviewing Buddhist and charitable activities; Reforming and developing the organizational structure of Ni Bộ Phật giáo.

By 1975, after the reunification of Vietnam, Bhiksuni Như Thanh returned to Huê Lâm Temple, where she continued her research, translation of Buddhist scriptures, and the development of Buddhist institutions. She dedicated the final years of her life to consolidating Bhikkhuni education and Dharma

<sup>8</sup> Ni bộ (1957): 1-2.

propagation, laying the groundwork for the strong growth of Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha in the modern era. Bhiksuni Như Thanh entered Nirvana on March 13, 1999, at Huệ Lâm Temple, leaving behind a profound legacy in Bhiksuni education and Engaged Buddhism.

She played a pivotal role in transforming the model of Bhiksuni education—from a self-study approach in individual temples to a structured system with Buddhist Institutes, schools, and formal education programs. She laid the foundation for the organizational system of *Ni Bộ Nam Việt*, enabling Bhiksunis to pursue monastic training, engage in Dharma propagation, and systematically participate in social service.

Her educational contributions extended beyond Buddhist studies, incorporating secular education to equip Bhikkhunis with the necessary skills to actively contribute to social development. Thanks to her dedication, Vietnamese Bhiksunis gained access to greater educational opportunities and professional development, continuing the legacy of compassion intertwined with social responsibility that she devoted her entire life to upholding.

### **3.2.6. Charitable activities: Supporting the poor, orphans, and patients**

Amid the tumultuous wartime conditions in Southern Vietnam, where many orphans, impoverished individuals, and patients lacked proper care, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was not only a leader in the education of Bhiksunis but also a pioneer in social charity efforts. Under her guidance, charitable institutions, schools, orphanages, medical clinics, and vocational training centers were established to alleviate suffering and improve community well-being. These initiatives not only provided direct assistance to thousands of people but also created a model of Engaged Buddhism, serving as an exemplar for Bhikkhuni temples across the country.

### **3.2.7. The charitable school system – a model of Engaged Buddhist education**

One of Bhiksuni Như Thanh's most significant contributions to charitable activities was the founding and development of the Kiều Đàm school system, aimed at providing education for underprivileged children and Bhiksunis. In 1952, she established Kiều Đàm Primary School at Huệ Lâm Temple, offering free education to 200 students per year. By 1967, the system had expanded with the establishment of Kiều Đàm Secondary and Primary School (800 students per year) and Kiều Đàm Kindergarten (200 students per year). In 1970, she further expanded by opening a new facility at Quy Sơn Temple (Vũng Tàu), which included Kiều Đàm Primary School and Kiều Đàm Orphanage<sup>9</sup>.

This educational network was not only focused on literacy but also moral education, providing thousands of disadvantaged children with opportunities for learning and personal development. It became a pioneering model of Bhiksuni-led education, laying the foundation for Bhikkhunis to engage in secular education and broader social work in later years.

<sup>9</sup> Tổ đình Huệ Lâm (1999): 305 - 306.



### **3.2.8. Establishing and managing orphanages – providing care for orphaned children**

During the wartime turmoil, thousands of children lost their parents and were left without support. Bhiksuni Như Thanh recognized that establishing orphanages was not just an act of charity but also a Buddhist mission to rescue and support disadvantaged lives. In 1970, she founded Kiều Đàm Orphanage at Huế Lâm Temple, providing care for 800 children annually. In 1971, another orphanage was established at Quy Sơn Temple in Vũng Tàu, sheltering 56 orphaned children per year. According to the 1972 Bhiksuni Congress of the Mahāyāna Tradition, the orphanage network guided and supported by Bhiksuni Như Thanh had cared for over 7,000 children across 41 facilities throughout Southern Vietnam.<sup>10</sup>

These orphanages not only provided shelter and medical care but also offered education and moral guidance, ensuring that orphaned children had opportunities to grow up in a nurturing and healthy environment.

### **3.2.9. Developing traditional and modern medicine clinics – providing healthcare for the poor**

Understanding that impoverished individuals had limited access to medical services, Bhiksuni Như Thanh established free clinics at Huế Lâm Temple to provide healthcare and medical support to the community. In 1961, she opened a Traditional Medicine Clinic (Phòng thuốc Nam) at Huế Lâm Temple, serving 600 patients per month, and sustained its operation for 28 years. In 1966, she expanded by opening a Western Medicine Clinic (Phòng thuốc Tây), offering free medication to thousands of impoverished patients. In 1975, she founded an Acupuncture Clinic at Huế Lâm Temple, treating 300 patients per month and maintaining operations for 15 years.

These clinics not only met the medical needs of the poor but also became training centers for Bhiksunis in traditional medicine, contributing to the integration of Buddhist healthcare into daily life.

### **3.2.10. Vocational training classes – supporting women and vulnerable groups toward self-sufficiency**

In addition to education and healthcare, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was deeply concerned about the livelihoods of the poor, particularly women and vulnerable individuals. She established vocational training classes at Huế Lâm Temple, equipping learners with practical labor skills, enabling them to become self-sufficient. In 1966, she launched a knitting class, training 50 students per year. In 1968, she opened a sewing class, attracting 30 students per year<sup>11</sup>.

### **3.2.11. Developing a self-sustaining economic system to support charitable activities**

To ensure that charitable initiatives were not entirely dependent on

<sup>10</sup> Giáo hội Việt Nam thống nhất (1972): 24 - 25.

<sup>11</sup> Tổ đình Huế Lâm (1999): 305 - 306.



donations, Bhikkhuni Nhu Thanh developed a self-sustaining economic system to create a stable source of funding. Buddhist scripture publishing centers at Huê Lâm I, Huê Lâm II, and Hải Vân, generating financial resources for education and charitable programs. Vegetarian restaurants, including Tịnh Tâm Trai and Thanh Tâm Trai in Saigon, provide a steady stream of income. White Lotus Soy Sauce production and incense manufacturing workshops, helping fund social welfare initiatives. A tailoring workshop at Huê Lâm not only provided employment opportunities but also helped finance schools and orphanages. This economic model enabled the Bhiksuni community to sustain charitable activities independently, reducing reliance on external support.

### **3.2.12. A lasting impact on Vietnamese society and bhiksuni philanthropy**

The charitable projects initiated by Bhiksuni Như Thanh directly assisted thousands of people, including orphans, impoverished individuals, patients, and vulnerable women. Her contributions: Helped stabilize social life, especially during wartime and post-war recovery; Transformed Huê Lâm Temple into a center for education, healthcare, and livelihood support, pioneering a model where Buddhist temples actively engaged in social charity; Encouraged Bhiksunis to actively participate in social work, laying the foundation for the strong development of Bhiksuni-led philanthropy and Dharma propagation in Vietnam.

Thus, Bhiksuni Như Thanh built an extensive charitable network, including schools, orphanages, medical clinics, and vocational training centers, enabling thousands of impoverished individuals to access education, healthcare, and career opportunities. She was not only a dedicated Buddhist activist but also a talented organizer, developing self-sustaining economic models to ensure the longevity of charitable activities. Her contributions extended beyond a single historical period, providing a foundation for the long-term development of Bhiksuni-led philanthropy in Vietnam, leaving a legacy of immense value.

## **3.3. The ideological values and lessons from the actions of bhiksuni Như Thanh**

### **3.3.1. Bhiksuni Như Thanh and her contributions to Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam**

Throughout her life, Bhiksuni Như Thanh exemplified a strong model of Engaged Buddhism, in which compassion was not merely an abstract doctrine but was manifested through concrete actions. Unlike the traditional perspective that viewed Bhikkhunis primarily as practitioners supporting the monastic community, she demonstrated that Bhikkhunis could take on leadership roles and actively serve society. Through the establishment of schools, orphanages, medical facilities, and vocational training centers, she embodied the Mahāyāna Buddhist principle of compassion in action, transforming compassion into tangible efforts to relieve suffering and uplift society. This reflects the Buddhist tenet: *“The Dharma is not separate from worldly affairs”*. Her initiatives not only provided immediate benefits but also created long-term societal

transformations, contributing to a shift in perception regarding the role of Bhiksunis in Vietnamese Buddhism.

Bhiksuni Như Thanh not only taught Buddhist doctrines but also applied the Dharma in real-life contexts, particularly in education and charity. She established the Kiều Đàm school system, granting educational opportunities to both Bhiksunis and underprivileged children, integrating secular education into temples, and paving the way for Bhikkhunis to engage in cultural and social sectors. Her efforts extended to developing orphanages, medical clinics, and vocational training programs, which not only aided the impoverished but also created opportunities for marginalized groups to thrive. Recognizing the need for financial sustainability, she organized a self-sufficient economic system to support charitable projects, reducing dependence on traditional almsgiving. These models opened new pathways for Vietnamese Bhikkhunis, proving that they were not merely supplementary figures within monastic institutions but could independently organize and manage large-scale Buddhist initiatives.

### **3.3.2. Lessons from Bhiksuni Như Thanh's Engaged Buddhist model for contemporary Buddhism**

One of the most significant lessons from Bhiksuni Như Thanh's model is the affirmation of the role of Bhiksunis in Vietnamese Buddhism. In the 20th century, she took the initiative to establish an independent Bhiksuni organization, enabling female monastics to self-govern and develop autonomously. This laid the foundation for Bhiksunis today to continue assuming leadership roles in both Buddhist and social initiatives. In contemporary times, greater opportunities should be provided for Bhiksunis to participate in education, Dharma propagation, and charity work rather than being confined solely to internal monastic affairs.

The spirit of compassion, coupled with practical action, as embodied by Bhiksuni Như Thanh, remains highly relevant in the modern era. In today's world, challenges such as social inequality, climate change, and ethical crises present major concerns. Buddhism must develop engaged and practical solutions to better serve the community. Instead of limiting itself to basic charity work, Buddhism should implement sustainable programs in areas like education, healthcare, and vocational training, enabling individuals to become self-sufficient rather than relying solely on short-term assistance.

One of Bhiksuni Như Thanh's most effective strategies was establishing a self-sustaining economic model, ensuring the long-term viability of Buddhist educational and charitable programs. Institutions such as vegetarian restaurants, sewing workshops, and Buddhist publishing centers provided a stable financial foundation for Buddhist activities. Today, temples can expand on this concept by developing sustainable economic models, such as producing vegetarian food, offering vocational training, or providing charitable healthcare services, to generate long-term financial support. Rather than relying solely on donations, Buddhist institutions should strategically plan for financial self-sufficiency, allowing them to expand their charitable and educational efforts sustainably.

### 3.3.3. The legacy of Bhiksuni Như Thanh for Vietnamese Buddhism

Bhiksuni Như Thanh left a profound legacy for the development of the Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha, including: Establishing an independent Bhiksuni administrative system, enabling female monastics to develop autonomously; Training multiple generations of capable Bhiksunis, who continue to uphold the spirit of Engaged Buddhism; Creating an integrated model of education, charity, and self-sustaining economy, which serves as a foundation for modern Buddhist initiatives.

The philosophies and models pioneered by Bhiksuni Như Thanh remain highly relevant in the 21st century, especially in the integration of Buddhist education with social engagement. Contemporary Buddhist institutions can expand their role by offering life skills training, supporting disadvantaged communities, and promoting environmental education. It is essential to connect Buddhism with social action, allowing Bhiksunis and Buddhist monastics to actively participate in humanitarian work, environmental protection, and supporting vulnerable groups, following Bhiksuni Như Thanh's model. Additionally, developing a self-sustaining economic model remains crucial to ensuring the long-term sustainability of Buddhist and charitable activities.

Bhiksuni Như Thanh stands as a quintessential model of Engaged Buddhism, blending the philosophy of compassion with social responsibility. Her contributions redefined the role of Bhikkhunis in modern Buddhism, paving the way for a socially engaged monastic path. Her ideas continue to hold significance in the 21st century, serving as a source of inspiration for contemporary Buddhist, educational, and charitable endeavors.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Bhiksuni Như Thanh was not only a respected monastic leader but also a symbol of Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam. Her life and career exemplified a strong spirit of social engagement, where the doctrine of compassion was translated into concrete actions. Through the education of Bhiksunis, the establishment of educational and charitable institutions, and the development of a self-sustaining economic system, she laid a solid foundation for the advancement of the Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha and the model of Engaged Buddhism in the 20th century.

From Bhiksuni Như Thanh's contributions, three key lessons can be drawn: The first, compassion in action. Buddhism should not merely preach compassion but must manifest it through tangible activities that benefit society. Bhiksuni Như Thanh embodied this principle by establishing schools, orphanages, medical clinics, and vocational training centers, providing long-term benefits to the community. The second, developing an engaged Buddhist model integrated with education and social charity. Instead of limiting Buddhism to temple-based religious propagation, she combined Buddhist practice with secular education and charitable work, empowering Bhiksunis to take on leadership roles in social initiatives. The third, building a self-sustaining economic system to support charitable work. Rather than

solely relying on donations, she developed economic enterprises, including vegetarian restaurants, sewing workshops, and Buddhist scripture publishing, ensuring financial stability for sustainable charitable activities. The ideas and models established by Bhiksuni Như Thanh were not only significant within the historical context of the 20th century but also hold lasting value for contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism.

In today's world, where Buddhism faces new challenges such as social inequality, climate change, and moral crises, her Engaged Buddhist philosophy remains a crucial guiding principle. Continuing to uphold the spirit of compassion intertwined with social responsibility, expanding the model of education, charity, and self-sustaining economy, and enhancing the role of Bhiksunis in Buddhist leadership are essential steps to inherit and develop Bhiksuni Như Thanh's legacy in the modern era.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- Commemorating the Southern Vietnam Buddhist Nuns' Sangha Congress*. [Kỷ niệm Đại hội Ni bộ Nam Việt (1957), Ni bộ ấn bản và phát hành].
- Elder Venerable Nun Như Thanh: Life and Career*. [Sư trưởng Như Thanh: Cuộc đời và sự nghiệp, Tổ đình Huệ Lâm (1999). Tp.Hồ Chí Minh. Nxb. Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh].
- Grand Memorial Ceremony and Scientific Conference Commemorating the 906th Anniversary of Bhikkhuni Diệu Nhân's Passing and the Meritorious Predecessor Bhikkhunis*. Hanoi. 861 pages. [Đại lễ tưởng niệm và hội thảo khoa học Kỷ niệm 906 năm ni sư Diệu Nhân viên tịch cùng chư vị tổ sư ni tiền bối hữu công (2019)].
- Harvey, Peter (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.  
<https://langmai.org/tang-kinh-cac/bai-viet/tu-bi-la-yeu-to-giai-phong>. Accessed on February 8, 2025.
- <https://viengiac.info/2015/01/phat-bo-de-tam-kinh-luan-quyen-ha/>. Accessed on February 20, 2025.
- <https://viengiac.info/2020/01/kinh-thang-thien-vuong-bat-nha-ba-la-mat-q3>. Accessed on February 20, 2025.
- Nguyễn Lang (2000). *Việt Nam Phật giáo sử luận (3 volumes)*. Hanoi: Văn Học Publishing House.
- Proceedings of the Congress of the Northern Tradition Bhikkhuni Order*. [Giáo hội Phật giáo Việt Nam thống nhất. 1972. Kỷ yếu Đại hội Ni bộ Bắc tông].
- Thích Nhất Hạnh (1993). *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

# COMPASSION, UNITY, INTEGRITY AND MINDFUL EFFORTS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: AS DEPICTED IN THE THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

Dr. Lalan Kumar Jha\*

## Abstract

The study presents key concepts in Theravāda Buddhism, especially compassion, unity, integrity, and mindful efforts. The study emphasizes that compassion in Buddhism is not just ordinary compassion but also a noble quality necessary for building a harmonious society. The study analyzes the unity in the Buddhist *saṅgha* in ancient times, highlighting the qualities that help preserve harmony. Integrity is demonstrated through the lives of the Buddha and his disciples, as well as through precepts and ethical behavior. Finally, the study discusses the importance of mindful efforts and meditation practices in achieving a sustainable future. The study suggests that the combination of compassion, unity, integrity, and mindfulness can create an ideal society and a sustainable future for all.

**Keywords:** *Compassion, unity, integrity, mindfulness, sustainable future.*

\*\*\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Compassion is generally defined as kindness or kind gesture or sympathy towards people suffering from any ailment. In English Dictionary it is defined as – a strong feeling of sympathy for people who are suffering and a desire to help them.<sup>1</sup> But in Buddhism this term has immense value. It was so intense in the Buddha that he was given epithet of *Mahākāruṇiko* (the great compassionate One). Not only His compassion but His whole life and His dispositions were such that several great personalities of world have spoken so many things about His life and His behaviors. R. N. Tagore calls him the greatest man ever born.<sup>2</sup> Fausboll, a Russian says that the more I know Him the more I love Him. H. G.

---

\* Associate Professor. Dept. of Pāli, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda.

<sup>1</sup> Oxford, *Advance Learner's Dictionary* (2000), Ed. by Sally Wehmeer, Phonetics Editor Michel Ashby, Oxford University Press, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> *A Manual of Buddhism* (1992), Buddhist Missionary Society, Buddhist Vihar, 123 Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, p.85.



Wells, a great thinker assigns Him the first place amongst the seven great men in the world.<sup>3</sup> This Compassion together with Universal Friendliness (*mettā*), Universal Joy (*muditā*) and Universal Equanimity (*upekkhā*) constitute Sublime wayfaring of life (*Brahma Vihāra*).<sup>4</sup>

This Compassion is not something that one is passing through a road and sees a beggar in a shamble condition and on demanding something one gives some paise or scents and feels elated in doing so. This is also not something when someone asks for some money and people generally give whatever their pocket allow and think that it is sufficed. In Buddhism this term has great meaning and the Buddha had preached it to make a cosmopolitan society where a man can leave freely and happily honoring others and in turn get honored.

*Mettā* is to think or to wish about welfare or true happiness of all the living beings. The third constituent of Sublime Welfare of Life (*brahmvihāra*) is *muditā*. It is appreciative joy to see progress of others and is antidote of jealousy. The fourth part is Equanimity (*upekkhā*). There are eight worldly conditions (*aṭṭha loka dhammā*). These are loss (*hāni*), gain (*lābha*), fame (*yasa*), defame (*apayasa*), despise (*nindā*), praise (*pasamsā*), happiness (*sukha*) and pain (*dukkha*).<sup>5</sup> Under this First Worldly affairs Sutta (*paṭhamalokadhammasuttam*) in the *Āṅguttaranikāya* it is explained in Pāli as follows. The Buddha says in this sutta that whosoever remains balanced in all the above condition he crosses the world smoothly. This teaching of Equanimity in true sense is the spirit of Buddhism therefore, the author of this article consider it as utmost need and is quoting from the *Āṅguttaranikāya* in full:

*Lābho alābho ca yasāyaso ca, / Nindā pasamsā ca sukhaṃ dukhañca I / Ete aniccā manujesu dhammā, / Asassatā viparināmadhammā II / “Ete ca ñatvā satimā sumedho, / Avekkhati viparināmadhamme I / Iṭṭhassa dhammā na mathenti cittaṃ, / Aniṭṭhito no paṭighātāmeti II / “Tassānurodhā atha vā virodhā, / Vidhūpitā atthaṅgatā na santi I / Padañca ñatvā virajaṃ, / Sammappajānāti bhavassa pāragū”ti II*

The second part of Sublime Welfare of Life is *Karuṇā*. It is made up of two parts. *Kaṃ + Ruṇāti*. *Kaṃ* means suffering (*dukkha*). *Ruṇāti* means to enter into it and not to stop till its solution is found. Therefore, it is not showing mercy or favor towards anyone. It is also not just giving something to someone and in this way feeling elated.

Writing about this Compassion an author writes - “It is compassion that compels one to serve others with altruistic motives. A truly compassionate person lives not for himself but for others. He seeks opportunities to serve

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *The Suttanipāta* (1990), Ed. by Prof. P. V. Bapat, pub. by Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Book Centre, 40/5, Shakti Nagar, Second Edition, First Edition Poona 1924, Delhi, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Āṅguttaranikāyo III, (paṭhamo khandho)*, (1998), pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 7



others expecting nothing in return, not even gratitude.”<sup>6</sup>

In the *Visuddhimagga* it is explained as when noble person’s heart is moved by seeing suffering of others it is said as compassion (*paradukkhe sati sādhuṇaṃ hadayakampanaṃ karotī ti karuṇā*).<sup>7</sup> Further, its characteristic feature (*lakkhana*) is called as promoting the aspect of allaying suffering; its function (*rasa*) resides in not bearing others’ suffering. It is manifested (*puccuppaṭṭhāna*) as non-cruelty. Its proximate cause (*padaṭṭhāna*) is to see helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. It succeeds (*sampatti*) when it makes cruelty subside and it fails (*vipatti*) when it produces sorrow.<sup>8</sup> The text also talks about its Near (*āsanna*) and Far enemies (*dūrapaccatthikā*). Compassion has grief based on the home life as its near enemy since both share in seeing failure. Cruelty which is dissimilar to the similar grief is far enemy. Therefore, it is said that compassion must be practiced free from fear of that because it is not possible to practice compassion and be cruel to breathing things simultaneously.<sup>9</sup>

Who need compassion regarding this not only people suffering with any ailment are considered but also those people who are spiritually bankrupt are also considered. Narrating about this an author write - “Many in this world are badly in need of substantial spiritual food, which is not easily obtained, as the spiritually poor far exceed the materially poor numerically, as they are found both amongst the rich and the poor.”<sup>10</sup>

These four are call illimitable as there are not certain boundaries regarding which direction these can be increased. These can be increased in all the directions and are limitless.

One can doubt that why wicked, vicious, cunning and ignorant persons deserve compassion when their behavior is totally contrast. A solution of this problem is given by the same author and he writes- “The vicious, the wicked and ignorant deserve compassion even more than those who suffer physically as they are mentally and spiritually sick. They should not be condemned and despised but sympathized with for their failings and defects. Though a mother has equal compassion towards all her children still she may have more compassion towards a sick child. Even so, greater compassion should be exercised towards the spiritually sick as their sickness ruins their character.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *The Buddha and His Teachings* (1988) by Nārada Thera, pub. by Buddhist Missionary Society, 123, jalanaBerhala, 50470, Kualalumpur, Malaysia, First Edition 1964, Fourth Edition, ISBN; - 967-9920-44-5 (1988), p. 629.

<sup>7</sup> *The Visuddhimagga* (1977), Ed. by Swami Dwarikadas Sastri, Bauddha Bharti Series-12, Bauddha Bharti Varanasi, p. 262.

<sup>8</sup> *The Path of Purification* (2007), by Ven. Buddhaghosa, tr. by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 344.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 345.

<sup>10</sup> *The Buddha and His Teachings* (1988) by Nārada Thera, p. 631.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 633.

This is supported by the same author by giving example of courtesan Ambapālī and dreaded dacoit Aṅgulimāla to whom the Buddha had great compassion and both of them later became member of the *saṃgha* and attained *arahathood*.<sup>12</sup>

In the present situation world needs this compassion more than ever because several countries are at war with others and several countries are preparing for war. In the name of religion several countries are involved in helping like-minded countries and in this process humanity suffers and innocent people are being killed in the name of expansion of religion. Some organized religions lure people of other faiths to convert in their own religion by giving financial or false promises. Other organized religion tries to convert people of lower strata by sword or by increasing population. India has witnessed all these conversions in epoch of history and is witnessing in the modern time too. Here it is important to note that some of the neighboring countries were part of India and due external aggression and mass conversion Buddhism was vanished from those areas and slowly-slowly those areas became independent countries. As for example Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal) can be seen which slowly-slowly became Muslim dominated countries. In all these countries previously, conglomeration of Hinduism and Buddhism constituted majority of population.

