

Buddhism and World Peace

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Buddhism is the most rationalistic religion if ever it is to be called a religion. But the Buddha was a man-a superman and he never professed himself to be a God as was believed later by his own followers under the dense growth of accretions.

Buddhism is now the religion of the one-third of the entire population of the world. It is because there is in Buddhism shelter for all people condemned as inferior to others or as untouchables. The Buddha was the first man to believe in the equality of man irrespective of caste, creed, colour and faith. As such, Buddhism has never been a religion in the sense other religions are religions. It is the code of conduct and a way of thinking, an attempt to revolt against the tyranny of the idea of God existing as the supreme force. It was a revolt specially at a time when Brahmanism was at the zenith of its progress. It was also equally revolutionary to preach that man is a sovereign being.

Lord Buddha's contribution to philosophy is really very unique. His theory of dependent origination(Pratitya Samutpad) is the beginning of the scientific thinking in the orient many hundred years before its advent in Europe. Lord Buddha thought that when something exists, it

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undergoes changes, we are born as babies: gradually we grow older and finally we die. So when birth exists, old age and death arise, for old age and death have birth as their cause.

Lord Buddha's contribution to scientific thinking is the prelude to the beginning of a new era and the ending of a dark age, but he is not so drastic as to suggest extreme measures because his goal is to attain Nirvāṇa, but he has also thought of innumerable people who partly by their karmic complications and partly by their misconception fail to realise his doctrine. He, therefore, propounded the theory of Madhyama Pratipada, the Golden Middle Path with the help of Bina, a musical instrument with strings. If all strings are too tight, it produces sharp notes while it produces dull tone if it is too loose. So to have the most melodious notes it must be neither too tight nor too loose. Similar is the case of a man. He must avoid any extremes in life. The emancipation lies in cool-thinking based on realistic approach.

If we judge him from the contributions he has made to this modern world, we will find that he has given us his most enlightened leadership in social, political, economic, psychological and religious fields. In fact, he has been the only spiritual teacher who has never been flouted by any body at anything. In this world all human beings are entirely different from each other. They differ from each other in character and personality as well as in psychology and philosophy. There are no human beings anywhere who may be considered to be identically the same. Even perfect identical twins, whose biological make-up is exactly the same, differ in some way or another, in character and personality as well as in psychology and philosophy.

In spite of such differences, human beings, from the beginning of times, have yearned desperately for one common element: peace. Every single person on earth, deep inside, would not trade peace for anything else. In spite of this reality, human history is characterized by one war after another. There is hardly one era of history which was termed as peaceful.

Peace is described as a state of quiet and tranquility. It is viewed as freedom from war, cessation of hostilities, absence of strife,

tranquility of mind, quiet of conscience. Peace in the community means harmony among diverse people. The question which needs to be raised here is this: If peace is something which everybody wants, how come no one seems to be able to get it., at least for an extended period of time? The reply is simple. The seed of peace is found in the inside of the human being. It is not imposed from the outside on a person or a nation. Peace, by its very nature, is linked to the spiritual aspect of the human being and not to the physical sphere.

Also, peace is the source of happiness. Most people search for peace in the wrong places. They believe that wealth and money are sources of happiness, that having a new car and an excellent house constitute a source of enjoyment, and that being a success in life, as revealed in one's popularity, contributes to serenity of life. Unfortunately, such people all proved to be wrong.

If wealth and successful people prove to be happy, it is because they have peace in their heart. This means that, although they value every material good they have, they are, by no means, attached to it. Gautama Siddhartha, who later became the famous Buddha of history, was born in a wealthy family. He had everything he wanted except for one thing: peace. To secure peace he was ready to do anything unconditionally, even giving away all of his wealth.

Buddha, who has been revered by millions of followers for some 2,500 years, gave everything he had to the poor and went out to lead a very simple life. He concentrated on the practice of virtue which enabled him to find genuine peace within himself.

Peace is altruistic which means that we must be concerned about the welfare of all people without exception. Such a concern will move us to do anything that is legitimate and appropriate to this end, regardless of the self-sacrifice that may be involved. In view of this, we may easily understand why governments throughout history did not succeed to bring about a permanent world peace. Government, by their very nature, tend to be selfish and inconsiderate to the needs of others. In fact, we often hear government officials speak of American interests, Chinese interests, Russian interests, British interests, French interests

and so on and so forth. Governments will become instruments of peace when they start viewing the whole world as one global family...when they start thinking world interests instead.

The horrific events of September 11 can be a weak-up call for the beginning of the Third Millennium. It is now or never. The only way to protect the diversity of nations, religions, and individuals on our planet is to create a unity that embraces and affirms them all. The only way to break the cycle of violence is to create a framework for democratic dialogue and debate in which differences are not dealt with by military or terrorist force, but through a dialogue mandated and moderated by the rule of law. The cycle of violence, terror and injustice will not be broken though human beings suddenly become peaceful in some miraculous way. It can be broken by the democratic rule of law which legitimates diversity and gives it a voice. Only under the Buddhism, which creates peace with justice throughout the world, will religious people then be able to recite, "one planet Earth under Buddha's thought, with liberty and justice for all."