

Peace in Buddhism: From a Peaceful Village to Peace in Thai Society

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1. Introduction

There is conflict and violence in the present world. Immediate examples that come to mind are the current situations in Iraq, Palestine and in the south of Thailand. What we wish to see is solutions to these those problems by peaceful methods, for instance negotiation and mediation, but, even though, sometimes, some groups might attempt to use such methods, in the end: conflict and violence still remain a constant. It is as though neither conflict nor violence will ever die out in human beings or societies.

It might be the case that human beings interpret or define peace in different ways. As a result, they also have different thought and actions. This leads us to seek tools for managing conflict and violence in a different ways. From this, I would like to consider the meaning of peace that is ascribed as defined by scholars, especially from the Buddhist perspective.

Lest this prologue sound unduly negative, let me hasten to add that, as we are all aware, Buddhism is not a monolithic structure, and there are also certain underlying features of Buddhist teachings that may be conducive to the furtherance of peace. What I wish to do in this paper is to explore one of these features by drawing on a particular western concept of peace and providing an introductory sketch of how this might provide a foundation for peace in Buddhism.

2. What is peace?

In order to answer this question, which refers to the key term in this discussion, first of all, I will begin by defining the expression 'peace' itself.

According to the Webster dictionary, peace means "freedom from war", which is "to stay without war". Moreover, Alvin Toffler and Disaku ikeda, who were experts in the way of 'non-violence', point out that "arising from peace is appearance of war". However, Johan Kaltung, suggests that 'peace does not only mean the 'appearing of war', but it is a state of 'non-violence'

These statements come very close to our concept of the definition of peace. That is "without war or violence, peace will occur". In other words, following this idea, if we depart from war, we become absolutely peaceful.

From a Buddhist perspective, the word 'peace' contains two level meanings. Firstly, as an ultimate truth, it means 'Niravana': the State of mind that does not have passions, such as desire, ignorance and delusion. In another words, whenever our mind is not under the control of passions, it is calm and peaceful. So, we are able to call 'true peace'.

Secondly, in general truth, 'peace' means human beings and societies might have conflict with each other, for instance conflict of data, interest, structure and value, but they attempt to choose the best option by negotiation or dialogue without violent action.

Therefore, 'peace' in term of Buddhism has much more to say that "not only when human beings and societies have problems with each other, they do not solve problems by using violence, such as war, beating, killing and so on, but they also have loving-kindness and compassion with other people in the world.

In fact, one might define peace as follows: there is a slightly different thing between the western scholars and Buddhism. The former attempts to focus on external peace; whereas the latter is aware of both external and internal peace.

3. Why is peace very essential to human beings and societies?

There is no less suffering in the world today than there was in the past, and there are no fewer problems. Indeed, it could be said that there are now more problems and greater unhappiness than ever before. This suggests that the solution to our problems, and to those of society as a whole, does not lie in knowledge or control of the external world.

Furthermore, in the present world, whenever human beings and societies conflict with each other they

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resort to violence, instead, they should resolve the problem by using reconciliation rather than violence as a tool in order to manage conflict, 'peace' is the best alternative way. I, therefore, propose to show why is peace so essential to human beings and societies and how it can be used to manage conflict?

3.1 Peace brings loving-kindness to human beings and societies

From a Buddhist perspective, whenever our minds have peace particularly inner peace, it is very easy to build loving-kindness and give it to other people who need help. Loving-kindness means we understand the feelings and needs of other people. We are encouraged to take positive action when we are represented with an appropriate opportunity to help those who are in need.

Human beings are not independent of each other. That is why human being must love each other. So loving-kindness or Metta is like bridge that builds harmony between human beings and societies.

Clearly, because of just peace, we are able to have loving kindness and be happy as well as helping other people unconditionally.

3.2 Peace brings happiness to human beings and societies

My question in this case is: why do human beings have so many possessions in their lives, such as money, cars, and houses, but are still unhappy with all this. The reason is that they receive every day is not true happiness but false happiness. In fact, true happiness does not arise if our minds do not have peace. Not only can peace can build true happiness but it also brings it to other people who follow us or live beside us. Moreover, happiness and suffering are states of mind, and so their main causes cannot be found outside the mind. The real source of happiness is inner peace. If our mind is peaceful, we will be happy all the time, regardless of external conditions, but if it is disturbed or troubled in any way, we will never be happy, no matter how good our external conditions may be. External conditions can only make us happy if our mind is peaceful. We can understand this through our own experience. For instance, even if we are in the most beautiful surroundings and have everything we need, the moment we get angry any happiness we may have disappears. This is because anger has destroyed our inner peace. Therefore, peace is important for building happiness within human beings and societies. Without peace, our world will be permeated by both conflict and violence, until no one helps, understand or love anyone else.