Here it is also important to note that great *Vipassanā Acārya* (teacher) Shri S. N. Goenka spoke clairvoyantly in the UN Assembly when he was invited for talks that he was certainly for conversion but not from one organized religion to other. According to him he wanted to have conversion from misery to happiness, conversion from suffering to pleasant state of mind, conversion from poverty to richness by the means of self-awareness, diligence and by hard labour.

It is said that greatness is latent in every wicked person or persons of different professions. Above example of Āmbapālī and Aṅgulimāla have been discussed in the sense of why vicious persons need compassion. They were notorious in their field but when they got serene company of Buddhist Fraternity lead by the Buddha they got supreme position in the *saṃgha*. Examples of some of the kings can be seen as Ajātasattu of Magadha and the great king Ashoka of Maurya dynasty. When Ajātasattu came in contact with the Buddha his idea about the Buddha and Buddhist *Samgha* changed and Later on he became patron of the First Buddhist Council.

Who can forget the *caṇḍāsoka* who after getting good words became so much benevolent towards men and animal that he was christened as Dhammasoka with his charitable and Dhammic works. Here example of king Pasendi and king of Gandhāra Pukkusāti can also be seen who became of pious minded in contact of the Buddha. The King of Gandhara Pukkusati exchanged gifts with the king Bimbisara who was the ruling Magadha at that time. In reverence to the Buddha he went to see him on foot to pay respect to the Buddha.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ancient India (*An Introductory Outline*). (1990}, by D. N. Jha, Pub. by People's Publishing House, New Delhi, First Edition 1977, Sixth Print, 1990, p. 43.

Seeing all the above ingredients of Compassion it can be said that *karuṇā* is not just pity or kindness or sympathy. In Buddhism it has great meaning. Passing through several births and observing all the perfections the Buddha was christened as *Mahākāruṇiko* (the great Compassionate One).<sup>14</sup> Not only this the disposition of the Buddha was such that the same author has given Him epithet of possessor of Great Mind (*mahāmati*), possessor of great strength (*mahāvīro*), great meditator (*mahājhāyī*), the Possessor of great force (*mahābalo*) and destroyer of great darkness (*mahātamapanūdano*) and all these are in Pāli as follows:

“*Mahāmati, mahāvīro, mahājhāyī, mahābalo* I / *Mahākāruṇiko nātho mahātamapanūdano* II.”<sup>15</sup> His disposition is equated with sinlessness of the rays of the Sun. Whatever beauty is not in the great Himalayas, whatever calmness is not in the Moon, what depth has not in the depth of the great Ocean that depth has been told in His disposition (*cariyā*), is in His *Iriyāpatha*, is in His words.<sup>16</sup>

## II. UNITY

The next unit of this paper is Unity. Whist is Unity? In Dictionary it is explained as “The state of being in agreement and working together or the state of being joined together to form one unit.”<sup>17</sup> After getting enlightenment and initiation of the Five-fold monks (*pañca vaggīya bhikkhū*) the Buddha initiated *yasa* the son of a great merchant of Varanasi and his four-friends Vimal, Subāhu, *Puṇṇaji* and Gavampati and fifty-friends of *yasa* in his village the *saṃgha* was established by the Buddha.<sup>18</sup> Up to here there were 61 *Arahatas* there. The Buddhist *saṃgha* was epitome of example of Unity where anyone could become member of the Fraternity but not for forceful conversion or illegal works. According to one author after getting enlightenment up to for the first twenty years there was no schism in the *Samgha* (*paṭhama bodhiyaṃ vīsati vassāni*).<sup>19</sup> Few rules had been framed by the Buddha but there was no any dissension in

<sup>14</sup> *The Paramatthadīpanī (Theragāthā- Aṭṭhakathā)*, (1998), pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri-422403, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthmālā- 61, Co-published by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *The Paramatthadīpanī (Theragāthā- Aṭṭhakathā)* {1998}. p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> *Pāli Sāhitya Kā Itihāsa* (1986), by Dr. Bharatsingh Upādhyāya, Pub. by Hindi Sāhitya Sammelana, Prayāga, 12, Sammelana Mārga, Allahabad (Modern name as Prayāgarāj), 4<sup>th</sup> Improved Edition, p. 713.

<sup>17</sup> *Oxford, Advance Learner's Dictionary* (2000), Ed. by Sally Wehmeer, Phonetics Editor Michel Ashby, Oxford University Press, p. 1420.

<sup>18</sup> *The Mahāvaggapāli*, (1998), pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> *Pāli Sāhitya Kā Itihāsa* (1986), by Dr. Bharatsingh Upādhyāya, Pub. by Hindi Sāhitya Sammelana, Prayāga, 12, Sammelana Mārga, Allahabad (Modern name as Prayāgarāj), 4<sup>th</sup> Improved Edition, p. 375.

the *Samgha* and it was pure as a unit. If anyone has to see crystal purity, he or she could have seen in the *Samgha*. The author of this article does not mean that thereafter there was no Unity in the *Samgha* but for the sake of mass unity and for pious cause of getting *nibbāna* Unity in the *Samgha* was marvelous.

How unity can be protected can be seen in the *Dīghanikāya* in the *Mahāpari nibbāna Sutta* when the minister of Ajātasattu named Vassakāra went to meet the Buddha and after salutation asked the will of his king Ajātasattu to destroy the Vajji the Buddha replied after enquiring with Ānanda that so long as Vajjian held regular and frequent assemblies, carried their business in harmony, so long as Vajjian did not authorize what has not been authorized, so long as they were hearing and so long as they did not forcibly abduct others' wives and daughter forcibly, so long as they saluted shrines at home and abroad etc. Vajjian would be prosper and would not decline.<sup>20</sup> A little ahead in the same text after returning of the minister Vassakāra the Buddha asked Ānanda to get monks assembled and the Buddha taught Seven things that were conducive to welfare. Some of these were holding frequent assemblies, not to authorize what had not been authorized by law, honoring of parents and other elders etc.<sup>21</sup>

These are such properties which can be applied in any society and any society can remain united. For durable peace every society needs it and their public need these seven qualities which are known as *aparīhāṇīyadhammā* and in the *Dīghanikāya* these qualities have been two kinds. (Qualities related to kings) *rājaaparīhāṇīyadhammā* and (Qualities related to monks) *bhikkhuaparīhāṇīyadhammā*

In the *Dhammapada* regarding unity it is said that birth of Awakened One (the Buddha) is very happier state, teaching of the true Dhamma is very joyful, unity in the *saṃgha* is matter of great happiness and austerity of the united is matter of great joy or happiness. “*Sukho buddhānaṃ uppādo, sukhā saddhammadesanā* I/ *Sukhā saṃghassa sāmaggī, samaggānaṃ tapo sukho* II.”<sup>22</sup>

It is well-known fact that most of the things in the form of teachings have been given by the Buddha for monks and nuns but lay devotee also can extract good things for themselves. Here too lay people can take unity for themselves.

In the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*<sup>23</sup> the Buddha talks about sign of

<sup>20</sup> Op. Cit. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), by Maurice Walshe, pub. by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, first published in 1995, Wisdom Publication, 361 Newbury Street Boston, Massachusetts, USA, ISBN 955-24-0154-2, p. 231 – 232.

<sup>21</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 233, Also *Dīghanikāyo* II, (1998), Ed. by pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 57 – 58.

<sup>22</sup> *The Dhammapada a Translator's Guide* (2009), by K. T. S. Sarao, pub. by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi-110055, ISBN-978-81-215-1201-5, verse no. 194.

<sup>23</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 458 and

great man and says in His former life Tathāgata ... rejecting idle chatter, spoke at the right time, what was correct and to the point, of Dharma and discipline and what was bound up with profit... and in unity enjoyed (*yampi, bhikkhave... pisuṇaṃ vācaṃ pahāya ... samaggārāmo samaggarato samagganandī samaggakaraṇiṃ vācaṃ bhāstā ahoṣi.*)

It is seen in several instances that person of lower strata and of followers of some religions become united in the name of religion or caste and creed. The Buddha was aware about this and He advises His fellow brothers that in the name of *samaṇa* (monk) some persons think them as so. Remove those persons as chaff who are not *samaṇa* and blow them away who have sinful desires and have sinful deeds and objects. In the next verse the Buddha admonishes that be pure and live together with pure, being thoughtful agreeing with wise you can put an end to the sufferings or pain. In Pāli it is as follows: “*Tato palāpe vāhetha assamaṇe samaṇamānīne I/ Niddhamitvāna pāpicche pāpaācāragocare II/ Suddhā suddhehi saṃvāsaṃ kappayavho patissatā I/ Tato samaggā nipakā dukkhassantṃ karissathāti II*”<sup>24</sup>

So unity with sinful persons is not advised by the Buddha. He advocates unity and unison with wise (*samaggā nipakā*). Now it seems pertinent here to say who is a *samaṇa* and *Thera* and who are not. Regarding these verses from the *Dhammapada* is necessary to quote here. He is not a *samaṇa* who have shaved his head and is immoral and speaks a lie. Who is full with desire and greed how he can become a monk. In the same way he is not an Elder (*thera*) who has shaven head and has come of ages. Such persons are only aged persons and have grown up in desires. The verses are as follows: “*Na muṇḍakena samaṇo abbato alikaṃ bhaṇaṃ, / Icchālobhasamāpanno samaṇo kiṃ bhavissati ? / Na tena thero hoti yenassa Pāṭitaṃ siro, / Paripakko vayo tassa moghajijṇo ti vuccati II 260 (verse no. 260)*”<sup>25</sup>

In contrary to this it is said at the same *vagga* of the *Dhammapada* that who quietens evils small or big, thoroughly he is indeed an ascetic as he quietens all evils. About an Elder (*thera*) it is said that in whom there is truth and righteousness, non-violence, restraint and moderation is indeed an Elder who has discarded impurity and is wise.<sup>26</sup> About a real *samaṇa* it is said that who has quietened small and big evils he is really a monk.<sup>27</sup>

One who is a real *Dharmācārya* (propounder of the Dhamma) clearly foresees the future and gives his teachings according to the real danger coming in future. In India there had been several religious poets and other

---

also *Dīghanikāyo* III (1998), Vipassanā Research Institute, Igatapuri, *Dhammagiri – Pāli-Gaṇthamālā*, Devanāgrī-3; p. 129.

<sup>24</sup> *The Sutta-Nipāta* (1990), Verse No. 281-282; Ed. by P. V. Bapat, published by Sri Satguru Publications a division of Indian Books Centre, 40/5, Shakti Nagar, Delhi-110007, India, First Edition Poona 1924, Second Edition, ISBN-81-7030-232-8, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> *The Dhammapada*, A Translator's Guide (2009), Verses 264 & 260, p. 324 & 319.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* Verse 265, p. 325.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Verse 261, p. 320.



*dhammagurus* (teachers of Dhamma) who have preached taking cognizance of the future danger by their own disciples. One such dhammaguru was kabīr who says that one who has taken birth in a higher caste but his acts are not so high, he is like a pot of gold which is full with wine.<sup>28</sup> This paper is related with Buddhism so quoting the Buddha would be better than any other saints. In the Sutta-Nipāta the Buddha says that by birth no one becomes an outcaste and by birth no one becomes a Brāhmaṇa. By action one becomes an outcaste and by action one becomes a person of higher caste. *Na jaccā vasalo hoti, na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo* I/ *Kammunā vasalo hoti, kammunā hoti brāhmaṇo* II.<sup>29</sup>

Not only this but in the last group (*vagga*) of the *Dhammapada* there are about forty verses in which the Buddha talks about a real Brāhmaṇa and the author of this article without giving many verses just gives the gist of a verse in which the Buddha says- “One who is strong, noble, a here, a great seer, victorious, free from craving, has attained perfection in the Dhamma is awakened, him I call a Brāhmaṇa.”<sup>30</sup>

In the *Kiṇṭhisutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* the Buddha advises monks for unity in the *Samgha* and teaches how it is possible. This can be applied in day to day life and unity in any society can be achieved.<sup>31</sup> In fact the Buddha was staying at Baliharaṇa near Kusinārā (modern Kusinagar) in U. P. State of India. The Buddha asked monks Whether His Wayfaring with alms bowl and preaching were for robe material or for alms food and lodging or for success or decline of the Dhamma. Monks replied that His teachings were out of compassion for them. The Buddha says His teachings of four applications of mindfulness (*cattāro satipatṭhāna*), four right efforts (*cattāro sammappadhānā*), the four bases of psychic power (*cattāro iddhipādā*), five controlling faculties (*pañcaindriyāni*), the five powers (*pañca balāni*), the seven links in awakening (*satta bojjhaṅgā*), and Eight-fold path (*ariyo-aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*) are well proclaimed and you should train yourselves altogether in harmony and without contention each and all of these. But there might be two monks who would be speaking differently about the Dhamma. The Buddha further says that there may be differences in denotation and connotation. Solve in this way and try to soothe the problems so that no one is harmed and unity in the *samgha* should be maintained. In the case if any monk has transgressed some rules then do not try to reproof him in haste and the individual must be examined. A little ahead in the same *sutta* the Buddha says that it may be possible living and training together a monk can speak with another monk with harsh speech. When he

<sup>28</sup> The Kabīra *Sākhī, Darpaṇa* (2012), Devanagri, Ed. by Shri Kabīra Jñāna Prakāshana Kendra, Santa Kabira Jñāna Marga, Sirasiyā, Giridiha-815301, Jharakhanda, First Edition-2009, ISBN No. 978-81-920824-7-9, p. 135.

<sup>29</sup> The *Sutta-Nipāta* (1990), verse-136, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> The *Dhammapada*, A Translator's Guide (1990), verse. 422, p. 527.

<sup>31</sup> The *Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya)* {1996}, Vol. III, Tr. by I. B. Horner, pub. by The Pāli Text Society, Oxford, First Edition 1959, Reprinted 1996, ISBN0 860130022 3, p. 25.



becomes normal then ask him o brother we were trained in the Dhamma together and we had been living in unity but you lost your temper and would this losing temper would help you in realizing *nibbāna*? In this way he would change his behavior as it was against the norm of the Dhamma.<sup>32</sup>

Further, the discussion comes to an end narrating that if some monks do not behave well then some trained monks can say him like this. O brothers all of us have been trained by the Buddha and have become skilled in the Dhamma. But how you speak it will not yield you desired result. It will not lead you to ultimate goal and your goal would be eluded. After some times he would realize the mistake and would improve himself.<sup>33</sup>

It is generally seen in the society that if some persons have any iota of quality then on persuasion he or she realizes their fault and improve themselves. Even during student days if above methods are applied results are sure to come. Therefore, above methods as described in the said sutta on application yield positive results. One thing is very clear how common masses of the society are trained. Regarding Buddhism and its followers in different countries are trained by monks and nuns and such training make the society restraint in several aspects. That is why it was this training which helped them during Covid 19 much and casualties in Buddhist countries was less in comparison to those of other countries.

This *sutta* is considered as pioneer in the *Tripitāka* to establish peace in the *Samgha* and tool for reconciliation in the case of dissension in the *Samgha* so that *Sāsana* can live long.

Here a question can be asked that which type of congregation or company can attain lasting peace. In answer to this question what the Buddha said in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* is very pertinent and fit to the situation. The Buddha says that O monks I do not praise wrong conduct in two either house-holder or home-leaver. To achieve any goal right method is necessary. Regarding this the Buddha says that if wrongly conducted neither house-holder nor home-leaver can win true method, true Dhamma.<sup>34</sup> Further, the Buddha says that there are two types of companies e.g. I. Shallow II. Deep. About shallow company He says that which company is frivolous, empty-headed, busy-bodies, of harsh speech, loose in talk, lacking concentration, unsteady, not composed, of flighty mind, with senses uncontrolled- that Company is called as shallow. In contrast to each of the above like which is not frivolous and not is empty-headed so on and so forth that company is deep. A little ahead in the same place the Buddha enumerates two more companies like discordant and harmonious. The Buddha goes on explaining different kind of duet companies

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhim-Nikāya)* {1996}, Vol. III, Tr. by I. B. Horner, pub. by The Pāli Text Society, Oxford, First Edition 1959, Reprinted 1996, ISBN0 860130022 3, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara Nikāya)* {1954}, printed in Great Britain, First Edition 1932, Reprinted, p. 64 – 65.

like-distinguished and ignoble; the Ariyan and un-Ariyan, dregs and cream; company trained in bluster and company trained in discussion by inquiry etc. Here all the companies have been elaborated by the Buddha through His experiences.<sup>35</sup> These companies are not right companies and are to be avoided by house-holders and house-leavers for the sake of advancement on their path unity achieved would not be long-lasting. After a little explanation on the Unity it is pertinent to say something on the Integrity.

### III. INTEGRITY

Integrity is defined in various ways. Somewhere it is defined as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. It is also explained as the state of being whole and not divided.<sup>36</sup> The life of the Buddha was a great embodiment of integrity and after his *Mahāparinibbāna* His teachings are full with examples of integrity. After taking a vow to leave the house-hold life He did not see back and for whole life he wandered and even after being the son of a king he kissed difficulties and attained *nibbāna* the *summum bonum* of his life and provided a fool proof system on which if any one treads he or she would get himself or herself liberated. During his life time He liberated enumerable beings and after His demise enumerable would liberate from the bond if accepted His path. Following are some examples of integrity.

Amgulimāla was a dreaded dacoit and had become nuisance for the king of Kosala and for people who were passing through the jungle of Kosala. He was waiting for his last prey. But he himself was won over by the Buddha when the Buddha passed through the jungle. Even after forbidding by the guards the Buddha went on walking. The robber saw him from a distance and prepared his bow and arrow. He ran to catch the Buddha but due to supernormal power created by the Buddha he could not catch Him. For the first time he started thinking that previously he was catching running elephants, horses, chariots and deer etc. but with a normal speed this monk was going and he was not able to catch Him. Then he asked the Buddha to stop. The Buddha replied that he had stopped when would he stop - "*Thito aham, Amgulimāla, tvaṃ ca tiṭṭhā*".<sup>37</sup>

Then it occurred to the robber this *samaṇa* is walking and says that he is standstill. There arose in his mind that *samaṇas* were truth speakers and approvers of truth and he wanted to ask Him. This great conviction in the mind of a robber proves and shows how integrity was in the lives of monks and nuns and how the Buddha and His wayfaring was full with integrity. Not only this when Amgulimāla was begging relatives of slain persons beat him with pelting stones and with staffs but Amgulimāla never reacted to anyone. Such was honesty and integrity of a robber who once turned was turned for life and never ever transgressed the vows which he or she took. Such integrity in personal life is rare in the present time. Climax of the story is when the king

<sup>35</sup> Op. Cit. Ibid. p. 65 – 71.

<sup>36</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000), p. 676.

<sup>37</sup> .. The Majjhimanikāya (1999), Ed. & tr. by Swamī Dwārikādās Sāstrī, pub. by Bauddha Bharti, Bauddha-Bharti Series-24 - 25 (Hindi Edition), Unique Edition, p. 855.

of Kosal Prasenjit became ready to catch the robber with five hundred soldiers he went to meet the Buddha in the Jetavana Monastery. When the Buddha knew that the king was going to catch the robber Aṃgulimāla he asked the king what if he could get the wanted person as donning yellow robe after saving off mustache and beard leading to life of a recluse. The king said that he would salute him and would offer him robe and food. But how was it possible to see such a robber of evil character would control in moral habit would live a moral life. After that the Buddha raised the right hand of Bhante Aṃgulimā and said to the king that he was Aṃgulimāla. Then on enquiry by the king venerable Aṃgulimāla said that clan of his father was Gagga and his mother was of Maṇṭāṇī clan. And the king when offered him robes and food as the ven. Aṃgulimāla was observing Austerity practices (*dhutaṃgāni*) refused to take as saying that he had sufficient for his practices.<sup>38</sup>

There is a well-known story of the child Nāgasena being persuaded by ven. Rohaṇa and ultimately he was initiated into *Samgha* in the Milindapañho. When Mahāsena was conceived into the womb of the wife of Soṇuttara Brāhmaṇa in the village of Kajaṅgal in the Himalayas, ven. Rohaṇa started begging into the house of that Brāhmaṇa as child Nāgasena was to initiate into the saṃha. But Soṇuttara Brāhmaṇa was so miser that he never offers rice or pulse or vegetable to ven. Rohaṇa. Not only this but not a single word of salutation also he did not get. Instead of a soothing word ven. Rohaṇa was always saluted with harsh denigrating words. For continuously seven years and ten months ven. Rohaṇa was going to beg alms to the house of Soṇuttara Brāhmaṇa and he did not get anything and any good words eve. One day someone from the house of Soṇuttara Brāhmaṇa told that ven. please go ahead. Soṇuttara Brāhmaṇa was returning from some works being completed from somewhere. In anticipation he asked ven. Rohaṇa in suspicion did someone had given him something in his house. Ven. Rohaṇa said that today he got something and Soṇuttara Brāhmaṇa inquire in his house to his wife that why she gave anything to that Bhante. Her wife said that she did not give anything to ven. Rohaṇa. On approaching the next day Soṇuttara Brāhmaṇa asked ven. Rohaṇa that no one gave you anything in my house yesterday and even then you said that you got something. Was it fair for a monk to speak untruth?

Here it is important to note that Brāhmaṇa Soṇuttara had great belief that a samaṇa always speak the truth. It was the high honor for monks and nuns that persons of the other faith had a great belief that monks and nuns do speak untruth. It was the high level of integrity and honesty of the *Samgha*.

This story has another facet of dedication, sacrifice and renunciation. When ven. Rohaṇa was asked to meet punishment as the *Samgha* Kamma he did not think otherwise and continuously did alms round and after that he became successful in his work of ordaining Nāgasena. Therefore, it can be said that such dedication and renunciation is difficult to find.

<sup>38</sup> The Majjhimanikāya (1999), Ed. & tr. by Swamī Dwārikādās Sāstrī, pub. by Bauddha Bharti, Bauddha-Bharti Series-24 – 25 (Hindi Edition), Unique Edition, p. 858.

