

Buddhism and Development of Peace

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Many viewpoints are possible when we discuss the relationship of Buddhism to the problem of peace. Here, however, I would like to focus on the Buddhist concept of karma in order to show how pacifist thought in Buddhism is inherent in and can be derived from the concept of karma.

The Buddha set out to develop an individual method of action by which to live one's life, the focus of which is on the development of wholesome mental state¹ as presented with the famous injunction of the Dhammapada:

**“Not to do any evil; to cultivate what is wholesome;
To purify one’s mind. This is the teaching of the Buddhas.”
(Dhp183)**

Buddha was born into this world. In this world, he became Buddha, preached the dharma, and practiced the paramitas--the freeing of self and other human beings from miseries. According to the Buddhist Scripture, he taught industriously throughout the years after his enlightenment and his footprints were widespread on both sides of the Ganges. His disciples were of all colors and ranks--from kings, nobles, rich merchants, and scholars to beggars and slaves. He abandoned the royal life and devoted himself to the pursuit of wisdom and truth and to the cause of the enlightenment of others. He was tireless in discovering truth and in passing it on to others. His objective throughout his Buddha hood in this world was to rescue human being and society. To realize this he formed the sangha and led them to the country and to cities to beg alms and to preach the dharma to purify this world. Overall, Buddha did all he could do to work for human society. He engaged himself in this world instead of remaining aloof from society and human affairs. The idea of the "pure land" is found in Buddhism. We often hear that if one cultivates oneself well enough according to the rules and disciplines of Buddhism, then in afterlife one may live in the "pure land," or "the world of utmost joy." The idea of the "pure land" first appeared in the Agamasutra, where it can refer to the "pure land" either in heaven or on earth. "One who wishes for the 'Pure Land' should have a purified heart; where the heart is purified is the 'pure land of Buddha.'" The "pure land" exists with enlightenment of the heart.

The relationship between action (mental, physical or verbal) and the results of action are to be understood in terms of the somewhat ambiguous designation of 'Karmic Fruitfulness'. The nature of karma is discussed at length in the Canonical literature^[2]. The Nirvana experience in the life of the Arahats is described by Harvey (op.cit: 43) as "the destruction of attachment, hatred and delusion." The Arahats no longer has the capability of unwholesome action, and therefore fails to produce Karmic fruit. Unwholesome and wholesome moral conduct (sila) are said to have stopped (M.II. 26-7), wrong conduct has been replaced with right conduct, the non-attachment to actions is as the result of perfecting moral virtue culminating in the perfection of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. He/she is not constrained by ideas of what he/she ought to do, acting virtuously without attachment to virtue. As Harvey (ibid: 45) suggests "he is non-violent because of his destruction of attachment, hatred and delusion, not because of grasping at precepts and vows (Vin I.184)." Peace is a central concept in the religion of the Buddha, who came to be known as the "santi-rājā" or the "Prince of Peace." For, on the one hand the aim of the good life, as understood in Buddhism, is described as the attainment of a state of "Peace" or "santi," which is a characteristic of Nibbāna or the Transcendent Reality. On the other hand, the practice of the good life is said to consist in "sama-cariyā" or "harmonious (literally: peaceful) living" with one's fellow beings. It was this doctrine, which gave "inward peace" (ajjhata-santi)^[3] and resulted in "harmonious living" (or "righteous living"—*dharmacariyā*—as it is sometimes called), which the Buddha for the first time in the known history of mankind sought to spread over the entire earth when he set up, as he claimed "the kingdom of righteousness" (*dhama-cakkam*, literally, rule of righteousness) or "the kingdom of God" (*brahma-cakkam*).^[4] The crux of this discussion is in realizing that an action of body, speech or mind requires reflection, before, during and after the act, in order to consider the likely harm to oneself, others or both. If it is unwholesome it will result in *dukkha*. The consequences of *dukkha* being, the karmically deadening unwholesome states, of greed, hatred and delusion, which result in experiences of unsatisfactoriness /suffering, agitation, stress and anxiety in this present life.(A.I.202).

¹ There are many canonical references to the development of wholesome mental states, see for example Walshe's (1995) translation of the DighaNikaya i.124; Nyanaponika (1975) AnguttaraNikaya and Thanissaro, Trans. (2002) Further Factored Discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the AnguttaraNikaya.

² As part of that exploration two issues are raised on a technical note: 1. The paper does not use diacritics for Pali or Sanskrit words; they do however appear in italics (unless they relate to names of people). The reason being, as the paper is passing through electronic sources from author to conference it would become illegible due to changes in formatting along the way, which may not support the author's diacritic software. 2. The abbreviations of Canonical literature and commentary are as follows: A. = AnguttaraNikaya; D. = DighaNikaya; Dhp. = Dhammapada; M. = MajjhimaNikaya; S. = SamyuttaNikaya; Sn. = Sutta-nipata (The Group of Discourses, Vol I and II); Vin. = VinayaPitaka (The Book of the Discipline).

³Sn 837

⁴ "Brahmā" means here "the highest" or the "most sublime" without theological connotations.

The universality of Buddhist practice in developing the wholesome nature of humanity is based on the ability of Buddhists to develop the inner peaceful world, with which one can wisely deal with the outer physical world. Success in this endeavour as human beings will become apparent, as those with inner peace generate happiness in the human condition. Living in peace generates peaceful aspects in all causal conditions, as they live in peace with all sentient life.

References

1. Dhammapitaka P. Buddhist Solutions for the Twenty-First Century. Bangkok, Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1986.
2. Dhammapitaka P. Good Evil and Beyond: Karma in the Buddha's Teaching. Bangkok, Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1993a.
3. Harvey P. An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.