3.3 Peace brings solidarity and harmony to human beings and societies

Solidarity in this sense is like 'social energy' that arises from cooperation within human beings and societies to help each other. It means the way in which we are able to find values and agreement in each group. In order to establish solidarity and harmony in societies, we first have to build peace in our minds. Because it leads us to positive behaviours, such as speaking, listening, walking and living. Therefore, peace is very important for building solidarity and harmony. If we do not have it, it is impossible for the world to have happiness and cooperation in many activities, such as prevention of terrorism and global warming. To sum up, the reasons why human beings and societies should have peace or why peace is so important to them is that world cannot survive without peace. Peace is like a bridge that joins between human beings and societies. Without this bridge, it is impossible for people to talk and share happiness and suffering with each other.

4. Why do not mankind and society have peace?

There are many reasons why human beings and societies do not have peace in present world. First of all, we will consider this term as it is understood in Buddhism. We may conclude that, from a Buddhist perspective, the causes of those are multiple. They include desire, arrogance, and delusion.

4.1 Desire refers to acquisitiveness and aspirations. Acquisitiveness includes the need to 'possess' material goods and also people, whereas aspirations concern the wish for status, power and position. Furthermore, the world's natural resources would be sufficient for all the world's people, but a greedy person always wants more, because materialist and capitalist societies do not have unlimited

raw materials. Such societies, therefore, will go to great lengths to obtain all the available resources, even though this means depriving other groups. Failure to negotiate results in conflict.

We can illustrate this with reference to the following story from Buddhist scripture: the brahmin Aramadanda asked Mahakaccayana, 'What is the cause of conflict between a king and a king, Bhramana and Bhramana or wealthy person and wealthy person?'. The latter replied that whenever human beings grasp tightly, adhere, or are sexually aroused or held by desire, they come into conflict. Also, parents and children, siblings and other relatives come into conflict, quarrel and attack each other because of desire.

According to Tipitaka, Koliya and Sakaya, who are relatives of the Buddha, fought because they wanted water for agriculture, and the kings Pasenadi of Kosala and Ajatasattu fought because they wanted to control part of the land which is on the border between their countries. When we analyze these two examples, we can see that conflict arose between these people because they were controlled by desire.

However, in my view, desire in this case covers the need for power, too. Power in itself is neither good nor bad, but in this case, 'power' refers to politics, money and social control. These kinds of power tend to corrupt the mind: The love of power leads to the desire for even more power and control. When everybody wants power, conflict arises, because nobody wants to be subject to the power or authority of anybody else.

4.2 Arrogance refers to human beings' preference for showing themselves that they are better than other people in term of status, personality, property, education, work or knowledge. As a result, somebody who has been insulted sometimes disputes, quarrels and even kills. In this case, the Buddha said that anyone who really likes to say and think that he is better than other people, is highly likely to come into conflict within his society.

A good example of this is the case of the kings of Sakaya who believed that they were racially superior to all the other kings of Jambudipa. They therefore refused to associate with or marry into other groups. When the king Pasendi of Kosala, who came from the ordinary people, wanted to marry a relative of Sakaya, they brought him a slave. Not long afterwards, he had a son, Vithuthapha. The kings of Sakaya did not want to welcome him, when he went to visit them in the Kipilapat. When Vidudabha learnt that he was not their grandson, but the son of a slave, he and his soldiers went to kill all the kings of Sakaya.

For this reason, the Buddha said that Bhikkhus should not claim that they are better people because they observe many precepts or have great merit.

Whenever people are arrogant, they do not like to listen to or understand each other. In general, active listening is extremely important, because it involves opening one's mind in order to understand another person's feelings and needs. However, selfishness obstructs creative thinking, causing an inability to accept a diversity of views.

4.3 Delusion is a form of ignorance, which can be compared to a shadow over the mind that prevents us from seeing things as they really are. Thus, good and evil can become confused; advantages can be perceived as disadvantages (and vice versa).

The Buddha said, 'Whoever holds extreme opinions quarrels very easily and has difficulty avoiding disputes'. On another occasion, the Mahakaccayana asked the Buddha what the cause of conflict between monks was. The Buddha replied that whenever monks refuse to accept different views from their own, cling to material things or are sexually aroused or controlled by desire, conflict very easily arises.