Integrity also means adherence to moral practices. It does not mean to become honest for some times and when he or she gets chance becomes dishonest and start doing immoral works. Therefore, the Buddha started morality from the entrance of the *Samgha* itself. Moment a person enters the *Samgha* either he or she, has to take ten moral precepts which is known as *Dasasikkhāpadāni*.<sup>39</sup> These moral precepts are also for house-holders. When a house-holder wants to walk on the path he at first takes five precepts which is known as *pañcasīla*. When he progresses on the path he further practice three more precepts and take three precepts more which is called as *aṭṭhasīla*. Such was arrangement made by the Buddha when he established *Samgha* and people in large number started becoming member of the Fraternity. And how these moral practices have to be kept has been told by the Buddha. As an ant keeps its egg, cow protects its tail, a mother protects her son, as a one eyed man protects his eye in this way morality has to be protected. It is narrated in Pāli as follows: “*Kikī va aṇḍaṃ camarī va vāladhiṃ, piyaṃ va puttaṃ nayaṇaṃ va ekakaṃ* // *Tatheva sīlaṃ anurakkhamānakā supesalā hotha sāgaravā ti* II.”<sup>40</sup>

Morality for House-holders: As the Buddha suggested morality or moral principles for monks He also prescribed moral actions for house-holders. These are Generosity (*dāna*) which yields wealth, Morality (*sīla*)-it gives birth in noble families and in state of happiness, Meditation (*bhāvanā*), which gives birth in Realms of Form (*rūpī brahma*) and Formless Realm (*arūpī brahma*) and which tends to gain higher knowledge emancipation. The next moral actions are Reverence (*apacāyana*)-it causes noble parentage; Service (*veyyāvāca*); Transference of merit (*patidāna*); Rejoicing in others’ merit (*pattānu modanā*)-which is productive of merit whenever one is born; Hearing the Doctrine (*Dhamma savanna*)-it promotes wisdom; Expounding the Doctrine (*Dhamma desanā*)-which promotes wisdom Strengthening of one’s own views (*Ditṭhiujjukaṛaṇa*)-it enhances confidence.<sup>41</sup> These qualities are universal in nature and can be applied in any society and on application members would be benefited. These actions can also be termed as actions of Integrity.

Integrity includes honesty and uprightness too. In the *Samgīti sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* under set of two (*dukaṃ*) section it is said that there are set of two things that were perfectly proclaimed by the Buddha. Under this section there are various qualities mentioned in the above text and one of them is *ajjavanca lajjavanca*.<sup>42</sup> It means straightforwardness and modesty.

<sup>39</sup> *The Khuddakapāṭho* (1992), Ed. & Tr. By Bhikshu Satyapāla and Om Prakash Pathak, pub. By Bhikshu Satyapāla, General Secretary, Buddha Tri-Ratna Mission, B-129, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *The Visuddhimagga* (1977), Ed. by Swami Dwarikadas Sastri, Bauddha Bharti Series-12, Bauddha Bharti Varanasi, p. 30.

<sup>41</sup> *A Manual of Buddhism* (1992) by Narada, pub. by Buddhist Missionary Society, Buddhist Vihara, 123, Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ISBN 967-9920—58-5, p. 97 – 98.

<sup>42</sup> *The Dīghanikāyo* (1998), Part III, pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation,

These two are well proclaimed by the Buddha so monks should recite these two. Here it is important to observe that some persons are straight forward but they are not moderate. Modesty is eluding them. But the Buddha says with straightforwardness modest should also be there.

The *Tripitaka* is full with integrity or honesty. Whole life the Buddha strove for honesty and integrity. It is not possible to narrate all of them. But the author of this article is unable to hold his temptation and gives the *Cūlapuṇṇamasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* in which the Buddha talks about *sappurisa* and *asappurisa*.<sup>43</sup> The Buddha starts discussion by asking a question to the monks as is it possible by a bad man to know about a bad man and monks replied in negative. Then the Buddha asked that was it possible by a bad man to know of a good man. Again monks replied in negative. The Buddha then says that a bad man possesses a bad state of mind, he consorts with bad men, he thinks like bad men, he advises as bad men he speaks like bad men, he acts like bad men, his views are like bad men and he gives a gift as bad men do.<sup>44</sup> The Buddha says there that a bad man lacks in faith, he has no shame, no fear of blame, he does not hear the Dhamma more, he is lazy, he is not mindful and he is weak in wisdom.<sup>45</sup>

Then the Buddha asked monks about good men that it was possible that a good man could know about a good man. At the same time monks also replied positively about a good man can know about a bad man. The Buddha further says that a good man possesses good state of mind, he consorts with good men, he advises like good men, he speaks like good men and he gives gift like good men. After this the Buddha elaborates about each quality described above.

Renunciation is also one meaning of Integrity. In the Eight-fold Path the second part is Right Aspiration (*sammā saṃkappo*). It has been explained as three types e.g. *nekkhamma saṃkappo*, *avyāpāda saṃkappo* and *avihiṣā saṃkappo*. An author also translates *Sammā saṃkappo* as Right Thought.<sup>46</sup> *Nekkhamma saṃkappo* means to come out of the periphery of cravings. It is opposite to lustful desires. Here it is very important to note that coming out of periphery of *taṇhā* is very difficult. People long for this world and it is easy to say but difficult to be done. It is generally seen that several saints, various monks and other ascetics have just donned either yellow robes or brown robes but they are not able to bring themselves out from the periphery of *taṇhā*. In the Dhammapada it is said that if it rains gold coins from the sky even then desires

11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 170.

<sup>43</sup> *The Majjhimanikāya* (1999), Part III, Ed. & tr. by Swamī Dwārikādās Sāstrī, pub. by Bauddha Bharti, Bauddha-Bharti Series-24-25 (Hindi Edition), Unique Edition, p. 1107.

<sup>44</sup> *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhim-Nikāya)* {1996}, Vol. III, Tr. by I. B. Horner, pub. by The Pāli Text Society, Oxford, First Edition 1959, Reprinted 1996, ISBN0 860130022 3, p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhim-Nikāya)* {1996}, Vol. III, Tr. by I. B. Horner, pub. by The Pāli Text Society, Oxford, First Edition 1959, Reprinted 1996, ISBN0 860130022 3, p. 71.

<sup>46</sup> *A Manual of Buddhism* (1992), p. 132.



of the human beings cannot be fulfilled. The wise man having understood that sensual desires give only little pleasure and are painful either he or she does not find likings even in divine pleasures. A pupil of the Awakened One is completely devoted in destruction of desires. It is mentioned in Pāli as follow: “*Na kahāpana vasseyya titti kāmesu vijjati, / Appasādā dukkhā kāmā iti Viññāya paṇḍito I / Api dibbesu kāmesu ratim so nādhigacchati, / Taṇhakkhaya rato hoti sammāsambuddhasāvako II.*”<sup>47</sup>

*Vyāpāda* is explained as desire of others destruction (*para vināsa cintā*). *Avyāpāda* is opposed to it and it is opposite to ill will. Thoughts of Harmlessness (*avihiṃsā saṃkappa*) are not to harm others and it is opposite to cruelty. All these tend to purify the mind.<sup>48</sup>

In the *Aṃguttara Nikāya* particularly in the *Sikkhāpada Sutta* the Buddha has used a method to observe on the five precepts to demarcate a person of no integrity from a person of Integrity. A person of no integrity involves himself in killing living beings (*pāṇātipātā*), taking what is not given to him (*adinnādānā*), sexual misdeeds (*kāmesu micchācārā*), telling a lie (*musāvādā*) and indulging in wine, arrack and other intoxicating hard dinks that makes a person inebriated (*surā-meraya- majjappamādā*) {*Katamo ca, bhikkhave, asappuriso? Idha bhikkhave ekacco pāṇātipātī hoti, adinnādāyī hoti, kamesumicchācārī hoti, musāvādī hoti, surāmerayamajjappamādaṭṭhāyī hoti. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, asappuriso.*}<sup>49</sup> Here one thing is important to note that in the sexual misdeeds for monk a term is used and it is *abrahmacariya* but for a lay devotee *kāmesu micchācārā* termed is used. The Buddha says here a person of no integrity indulges in above mentioned acts and also involves or encourages other to do so. The Buddha says that he is worse than a person of no integrity. In contrary, a person who abstains from all these special and peculiar qualities is called as person of integrity and who does not encourage other to do so is better than a person of integrity.

In another *sutta* named the *Sappurisa Dhamma sutta* of the *Aṃguttara Nikāya*<sup>50</sup> the Buddha has enumerated ten unwholesome deeds and in opposition ten qualities of a person of no integrity and a person of integrity. In the list of a person of no integrity following marvelous qualities has been given: (1) Killing living being. (2) Taking what is not given. (3) Sexual misdeeds. (4) False speech. (5) Slandering. (6) Harsh speech. (7) Greed. (8) Ill-will. (9) Wrong view.

<sup>47</sup> *The Dhammapada*, A Translator's Guide (1990), verse No. 186 - 187, p. 231 – 232.

<sup>48</sup> *A Manual of Buddhism* (1992), p. 133.

<sup>49</sup> *The Aṃguttaranikāyo, Paṭhamo Bhāgo (Dutiyo khandho)*, (1998) “*sikkhāpada suttaṃ*” Devanāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 247.

<sup>50</sup> *The Aṃguttaranikāyo, Tatiyo Bhāgo (Dutiyo khandho)*, (1998), “*Sappurisa dhamma suttaṃ*”, Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 247.



And in Pāli it is: (*sappurisa dhammaṇca vo, bhikkhave, desessāmi asappurisa dhammaṇca. Taṃ suṇātha... pe... katamo ca, bhikkhave asappurisa dhammo? Pāṇātipāto... pe... micchādītṭhi-ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, asappurisa dhammo*). A person who commits above misdeeds is called by the Buddha as a person of no integrity and in opposition a person who refrains from the above qualities is characterized by the Buddha as a person of integrity.

In another *sutta* of the same name *Sappurisa sutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāyo* the Buddha has narrated about a person of integrity and his qualities. The Buddha says that when a person of integrity takes birth in a family he becomes helper and liberator of many persons like parents, son and wife, becomes supporter of workers, of friends and relatives and helps also *Samaṇa* and *Brāhmaṇs*. The Buddha further says that as a great cloud after raining satisfies most of people so in the same way when a man of integrity takes birth in a family help various persons (*Sappuriso, bhikkhave, kule jāyamāno bahuno janassa atthāya hitāya sukhāya hoti, mātūpitūnaṃ... pe... puttadārassa... pe... dāsakammakaraposisassa... pe... mittāmaccānaṃ... pe... samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ...*).<sup>51</sup>

Yet in another *sutta* of the same name of the *Aṅguttaranikāyo* the Buddha has described the difference between a person of no integrity and a person of integrity on the basis of good and bad qualities of their own and of others. These are four distinct qualities of both of them. At first He has given characters of a person of no integrity which are as follows:

(1) Even on not asking he will reveal bad qualities of other persons. When asked he describes bad habits and qualities of another person in full and not in short. (2) When asked he will not reveal good qualities of another person. On pressing hard expresses good qualities of others in short but not in detail. In most cases he conceals good qualities. (3) On asking about his bad qualities he does not reveal. While pressing hard says only few bad qualities about him. (4) Without asking he explains his good qualities. When asked he describes his good qualities fully without concealing anything.

(*Catūhi, bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato asappuriso veditabbo. Katamehi catūhi? Idha, bhikkhave, asappuriso yo hoti parassa avaṇṇo...*)<sup>52</sup>

The four distinct qualities of a person of integrity are as follows:

(1) On asking he does not reveal bad qualities of another person. When he is not asked he does not express anything about a bad person. When he is asked to do so again and again even then he does not reveal bad qualities fully or in detail. He generally eludes some bad qualities and hold back some. (2) When he is not asked he reveals good qualities of

<sup>51</sup> *The Aṅguttaranikāyo*, (1998), *Dutiyo Bhāgo (Pṭhamo khandho)*, “Sappurisa suttam” Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 42 – 43.

<sup>52</sup> *The Aṅguttaranikāyo, Paṭhamo Bhāgo (Dutiyo khandho)*, (1998), p. 89.

another person. While he is asked he narrates good qualities of others in full and does not omit or hold back anything. (3) When is not asked about bad qualities of himself he reveals it. On asking he certainly narrated his bad qualities and when repeatedly asked he reveals his all the bad qualities of himself and does not hold back any. (4) On asking about his good qualities he does express it. When not asked he will not express his good qualities. On asking repeatedly, he describes his good qualities not in full or in detail. He can omit or hold back some.

(*Catūhi, bhikkhave, dhammehi samannāgato sappuriso veditabbo. Katamehi catūhi? Idha bhikkhave, sappuriso yo hoti parassa avaṇṇo taṃ puṭṭhopi na pātu karoti, ko pana vādo apuṭṭhassa! Puṭṭho kho pana pañhābhinito hāpetvā lambitvā aparipūraṃ avitthārena parassa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsitaṃ hoti. Veditabbametam, bhikkhave, sappuriso ayaṃ bhavanti*).<sup>53</sup>

There are various other qualities which can be said about a person of integrity on the basis of Pāli literature. Paucity of time does not permit the author of this article to do so.

#### IV. MINDFUL EFFORTS

In the Pāli literature mindful efforts have very exalted place. Not only Pāli literature but in any literature or in any religious domain Mindful actions have their own position.

Right Effort is the translation of *sammā vāyama* which is a technical term rather the sixth part of the Eight-fold Path which has been narrated as follows:

(1) Endeavour to not to arise evil qualities which have yet not arisen in anyone (*anuppannānaṃ akuslānaṃ dhammānaṃ anuppādāya vāyamo*). (2) Endeavour to discard evil qualities which have already arisen (*uppannānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya vāyamo*). (3) Endeavour to arise good qualities which have yet not arisen (*anuppannānaṃ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ uppādāya vāyamo*). (4) Endeavour to increase whatever good qualities have arisen (*uppannānaṃ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ abhiviḍḍhiyā vāyamo*).<sup>54</sup>

Above are real efforts which will bring good results in the life of anyone who wants to ameliorate one's life. Whether it is a life of a recluse or life of a householder in both cases above efforts would yield positive and prosperous efforts.

Mindful actions can also be narrated as actions done mindfully. It can also be elaborated as actions done with awareness. Awareness is translated in Pāli as *sati*. It has been elaborated four types: (1) Mindfulness regarding body (*kāyānupassanā*). (2) Mindfulness regarding feelings (*vedānānupassanā*). (3) Mindfulness regarding mind (*cittānupassanā*). (4) Mindfulness regarding Dhamma (*dhammānupassanā*).

<sup>53</sup> *The Aṅguttaranikāyo, Paṭhamo Bhāgo (Dutiyo khandho)*, (1998), p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> *The Vibhaṅgapāli*, (1998), Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā-114, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 266.

Mindfulness regarding body (*kāyānupassanā*): Here, it is a matter of thinking that at first a man takes birth as a newborn baby and passing through different stages of Toddler (child of 1 to 3 years), child (3 to 9 years), Preteen (9 to 12 years old child), youth stage to middle aged adult and finally passing through Elderly stage one day reaches to final destination which is called death (*maccu*). Some biological reactions are happening every moment in our body. Therefore, to remain aware about one's own body is known as Mindfulness regarding body (*kāyānupassannā*) and the original Pāli is as- (*kāye kāyānupassī viharati atāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ*).<sup>55</sup> Here the word *sampajāno* needs further explanation. In Pāli literature it is also explained as *sati sampajañña* which means remaining alert for every moment of every action with clear awareness. In the *Dīghanikāya* the Buddha explains it as while going forth and back, in looking ahead or behind him, in bending or stretching, in wearing outer or inner robes and carrying his bowl, in eating, drinking, chewing, in swallowing, in evacuating and urinating, in walking, standing, sitting, lying down, in walking, in speaking, and in keeping silent he acts with clear awareness.<sup>56</sup> It is in Pāli as- "*Bhikkhu abhikkante paṭikkante sampajānakāṛī hoti, ālokite vilokite sampajānakāṛī hoti, samijjite pasārite sampajānakāṛī hoti, saṃghātipattacīvaradhāraṇe sampajānakāṛī hoti, asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajānakāṛī hoti, uccārapassāvakamme sampajānakāṛī hoti, gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṇhībhave sampajānakāṛī hoti*."<sup>57</sup>

Mindfulness regarding body is to ponder over head to feet and to see each part starting from hair, nails, teeth and skins etc. up to both feet one should survey one by one. This reviewing of the body is supplemented with an example in which it is said that as a farmer has a bag which is open from the two sides and he puts different seeds and is aware about each seed so a mendicant or a recluse should review his own body from top to bottom and from bottom to top. He reviews internal and external body independently. At the same time, he reviews his body in terms of elements like earth – element, water – element, fire – element and air – element and in the text it is given with a simile of a butcher. This is known as to see the body as the body.<sup>58</sup>

Mindfulness regarding feeling: When a monk or mendicant or lay devotee contemplates pleasant feeling as pleasant and unpleasant as unpleasant and indifferent feeling as indifferent then he is mindful regarding feelings. He is well aware about sensual-feelings. He abides internal and external feelings as they really are. In feelings whatever things arise and vanish, he is fully aware with

<sup>55</sup> *The Vibhaṅgapāḷi*, p. 266.

<sup>56</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), by Maurice Walshe, pub. by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, first published in 1995, Wisdom Publication, 361 Newbury Street Boston, Massachusetts, USA, ISBN 955-24-0154-2, p. 100.

<sup>57</sup> *The Dīghanikāyao* (1998), Part-I, Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā-1, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 62 – 63.

<sup>58</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 337 – 338.

that. This arising and passing away of *khandhā* in feelings provides intrinsic joy or satisfaction. In the *Dhammapada* it is narrated as-whenver one understands fully the arising and passing away of the aggregates one obtains joy and happiness. Whatever one knows is like the state of deathlessness (*amataṃ*).

“*Yato yato sammāsati khandhānaṃ udayavyayaṃ/ Labhati pītipāmojjaṃ amataṃ taṃ vijānataṃ*”II.<sup>59</sup> When a mendicant abides independently not clinging to anything, it is known as contemplating feeling as feeling.<sup>60</sup>

Mindfulness regarding mind: When a monk contemplates on lustful mind as lustful, a mind free from attachment as free from lust or attachment, a hating mind as hating, a mind free from hate as free from hate, a deluded mind as deluded, undeluded mind as undeluded, a contracted mind as contracted, a distracted mind as distracted, a developed mind as developed, an undeveloped mind as undeveloped, a surpassed mind as surpassed, an unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed, a concentrated mind as concentrated and a liberated mind as liberated etc. He also contemplates on internal and external mind.<sup>61</sup>

Mindfulness regarding Dhamma: The Dhamma here means dhammas preached by the Buddha. At first he ponders over Five-fold-clinging to existence (*pañca-upādāna-khandhā*). Then he contemplates on six internal and external senses *āyatana*, seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*) and then he contemplates on truth. It is necessary here to describe five factors of hindrance (*nīvaraṇa*) as these create obstacle in the way of getting mind concentrate. These are five in number and there five *jhāna* factors. If *nīvaraṇas* are controlled other ingredients become easy to control. These are: (1) Desire for sensual please (*kāmacchanda*) It is sensual pleasure which arises due to all six – senses. (2) Ill-Will (*vyāpāda*) It is desire to harm others. (3) Sloth and Torpor (*thina-middha*) It is bruding over what has been done and what has not been done. (4) Wary and Flurry (*uddhacca-kukkuccam*) It is distraction of mind. (5) Doubts (*vicikicchā*) It is doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma and *Samgha*.<sup>62</sup>

In contrary to above there are five-factors of *jhāna* which are Vitakka, Vicāra, Pīti, Sukha and Ekaggatā: (1) Initial application of mind (*vitakka*). By this mind is directed on the objects of meditation. (2) Sustained application of mind (*vicāra*) It is to direct mind on the object again and again. (3) Joy (*pīti*) It is name of joy to know the state of mind. (4) Happiness (*Sukha*) It is happiness to celebrate fruits. (5) One Pointedness (*Ekaggatā*). It is the state when mind is concentrated.<sup>63</sup> Any action done with clear awareness would yield moral action and would bring positive result in the society and the society would be benefited.

<sup>59</sup> *The Dhammapada*, Verse no. 374, p. 466.

<sup>60</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 340

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *The Dīghanikāyo* (1998), Part-II, p. 222.

<sup>63</sup> *A Manual of Abhidhamma* (1979), by Narad Mahā Thera, pub. by Buddhist Missionary Society, 123, Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, First Edition-1956, Fourth Revised Edition, ISBN 967-9920-42-9(1987) p. 48 – 50.

## V. SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The word sustainable means - “Involving the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment. It also means that can continue or be continued for a long time.”<sup>64</sup> It is generally used with environment and economics.

Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations (UN) on September 25, 2015. On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SdGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were fixed by the member countries.<sup>65</sup> The aim of these global goals is “peace and prosperity for people and the planet” - while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests. For whole of His life the Buddha preached for peace and prosperity which can be seen in his teachings.

Sustainable Future is talked in various quarters but what should be done is not suffice. As far as sustainable future is concerned the Buddha was very much aware about this and His most of the activities and His teachings describe sustainable future or sustainable development for sustainable future.

In the *Brahmajāla sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* the Buddha says there are some monks and Brāhmaṇs who after receiving food from lay devotee are engaged in destroying various kinds of destruction of seeds as are propagated from roots (*mūlavijam*), from stems (*khandhavijam*), from joints (*phaluvijam*), from cuttings (*aggavijam*) and from seeds (*bījabijam*) etc. The Buddha advises monks and nuns to refrain from destruction of seeds.<sup>66</sup>

In the *Sūtanipāta* the Buddha describes animals as giver of food, strength, complexion and happiness. Regarding cow, the Buddha says that they give food and strength. Likewise, they provide good complexion and happiness. Then the Buddha advises that knowing all these cows should not be killed. “*Annadā baladā cetā vannadā sukhadā tathā I/ Etamatthavasam nātvā nāssu gāvo haniṃsu te II*.”<sup>67</sup>

Not only the above the Buddha also says that cows are like our mother, father, brother and other relatives and like the best friends which gives us medicines. In the same sutta the Buddha advises not to kill cows in the sacrifices.<sup>68</sup> “*Yathā mātā pita bhātā aññe vāpi ca nātakā I/ Gāvo no parmā mittā yāsu jāyanti osadhā II*.”

Here one thing is very important that starting from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE human being started developing a peculiar trait of killing environment and at the same time person like the Buddha come to the scene and preaches to save environment. Though, it was not for the first time when someone advocated preserving environment. Vedic literature, Upaniṣadic literatures are full of such instruction but that is not the subject matter here.

<sup>64</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000), p. 1312.

<sup>65</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org>

<sup>66</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 69.

<sup>67</sup> *The Sutta Nipāta* (1990), “*Brāhmaṇadhammika Sutta*” Verse- 297, p. 41.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Verse-296, p. 41.



What is paramount here is greed (*lobha*) which has played major role in destruction of forests, green cover and texture of the mother earth. Greed has given dark side of globalization and consumerism has acted as giving fuel to the fire.

In the *Aggañña Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* the Buddha says that previously there was no husk in the paddy. What people had taken in the evening for supper had grown again and was ripe in the morning, and what they had taken in the morning for breakfast was ripe again by evening with no sign of reaping. These beings set to and fed on this rice, and this lasted for a very long time. And as they did so their bodies became coarser still, and difference in their looks became even greater. Females developed female sex-organs and the males developed male organs. In this way when women became excessively preoccupied with men and men became excessively preoccupied with women, owing to this occupation their bodies burnt with lust.<sup>69</sup>

When men developed greed slowly-slowly husk grew in paddy as people started eating rice at field itself and started grabbing field of others. Even after repeated warnings when such people did not improve themselves then people started beating with staffs. Hereafter, stealing, despising, telling a lie and process of fixing punishment started. After that process of choosing kings started. Another message of the *sutta* is such- as men behave the nature starts acting accordingly. Summing up the Buddha says that the Dhamma is the best thing for people in this life and the next as well (*dhammo hi seṭṭho janetasmiṃ diṭṭhe ceva dhamme abhisamparāyaṇca*).<sup>70</sup>

Now a question can be asked – above are the problems only what about solutions. Regarding this it can be said that the Path prescribed by the Buddha is well described and tested. The Buddha has given the Path after experiencing and realizing Himself. It is a practical Path on which followers can minimize greed and can lead a happy life. Prosperity for both house-holders and monks and nuns are very essential and for this the Buddha has given the *Dīghajāṇu sutta*. This *sutta* is also known as *Vyagghapajja sutta* as it was family name of *Dīghajāṇu* as his ancestors were living in a forest which was infested with tigers. The crux of this *sutta* is as follows when asked by him about progress of this life and life after for a house-holder. Here the Buddha prescribes four Dhammas for a house-holder which are conducive for this life.

- (1) The achievement of persistent effort (*uṭṭhānasampadā*) - In fact it is about skill which one is accepted for one's own survival. One should become able to manage his job whatever profession one chooses.
- (2) The achievement of Wariness (*ārakkhasampadā*) – It means protection of one's properties from the government, thieves, robbers, protection from fire, water and handing over to able successor.
- (3) Good Friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*) – Here the Buddha suggests for talking with persons of different age groups with faith, virtue, charity and wisdom. Here the Buddha talks about level of persons and accordingly suggests talking

<sup>69</sup> *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 411.

<sup>70</sup> *The Dīghanikāyo* (1998), p. 69.



with person of different levels with above levels. (4) Balance livelihood (*samajīvikatā*) – It is the name of living a life according to income. One should be aware of one's income should spend according to earning is called Balance livelihood.<sup>71</sup>

Further, the Buddha says that wealth amassed by a house-holder amassed in such a way has four sources of destruction. What are those four? (1) Debauchery (*itthidhutto*). (2) Drunkenness (*sutādhutto*). (3) Indulgence in gambling (*akkhadhutto*). (4) Friendship, Companionship with and intimacy with evil-doers (*pāpamitto pāpasahāyo pāpavñko*).<sup>72</sup>

All these are simple terms so do not need explanation. Further, the Buddha prescribes four ways of doing spiritual progress which are as follows: (1) Achievement of Faith (*saddhāsampadā*). (2) Achievement of Virtue (*sīlasampadā*). (3) Achievement of Charity (*cāgāsampadā*). (4) Achievement of Wisdom (*paññāsampadā*)

When a mendicant believes in the enlightenment, wisdom and omniscient of the Tathāgata it is known as the Achievement of Faith. When a clansman abstains from killing living beings, stealing, unchastity, lying and intoxicating drinks which produce infatuation and heedlessness is called Achievement of Virtue. When a mendicant is free from avarice and is filled with generosity is known as Achievement of Charity. When a clansman strives for achievement of wisdom and insight it is called as Achievement of Wisdom.<sup>73</sup>

For gender equality a lot has been told by the Buddha. In the *Therīgāthā*, Somā Therī says paeen and narrates whose mind has become pacified what femininity can do when mind is completely free from defilements and has learnt the Dhamma in a right way. “*Itthibhāvo no kiṃ kayirā, cittaṃhi susamāhite Iññāṇaṃhi vattamāṇaṃhi, sammā dhammaṃ vipassato II*.”<sup>74</sup>

It was by request of Ānanda the Buddha gave permission to women to become member of the *Samgha*. It was such a foresighted work of the Buddha that He did a great help to women and it was a revolutionary work of the time. What the Christianity has done in 1990s that work of women being priest was done by the Buddha 2550 years before.

As far as economy is concerned it can be said that nothing should be governed by the sole motive of profits. If altruism and helping of others are also taken as motto, then profit will automatically have reached up to essential limit and employee welfare would also be done.

There should not be a vast gap between salary structure of CEO and a maintenance staff. It produces avarice in mind merit become blunt.

<sup>71</sup> *A Manual of Buddhism* (1992) by Narada Thera, p. 168 – 170.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 168 – 170.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 171 – 172.

<sup>74</sup> *Therīgāthāpālī* (2008), Ed. & Tr. by Swāmi Dwāriādās Śāstri, pub. by Bauddha Bharti Varanasi, Bauddha Bharti Series No. 51, p. 247.

## VI. CONCLUSION

When people of any society become compassionate and remain united, Integrity can be achieved in plurality. Integrity supported by mindful actions can provide sustainable future in posterity can also live happily. This is something like live and let live policy where everyone has equal right and everyone understands his duty. That society can become an ideal place to live in. Paucity of time is restricting the author of this article to stop here.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

### Primary sources

- Aṃguttaranikāyo* III (paṭhamo khandho) (1998), pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 7.
- The *Dhammapada* a Translator's Guide (2009), by K. T. S. Sarao, pub. by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi-110055, ISBN-978-81-215-1201-5, verse no. 194.
- The *Dīghanikāyo* (1998), Part III, pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 170
- The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), by Maurice Walshe, pub. by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, first published in 1995, Wisdom Publication, 361 Newbury Street Boston, Massachusetts, USA, ISBN 955-24-0154-2, p. 231-232.
- The Path of Purification (2007), by Ven. Buddhaghosa, tr. by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 344.
- The *Suttanipāṭa* (1990), Ed. by Prof. P. V. Bapat, pub. by Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Book Centre, 40/5, Shakti Nagar, Second Edition, First Edition Poona 1924, Delhi, p. 20.
- The *Sutta-Nipāṭa* (1990), Verse 136, p. 19.
- The *Visuddhimagga* (1977), Ed. by Swami Dwarikadas Sastri, Bauddha Bharti Series-12, Bauddha Bharti Varanasi, p. 262.

### Secondary sources

- A Manual of Buddhism* (1992), Buddhist Missionary Society, Buddhist Vihar, 123 Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kualalumpur, Malaysia, p. 85.
- Ancient India (An Introductory Outline)* {1990}, by D. N. Jha, Pub. by People's Publishing House, New Delhi, First Edition 1977, Sixth Print, 1990, p. 43.
- Oxford, Advance Learner's Dictionary* (2000), Ed. by Sally Wehmeer, Phonetics Editor Michel Ashby, Oxford University Press, p. 245.

- Pali Sāhitya Kā Itihāsa* (1986), by Dr. Bharatsingh Upādhyāya, Pub. by Hindi Sāhitya Sammelana, Prayāga, 12, Sammelana Mārga, Allahabad (Modern name as Prayāgarāj), 4th Improved Edition, p. 713.
- The Buddha and His Teachings* (1988) by Nārada Thera, pub. by Buddhist Missionary Society, 123, Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, First Edition 1964, Fourth Edition, ISBN: 967-9920-44-5 (1988), p. 629.
- The Dhammapada, A Translator's Guide* (1990), Verses 264 & 260, p. 324 & 319.
- The Kabira Sākhī, Darpaṇa* (2012), Devanagri, Ed. by Shri Kabira Jñāna Prakāshana Kendra, Santa Kabira Jñāna Marga, Sirasiyā, Giridiha-815301, Jharakhanda, First Edition-2009, ISBN No. 978-81-920824-7-9, p. 135.
- The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 233, p. 340.
- The Mahāvaggapāli* (1998), pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 23.
- The Majjhimanikāya* (1999), Ed. & tr. by Swamī Dwārikādās Sāstrī, pub. by Bauddha Bharti, Bauddha-Bharti Series-24-25 (Hindi Edition), Unique Edition, p. 855.
- The Paramatthadīpanī (Theragāthā- Aṭṭhakathā)* {1998}, pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri-422403, Dhammagiri-Pali-Ganthmālā-61, Co-published by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 1.
- The Vibhaṅgapāli* (1998), Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pali-Ganthamālā-114, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri-422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 266.



# MINDFUL COMMUNICATION AND A NEW PATH FOR PEACE JOURNALISM

Dr. Kalinga Seneviratne\*

## Abstract:

The Western model of Journalism we have been teaching across the world for the past half-century based on the “watchdog” principle of a “free media” has created an adversarial journalism culture that drives conflicts, and the media is unable to stop conflicts that they have helped to create in the first place. Today’s geopolitical conflicts are mainly driven by this model. A new definition and model of journalism is needed to promote cooperation and harmony in society, not conflicts. A Buddhist model of mindful communication for sustainable development and peaceful co-existence could be adopted to promote a new model of Peace Journalism. This paper discusses how Buddhist philosophical concepts could be adopted to design such a curriculum for journalism training. Specific recommendations are given on how we could use such a curriculum to train communicators across Asia and the world.

Many of today’s geopolitical tensions and conflicts can be attributed to the adversarial reporting culture promoted by the Libertarian Media Function Theory that underpins the Western “free media” model of “watchdog” journalism. It is creating and driving conflicts with the media unable or unwilling to help to solve them.

We need a model of Peace Journalism that helps to promote understanding, cooperation, and harmony among countries and within communities. The term Peace Journalism has been around for at least two decades, but we need an Eastern – more precisely a Buddhist – model of Journalism.

**Keywords:** *peace journalism, mindful communication, Buddhist media ethics, sustainable development, Conflict Resolution, Kalama Sutta, middle path reporting*

\*\*\*

---

\* Founder Lotus Communication Network, Research Fellow, Shinawatra University, Thailand.

## I. WHAT IS PEACE JOURNALISM

The practice of journalism is deeply rooted in getting at least two sides of a story together in reporting an issue, which naturally creates a conflict. We lead to war when a narrative of “them” and “us” is created. Conflict is portrayed as a zero-sum game where victory is achieved in the predominance of one party over the other.

Media will try to make us believe that one side is wrong and it is the aggressor. Thus, the right side needs to win. We see this in the recent coverage of the Russia conflict.

Peace journalism, by contrast, is a journalistic approach committed to examining the root causes of conflicts to create opportunities for society to embrace non-violent responses. Its origins can be traced back to 1965, when Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge analyzed what rendered foreign news newsworthy in a Norwegian newspaper. Their study revealed that the media predominantly exhibit a bias toward violence, operating under the assumption that ‘conflict’ is synonymous with ‘war.’ Lynch and Galtung contend that such a view is problematic, as it precludes the possibility of seeing conflict as an opportunity to foster new forms of harmony among disputing parties—a process that need not necessarily culminate in war (De Michelis, 2018, p. 45).

To provide a framework for peace journalism, Galtung and Lynch established four guiding principles:

**i. Explore the genesis of conflicts:** Analyze who the involved parties are, their respective goals, the socio-political and cultural contexts, and both the visible and invisible manifestations of violence.

**ii. Avoid dehumanization:** Refrain from portraying the parties in conflict in dehumanized terms; instead, expose and understand their underlying interests.

**iii. Offer non-violent alternatives:** Present responses to conflict that eschew militarized or violent solutions in favor of peaceful options.

**iv. Document grassroots initiatives:** Report on non-violent actions at the grassroots level, following through the phases of resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation (De Michelis, 2018, p. 45).

This approach not only challenges the conventional media bias toward sensationalism and violence but also promotes a more balanced and constructive perspective on conflict, highlighting the potential for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

## II. KALAMA SUTRA AND PEACE JOURNALISM

The Buddha’s discourse, commonly known as the *Kalama Sutta*, is widely regarded as the Buddhist Charter of Free Inquiry – a communication framework that predates Western theories such as the Libertarian Media Function Theory by over 2500 years. In this seminal sermon, delivered to the warring Kalama community who were embroiled in debates over competing and often confusing doctrines propagated by various gurus seeking converts, the Buddha urged his listeners to engage their critical faculties. He emphasized



that each individual should independently investigate and discern what is good and wholesome for practice.

In his address to the Kalamas, the Buddha advocated for a rational approach to ethical evaluation. He encouraged his audience to cultivate a mindset grounded in critical inquiry and self-reflection, thereby empowering them to determine the most beneficial practices for personal development. This method, which can be described in contemporary terms as 'scientific,' remains a timeless cornerstone of Buddhist thought (Gunanarama, 2003, p. 45).

By challenging conventional reliance on dogmatic assertions, the Buddha's teaching in the *Kalama Sutta* not only provided a means for personal liberation but also laid the groundwork for free inquiry in matters of spiritual practice. His insistence on individual verification of truth underscores a profound respect for human agency – a principle that resonates with modern notions of intellectual autonomy and ethical responsibility.

Thus, the *Kalama Sutta* continues to serve as a model for how critical inquiry can lead to a deeper understanding of life and the development of wholesome practices. Its enduring relevance is evident not only in the realm of religious thought but also in broader discussions about the nature of free inquiry and the pursuit of truth. The integration of reason, ethical evaluation, and direct personal experience in this discourse offers a holistic approach that is as applicable today as it was over two millennia ago.

In summary, the Buddha's teaching to the Kalamas is a clarion call for self-determination in spiritual practice—a message that transcends time and culture. It calls on each individual to use reason and critical insight as the foundation for choosing a path that is both beneficial and life-affirming (Gunanarama, 2003, p. 45).

*Kalama Sutra* sheds light on Buddhist social philosophy with ten principles to guide one in what should be acceptable. It includes:

- i. views not to be accepted due to revelation;
  - ii. tradition;
  - iii. hearsay;
  - iv. authority of sacred texts;
  - v. logical format;
  - vi. merely on the view that seems rational;
  - vii. reflection on mere appearance;
  - viii. agreement with a considered views;
  - ix. considering the competence of a person;
  - x. or considering that the recluse is our teacher
- (Gunanarama, 2003, p. 45).

Thus, the *Kalama Sutra* has valuable guidelines on free inquiry with the freedom of expression, personal verification, and the right to dissent. Western theories of journalism and mass communication have much in common, but

where and how can we develop a Buddhist path to Peace Journalism?

Let us first look at two principles that are at the very root of the Buddhist philosophy.

### III. TRIVISA – THE THREE POISONS

The *Trivisa* or the Three Poisons – greed, aggression, and ignorance – are fundamental mental states Buddhism identifies as the root causes of suffering and the obstacles to harmonious living.

The three poisons, greed (*raga*, also translated as lust), hatred (*dvesha*, or anger), and delusion (*moha*, or ignorance) are opposed by three wholesome, or positive attitudes essential to spiritual liberation - generosity (*dana*), loving-kindness (*maître or metta in Pali*), and wisdom (*prajna*). Buddhist practice is directed toward the cultivation of these latter virtues and the reduction or destruction of the three poisons.

It is useful to think of the three poisons as a process that involves our insatiable urge to possess that which we desire and the ensuing aggravation that arises when we don't get what we want or have what we don't want forced upon us. These lead to hatred of the "other". Yet, we are oblivious to the futility of these conditioned responses due to our lack of discernment, and thus, we mindlessly continue to get caught up in this casual nexus (Buddha-Nature)<sup>1</sup>.

If you look at today's geopolitical tensions, it is clear that what drives these conflicts are the three poisons, and the media continue to be trapped in a delusion of resolving these conflicts by militarization. I have recently written a book on how the media is pulling us in different directions by fueling geopolitical conflicts in Asia and the Pacific and given one example after another of how that is happening (Seneviratne, 2024, p. 54).

What is lacking in today's media is *prajna* – the wisdom – to understand the delusions behind the greed for the control of resources, and thus an inability to craft a journalistic strategy that would promote cooperation, understand the root causes of this grab for resources, and the need to control one's cravings by developing aspects of *dana* – generosity – and *metta* – a humanistic feeling towards people who are been subjected to inhuman treatment and misery in the process of the grab for resources.

Buddha introduced these poisons in *Adittapariyaya Sutta* as fires, and putting off these "fires" (negative quality of mind or consciousness) is the goal of Buddhist practice that leads to the attainment of *nirvana* (*nibbana* in Pali).

*Nibbana* is the ultimate achievement of non-attachment. It may also be defined as the extinction of lust, hatred, and ignorance. "Nibbana is not situated in any place nor is it a sort of heaven where a transcendental ego resides. It is a state, which is dependent upon this body itself" (Narada Thera, 1933: 79 - 80).

### IV. ANICCA – STATE OF IMPERMANENCE

Impermanence, called *anicca* (in Pāli) or *anitya* (in Sanskrit), appears

<sup>1</sup> [https://buddhanature.tsadra.org/index.php/Key\\_Terms/trivi%E1%B9%A3a](https://buddhanature.tsadra.org/index.php/Key_Terms/trivi%E1%B9%A3a)

extensively in the Pali Canon as one of the essential doctrines of Buddhism.

Practitioners have always understood impermanence as the cornerstone of Buddhist teachings and practice. All that exists is impermanent; nothing lasts. Therefore, nothing can be grasped or held onto. When we don't fully appreciate this simple but profound truth, we suffer (Fisher, 2024, p. 56).

Understanding impermanence is essential for today's journalists to report about the impacts of climate change and other development issues, such as changing economic indicators, political instability, and so forth. Climate is changing at a rapid pace, impacting particularly on farming and environments, with regular droughts and floods. Mitigating climate change requires an understanding of how to cope with impermanence and design strategies and protection measures.

## V. MINDFUL COMMUNICATION AND PEACE JOURNALISM

Mindfulness has become an international fad today, but because it is being appropriated from Buddhist teachings in order to satisfy a desire to improve one's concentration powers, its real objective in developing compassionate mindsets to address peaceful human existence has been lost.

Buddha elevated the practice of focused, calming self-observation into a well-defined discipline known as *vipassanā bhāvanā* – a method of self-transformation through direct introspection. Consequently, applying the *vipassanā* approach to peace journalism entails rejecting the conventional “them” versus “us” paradigm often found in conflict reporting. Instead, it advocates for a model of self-transformation in which one sees things as they truly are and understands their impact on communities, individuals, and the environment.

In early Buddhist teachings, the Pali term for mindfulness, *sati*, denotes an insightful awareness nurtured through meditation and self-reflection. Recognized as one of the seven factors of enlightenment, *sati* is described as the “correct” mindfulness necessary for achieving liberation (Hsu, 2023, p. 78). Equally important is the cultivation of compassion as an integral component of mindful communication – a vital pathway toward constructing a Buddhist peace journalism model. This paper will discuss how such a paradigm can be developed.

Moreover, the evolution of peace journalism has been significantly informed by classical media theories. The work “Four Theories of the Press” (Seibert et al., 1956, cited in Nordenstreng, 1997, p. 115) has, for over half a century, defined the role of journalism and mass communication through its encompassing models of Libertarian, Authoritarian, Social Responsibility. To develop an Asian model of libertarian communication theory, two principles rooted in traditional Asian thought emerge as essential. First is the recognition of impermanence: understanding that all phenomena are transient and subject to change, which allows individuals and societies to acknowledge and adapt to ongoing transformations. Second, it is crucial to address the three poisons – greed, hatred, and delusion – and to actively refrain from endorsing and propagating such delusions.

Between 2016 and 2017, I was part of a team at Chulalongkorn

University in Bangkok engaged in a UNESCO-funded project titled “Mindful Communication for ASEAN Integration.” The project aimed to develop a curriculum for training Asian journalists using philosophical concepts derived predominantly from Buddhist thought. In the following discussion, I will first elucidate several core elements of this curriculum, which serve as invaluable tools for introducing peace journalism training.

V. FOUR NOBEL TRUTHS AND JOURNALISM

In the curriculum we developed, we turned a negative aspect of the Buddhist teachings, *dukkha* contained in the Four Noble Truths (FNT) into a positive path. The path is so secular that you do not need to become a Buddhist to put that into practice, as it is a people-focus methodology of participatory communication.

Let me explain it through this illustration.

Each Noble Truth	Meanings	Duties to deal with it
1. <i>Dukkha</i>	Suffering, dissatisfaction	To comprehension of suffering. To know location of the problem
2. <i>Samudaya</i>	The cause or origin of dissatisfaction or suffering	To eradicate the cause of suffering. To diagnose of the origin
3. <i>Nirodha</i>	The cessation or extinction of suffering	To realize the cessation of suffering. To envision the solution
4. <i>Magga</i>	The path leading to the cessation of dissatisfaction or suffering	To follow the right path through actual practices

The first of the four noble truths addresses *dukkha* - unhappiness – and poverty is a cause of such unhappiness. It is a lack of access to services, resources, and economic means for driving day-to-day life. In order to understand that, we need to approach the communication process with a compassionate mindset – talk to the people who are suffering, listen deeply to them, and figure out the problem from their perspective. Listening deeply could be assisted with prior training in mindful meditation that we included in the curriculum.

The second FNT path is the cause or origin of suffering or dissatisfaction (*samudaya*). If the problem is poverty, you need to ask questions. Is it due to the exploitation of the poor by employers, developers, labour recruiters, etc? Is it because of discrimination due to caste, ethnicity, or religion? Is it because of corruption at the government and business level? Is it because of favours given to investors that have chased the people out of their homes? The list could go on and on; it all depends on the local situation and could also be linked to foreign trade, investment, and geopolitical issues. You need to be mindful of all these dimensions. This is the step to overcome *avijja* (ignorance).

At this stage, you go to the third phase of FNT – how to help in the

cessation of suffering (*nirodha*). You need to think about how to craft your story/message. The adversarial methodology of ‘watchdog’ journalism would start to point fingers at the government authorities, big business, ‘despotic’ leaders, greedy business people, etc - yes, that may be the problem - but you need to assist in finding a peaceful solution to it rather than encouraging people to come out to the streets in protest and end up in a riot.

Now we go into the fourth phase of FNT – path leading to the cessation of suffering – which leads you to the Buddhist ‘Eight-Fold Path’ known as the *maggā* (path) to attaining enlightenment. This includes you as a communicator practicing compassion and loving-kindness, especially toward the people you are trying to help with your reporting/ communication. This path includes right understanding (through research and interviews/ discussions), right thought (with compassionate mindset), right speech (being mindful of the language you use in your communication), right action (using proper and ethical channels to gather and disseminate your report), right livelihood (ie. no taking bribes/ junkets to write your report or compost it), right effort and right mindfulness.

If you go through this path, the communication methodology that comes out of it is naturally people-centric and participatory. It is also important to note that developing this path should be taken in the spirit of the *Kalama Sutra* – the Buddhist blueprint of free inquiry and personal verification discussed earlier.

Gnanarama (2003) argues that on closer scrutiny, we should be able to discover from the discourse “a positive way to approach problems involving man’s potential ability to mould his destiny” - that some of the important premises relevant to modern concepts of freedom and civil rights are included here.

American Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Bodhi, in an article written on the eve of the UN Food Summit in New York in September 2021, reflected upon the ignorance (*avijjā*) that drives the global media networks toward a delusion of development that does not serve a majority of humankind. He wrote:

Tackling global hunger requires that we identify its fundamental causes and remove them at the roots. This requires not only the adoption of transformative policies but a fundamental change in our values and attitudes. The Buddha teaches that to effectively solve any problem, we have to remove its underlying causes. While the Buddha himself applies this principle to the ending of existential suffering, the same method can be used to deal with many of the challenges we face in the social and economic dimensions of our lives. Whether it be racial injustice, economic disparities, or climate disruption, to resolve these problems, we have to dig beneath the surface and extricate the roots from which they spring (Bodhi, 2021).