According to the Tipitaka, conflict arose between Vinayadhara Bhikkus and Dhammadhara Bhikkus in Kosambi, even though they had been good friends before, because they had different views on the interpretation of the Vinaya,.

Summarizing the above, most conflict arises from desire, arrogance and delusion, all of which the Buddha counselled against, because they prevent clear thinking and impede effective social and professional relationships. Whenever a human being can be brought to understand this, inner peace becomes possible, and this is the basis for true happiness in human society.

5. from a Peaceful Village to Peace in Thai Society

There are two kinds of peace discussed in the present times: inner peace and outer peace. The author believes firmly that one aspect to fostering peace in society is that 'the roots of international or global peace must begin at the village level.' Village communities are made up of three vital parts: the household, the monastery, and the school. One essential question for development is how we can develop and integrate these three parts of village life, so that one creates a stable and sustainable peaceful village ('Peace Village'), endowed with a healthy 'immune system.'

In response to this question, the Master's Degree Program on Peace Studies at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) is determined to develop a model village community. Ta Koy Nang Village (Tambon Sawai, Amphur Prang Ku, Sisaket Province, Thailand) has been selected as the original 'Peace Village.' This project began on the November 2, 2012. Various activities and projects have been initiated, including participation in disaster management and village restoration on account of the recent flooding. The framework for developing this Peace Village follows four principal strategies:

1) Physical Development: the development of peace must begin by developing the physical environment or external conditions so that they promote sustainability for human beings. In this context, Chinese development plans emphasize: 'Food first, Speech later.' This corresponds with the Buddhist principle: 'Hunger is a great illness; sustaining the body is fraught with difficulty/conditioned phenomena are subject to stress.' Hunger and poverty are important variables that the government must manage to ensure people's survival and existence. If these issues are not solved, they breed wider social problems, like robbery and theft in order to physically survive.

From the project's inception up to the time of the flooding, it has worked together with state agencies, regional administrative organizations, and private individuals, as well as with the Miracle of Life Foundation, in order to improve the physical conditions of the village, including:

Donating necessities for survival during the time of the flooding. Repairing the main road entering the village which is linked to Surin Province, where there was no danger from flooding. Requesting support from the Prang Ku Hospital and from public health authorities in Prang Ku on issues of health and sanitation.

Inviting district development officials to offer career advice and support to those villagers whose entire rice crops were destroyed by the floods.

> The current project that is being coordinated and managed is the development of the main village water supply. At the present time, the village has an old water tank that can no longer be used. By repairing and replacing some of the equipment, it can be used once again.

2) Behavioral Development: the five precepts are considered the fundamental basis for building peace in the village. The five precepts create a sanctuary, a space free from fear (abhaya-dāna), which dispels mutual mistrust and fear. We shall start by making the village a sanctuary, a place that promotes forgiveness and a freedom from fear.

Here, the values of community life emphasize loving-kindness, mutual respect, the honoring of other people's property and spouses, right speech, mindfulness, and refraining from the pathways to ruin (apāya-mukha). This project has led the villagers to recognize the importance of these qualities. It has begun with developing the children at the Ta Koy Nang Village School, by organizing events to foster virtue and ethical conduct. Guest speakers from the Dhamma Wardens Group/ Dhamma Protectors Group have been invited to teach the students and adults, by organizing events both in the monastery and out in the community. The villagers have been reminded to apply the five precepts as a way of practice for building stability in their lives and for maintaining harmony in the community.

3) Mental Development: the project holds firmly to the Buddhist principle: 'A well-trained mind leads to happiness.' A well-trained and well-developed mind also leads to inner peace, as confirmed by the Buddha's words: 'There is no greater happiness than peace of mind.'

Following this principle, events are organized to develop the minds and hearts of the villagers, including the village leaders, the teachers, the householders, and the students, in order to bring about a good quality of mind, mental health, and mental capability. Events for developing the minds of the students are organized at the school by way of the Camp of Virtue.

The event of chanting at New Year's in the monastery is also organized, at which time one chants and meditates for peace. Chanting books are distributed to the villagers so that they can learn the chants and recite them each evening before going to sleep.

This mental development allows the villagers to more easily adjust and adapt to any emergencies or natural disasters that may occur. Moreover, it leads them use to these obstacles and difficulties as a means to develop a positive outlook, leading to even greater stability in their lives. After one year of organizing such projects on mental development, it has been observed that the villagers have an increased ability to maintain a positive attitude and are better able to adapt to and deal with obstacles and difficulties in their lives.

4) Intellectual Development: based on the Buddhist maxim, 'Wisdom is the world's beacon,' the project has invited more than fifty doctoral students in the field of 'Buddhist Seminars and the Way of Peace,' Master's Degree students of Peace Studies, and volunteers to participate in a Seminar on Peace.