Bhikkhu Bodhi added that “violent conflict aggravates hunger by siphoning funds away from food supplies to the purchase of weapons”. He pointed out that in 2020, while the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the world, global military spending rose by \$51 billion, more than six times the \$8 billion that the UN



has requested to provide food for the hungry. “The U.S. continues to spend over \$700 billion annually on its military programs, almost a hundred times what is needed to alleviate extreme hunger,” noted Bhikku Bodhi (2021), an American Buddhist monk.

Quoting from an OXFAM report,<sup>2</sup> he points out the dependent originations of an impending famine that has been triggered by the pandemic.

Looking at the crisis of global hunger from a Buddhist point of view, I would hold that beneath the three causes of hunger outlined in the Oxfam report, there lies a deeper web of causation that ultimately stems from the human mind. At the base of conflict and war, extreme economic inequality, and ever more deadly climate devastation, we would find the “three root defilements” - greed, hatred, and delusion - along with their many offshoots.

## VII. DEPENDENT ORIGATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016. By 2030 – that is, in 15 years - these new Goals are expected to mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities, and tackle climate change while ensuring that no one is left behind.

*Paticca Samuppāda*, or dependent origination, is a basic teaching of Buddhism. It is at the root of the explanation of the origin of suffering and the eradication of it, as prescribed in the ‘Four Noble Truths’ (*cattāriariyasaccāni* in Pali) contained in Buddha’s sermon in *Anguttara Nikaya*.

*Paticca samuppāda* manifests the sequential order of arising previously discussed: beginning with the first truth of *dukkha* (suffering), conditioned by the second truth, *samudaya*, followed by the cessation of suffering, the third truth, *nirodha*, and culminating in the manner of its cessation, the fourth truth, *patipada* or *magga* (Piyadassi Thera, 1959, p. 47).

*Avijjā* (ignorance) is recognized as the initial link – the fundamental cause – of the wheel of life. All activities encapsulated by the Four Noble Truths, whether wholesome or unwholesome, find their origin in this ignorance and manifest the corresponding effects. Consequently, the performance of good actions is indispensable for overcoming the ills of life (*akusala*) (Narada Thera, 1933, p. 112).

---

<sup>2</sup><https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/oxfam-reaction-food-security-and-nutrition-sofi-report>





If you look at the above chart, the way the 17 SDGs are structured falls perfectly in line with the ‘dependent origination’ or ‘*paticca samuppada*’ theory, where the achievement of one goal is dependent on the realization of another, and so on.

For example, ‘No Poverty’ cannot be achieved without tackling hunger, good health, quality education, provision of clean water and sanitation, clean energy, climatic action, decent jobs, etc. Thus, the SDGs are consistent with ‘*paticca samuppada*’ as each goal is embedded in a complex relationship of cause and effect.

The principles of *Pratitya Samutpada*, along with the Four Noble Truths path explained earlier, can be used to design a path of Buddhist peace journalism that promotes the SDGs.

It is essential to understand that peace cannot be achieved without solving the world’s pressing socio-economic problems, and a mindful communication methodology needs to be adopted to report on economic and social development.

A journalism education model designed to train communicators to assist in the achievement of the SDGs is in itself a path of Peace Journalism.

## VIII. UNDERSTANDING CONFLICTS AND SUFFICIENCY ECONOMICS

A lot of today’s conflicts are driven by economic factors – be it at regional or international level or at community level. People and nations want more, and if they can’t get it by peaceful means, they will steal or go to war to get it.

In 1997, when the Asian Financial Crisis started in Thailand, it dawned on the Thai people that modern development had caused changes in all aspects of Thai society. It has created an “impermanent” economic bubble.

The economic crisis laid bare that the Western development theory - the Thais have followed devoutly for decades - had given them rapid economic growth, but the rise of consumerism has led to a state of economic dependence and deterioration of natural resources as well as the dissolution of existing kinship and traditional groups to manage them. It was also based on indebtedness.

It was at this time that King Bhumibol started to re-emphasise his theory of ‘sufficiency economics’.

Economic development must be done step by step. It should begin with the strengthening of our economic foundation by assuring that the majority of our population has enough to live on...Once reasonable progress has been achieved, we should then embark on the next steps by pursuing more advanced levels of economic development. Being a tiger is not important. The important thing is for us to have a sufficient economy. A sufficient economy means to have enough to support ourselves...we have to take a careful step backward...each village or district must be relatively self-sufficient (King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, 1997)<sup>3</sup>.

It is a method of development based on moderation, prudence, and social immunity. The philosophy of Sufficiency Economy has three pillars:

- **Moderation:** Sufficiency at a level of not doing something too little or too much at the expense of oneself or others, for example, producing and consuming at a moderate level.
- **Reasonableness:** The decision concerning the level of sufficiency must be made rationally with consideration of the factors involved and careful anticipation of the outcomes that may be expected from such action.
- **Risk Management:** The preparation to cope with the likely impact and changes in various aspects by considering the probability of future situations.

Renowned Thai Buddhist monk Prayudh Payutto (1992:26) argues that ethics are important in economics and drive both social and business structures. "If ethical values were factored into economic analysis, a cheap but nourishing meal would certainly be accorded more value than a bottle of whisky," he argues.

At the very heart of Buddhism is the wisdom of moderation – the Middle Path. When the goal of economic activity is seen to be the satisfaction of desires, economic activity is open-ended and without clear definition – desires are endless. Lacking a spiritual dimension, modern economic thinking encourages maximum consumption. In their endless struggle to find satisfaction through consumption, a great many people damage their health and harm others.

Ven. Phuwadol Piyasilo, a Thai forest monk who was trained and worked as a journalist for many years, argues that if mindfulness training is accompanied by a moral (*sila*) framework, it will be very useful in developing peaceful communication methodologies (Seneviratne, 2018, chapter 1).

Looking at journalistic practices today, Piyasilo (Seneviratne, 2018:26) notes: "One cannot be mindful when distracted by feelings and emotions. To see the situation as it is, you need to see what is happening, what you want to happen, or how they think about what is happening. Otherwise, this situation becomes a problem in itself".

Reflecting on the fact that we focus a lot on suffering in Buddhist teachings, Piyasilo argues that we need mindfulness along with wisdom to

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.chaipat.or.th/eng/concepts-theories/sufficiency-economy-new-theory.html>

develop a communication process to address suffering. “We can look at how we analyse suffering and help other people to reduce their sufferings, aiming to reduce it in their everyday life. This is something we can contribute by making communication better, not promote conflict and suffering” (Piyasilo in Seneviratne, 2018:27).

## IX. GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS MODEL

The tiny Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan is now trying to redefine the concept of happiness (development) by using a different criteria known as Gross National Happiness (GNH), which is based on a Buddhist philosophical concept.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is usually used as a criteria to judge a country's development. The primary metric considered here is per capita GDP, meaning the total GDP of a country divided by its population; a higher per capita GDP generally indicates a higher level of economic development within a country. But this is increasingly seen as an unreliable indication of a country's economic wellbeing because of increasing income disparities within countries.

A country like Qatar and Singapore are rated among the top ten in the world in the GDP chart, but these countries have a very small population with a significantly large component of their residents' lowly paid labour from overseas living in slave-like conditions that help to spur the GDP figures.

The GNH-based model is distinguishable from the GDP model by attempting to be a more direct measure of collective happiness through emphasizing harmony with nature and select cultural values. The 4 pillars of GNH are sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, environmental conservation, preservation and promotion of culture, and good governance.

In a resolution adopted without a vote at the United Nations General Assembly on 19 July 2011<sup>4</sup>, the UN called upon its member states to undertake steps that give more importance to happiness and well-being in determining how to achieve and measure social and economic development. The resolution notes that the GDP indicator “was not designed to and does not adequately reflect the happiness and well-being of people in a country,” and “unsustainable patterns of production and consumption can impede sustainable development.”

While many fellow Asian countries have been reluctant to look at the GNH model, in recent years, many United Nations agencies have paid attention to it. Some Western countries such as Ireland<sup>5</sup> and the UK<sup>6</sup> have been looking seriously at adopting this model to judge peoples' economic wellbeing.

## X. MIDDLE PATH JOURNALISM TO PROMOTE PEACE

As discussed in this paper, Buddhist philosophy offers a lot of ideas to

<sup>4</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/07/382052>

<sup>5</sup> <https://drujournal.bt/how-ireland-is-adopting-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/oct/28/gross-national-happiness-can-we-measure-a-uk-feelgood-factor>

design and adopt a journalism paradigm that would not drive conflicts and war, and instead promote peaceful resolution of conflicts, and encourage actions to living in harmony with the environment recognizing the impermanent nature of the health of our environment and society.

Bhutanese communication scholar Dorji Wangchuk (Seneviratne, 2018, chapter 11) notes that there is a fundamental difference between the Judeo-Christian and Buddhist worldviews. The former talks about an ‘Original Sin’ that you carry until Judgement Day, while in Buddhism, there is a positive view that all sentient beings have Buddha nature. Thus, he asks, referring to the Judeo-Christian philosophy, “Would this explain why the traditional media all over the world has increasingly thrived on negativity?”

Looking at the Bhutanese media. Wangchuk notes that newsrooms are increasingly on the lookout for stories on corruption, controversies, and conflicts in a country where the people are generally easygoing, optimistic, and content.

To address this problem of negativity, Wangchuk recommends a Middle Path Journalism paradigm, which could be defined as a human-centric model that will take into account the values and vision of a country in the practice of media and communication. He describes this model as:

Middle Path Journalism is thus anchored in two concepts – values and vision. Values are a set of principles or standards of human behaviour that determines one’s judgement and belief of what is important in life within one’s place in society. Vision, on the other hand, is the long-term stated goal of a nation that provides the strategic direction of what is to be achieved collectively and as a nation (Wangchuk in Seneviratne, 2018:139).

There is ample material from the Buddhist philosophy, as discussed in this paper, to develop a new model of reporting – which we may call Middle Path Journalism so that it is not confused with the earlier versions of Peace Journalism.

There is already a curriculum developed that could be updated and adopted. The curriculum we developed at Chulalongkorn University could be a start. However, it was very disappointing to see the lack of willingness of Asian communication scholars to adopt something that is driven from Asia. Attempts to introduce short courses based on the curriculum at Buddhist universities such as Nalanda in India were stalled by the pandemic, and they need to be revived.

Training for Middle Path Journalism could start with short certificate courses of one to four weeks of residential type or 3 to 6 months long online courses. All these need a component of not only classroom or theoretical teaching, but application of it in real-life reporting exercises.

I would like to see Buddhist universities in Asia – such as India’s Nalanda, Thailand’s Mahachulalongkorn, Vietnam Buddhist University, and Sri Lanka’s Pali and Buddhist University – taking a lead in introducing short-term courses. The new buzzword in higher education today is “microcredentials,” which are short courses designed to address the needs of employers. These same structures could be adopted to offer courses to address the needs of societies.

Perhaps the World Fellowship of Buddhists World Buddhist University could be revived by coordinating such a regional program, maybe with online teaching. The curriculum we have developed at Chulalongkorn University could be used for a specialized semester-long final year module in journalism and mass communication degree programs in secular universities.

The time has come to introduce a new model of journalism education with Asian philosophical characteristics that could promote peace rather than drive conflicts. The question is, are Buddhists ready to challenge the Western concepts of practicing journalism with a model of our own?

Let me finish with a concluding remark by Thai journalist and television producer Pipope Panitchpakdi (Seneviratne, 2018:97):

I think news has to be critical, but being critical does not have to be confrontational. Being critical is looking at things objectively, but the approach of doing it does not have to be negative. We have to find a concept of finding a solution to journalism that is currently based on the adversarial model of journalism borrowed from the West. When we talk about negativity, the news by itself is not negative, but it is the way that news is approached and explained. I will call news positive if it has the value of bringing change, even if it is reporting on a bad situation.

\*\*\*

## REFERENCES

- De Michelis, S (2018), *Peace Journalism in Theory and Practice*, E-International Relations, UK - <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/12/23/peace-journalism-in-theory-and-practice/>
- Gunanarama, P. (2003). *Blueprint of Free Inquiry and Personal Verification*, Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association, Singapore.
- Hsu, S (2023), *The History of Mindfulness: A Comprehensive Guide to Cultivating Inner Calm and Improving Mental Well-being* 19 June, Muse, USA – <https://choosemuse.com/blogs/news/the-history-of-mindfulness-a-comprehensive-guide-to-cultivating-inner-calm-and-improving-mental-well-being?>
- Narada Thera (1933), *Buddhism In A Nutshell*, Buddhist Cultural Center, Sri Lanka.
- Nordenstreng, K (1997), *Beyond the Fourth theories of the Press*, pp 97-110, *Media and Politics in Transition: Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalisation*, ACCO, Netherlands
- Payutto, P. A (1992), *Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Market Place*, Buddhaddhamma Foundation, Thailand.
- Piyadassi, Thera (1959), *Dependent Origination (Paticca Samuppada)*, The Wheel Publication No. 15, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.
- Seneviratne, K ed (2018), *Mindful Communication for Sustainable Development: Perspectives from Asia*, SAGE, India/USA/UK

- Seneviratne, K (2024), *Geopolitics and the Media in Asia and the Pacific: Pulling in Different Directions*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK.
- Fisher, N (2024), *Impermanence is Buddha Nature*, 14 August, Lion's Roar, USA.
- Bhikkhu Bodhi (2021), *Tackling Global Hunger at its Roots*, 10 Sept, Buddhist Global Relief - <https://buddhistglobalrelief.org/tackling-global-hunger-at-its-roots/>



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Medhivajarapundit** (Hansa Dhammhaso) is currently a Full Professor of the International Buddhist Studies College of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and also a Secretary to the Rector, Director of the International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU), and Director of the International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. He is also a very skilled teacher, and the courses he teaches fall in the areas of Buddhism and Modern Hermeneutics, Seminar on Buddhism and Peaceful Means Studies (Ph.D.), Buddhism and Current Affairs, Buddhist Philosophy, Seminar on Buddhism (MA), and Engaged Buddhism. Phramaha Hansa is often invited to lecture at government and private sector schools and businesses. For example, he has lectured and taught at Thammasat and Chulalongkorn Universities and he has given seminars at Government Institutes such as the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment. Venerable Phramaha Hansa Dhammhaso is also of course an experienced and meditation teacher.

**Most Venerable Dr. Thich Duc Tuan (Anh Vo)** taught by many most venerables from previous generations of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Most Venerable Dr. Thich Duc Tuan is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha since 1975, a chaplain since 1997, and a spiritual counselor since 2010. He possesses impressive multilingual proficiency languages and exemplifies humility, continuous learning, and dedication to advancing his knowledge and skills across various fields, including but not limited to Buddhism, Sociology, Psychology, cultural diversity, and social activities. In 1999, after obtaining multiple advanced Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, French, Japanese, and English certificates and a deep interest in Sociology and Psychology education, Most Venerable Dr. Thich Duc Tuan attended San Jose State University. He earned a B.A. in Sociology in 2005. During this time, he worked as a chaplain at the Regional Medical Center of San Jose and as a case manager at the John XXIII Senior Center in San Jose, California. In 2010, Most Venerable Dr. Thich Duc Tuan earned a Master's in counseling and education. Since then, he has worked as a spiritual counselor for end-stage cancer patients throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and attended Buddhist events and rituals across Asia and Europe. In 2023, he achieved his Doctorate of Psychology at California Southern University and has been sharing his profound knowledge and insights worldwide. Most Venerable Dr. Thich Duc

Tuan is a Member of the Central Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Executive Council and Deputy Chair of the National Department of International Buddhist Affairs. In 2024, he becomes Member of Central Vietnam Fatherland Front and lives at Vinh Nghiem Pagoda, 339 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia St. District 3, Hochiminh City, Vietnam. His phone number is 0865122068.

**Most Venerable Professor Dr. Gallele Sumanasiri Thero**, a luminary in the field of Buddhist philosophy and Sinology, serves as the Vice Chancellor of the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka. Born in 1956, he embarked on his monastic journey in 1969 and received higher ordination in 1976, subsequently pursuing a distinguished academic path. A scholar of Pali under the traditional monastic education system, he holds a Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Buddhist Philosophy and a Master of Arts from the University of Kelaniya. Dr. Sumanasiri furthered his expertise with scholarships to the University of Delhi and Peking University, delving into Chinese religion and culture. His prolific contributions include seminal works such as *\*Buddhism and Confucianism\** (1998) and *\*A Historical Survey of Chinese Buddhism\** (1999), alongside research on universal peace, economic applications of Buddhism, and monastic management. As a thought leader and author of cross-cultural studies, Dr. Sumanasiri bridges ancient traditions with contemporary relevance, advancing global understanding of Buddhist philosophy's role in fostering peace, ethics, and cross-cultural dialogue. His influence resonates profoundly in academic, interfaith, and monastic circles worldwide.

**Tabona Shoko** is Professor in African Traditional Religion and Phenomenology of Religion in the Department of Philosophy Religion and Ethics at University of Zimbabwe. He is Member of Research Board, Member of Research and Innovation Committee and Research Group Leader in the Dept & Faculty. He is founding Director AAIRTA Lab and Editor-in Chief of Journal of Association of African Indigenous Religion, Theology & Arts. He had several Research Fellowships at Universities abroad namely Vanderbilt, USA (2021-22); Florence, Italy (2017); Bamberg, Germany, (2016); Soderton, Sweden (2008); ASC, Netherlands (2006); Edinburgh, UK (2004, 1994); Utrecht, Netherlands (2002, 1988-9), Botswana (1998-99, 1997). His areas of research interest include Religion and Climate Change, Environment, Peace and Conflict Resolution, Human Rights, Religion and Pandemics, Gender and Sexuality, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. He has published numerous books, book chapters and articles. His relevant publications include, 'African Traditional Religion and Climate Change: Perspectives from Zimbabwe', in E. Chitando, E. Conradie, S. Kilonzo, *African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change*, London: Tylor and Francis, 2022, 22-34.

**Dr. YoungHoon Kwaak** is a distinguished academic, urban planner, and global policy advisor, currently serving as the Founder and President of the World Citizens Organization (WCO). With an extensive career in urban design, environmental policy, and international development, he has played a pivotal role in major global initiatives, including the Silk Road Economic Belt Cities Cooperation and Development Forum and the United Nations

Association of Korea. Dr. Kwaak holds a Ph.D. in Educational Philosophy from Dongguk University, an M.A. in Education from Harvard University, and degrees in Architecture and Planning from M.I.T.. He has also completed advanced studies at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and M.I.T.'s Advanced Environmental Studies Program. Throughout his career, Dr. Kwaak has held esteemed teaching positions, including as a Distinguished Professor at Jeju National University and Lumbini Buddhist University, as well as a Senior Fellow at Harvard Divinity School. His contributions extend beyond academia, having been a policy advisor for KOICA, a master planner for Expo events, and a consultant for Olympic and urban development projects. His expertise in urban planning, environmental sustainability, and international cooperation has led him to develop master plans for cities worldwide, including Abuja, Ghana, and Subic Bay, as well as major projects in Korea, such as Seoul's first long-range master plan and the 1988 Seoul Olympic Park. A visionary in city planning and global peace initiatives, Dr. Kwaak continues to shape sustainable urban development and international collaboration.

**Venerable Professor Dr Mahinda Deegalle** is a Professorial Research Associate at SOAS, University of London and Professor Emeritus in Religions, Philosophies and Ethics, Bath Spa University, United Kingdom. Recently, he was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Cambridge. He is an ordained Theravāda Buddhist monk, trained in the History of Religions and Buddhist Studies. He graduated from the University of Peradeniya (B.A. Hons), Harvard University (MTS) and The University of Chicago (Ph.D.). He has held Numata Visiting Professorship in Buddhist Studies at McGill University, Canada and NEH Professorship in Humanities at Colgate University, USA. He has conducted post-doctoral research at Kyoto University and other institutions under Japan Society for Promotion of Science and Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai. He has been awarded grants by the British Academy / Leverhulme Trust, British Council and Fulbright. He is the author of *Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka* (State University of New York Press, 2006) and several edited volumes including, including *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka* (Routledge, 2006), *Vesak, Peace and Harmony* (2015), *Philosophy, Ethics and Buddhist Practice* (2023) and *Buddhism and Humanitarian Law* (Routledge 2024). He appears regularly in BBC and other international media.

**Ven Thich Tam Thien** was born in 1970, entered the Buddhist monastic life in 1976. He was fully ordained by Grand Master Most. Ven. Thich Tri Quang at An Quang Temple in 1991. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in literature and journalism from the Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities in 1997. In 2000, he was invited by the U.S. State Department to come to the United States to participate in an international exchange program. While he was in the U.S., he was invited to give Dharma talks and lectures at a number of universities. A few years latter, he came to the US to continue his study at Community college in Los Angeles. Later, he was accepted to study at the University of the West where he had the opportunity to study

and research with world famous professors, such as Lewis R. Lancaster, Bruce Long, Ananda W.P. Guruge. At this university, he also received a number of scholarships. In 2008, he graduated from this University with a Doctoral degree. In 2005, he established the White Sands Buddhist Center in Mims, Florida, a famous monastery that has the four largest granite Buddhist statues in the State of Florida. In 2015, he travelled to Japan to study under the guidance of Grand Master Yoshimizu Daichi, a long-time friend of his Grand Master. In 2018, he returned to the United States and established the Thuong Hanh Monastery in McKinney Texas, where he is currently residing. Ven. Dr. Thích Tâm Thiện has authored numerous articles and published a dozen of books on a variety of Buddhist topics. In 2014, he became the first Buddhist monk to be invited to give a dharma lecture to a group of scientists and engineers at NASA – Kennedy Space Center. Also in this year, he was a member of the US delegation participating in the Sixth Buddhist International Conference in Japan. In 2017, he was invited to participate in a conference in India focusing on Mahāyāna Sutras, including the Lotus Sutra and the Heart Sutra. During the event, he was invited to give talks regarding the Lotus Sutra for the international participants at the University of Nalanda (India). In 2019, during the Buddhist Vesak Ceremony in Vietnam he was invited to be moderator in two English workshops. He is currently the head of two Buddhist monasteries that he established – White Sands Buddhist Center (Florida) and Thuong Hanh Buddhist Monastery (Texas), both of which regularly host meditation retreats for many participants around the world.

**Mr. Ashok Nanda Bajracharya** (PhD Scholar) is a renowned scholar and academic with a strong background in Buddhist philosophy and environmental studies. He holds an MSc and MA in Buddhist Philosophy, as well as a PGD in Buddhism. Currently, he is a Ph.D. scholar and a lecturer at the Lotus Academic College, where he teaches Buddhism and Environment. His research interests lie at the intersection of Buddhism and environmental ethics, and he has published several peer-reviewed articles on the topic. Mr. Bajracharya has presented papers at numerous international conferences, including the 2nd Belt and Road Asian Buddhist Cultural Forum in Beijing, China. He has also participated in various Buddhist conferences, seminars, and workshops, both nationally and internationally. His publications include articles in *The Maha Bodhi*, the *International Buddhist Journal*, as well as several other peer-reviewed journals and magazines. Mr. Bajracharya has received several awards for his academic work, including the “Panchabirsingh sirpa” for Best Male Writer of the Year 2057 BE. He is fluent in multiple languages, including English, Hindi, Nepali, and Nepal Bhasa. With his extensive knowledge and experience in Buddhist philosophy and environmental studies, Mr. Bajracharya is a respected figure in his field.

**Dr. Neeraj Yadav** is an Assistant Professor, NCWEB, University of Delhi. He completed his Graduation from Ramjas College, University of Delhi. He has done his Post-graduation, MPhil and PhD in Buddhist Studies from University of Delhi. He taught in Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi as an Assistant Professor. His research area is related with Buddhism

in Mathura. He presented more than twenty nine papers in National and International conferences. His research papers have been published in various national and international journals.

**Venerable Pannabodhi** is a Buddhist monk from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a middle country of the African continent. Born in April 8, 1986 from a Buddhist family. His father who ordained as a monk in Thailand passed away eight years ago, he is the one who started the Buddha Dhamma in Congo from his early lay life. However, like his father, Ven. Pannabodhi got his higher ordination in November 2017 in Sri Lanka Amarapura lineage. He is a devoted monk who tirelessly works to disseminate the dhamma in a country where even the name of the Buddha is still unknown through Dhamma talks, meditation programs, and retreats. Today he is the guide of three meditation centers in different parts of the country, with some lay followers who freely converted to Buddhism by taking refuge in the Triple Gem. Bhante hopes that in near future he will be able to produce many monks for further propagation of dhamma in his country.

**Ven. Prof. Dr. Witharadeniye Chandasiri Thero** is a distinguished Theravada Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka, celebrated for his academic accomplishments and unwavering commitment to Buddhist scholarship. In 2003, he earned the prestigious Royal Pundit degree, marking the beginning of his academic journey. After completing his Advanced levels, he pursued a Bachelor of Arts as an external student at the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka. He went on to earn a B.A. special degree in Pali with first-class honors from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 2008. Further enhancing his academic profile, He obtained diplomas in English and Computer Studies. He then completed three M.A. degrees in Pali and Buddhist Studies from the University of Kelaniya. Additionally, he holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from the University of Colombo and was awarded a Ph.D. by the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 2014. His academic career began in 2011 as a temporary tutor at the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies. He became a permanent lecturer at the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka in 2014, eventually rising to Senior Lecturer and Professor at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Currently, he is undertaking postdoctoral research in Pali at Savitribai Phule Pune University, India.

**Ricardo Sasaki** is founder-director and teacher at Nalanda Center for Buddhist Studies in Brazil. He has trained for the last 42 years under many teachers of various Buddhist traditions. Besides his work in Psychological Counselling and directing the Buddhist Center, he is also a writer and a translator, being responsible for the translations of Ajahn Buddhādāsa, with whom he studied, into Portuguese language. He has been teaching Buddhist philosophy and meditation in Brazil and Europe, as well as participating and speaking in several international congresses in the past thirty years. He received Dharma teacher accreditation from Aggamahapandita Rewata Dhamma Sayadaw as “Dhammacariya Dhanapāla”, and later the title of “Mahāsaddhammajotikadhāja” from the Buddhist Sangha and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Myanmar,



and subsequently he was honoured with an honorary MA in Buddhism by the Birmingham Buddhist Academy, recognized by the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University of Myanmar. He is also a Certified Yoga Instructor by Vivekananda Kendra Yoga in Bangalore, Certified Dharma Teacher, and Lay Buddhist Minister in the lineage of Rev. Gyomay Kubose in Mahāyāna tradition, Certified Meditation Teacher in Culadasa lineage and Certified Mindfulness Coach in Shinzen lineage. He also is the pedagogical coordinator of NUMI - Nucleo de Mindfulness of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, an institute dedicated to the spread of secular mindfulness.

**Dr. Lye Ket Yong**, a Malaysian-born polymath, exemplifies a harmonious blend of technical expertise, humanitarian commitment, and Buddhist scholarship. An accomplished aviation engineer with certifications from leading authorities such as UK-CAA and EASA, Dr. Lye's illustrious career spans senior roles at Boeing and Airbus delivery centers, where he mastered the complexities of aircraft delivery, maintenance, and performance optimization. Beyond his engineering pursuits, he has been a torchbearer of interfaith collaboration and Buddhist leadership, earning accolades such as the Stockholm UN World Peace Award (2019) and the Outstanding Buddhist Leaders Award (2015). Co-authoring the insightful work *\*Celebrating Tolerance: Religious Diversity in the UAE\**, he has demonstrated a unique ability to merge spiritual philosophy with societal imperatives. Dr. Lye's philanthropic initiatives, including co-founding Tam Ha Ambulance & Health Support Services in Vietnam and chairing Hands That Help Humanity, underline his dedication to alleviating human suffering. As Secretary General of the World Alliance of Buddhists and an academic leader at institutions in Myanmar and Malaysia, his dual doctorates in Buddhist Philosophy and Public Administration empower him to bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary challenges. His life's work radiates a profound commitment to fostering peace, advancing education, and uplifting communities worldwide.

**Ajahn Brahmāli** was born in Norway in 1964. He first became interested in Buddhism and meditation in his early 20s, whilst on a visit to Japan. After completing master's degrees in engineering and finance, he traveled to Australia to train at Bodhinyana Monastery where he took full ordination in 1996, with Ajahn Brahm as his preceptor. 2025 is Ajahn Brahmāli's 30th year as a Buddhist monk. Ajahn Brahmāli is renowned for his excellent knowledge of the Pali language and his enthusiasm for teaching the Suttas. He is also well known as a scholar of the Vinaya—the monastic rules and procedures—of which he has completed the first full translation into English. Ajahn Brahmāli's clear and insightful talks help make the Buddha's teachings accessible to all. He is regularly invited to conduct retreats in Australia, South-East Asia, Sri Lanka, and Europe. Ajahn Brahmāli has also published numerous essays on important points of Dhamma, including the legitimacy of bhikkhuni ordination, of which he is a supporter. In 2023 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate degree for his contribution to Buddhist studies.

**Ven. Dr. Rathmale Punnarathana Thero** is a senior Theravada Buddhist



monk living in Germany since 1996. He was born in 1964 in Sri Lanka and became a Novice in 1979. He received his higher ordination in 1985. His first Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree was completed in 1990 from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. After that he completed a Master of Arts (MA) from the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka in 1993 and also received his Master of Philosophy (Mphil) from the same University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He also obtained a diploma in German language from the Goethe Institut in Germany in 1998. In 2015, he received his PhD from Global University in California, USA. . From 1998 to 2005, Ven. Punnarathana Thero served as the abbot of the Berlin Buddhist Temple, the oldest Buddhist center in Europe. In 2007, he established a Sri Lankan Buddhist and Pali University institute in Germany. Since then he has been the head of this institute. He is the founder of Karuna Samadhi organization ([www.karuna-samadhi.de](http://www.karuna-samadhi.de)) and has been doing excellent social service since 2004. He served as a senior lecturer at Johannes Gutenberg University, one of Germany's most famous universities, from 2005 to 2022. He is also the founder of the Buddhist Maha Vihara ([www.buddhistischer-vihara.de](http://www.buddhistischer-vihara.de)) in Schneverdingen, Germany.

**Bhikkhu Dr. Sobhana Mahatthero.** In 2015, he was appointed as the Chief Sangha nayaka of Germany from the Malwatte chapter of the Siyam Maha Nikaya in Sri Lanka. He also received an honorary degree from the Sri Lanka Ramanna Maha Nikaya in 2025. Bhikkhu Sobhana Mahatthero is a Theravāda Buddhist monk from Nepal. He was ordained as a Bhikkhu in 2004 under the guidance of Sayadaw Dr. Nandamālābhivamsa from Myanmar. In 2021, he earned his PhD from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, where his research focused on “Dispelling Anger: A Study of Anger Management Methods in Pāli Texts.” He also holds a BA and MA in Buddha Dhamma from ITBM University in Myanmar, with his MA thesis titled “A Study of Momentary Concentration (*khaṇikasamādhi*).” Additionally, he holds a BA in Psychology from Tribhuvan University in Nepal.

**Dr. (Mrs.) Niharika Labh,** an Indian national had double MA one in Hindi (Patna University) and another in Buddhist Studies with specialization in Pali and Theravada (Delhi University) and Ph. D. in Buddhist Studies from the University of Jammu on ‘Role of Nunnery in the Development of Buddhism.’ She has attended over 40 conferences/seminars on Buddhism in her own country India and some abroad. She has published a good number of papers as well mainly in Hindi.

**Ven. Tan Paññādīpa** is a lecturer at Shan State Buddhist University (SSBU). He completed his Master's degrees in Buddhist studies with distinction from both The University of Hong Kong and SSBU in Myanmar. He was a medical scientist specialized in molecular and clinical pharmacology and toxicology at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada, after obtaining his MSc and PhD in Medical Sciences from the University of Toronto. A recipient of the Khyentse Foundation Award for excellence in Buddhist Studies in 2018, he has contributed to more than 25 publication entries in Buddhist Studies and Medical Sciences. He is currently an editorial board member for the Journal of

International Buddhist Studies.

**Mr. Sunil Kamble** possessed Aircraft Maintenance Licence and worked as Service Engineer with Air India Ltd. Now Retired. He worked with social organizations in India for the upliftment and growth of Backward class people and for employee's welfare. He studied Pāli and Buddhism. He is associated with Dept. of Pāli, University of Mumbai, India for past 18 years. He possess MA, M.Phil in Pāli and various courses in Buddhist Studies. He did PG Diploma in Ambedkar Thought and Certificate Course in Peace Studies. Currently he is Visiting Faculty at Dept. of Pāli University of Mumbai, India. He read Papers in Various National and International Conferences. His 4 Research Papers Published.

**Most. Ven. Bhikkhuni Dr. Thich Diệu Hiếu** completed B.A. in Buddhist Studies from Vietnam Buddhist Academy in 2001. She joined International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University, Yangon, Myanmar from 2003-2016 and completed B.A., M.A., and PhD. Her main research area is tranquility and insight meditation according to early Buddhist texts. She completed her Doctoral degrees in 2015. Her doctoral dissertation focused on Insight Meditation, titled "Evaluation of Interrelationship between Samatha and Vipassanā in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation." Currently, she is Vice Dean of Pāli Department and a lecturer at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City teaching Vipassana Meditation, Pāli Language, Dhammapada, and Pāli Literature. She is a standing member of International Buddhist Committee in Vietnam. She is a standing member of the Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, Deputy Director and Secretary of the Research and Application of Theravāda Buddhist Meditation Center, and the abbess of Long Hung Monastery in Binh Tan District, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She delivers lectures on both Basic and Advanced Vipassanā meditation at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City. Additionally, she conducts short and long Vipassanā meditation retreats for both children and adults. She also organizes and leads vipassanā meditation programs specifically designed for nuns at her temple. Furthermore, she actively engages in giving Dhamma talks and teaching at weekend meditation retreats hosted in various temples across Vietnam.

**Dr. Jyoti Gaur** is a distinguished academician with over 21 years of teaching experience in the field of Psychology. She currently serves as a Professor at Suresh Gyan Vihar University, where she has made significant contributions both in academics and student development. Her extensive career is marked by dedication to research, teaching, and social service.

Dr. Gaur has published numerous research papers in reputed national and international journals, reflecting her deep commitment to advancing psychological studies. Her scholarly work has earned her several prestigious awards for outstanding articles and research contributions. In addition to her academic roles, Dr. Gaur holds the position of Dean of Student Welfare, where she plays a pivotal role in promoting student well-being and fostering a supportive educational environment. She also serves as the Programme Coordinator for the

National Service Scheme (NSS), demonstrating her dedication to community service and student engagement in societal development. Beyond academia, Dr. Jyoti Gaur is the Director of Swapnil Pankh Foundation, a prominent NGO committed to social upliftment. Through this foundation, she has spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at empowering underprivileged sections of society and promoting mental health awareness.

**Prof. Dr. J. Abraham Vélez De Cea**, born in Saragossa, Spain, Dr. J. Abraham Vélez de Cea is professor of Buddhism and World Religions at Eastern Kentucky University since 2006. Before joining ECU he taught Buddhist Ethics and Buddhist-Christian Mysticism in the department of theology at Georgetown University. In English, he has published two books: *The Buddha and Religious Diversity* (Routledge, 2013), *Buddhist Responses to Religious Diversity: Theravada and Tibetan Perspectives* (Equinox 2020). He has also published several articles about diverse aspects of Buddhist Ethics, early Buddhist thought, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue in peer-reviewed journals including *Philosophy East & West*, *Sophia*, *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue*, *Buddhist Studies Review*, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, *Journal of Buddhist-Christian Studies*. In Spanish, he has published several translations of classical Buddhist texts including *Majjhima Nikāya: The Middle Sermons of the Buddha* (Barcelona: Clásicos Kairós, 1999, together with Amadeo Solé-Leris), *Nāgārjuna: Verses on the Foundations of the Middle Way* (Barcelona: Clásicos Kairós, 2003), *In the Words of the Buddha* (Barcelona: Clásicos Kairós, 2019, together with Ricardo Guerrero and Aleix Ruiz Falqués), and the Spanish of the Common Buddhist Text.

**Prof. Elias Konyana** (Ph.D) holds a Doctor of Philosophy (Ethics) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is an Associate Professor in Applied Ethics in the Department of Ethics, Philosophy, Religion and Theology at Great Zimbabwe University. To date, Prof. Konyana has made significant academic and administrative contributions to the working life of Great Zimbabwe University. His research interests are in Applied Ethics, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Law and Culture as well as the Ethics of Development. He has published journal articles and book chapters on various ethical issues from a myriad of topics. He has also presented numerous papers at national, regional and international conferences. Prof. Konyana is an ACLARS Board Member (2024-2028). Also, at the University of Johannesburg, Prof. Konyana is a Senior Research Associate and also a Senior Proctor at Great Zimbabwe University.

**Ven Dr. Sumedh Thero** (Dr Banwari Lal Suman) Ph.D. (Agro), Ex Prof. Principal Scientist (Agronomy) ICAR-Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute, Jhansi, India Trainer Teacher Vipasana Meditation & Monks ordination 2009 to Continue. Organized National and International Seminars on Buddhism time to time in last two decades, Author of 33 Books in Hindi & English, over 350 research, popular articles. Founder Ancient Buddhism ISSN 2395-471X Supervised; 2 Ph. D. 7 M. Sc. These in Crop Production and Soils management, Visited; Myanmar in Dec 2004, USA 2006, Nepal 2019,

Sri Lanka 2012, 2017, 2018, 2019, Thailand 2017, 2024. Monastery: Sumedh Bhoomi Buddha Vihar, Dr Ambedkar Park, Jhansipura, Lalitpur-284403 India.

**Mr. Kohdayar Marri** is an experienced designer, photographer, and filmmaker with 24 years in the industry. He has worked with prominent organizations like Coke Studio, Hum TV, UNICEF, and Engro, and directed short films, documentaries, and advertisements. He also published photography books and photo essays. In June 2024, he was appointed as the Ambassador of Pakistan to Vietnam and Laos.

**Dr. Lauw Acep** is a Buddhist scholar, educator, and academic administrator, currently serving as the Dean of the Faculty of Education and Dharma at Nalanda Institute, East Jakarta. He holds a Doctorate in Religion and Culture from Universitas Hindu Indonesia (UNHI), Bali, along with a Master's and Bachelor's Degree in Dharma Acariya from STAB Maha Prajna and STAB Nalanda, respectively. With over three decades of experience in Buddhist education, he has taught at numerous schools and universities, including Nalanda Institute and STIE Trisakti, and has served in various leadership roles such as Chairman of STAB Nalanda (2007–2019) and Director of Sariputra School, Cikarang (2009–present). His contributions extend beyond teaching, as he has been an assessor for Indonesia's National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) since 2013. With a deep commitment to Buddhist studies, educational management, and institutional development, Dr. Lauw Acep continues to play a vital role in shaping Buddhist education and higher learning in Indonesia.

**Ven. Dr. Lieu Phap** is Standing Member of the International Buddhist Committee of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Deputy Head of the Department of Buddhist English, Vietnam Buddhist Academy in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

**Prof. Dr. Wimal Hewamanage** earned his B.A. with first-class honors (Pali) in 2001 from the University of Kelaniya. Then he obtained his M.A. and M.Phil (Buddhist Studies and Pali) from the same University. He earned his Doctoral Degree from Wuhan University in 2016 for his doctoral thesis on "Approaches to the stages of realization: A study of the problem of religious realization in early Buddhism, its development of Theravāda Mahayana and Chinese Chan perspectives" under the Chinese Government Scholarship Program. He received the Asian Universities Alliance Scholars Award 2023/2024. Hewamanage received Vice Chancellor's Award for Research Excellence - 2018, and the Senate Award for Research Excellence - 2019, University of Colombo. He has been a Co-secretary of the Sri Lanka Association of Buddhist Studies since 2017. He served as a Visiting Scholar of International Buddhist College, Thailand and Malaysian Buddhist Academy, Malaysia their Masters programs.

**Dr. Arvind Kumar Singh** has devoted his life to the spiritual and academic pursuit of Buddhism, rooted in the serene ambiance of Bodh Gaya, the land of the Buddha's enlightenment. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies and Director, International Affairs at Gautam Buddha University,

India since November 2011. Before this, he served at the University of Delhi's Department of Buddhist Studies as Assistant Professor, where he taught Buddhist Studies at PG level students and associated with publication of its esteemed journal named *Buddhist Studies*. With over 19 years of academic experience since 2006, Dr. Singh is a distinguished scholar specializing in Buddhist History, Buddhist Heritage Sites, Buddhist Personalities, Buddhist Ethics, Engaged Buddhism, etc. He has mentored numerous scholars, supervising six awarded PhDs, 26 MPhil theses, and 35 MA dissertations, while mentoring his 10 research scholars to publish books based on their research undertaken under his guidance. Dr. Singh's contributions to Buddhist literature include significant works such as *Animals in Early Buddhism*, *Buddhism in the Far East*, *Buddhism in South East Asia*, and *Buddhism in Far East*, along with edited *A Textbook of the History of Theravada Buddhism* and *Researches in Buddhist Studies*. He has published and presented over 100 research papers and organized multiple international and national conferences, bringing renowned Buddhist scholars to share their insights. His global engagements include presenting research at conferences across Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, and Russia. Dr. Singh's excellence has been recognized through numerous awards, including the Global Peace Ambassador Award (2017), Mahatma Buddha Peace Award (2020), and Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan Best Faculty Award (2021). He is also a member of the Academic Advisory Board for the Dhammachai International Research Institute in New Zealand and Australia. His scholarly endeavors and peace-building efforts solidify his reputation as a leading figure in Buddhist Studies, both in India and internationally.

**Dr. Jitka Cirklová** is a scholar whose work bridges sociology, religious studies, and cultural anthropology. She earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from Charles University and an M.A. in Comparative Religion from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, graduating magna cum laude. She currently serves as an Assistant Professor at the Czech Technical University in Prague, focusing on the sociology of identity, consumer culture, and the interplay between sustainability and architectural spaces. Her research extensively explores Buddhism's relevance in modern society, addressing themes like sustainability, identity formation, and well-being culture. Her article *Coping with the Quarter-Life Crisis the Buddhist Way in the Czech Republic* highlights the adaptation of Buddhist teachings to address contemporary challenges. She has also examined Buddhism's role as a source of values in shaping identities and lifestyles in non-traditional cultural contexts. Dr. Cirklová has been actively involved in interdisciplinary projects, such as the "'Visual Good Practice Lab,'" which investigated societal transformations post-pandemic. She has presented her findings at prestigious events, including the United Nations Vesak Day, and contributed to global dialogues on Buddhist studies. Her teaching includes courses on digital cultures, marketing communication, and sustainability, showcasing her commitment to bridging theory, practice, and ethical considerations in addressing today's societal challenges.



**Dr. Baatr Kitinov** (in Historical Sciences), Leading Researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Associate Professor at RUDN University. In 1990, he graduated from Kalmyk State University and entered the post-graduate studies at the Institute of Asian and African Studies (IAAS) of Lomonosov Moscow State University. In 1996, he defended dissertation “The main stages of the spread and features of Buddhism among the Oirats” at the IAAS for the degree of Candidate of historical sciences. In 2020, he defended dissertation “The Buddhist factor in the political and ethnic history of the Oirats (mid-15th century - 1771)” for the degree of Doctor of Historical Sciences. He completed an internship at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (Dharamsala, India). Dr. Baatr Kitinov is a recognized scholar in history and culture of Buddhism. He is a member of the International Association for Mongolian Studies and the International Association for Tibetan Studies. His works published in Russia, India, China, the USA and other countries. He is known as the main author of school textbooks, “Basics of Buddhist Culture”. He was the head of the history department at RUDN, the Ambassador of Mongolian Culture to Russia, and is a member of the Council of the Moscow Buddhist Society.

**Dr. Henry Hien Dang**, D.Lit, M.A. (Melbourne), S.D, J.P, is a distinguished scholar, interfaith leader, and community advocate whose lifelong dedication since 1980 has significantly shaped the landscape of Buddhism and interreligious harmony across Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific. With over three decades of senior service in the Australian Public Service and an equally enduring commitment to global Buddhist and community leadership, Dr Dang has held pivotal roles including Secretary-General of the Buddhist Federation of Australia, Chairman of the WFB Standing Committee on Unity and Solidarity, and Founder of key Vesak Observance initiatives. Author of numerous publications on Buddhist leadership, ethics, human rights, and sustainable development, Dr Dang’s work bridges doctrinal insight with pragmatic engagement. His scholarly interests span conflict resolution, multicultural family values, and applied Buddhist governance. Widely recognized with honours such as the Samma Dharmachakka Award and Global Peace Ambassador title, Dr Dang is celebrated as a transformative voice in modern Buddhist diplomacy and intercultural dialogue.

**Dr. Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury** is a Lecturer and a Faculty Member of the College of Religious Studies (CRS) of Mahidol University (MU), Thailand. He completed a PhD in Buddhist Studies from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) in Thailand. Sanjoy specialises in South and Southeast Asian Buddhism, Buddhist manuscripts of Pāli and Bengali Literature and Mindfulness studies. His research in Buddhism focuses on the Theravāda traditions of South and South Asian Buddhist history, heritage and critical textual analysis. In his Buddhist textual studies, Sanjoy researched the concept of Paṭiccasamuppāda (Dependent Origination) and its doctrinal significance based on Pāli manuscripts. Sanjoy’s research on South Asian Buddhism brings out a broad scholarship on Buddhist traditions and impactful Buddhist figures



in the region of Boṅgabhūmi from the past to modern times. He contributed research papers and articles on Buddhist philosophy, sacred Buddhist manuscripts of South Asia, Buddhism in Bengal, and contemporary Buddhist movements in Asia.

**Dr. Efendi Hansen Ng** came from a small village called Berastagi and through hard work, determination and following the path of Dharma, he has achieved a lot of things. Currently he involves in many important associations in Indonesia. He keeps strict discipline, right conducts and practices of kindness, compassion, generosity and righteousness toward all sentient beings.