This has provided the opportunity for the villagers to share some of their everyday challenges and difficulties. At the same time, the question has been posed to the villagers on how they wish for Tah Koy Nang Village to develop in order for it to become a 'Peace Village,' and their opinion has been asked on the effectiveness of the project's undertakings in light of this objective.

From this evaluation, the project received many replies, which will be ordered according to importance. There will be an ongoing discussion with the villagers on these matters, so that Ta Koy Nang Village can become a Peace Village in the truest sense.

To succeed with this project, it is essential that the villagers' wisdom proficiency is enhanced by way of 'peaceful discussion,' both formal and informal, on these four principal areas of safeguarding wellbeing. This way, the villagers will become confident that they can build a truly peaceful community – a Peace Village – in the Buddhist 26th century.

In sum, the four principal strategies are: 1) physical development, 2) behavioral development, 3) mental development, and 4) intellectual development. The Peace Village stems from the simultaneous development of both inner and outer peace. The development can be marked as 'horizontal' in the sense that it spans both inner and outer development, rather than focusing exclusively on a 'vertical' expansion of material wellbeing. The participants in this project are confident that Ta Koy Nang Village can act as a model community for a Peace Village for many years to come. This confidence is based on the stability of the three institutions mentioned earlier, of household, monastery, and school. These three factors are united in action and spirit, developing on the basis of learning, understanding, and prosperity. They function together in harmony, amongst a feeling of kindness, a sense of the common good, generosity, mutual respect, and a belief in the tradition of using peaceful means.

Peace in Thailand will never be possible if we are unable to foster peace in the villages, of which there are more than 74,956. Peace in society begins with peace in the village. The Master's Degree program in the field of Peace Studies at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) is thus determined to foster peace by creating a model Peace Village in a small area of land in Northeast Thailand. This village may then act as an example and inspiration for building peace in Thailand and around the world.

6. Conclusion

It's very apparent that conflict and violence will never be eliminated from our society despite our repeated attempts at civilization. Different cultures and different people have different interpretations of what peace really entails. Peace-management can be a very burdensome field to engage into. Buddhism provides answers at stabilization and tolerance – measures towards true peace.

We may often fail to recollect that the two most important people in human history to advocate for peace, were of the warrior-class in ancient-India. Both the Jain's Mahavira and the Buddha came from important families that likely warred with other states. It's well known that the Buddha mediated several disputes over water-rights and government-systems, as well as organizing the Sangha and settling individual disputes through the creation of the Vinaya. The Buddha created a whole systemic-structure for generating peace: between antagonists in the external world and with the internal chaos of the mind.

Materialism does not bring happiness; in fact the purpose for something like Buddhist economics is to fully comprehend what happiness is, and it has nothing to do with material-happiness which fades

over time. We might really consider equanimity as being a key factor in the management of our senses, since suffering is something that no one wants and too much happiness leads towards a seeking of extremes and dangerous overconsumption.

The desire and greed, very distant from self-interest and what is necessary for life, is what is driving many nations to war upon other nations. People are looking at distant places to exploit and plunder rather than finding novel ways to develop domestically. Arrogance is brought up and denounced, yet there may not be a need for arrogance if such a person was given equal footing in which to perform; but if the arrogant person was being suppressed, the arrogance would only arise if he was fully capable of achieving desirable results. There seems to be some disadvantage and the arrogant person considers that there is a need to seize the advantage. People who are labeling others as arrogant perhaps hold the wrong perspectives towards the one they are criticizing. The protagonist may just be the seemingly arrogant individual who must prove his value to the antagonist. We are talking about peace, here, but sometimes a person becomes mindless and neglects to place peace in the hearts and minds of others.

There is also the famous story of Devadatta wanting to take over the Sangha, but the Buddha replies with a derogatory term, calling Devadatta a miserable lick-spittle, as it is translated in the English version of the story – and this rattles Devadatta into a fit of negativity. This name calling didn't create peace in the heart or mind of Devadatta, regardless of how-far-gone from sane, or suffering from delusion, that he is determined to be in the Buddhist literature. A clear and perfected mind, free from defiling-characteristics is stressed as the model to aspire to craft. This takes diligent effort.

To move beyond the din of dogma or espousing rhetoric, MCU's Peace Studies Program actualized or transcended theory towards practical applications, and selected a village to transform, through praxis – through four strategies:

- Physical Development
- Behavioral Development
- Mental Development
- Intellectual Development

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