**Rev. Eishin (Fuminobu) Komura** worked at a large multinational company as an engineer for over thirty years. After retiring from the job, he moved from Japan to the U.S. and earned the Master for Divinity degree at Naropa University in 2014. He completed CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) training at multiple U.S. hospitals and served as a Buddhist interfaith chaplain at Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania from 2015 until 2024. He was ordained as a Buddhist priest at the Japanese Tendai School in 2014. Since he was at the graduate school, he has been doing research on the application of Buddhist dharma and practices in chaplaincy. He focuses on the spiritual care by chaplains as the bodhisattva path of realizing loving-kindness (*maitrī*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), which are not separable from wisdom (*prajñā*). He gave the research paper presentations on Buddhist chaplaincy at the international conferences including UNDV 2019 Conference held in Ha Nam, Vietnam, in addition to the oral presentations at the conferences and seminars in Japan and the U.S. He wrote articles and essays in multiple Japanese journals too. Currently he is an associate research fellow at Japan Buddhist Council & The Rinbutsuken Institute for Engaged Buddhism in Tokyo, Japan.

**Prof. Manuel Ato-Carrera** (Lima, Peru, 1978) is a PhD candidate in Philosophy and Religions at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, where he researches the ethics of engaged Buddhism. He holds a master's degree in Buddhist Studies, Philosophy, and Comparative Religions from Nalanda University (India), with Sanskrit studies at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute of Kathmandu University, as well as undergraduate studies in philosophy and law at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) and the University of Lima, respectively. He is a lecturer at the Center for Oriental Studies of the PUCP and a member of its Jose Leon Herrera Research Group / Asian Studies in Peru. He is also a lecturer in theology of religions at the Pacific University and a member of its Religion Studies Seminar. Currently, he is the National Coordinator of ALADAA Peru, Latin American Association for Asian and African Studies, Peru Section.

**Jhubhur Chakma** is a Buddhist scholar and current doctoral Research scholar in Buddhist Studies at the International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU), Thailand. He transitioned to MCU from the Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, where he began his doctoral studies. His Ph.D. dissertation, titled "The Two Forms of Buddhism in Bangladesh: The Erasure of Indigeneity, and the

Rise of the Jumma Resistance,” explores the intersections of religious identity, indigenous resistance, and socio-political marginalization among Buddhist communities in Bangladesh. He is currently a research fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation in United States of America. Jhubhur holds a Master of Arts in Religious Studies from Mahidol University, with a thesis entitled “Jumma Nation and Persecution in Bangladesh” (2021), and a Bachelor of Arts in Buddha Dhamma from the International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU), Yangon. His research focuses on Buddhist identity, human rights, and the lived realities of indigenous and minority communities across South and Southeast Asia. He has authored several scholarly works, including “Jumma Nation and Persecution in Bangladesh” published in the *Journal of International Buddhist Studies*, “The History of Buddhism in Bangladesh: A Study of Buddhist Socioreligious and Cultural Identity,” will be published soon in the *Journal of Pencerahan*, and his most recent submission to the upcoming UNDV 2025 Conference in Vietnam, titled “Buddhist Compassion in Action: Promoting Education, Harmony and Strengthening Unity through Buddhist Missionary Schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh”. He has served as a teaching assistant at both Rajamangala University and Mahidol University and has completed numerous academic training programs in research writing, presentation skills, digital literacy, and academic English. Outside academia, he served as Consultant for Student Affairs at the Embassy of Bangladesh in Bangkok (2020–2022) and previously worked as a Supply Chain Officer for Save the Children in Chittagong, Bangladesh (2012–2013).

**Bro Lim Kooi Fong** has been a student of Buddhism and Dharma teacher for more than 35 years. He is the founder of the Buddhist Channel (<https://buddhistchannel.tv>) and Buddhist Travel (<https://buddhistravel.com>) and the world renowned Buddhist AI, NORBU (<https://norbu-ai.org>). He is a life member of Upakara Kalyana Mitta Buddhist Association (UKMBA). He currently manages an IT/AI company based in Cyberjaya. He actively conducts Dharma talks for Buddhist societies around greater Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

**Prof. Dr. Projit Kumar Palit** is working as a professor and director of the Centre for Indological Studies in the Department of History at Assam University (a central university), Silchar, Assam. He obtained his PhD degree from Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. He has been engaging in teaching and research in this field for 25 years. He is working as the chairman of the students’ grievance cell at Assam University. He has previously served as a Research Associate at Ram Krishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata (2nd February 2000 to 20th August 2001) and Post-Doctoral Research, Rama Krishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata (20th August 2001 to 14th January 2004). He was former Head of the Department (from September 13, 2013 to October 2, 2016) and former Deputy Director, Directorate of Internal Quality Assurance, Assam University, Silchar (2011–2016). Dr. Palit has performed his duties as the Chairman of Board of Post graduate Studies and Board of Under graduate

Studies, Assam University ( from 13th September, 2013 to 02nd October , 2016), Deputy Dean, Deans of Students Welfare, Assam University, Silchar (2011-2014), Chairman of Student Feedback, Assam University, Silchar (2009-2014), Coordinator of Student Feedback, Assam University (2009-2014), NSS Coordinator, Assam University, (2008-2011), Course Co-Coordinator for Diploma in Tourism Studies, Assam University, Silchar (2005-2007) , He has published books such as Tribal Folk Songs in Tripura, History of Religion in Tripura, Manuscript and Manuscriptology in India, Religion and Literature: Indian Perspectives, Vivekananda and National Integration, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and its Relevance, The Manuscript and Indian Culture, Jainism and the Jaina Culture in India, and Hindu Religion and Ecology. He was also associated with the editorial work of Art Volume VII and Modern India Volume VIII of the Cultural Heritage of India (an Encyclopaedia of Culture History of India), the most prestigious publications of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata. He received the Sanskriti Sanrakshak' Award, 2022 and 2023, from Shri Bharatvarshiya Digamber Jain (T.S.) Mahasabha, New Delhi, for his contribution to protect and preserve the Jaina archaeological sites in North East India and Bangladesh. He has published various research works in several journals of national and international repute. Under his supervision, 25 PhD research scholars and 13 M.Phil. scholars have completed their research.

**Rev. Dr Ilukpitiye Pannasekara Thero** is the Chief monk for the African Continent, Vice President of World Buddhist Summit, President and Patron, kind heart Africa, (kha) Tanzania Buddhist Commissioner, Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa, Buddhist leader, trustee & founder member, Inter Religious Council for Peace, Tanzania Ambassador for Peace, Inter Religious & Interfaith Federation for World Peace, Honorary member - Dar es Salaam Association of Spain.

**Professor José Antonio Rodríguez Díaz** completed his PhD in Sociology at Yale University (USA) with scholarships from the Social Science Research Council and the Fulbright Commission. He is a Professor and has been director of the Department of Sociology and director of the Doctoral Program in Sociology, at the University of Barcelona. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard University's Center for European Studies, Yale University, and the University of California, Santa Barbara. Founder and principal researcher of EPP (Studies of Power and Privilege) and also co-founder and member of the management team of the Interdisciplinary Social Research Centre (ISREC), both at the University of Barcelona. His current research and publications focus on the role of social networks in organizations and societies, futures studies and the social dimensions of happiness. These lines of research converge in the study of the processes of transformation and articulation of Buddhism in modern society and in its social dimensions.

**Ven Thich Thien Tri** was born in 1974 in Cao Lanh City, Vietnam. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Arts in Buddhism in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (1997-2001). In the summer of 2002, he journeyed to the United States to realize his passion as a meditation teacher. In 2004 he opened a

meditation group for Vietnamese and Westerners in Mississippi. Since then, he has traveled to many other cities throughout the U.S. Thich Thien Tri opened “Zen and Mind Family” in New Orleans and led classes and retreats from 2015 to 2020 until the Covid-19 response affected the worldwide community. Especially from 2017 to 2019, he was invited to lead mindfulness courses and meditation workshops at Xavier and Loyola Universities. In addition, he has gone on to speak as a guest lecturer for other schools and Universities in multiple States. Thich Thien Tri graduated with an M.A. in Religious Studies in 2022 and is pursuing his Doctor in Religious Studies at the University of the West. Currently, he is invited to lead meditation courses. Ven. Thich Thien Tri is also a dharma teacher at Pho Quang Temple in Fort Worth-Dallas, Texas, a dharma teacher at Truc Lam Monastery in Houston, Texas where he teaches for thousands people of Latino Community, and a guest speaker for Universities and Interfaith programs in different States in the U.S. He is also the author of *Sharing from the Heart* and *Foundation of Mindfulness*, an essential guide to his meditation classes, and a poem (Vietnam language), *Vat Nang Phu Hu*.

**Dr. Budi Hermawan** is a distinguished academic and researcher in Higher Education Quality Assurance and Buddhist Spiritual & Religious Tourism. Born on October 4, 1975, in Cianjur, Indonesia, he has dedicated his career to advancing education standards and exploring the link between spirituality and tourism. Holding Doctorate in Educational Management (2009) from Universitas Negeri Jakarta and Management Science (2017) from Universitas Brawijaya, he specializes in education policy, accreditation, and institutional development. He served as an Assessor for the Buddhist Religious Education Study Program at BAN-PT until 2015 and continues as an Assessor for Primary and Secondary Education. Beyond academia, he managed the Master's Program in Buddhist Religious Education at Smaratungga Buddhist College (2011–2015) and worked as a quality consultant for Jinarakkhita and Bodhi Dharma Buddhist Colleges. Since 2014, he has led the Padma Dwipa Indonesia Buddhist Research Center and collaborates with the Metrics Research Institute and Statistics Consultant. In 2024, he was appointed Chairman of the Buddha Sakya Tsarpa Chogye Indonesia Foundation, further strengthening his contributions to Buddhist education and research. Currently, he is affiliated with Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana (Ukrida), Jakarta, focusing on Buddhist Spiritual & Religious Tourism research.

**Adele Tomlin** is a British writer, Buddhist scholar-translator, poet, teacher and practitioner, mainly based in India and SE Asia. She has two postgraduate degrees in Buddhist Studies (Hamburg University, Germany) and Philosophy (King's College, London). Adele is also the author-translator of two books on Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and practice, *Tāranātha's Commentary on the Heart Sātra*, with a foreword by Prof. Matthew Kapstein., and *Chariot that Transports to the Four Kāyas* by Bamda Gelek Gyamtso, with a foreword by Dr. Cyrus Stearns. Adele has spent many years studying Tibetan language in India, Nepal and Europe and received teachings and empowerments from many great Tibetan Buddhist masters. For the past two years, she has been

travelling around SE Asia, including Vietnam, doing research on Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the region. She is the founder of the first female-directed and solely authored Dharma research and translations website, *Dakinitranslations.com*. Featured recently in *Tricycle Buddhist Magazine*, she is also the host of a new Buddhist podcast channel, *Dakini Conversations*. Specialist subjects are Tibetan Buddhism, Vajrayāna, Kālacakra, Buddhist views of emptiness, women in Buddhism, female lineages, art and aesthetics. For information on her publications, interviews/talks, teaching, websites, and academic background, see: <https://adeletomlin.com>.

**Most Venerable Thich Nhu Duc** currently holds multiple key positions within the Buddhist community, including Rector of Phúc Trí Buddhist Academy, Deputy Abbot of Phúc Trí Buddhist Sangha Community, and Abbot of Nhất Tâm Pagoda – Bình Đông. Additionally, he serves as a Standing Committee Member of the Bình Đông Buddhist Sangha Association, Vice Chairman of the Dharma Propagation Committee of the Chinese Buddhist Sangha Association, and Permanent Supervisor of the Chinese Buddhist Sangha Association. Educated in Information Management at Tamkang University, his journey into Buddhism began in high school when he sought life's meaning and discovered Buddhist philosophy under an inspiring teacher. His passion deepened at university through Buddhist study groups and visits to esteemed masters. In 1997, under Venerable Thượng Nhật Hạ Thường's guidance, he was ordained. Committed to his teacher's profound influence, he has dedicated his life to preserving and spreading the Dharma as an act of gratitude.

**Lobsang Tshultrim GNON NA**, hailing from Gangtok, Sikkim, India, dedicated twenty years as a monastic scholar at the Shartse Monastic Institute in South India, where he immersed himself in traditional Indian and Tibetan Buddhist studies. After completing his studies, he earned his Geshe degree, equivalent to a Doctor of Divinity. He interpreted Buddhist teachings for his teachers internationally, at academic institutions in the United States and Buddhist centers in Eastern countries. He led a project to archive endangered monastic chants and authored his teacher's biography, preserving the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Furthering his education, he earned an M.Phil and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Kyoto University in Japan, focusing on Mindfulness Training in Samatha Meditation and its implications for Global Citizenship Education. His peer-reviewed papers have been published in journals such as *Religions* (MDPI), the *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, and *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*. He has presented his research on mindfulness, meditation, ethics, resilience, and global citizenship education at academic conferences in Japan and abroad. He received a scholarship from Khyentse Foundation and a fellowship from Kyoto University. He is currently a visiting scholar at UNESCO's Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, collaborating on ongoing research.

**Ven. Lopen Gem Dorji** is a Buddhist scholar, spiritual advisor, and educator, currently serving as an Advisor to the Central Monk Body of



Bhutan. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Buddhist Studies from Tango Buddhist University, Thimphu, Bhutan, and has pursued independent research on comparative Buddhist traditions at Tokyo University, Japan. His academic journey also includes a Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership from the East-West Center, Hawaii, USA, and training in Japanese language and culture at Reitaku University, Japan. With extensive experience in monastic education, research, and administration, he has served as a Lecturer at Tango Buddhist College, Deputy Secretary of the Monastic Board of Examination, and Director of the Dratshang Research and Library at Trashichhoedzong, Thimphu. He has also held key positions as a spiritual counselor, planning officer, and representative of the Central Monk Body in Bhutan's National Assembly and Royal Advisory Council. His contributions to Buddhism have been recognized internationally, receiving prestigious awards such as the World Buddhist Outstanding Leader Award (WBOLA) from Thailand's Supreme Sangha Council (2014) and the Recognition Award from the World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth (2015). His dedication to Buddhist education, monastic preservation, and interfaith dialogue continues to shape Bhutan's spiritual and academic landscape.

**Bhikkhuni Dr. Thich Nhu Nguyet (HL)** was born in 1966 in Can Tho. Year of Bhikkhuni ordination: 1988. Currently a Lecturer, Deputy Office, Head of the Nuns' Board of Management of the Vietnam Buddhist Academy in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

**Ven. Nyanabandhu Sakya** (Dr. Burmansah, M.Pd.) is a fully ordained Buddhist monk, educator, researcher, and mindfulness trainer with expertise in Buddhist education, mindfulness practices, and educational leadership. Born on October 28, 1985, in Indonesia, he has a Doctor of Education in Educational Management from Jakarta State University (2020), where he graduated with honors. His monastic training includes studies at Plum Village Buddhist Monastery, France (2010–2014), and Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple, USA (2014). Currently, he serves as Head of Jinarakkhita Buddhist College of Lampung and has previously led the Pancaran Dharma Ratana Foundation and Triratna Education Foundation. As a lecturer and researcher, he specializes in mindfulness, leadership, and educational management, contributing scholarly works such as *Mindful Leadership: The Ability to Develop Compassion and Attention Without Judgment*. His expertise has led him to appear as a Buddhist speaker on Indonesian National Television (2013–2018) and serve on the Indonesia Buddhayana Sangha Council. With a background in Buddhist mindful living, global ethics, and spirituality development, Ven. Nyanabandhu Sakya continues to inspire through his teaching, research, and leadership in Buddhist education and mindfulness training.

**Prof. Georgia Cristian Borges**, Vice President of the Nalanda Buddhist Studies Center, Brazil. Clinical Psychologist and Educator - Master in Health Sciences from the University of Brasília-UNB (Brazil), Vice President of the Nalanda Buddhist Studies Center - Brazil. She holds: Training as an Integral Yoga instructor. Training in Mindfulness-Based Therapies – CPPMP. Training of Mindfulness instructors (Medical Sciences). Mindfulness Instructor at NUMI



Belo Horizonte (Brazil). Lectured in the Postgraduate Course in Mindfulness - (IESLA). MBA in School Management from USP, Psychopedagogy – UNIGRAN. Clinical training in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (CESDE). Training in Positive Psychology in Clinical Practice (NPP). Certified as a Positive Discipline Parent Educator by the Positive Discipline Association USA. She has been teaching in Distance Education since 2008 in the Pedagogy course with subjects on Inclusive Education, Early Stimulation, Curriculum, and Assessment. She teaches undergraduate courses in History, Geography, Biological Sciences, Mathematics, and Philosophy with the subject of Special Education. She teaches the subject of Learning and Mediation in Early Childhood Education for Children and Youth and Adults in Special Education in the Postgraduate course in Special and Inclusive Education. She was part of the Bank of Evaluators of the National Higher Education Evaluation System (BASis) until 2022, in the distance mode for the act of Recognition and Renewal of Recognition of Undergraduate Courses.

**Dhammadipa Ila Bhante**, born Tackhoan Lee in 1974, is a Buddhist monk, meditation master, and international Buddhist leader. He holds degrees in Buddhist Studies from the University of Delhi and Dongguk University, as well as an M.A. in Economics from Yonsei University. With extensive experience in Buddhist teaching, meditation, and cultural exchange, he has served in key leadership roles, including Head Monk at Borimsa Temple (2010), Guidance Monk at Jijangjeonsa Temple (2012–present), and Head Master of the International Meditation Center in South Korea (2022–present). Actively engaged in international Buddhist cooperation, he is the Director of Foreign Cooperation for Mula Sangha (2018–present), International Commissioner for the International Buddhism Exposition in South Korea (2022–present), and President of the Korea-India Friendship Relationship Association (KIFRA) since 2021. In addition, he was appointed Correctional Commissioner of the Ministry of Justice (2023) and Master of the Korean Meditation Teacher Association (2024). His work focuses on Buddhist education, meditation training, and fostering Korea-India Buddhist relations, furthering global Buddhist dialogue and spiritual development

**Ven. Dr. Wistina Seneru**, also known by her Bhiksuni name Ven. Bhadrakhema (Shi Xian Ning), is a dedicated Buddhist nun, lecturer, and researcher. Born on June 25, 1990, in Kumbak Mataram, she was ordained as a Bhiksuni on November 29, 2019, at Kek Lok Si Temple in Malaysia. She currently serves as the Vice Chairman for Academic and Student Affairs at Jinarakkhita Buddhist College of Lampung, Indonesia. Her academic journey reflects a deep commitment to Buddhist education, having earned her Bachelor's degree from Jinarakkhita Buddhist College in the Dharma Acarya (Buddhist Education) Department. She further pursued a Master's degree in Literacy Studies from the Education and Teacher Training College of PGRI, Lampung, before obtaining her Ph.D. in Religion and Culture Science from Indonesia Hindu University of Denpasar, Bali. With a passion for Buddhist studies and education, Ven. Dr. Wistina Seneru actively contributes to research,

teaching, and academic administration, fostering a scholarly environment for the advancement of Buddhist thought and practice.

**Professor Dr. Milada Polišenská** currently serves as a Professor of History at Anglo-American University, Prague. She is also the university's **Provost Emerita** and has held key positions such as **Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences** and **Dean of the School of International Relations and Diplomacy**. With a Ph.D. in History from **Charles University, Prague**, and a **University Professorship** from **Palacký University, Olomouc**, her research focuses on **modern European history, Cold War diplomacy, exile studies, and the history of education**. Her extensive scholarly contributions include several books, notably *Czechoslovak Diplomacy and the Gulag* (CEU Press, 2015) and *The Fight of Exiled Journalist and Anti-Communist Activist Josef Josten: For Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights, 1948-1985* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2025). She has also co-authored four books and published numerous peer-reviewed articles, with **16 Web of Science records, 6 Scopus records, and over 120 citations on Google Scholar**. Throughout her career, Professor Polišenská has delivered keynote speeches at international conferences, including the **International Congress of Psychology (2021)** and **BASEES Conferences (Cambridge, Glasgow, 2022-2023)**. She has been a visiting professor at prestigious institutions such as the **University of Nebraska, Texas Tech University, European University Institute Florence, and the Institute for Human Sciences Vienna**. Her research has received significant grants from **Great Britain, the United States, and Canada**, further solidifying her influence in historical scholarship. Through her academic leadership, publications, and research, she continues to shape the discourse on **diplomatic history, Central European studies, and the role of education in socio-political transformations**.

**Dr. Sunil Kariyakarawana** was born in a rural village, Lelwala in the Galle district of Sri Lanka. After the primary and secondary education in the south of the island he entered the University of Kelaniya near the capital city of Colombo and obtained his B.A. honour's degree (with a first class) in Linguistics, Literature and Philosophy in 1983. In 1985, he won the Commonwealth Postgraduate scholarship offered by the Commonwealth Association of Canada and completed his Masters in Theoretical Linguistics at the University of Ottawa. In 1987, he was offered a teaching assistantship by the Cornell University, New York and obtained his PhD in Theoretical Linguistics and Cognitive Studies in 1992. In the same year, he was offered a senior lecturer position by the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka and worked there until April 2000. In April 2000, he won two international postdoctoral fellowships: one to take up research in child language acquisition at the Rikkyo University Tokyo, Japan and the other by the Association of Commonwealth Universities UK to take up research in Clinical Linguistics at the University College London. Having completed both research projects, in 2002, he joined the department of Language and Communication Science, City University of London teaching clinical linguistics to BSc. Students. In the same year, he migrated to UK under

the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme. Throughout his academic career, he has spent time studying and practicing Buddhist Meditation. Sunil has been offering meditation to professionals in the government departments in UK, including NHS and Home Office. At the Saddhatissa International Centre for Buddhist studies at Kingsbury affiliated to the Pali and Buddhist University of Sri Lanka, he taught a diploma course in Buddhism. In London Buddhist monasteries and other faith centres he has been lecturing and teaching meditation and mindfulness to help UK community in their mental health and general well-being. Sunil is currently the Buddhist Adviser at St Michael's College Cardiff University and the Director KalyanaMitra, Buddhist Chaplaincy Support Group. He is an executive member of the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) established by the Asoka Mission of India. Sunil has been in his new post as the first Buddhist Chaplain to the Her Majesty's British Armed Forces for the past 20 years and has been working for the MOD providing spiritual and pastoral care to Buddhist personnel across three British Armed Forces and their families and dependents. He has also been part of the recruitment of the Buddhist Religious Teachers (RTs) held in Nepal and presently mentoring the RTs in the Brigade of Gurkhas (BG). Sunil is the spiritual adviser to tri-service DBN (Defence Buddhist Network). His personal and professional interest is providing help and support to the community in the areas of mental health and wellbeing through Mindfulness meditation.

**Assistant Professor Dr. Asha Singh** is a distinguished scholar whose academic journey has been deeply intertwined with the study of Buddhism. Holding an M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. from the esteemed Department of Buddhist Studies at the University of Delhi, her scholarly pursuit reflects a deep and enduring commitment to the exploration of Buddhism. With a Master's degree in History also, she has been a dedicated faculty member at the University of Delhi for the past eight years. Her research has been notably focused on the Mogalmari site since 2015, where she has played a crucial role in the exploration and documentation of Buddhist sites over the past few years. The complete work has been published as a book titled *Mogalmari: Unearthing a Buddhist Treasure*. Asha Singh's passion for Buddhism and History is evident in her extensive work and commitment to these fields. She has been deeply engaged in research, contributing to the understanding and preservation of this ancient tradition. In her professional roles, she serves as the Research & Academic Director of the Mogalmari Buddhist Association, Director of the Tamralipta Buddhist Heritage & Culture Centre and Joint Secretary of the Mogalmari Development Trust, all based in West Bengal, India. Her contributions to these organizations reflect her deep commitment to preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of the region.

**Ven. Dr. Gombodorj Myagmarsuren** became a monk at the Dashichoiling monastery (1990). In 1994 he studied at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi, India. He defended Ph.D. degree on Buddhist Literature at the Institute of Mongolian Studies of the Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot, China (2016). He is Director of Research

Institute for Buddhism & Culture (from 2017) & Director of “Zuun Khuree” College, Zuun Khuree Dashichoiling monastery, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (2021). Published over 20 books on history, translations, presented over 60 scientific articles at the local and international conferences.

**Cynthia Chantal Infante Medina** is a dedicated Physiotherapy graduate from the Universidad Tecnológica de México, driven by a passion for promoting the well-being of others. Her journey into Buddhism began in January 2022 when she volunteered at the Dhamma Vihara Buddhist Monastery, Mexico, where she immersed herself in an environment of introspection, compassion, and discipline. On January 7, 2023, she was ordained as a Sayalay nun by Venerable Bhikkhu Nandisena, dedicating four transformative months to study, meditation, and service. Currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Health Organizations Management, Cynthia actively contributes to the Dhamma Vihara Monastery through administrative support and efforts to promote Buddhism. As an associate member of Buddhismo Theravada Hispano A. R., she plays a vital role in preserving and sharing Theravada Buddhist teachings within the Spanish-speaking community. Her work reflects a commitment to integrating compassion, discipline, and service into all aspects of her personal and professional life.

**Dr. Jeffrey Wilson**, a distinguished research consultant in Buddhist Studies, has dedicated his career to exploring the intersection of Buddhism, psychology, and socio-cultural theory. He earned his Ph.D. from Southern Cross University in 2004 with a groundbreaking dissertation on *\*The Relevance of Buddhism to Child-Development Theory\**, a multi-disciplinary study integrating Religious and Cultural Studies, Psychology, and Philosophy. His academic journey began with a B.A. in Humanities, Media, and Asian Studies, followed by First-Class Honours for his thesis on *\*Foucault, Buddhism, and the Circular Process of Life\**. Over the years, Dr. Wilson has contributed significantly to Buddhist academia as an Associate Supervisor at the University of Sydney, guiding graduate students through their doctoral research. His editorial expertise includes work on the *\*DIRI Journal\** and *\*Sermons of Phramongkolthepmuni\**, as well as publications in legal and philosophical journals, such as the *\*Southern Cross Law Review\** and *\*Great Spiritual Leaders\** (Barton Books, 2014). His latest research, soon to be published, examines *\*Narrative Form in the Writing of Meditation Manuals\**, focusing on Thai Buddhist meditation techniques before the mid-nineteenth century. Dr. Wilson’s influence extends beyond academia through collaborations with institutions like the Dhammachai International Society of Australia and Buddhist scholars worldwide. His work continues to shape contemporary understandings of Buddhist philosophy, meditation practices, and their applications in modern psychological and socio-cultural contexts.

**Dr. Yun-Fu (Frank) Tien** has been a Buddhist since high school days. He received his Ph.D. degree in Intellectual Property Law from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, China. Before that, Frank was in charge of the mainframe system at a commercial bank in Wall Street after receiving

his M.A. degree in Computer Sciences from the City College of New York. Together with a group of friends back in Taiwan, Frank has initiated a series of research into the relationship among Buddhist chanting, Chinese music, medicine, healing, and philosophy. Frank is very much into interfaith between Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese Folk Religions as he enjoys retrieving and applying the lost knowledge and connections to benefit all. He has also been a strong supporter for Buddhist women through participating in Sakyadhita conferences and traveling around the world with his wife, Dr. Christie Chang, in sharing their experiences and Dharma joy with all.

**Dr. Nguyễn Thị Bích Vân**, born in 1983, is currently a Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Theory and History, Faculty of Interior Architecture, at the University of Architecture Ho Chi Minh City. (She previously held the position of Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Interior Architecture at the same university.) After graduating with a major in Interior Architectural Design from the University of Architecture Ho Chi Minh City, she went on to earn two Master's degrees: one in Theory and History of Fine Arts (Vietnam) and the other in International Educational Art Management (France). She received her Doctorate in the field of Research and Creative Practices in Applied Arts (Thailand). With nearly 18 years of teaching experience in the fields of architecture and interior design, Dr. Vân has supervised over 250 students in completing their graduation projects at major universities across Vietnam. Concurrently, she serves as the Creative Director of *VAN Design* (Ho Chi Minh City) and *569 Décor* (Da Nang), companies specializing in architectural, interior, and landscape design. She has also led several landscape design projects for Buddhist temples. Dr. Vân is frequently invited to serve as a judge for prestigious design awards. Her research interests include interior architectural design, landscape design, sustainable design, cultural heritage studies, educational management, applied arts, 3D printing technology, ArtTech, and Buddhism. She has delivered more than 30 academic presentations at national and international conferences, with six papers published in international journals indexed in the *Scopus* database. Dr. Nguyễn Thị Bích Vân has also presented papers at international conferences on Buddhism, including the *2nd International Conference on Buddhist Philosophy and Cognitive Science* held at Acharya Nagarjuna University, India (March 2024); and the *2nd Buddhist Summit between Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam*, organized by the Vietnam Buddhist Academy and Samten Hill, Đà Lạt (December 2023).

**Ven. Dr. Omalpe Somananda** is a scholar who was graduated at Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, completed Ph.D (Buddhist social work) Shukutoku University – Japan, master of social work (MSW) at University of Bangalore - India, diploma in social work at School of Social Work - Sri Lanka. Preferred subject area is Buddhist social work, Buddhist philosophy, psychology, and counselling. He has published books such as *Approaches through Buddhism for social work*, *Experience in social work research*, *Buddhist approach for social development* and *Experience in social work in Sri Lanka*. At present serves as a Senior Lecturer at Buddhist and Pali University



of Sri Lanka. He is also currently the President of Association of social workers of Sri Lanka, conducting number of social welfare program through Centre for Buddhist social work in Sri Lanka.

**Prof. Dr. Susanne von der Heide** is a Cultural Scientist and Conservation Specialist. She was curator for education at the Museum of East Asian Art at Cologne from 1988-1995. Until-2001 she was employed at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, first at the World Heritage Centre and afterwards for the Division of Cultural Heritage of UNESCO, responsible for Special Tasks in the Himalayan region. In 2001 she was appointed Director, thenafter in 2008 Chairperson of the HimalAsia Foundation, which is operating in the Himalayan Areas, South and Central Asia. Besides, she is teaching at different Universities and has introduced at the Lumbini Buddhist University in Nepal a Master Degree program in Buddhism and Himalayan Studies together with her colleagues. She is one of the editors of the book-serie of UNESCO 'World Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites' and has made 6 films on the Heritage of the Himalayas. Special award from the Tourism Ministry Nepal for her engagement in the cultural sector (1998); IUCN Award in Bangkok for Safeguarding Medicinal Herbs in the Himalayan Area (2004); United Nations SEED Award in New York for Safeguarding the Biodiversity of the Himalayan Area (2005); American FAWCO Award for her engagement to restore the Buddhist Heritage in the Himalayan area and having established Buddhist novice schools in Mustang (2010) & Terres de Femmes Award for her engagement to protect the environment in the Himalaya (2017).

**Dr. Rida Jelita, M.H.,** is a distinguished scholar, educator, and Buddhist leader whose multifaceted contributions have significantly shaped the educational and spiritual landscape in Indonesia. Based in Pekanbaru, Riau, she holds a Bachelor's degree in Law Science (2001), and a Master's in Business Law (2008), and is currently pursuing her Doctorate in the same field at Riau Islamic University (2024). With an illustrious career, she has served as the Head of Metta Maitreya Kindergarten and is currently the Chairperson of STAB Maitreyawira, where she has fostered academic excellence and student empowerment. Her accolades include the SMB Maitreya Teacher Service Award (2017) and a prestigious honor from the Ministry of Religion for her over two decades of dedication to Buddha Dharma (2019). Dr. Rida's professional focus spans business law, leadership development, and Buddhist education. She has undertaken advanced training in public speaking, national values, and millennial leadership, equipping her with a unique blend of pedagogical and administrative expertise. Her work emphasizes bridging traditional Buddhist principles with modern educational methodologies, nurturing a generation of compassionate, ethically driven individuals. A certified communicator and trainer, Dr. Rida has also pioneered initiatives in personal branding, problem-solving, and innovative teaching strategies, demonstrating her commitment to holistic education. Her enduring influence lies in her ability to harmonize spiritual values with practical knowledge, making her a beacon of inspiration in both academia and the wider Buddhist community.



**Dr. Lang Heping (Fa Qing)** earned his Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from the University of Calgary, Canada, in 2001. Since then, he has taught Buddhism in Chinese and English across China, Malaysia, and Thailand. Currently, he serves as a senior lecturer and Dean of the Graduate School at the International Buddhist College, where his research focuses on early meditation texts in Chinese Buddhism. His recent publications in English include articles on mindfulness of breathing and meditation techniques, such as “What is the External Body in the Mindfulness of Breathing” (*eJournal of Buddhist Research Studies*, Vol. 11, 2024) and “How to Define Breathing Long and Short in Ānāpānasati” (*eJournal of Buddhist Research Studies*, Vol. 10, 2023). Dr. Fa Qing also presented papers at prominent conferences, including the International Buddhist College’s 15th Anniversary Buddhist Studies Conference and the 2nd International Academic Forum in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism. His work continues to contribute significantly to the study of Buddhist meditation and textual traditions.

**Ven. Jinwol Young Ho Lee**, the Seon (Chan/Zen) Master, was the Chair Professor of Buddhist Studies and Director of Institute of Seon at Dongguk University, Korea. Born in Gyeonggi, Korea, 1950. He started the monastic life in 1968. He graduated from Hain Sangha College and fully ordained in 1974. He practiced meditation at mountains until 1980. He took a MA in Religion at University of Hawaii, Manoa, in 1990, and a Ph. D. in Buddhist Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1998. He established United Religions Initiative of Korea in 1999 and had worked as a Global Council member of URI 2000-2010. He had been appointed and worked as a member of the Presidential Committee on Sustainable Development in Korea government 2004-2006. He has been working as the Secretary General of URI Asia 2010-2016. He was elected and served as a Vice-President of WFB 2012-2016. He has been a member of ICDV since 2013. He was elected for the President of WFBC&B in 2015, then, has tried to revive the way of Bodhidharma. He established a retreat center in the San Francisco Bay Area, 2016, to teach the traditional Buddhist meditation and transmit Dharma. He works as the Vice Chair of Board of Directors of IBAA since 2023. Among many publications in Korean and English, *Ch’oŭi Ŭisun: A Liberal Sŏn Master and an Engaged Artist in Late Chosŏn Korea*. (Asian Humanities Press, 2002), “A Mahayana Vision of Dharmic Society in Korea” in *Entering the Realm of Reality: Towards Dharmic Societies* (Suksit Siam, 1997), “The Ideal Mirror of the Three Religions (Samga kwigam) of Hyujŏng” in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (University of Hawaii Press, 1995), “Buddhism” in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization vol. I*. (Columbia University Press, 1993) are noticeable in English ones.

**Dr. Thich Hanh Chanh** is an advisor of International Relations at Sharda University and an Independent Scholar specializing in Buddhism. He earned his Ph.D. in 2006 and holds a Master of Arts in Buddhist Studies from Delhi University, where he was awarded the University Medal in 1996. His academic credentials are complemented by three Post Graduate Diplomas from the Central Institute of Management (India): International Relations & Diplomacy

(2007), Research Methodology (2008), and Education Administration (2009), all completed with first-division honors. Dr. Chanh has demonstrated academic leadership through his role as Chairperson of the Buddhist Studies Conference at Sharda University in July 2023. His research interests focus on Mahayana Buddhism and Engaged Buddhism.

**Dr. Christie Yu-ling Chang** is a linguist, translator, and educator who led CIEE study abroad programs at National Chengchi University in Taipei (2001–2020). A prominent Buddhist activist, she served as President of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women (2009–2013) and was elected a Joint President of the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) in 2017, being the only laywoman among the eight presidents. During the pandemic, Dr. Chang continued leading Sakyadhita Taiwan, writing, and moderating webinars, including her column “Dharma ABC” for Humanity magazine. She also began sharing compassion through music, releasing her album *M. Sam in the Met(t)erse* (<https://ladiesgentlemen.lnk.to/SamintheMettaverse>) and spearheading a global peace movement through the multilingual song *We All Have Moms* (10-minute, 5-language remix: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-x3RhZnIpY>). Recently, she has traveled extensively with her husband, Dr. Frank Tien, sharing their experience teaching in Bhutan and participating in historic interreligious dialogues among women at the Vatican.

**Märt Läänemets**, PhD (University of Tartu, 2009), is a senior scholar in Buddhist and Chinese studies. In Buddhist studies, his research includes the history of Mahāyāna thought, Mahāyāna sūtras, Buddhist humanism in theory and practice, Buddhist meditation. He has made extensive research in Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra and the teaching of kalyāṇamitras. Läänemets is also a chan-meditation instructor following the Taiwan Dharma Drum Mountain tradition. In Chinese studies, his research includes the history of Chinese thought, Confucian classics, and impact of Chinese spiritual legacy on contemporary Chinese political thinking and practices. Läänemets is the author of Estonian translation of the Chinese military classic Sun Zi’s *Art of Warfare*. Märt Läänemets was long time researcher and associate professor in Oriental studies at the University of Tartu. He is member of the board of the Estonian Institute of Buddhism and honorary member of the Estonian Oriental Society. Currently he is affiliated to the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences as a research fellow focusing on study of China’s strategic narratives, its international politics, and Sino-Russian relations. See more: [https://www.etis.ee/CV/Märt\\_Läänemets/eng/](https://www.etis.ee/CV/Märt_Läänemets/eng/)

**Dato’ Ang Choo Hong** holds a B. Eng (Hon) degree from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, a Master of Science (Engineering) degree from Universiti Malaya, a Diploma in Management Science from National Institute of Public Administration and a certificate in Oil Hydraulic Engineering from Kitakyushu International Centre (Japan). An active Buddhist since his university days, he is currently the Chairman of Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia (YBBM), President of Buddhist Research Society Malaysia (BRSM), Advisor of Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia (BMSM), Executive Board member

of World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), member of advisory panel of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). An eloquent speaker at many local and international seminars and forums, he has authored and published several books in different languages in the Buddhist field. In 2009, he was bestowed the Order of the Defender of the State (DSPN) which carried the title Dato' by the Governor of Penang.

**Dr. Numan Anwar** is a distinguished archaeologist and Field Supervisor at the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. With a strong academic background in archaeology, Dr. Anwar holds a Master's degree in Archaeology from the University of Peshawar. He furthered his education with an MS degree from Hazara University, focusing on "Bodhisattva Maitreya in Gandhara Buddhist Art: A Case Study of Peshawar Museum." Dr. Anwar's PhD research, completed on "Buddhist Narrative Relief Panels in Dir Valley, Northern Gandhara: A Case Study of Dir Museum, Chakdara," has significantly contributed to the field of Buddhist art. As a professional archaeologist, Dr. Anwar has published numerous research papers in national and international journals. His extensive experience in excavating Buddhist heritage sites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, has been instrumental in promoting heritage tourism in the region. Throughout his career, Dr. Anwar has demonstrated a deep commitment to preserving Pakistan's rich cultural heritage. His expertise and passion for archaeology continue to inspire future generations of scholars and researchers.

**Most. Ven. Bhante Jinalankara** is the abbot and president of the Dhamma Gavesi Meditation Centre in Wellington, New Zealand. He is a senior Buddhist monk, has been a monk for forty years in the Theravada forest monastic tradition from Sri Lanka, and is currently residing in New Zealand. He has a good knowledge of the Pali language and English languages. He has a deep understanding of Pali Tripitaka. He conducts meditation retreats in Sinhala and English for the broad community locally and internationally. He is a well-known Buddhist monk in New Zealand. Bhante Jinalankara is also an internationally recognized meditation teacher and dhamma speaker who delivers Dhamma talks on profound topics based on Abhidhamma philosophy in both English and Sinhala. Because of his profound Dhamma knowledge and meditation experience, Bhante Jinalankara has been able to guide many people in meditation. Bhante Jinalankara has travelled to many countries around the world for Dhamma programmes. Some of the countries that he visited were Myanmar, Thailand, India, Nepal, Australia, the USA, Canada, England, Switzerland, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. The purpose of all those visits was to conduct and participate in Dhamma and meditation programmes to propagate the Buddha's teaching.

**Dr. Ninh Thị Sinh** is a lecturer at the Trần Nhân Tông Institute, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. She has many years of experience as a visiting lecturer and a research supervisor for master's and doctoral students at the Vietnam Buddhist Academy in Ho Chi Minh City and the Vietnam Buddhist Academy in Huế. After successfully defending her doctoral dissertation on

The Buddhist Revival Movement in Northern Vietnam: The Case of the Buddhist Association (1934–1945), she continued to expand her research on the Buddhist revival movement in 20th-century Vietnam, gender issues in Buddhism, and Engaged Buddhism. Her work has been published both domestically and internationally. Tel: 0904.838.411

**Dr. Lalan Kumar Jha** has done M. A., M. Phil. and Ph. D. from Delhi University. For his Ph.D. he was awarded Jawaharlal Nehru Scholarship for Doctoral Studies and went to Sri Lanka and studied and collected material for his Ph.D. He joined Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, Bihar as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pali on 03 September 2010. At present he is teaching as an Associate Professor in the Department of Pali in Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, Bihar.

**Dr. Kalinga Seneviratne**, is a Sri Lanka born Australian journalist, podcaster, author and an international communications analyst. He is currently a consultant to the Journalism Program at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and also a Research Fellow at the Shinawatra International University in Thailand. He was the head of the research at the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) in Singapore from 2005-2012. He has authored 3 books 'Myth of Free Media and Fake News in the Post-Truth Era' (SAGE, 2020) and 'Countering MTV Influence in Indonesia and Malaysia' (ISEAS, 2012) and is latest is "GeoPolitics and the media in Asia and the Pacific: Pulling in Different Directions' (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2024). He has also edited numerous other books on communications issues such as 'Mindful Communication for Sustainable Development: Perspectives from Asia' (SAGE, 2018). He has been a prolific feature writer for news agencies and publications, especially in Asia, for the past 30 years. Kalinga is currently a regular contributor to the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong. He has also taught at tertiary level in Australia, Singapore, Thailand, India and Central Asia. He is a recipient of an UN Media Peace Award in 1987 for his work on Australian community radio.

**Dr. Li. Edi Ramawijaya Putra**, S.Pd., M.Pd is an Associate Professor and Principal (Rector) of Sriwijaya State Buddhist College in Tangerang, Banten. He holds a Doctorate in Applied Linguistics from Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia (2019), a Master's in English Education from Muhammadiyah University of Professor Hamka Jakarta (2011), and a Bachelor's in English Education from Mataram University (2008). Dr. Edi is a dedicated educator with extensive teaching experience, serving as a full-time lecturer at Sriwijaya State Buddhist College and a guest lecturer at various institutions, including Sampoerna University and the Indonesian Defense University. His research focuses on sociolinguistic competence in EFL pedagogy, with publications in *Lingua Cultura*, *ELT Echo*, and the *Journal of IATEFL-SIG*. He is an active member of TEFLIN, IATEFL-SIG, and ALTI, contributing to the advancement of English education and applied linguistics in Indonesia and beyond.

## ABOUT THE EDITORS

**Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien** obtained his Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from Delhi University in 2005, currently is Vice President-Secretary General of Executive Council of National Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS); Vice Chairman of Vietnam – India Friendship Association; Head of the Department of International Buddhist Affairs of VBS; Vice Rector of Vietnam Buddhist University in Hanoi; and Senior Lecturer of Vietnam National University, Hanoi (Tran Nhan Tong Academic Institute). He served as Secretary General of the 2014, 2019 and 2025 United Nations Day of Vesak in Vietnam. He has published, edited, and translated many books in Buddhist studies and history. He has received many prestigious recognitions from the Government of Vietnam (the Third-Class Labor Order), from the Royalty of Cambodia (the General Order), and from the Government of India (the Padma Shri Order).

**Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu** obtained his D.Phil. in Philosophy from Allahabad University in 2002. He currently serves as the ongoing Vietnamese Tripitaka Translation Project and chief editor of the Buddhism Today Series (with over 250 published titles). A prolific author, he has written over 80 Vietnamese books on applied Buddhism. He has traveled extensively across Vietnam, Canada, the United States, Australia, and Europe to deliver public Dharma talks, and has produced more than 5,000 VCDs on various Dharma topics. Most Venerable Thich Nhat Tu is currently the Vice Rector of the Vietnam Buddhist University and Vice Chairman of the National Department of International Buddhist Affairs. Several universities have conferred upon him the honorary degree Doctor Honoris Causa in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Buddhist education, academic research, and international Buddhist leadership. He has also received numerous awards, titles, and honors from the governments of Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia.

**Prof Dr. Amarjiva Lochan** is an esteemed scholar of South and Southeast Asian history, currently serving as a faculty member at the Department of History, University of Delhi, India. He is Vice President of International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), the supreme Body on researches on all religions in the world. He is also Director of Centre of Global Studies. His research focuses on early Indian cultural exchanges, extension of South Asian culture and history to Asia. His focus area is the spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia. Prof Lochan has authored over 50 academic publications, including books, research journal articles, book chapters, and

monographs. A worldwide traveller to all continents, Professor Lochan is frequently invited to speak at international conferences and has contributed extensively to the understanding of India–ASEAN historical relations, maritime trade and Indian diaspora. With his interdisciplinary approach, Prof Lochan continues to bridge historical scholarship with contemporary cultural dialogue in the region.





**VIETNAM LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION**  
**HONG DUC PUBLISHING HOUSE**  
65 Trang Thi, Hoan Kiem Dist., Hanoi  
Email: nhaxuatbanhongduc65@gmail.com  
Tel: 024.39260024 | Fax: 024.39260031

**UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY:  
BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Thich Duc Thien**  
**Thich Nhat Tu**  
**Amarjiva Lochan editors**

Publishing Responsibilities  
Publishing Director: PHAM THI MAI  
Content Supervisor: Editor-in-Chief LY BA TOAN  
Editor: Phan Thi Ngoc Minh  
Typesetting: Ngoc Anh

Collaborating Partner:  
GIAC NGO PAGODA  
92 Nguyen Chi Thanh, Ward 2, District 10, Ho Chi Minh City

---

Printed in 1.300 copies, dimensions 16x24 cm, at FAHASA Printing, Stationery and Packaging Enterprise, Lot B26/II-B27/II, Road No. 5, Vinh Loc Industrial Park, Binh Hung Hoa B Ward, Binh Tan District, Ho Chi Minh City. Publishing Registration Number: 1282-2025/CXBIPH/08-47/HĐ, issued on 16-04-2025. Publishing Decision Number: 885/QĐ-NXBHĐ, issued by Hong Duc Publishing House on 29-04-2025. Completed printing and archived in 2025. International Standard Book Number (ISBN): 978-604-613-959-1.