

SOME THOUGHTS ON SOLUTIONS FOR MODERN CRISES

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SOLUTION FOR VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM

Violence could be avoided on certain occasions because of wise men that have had some grounding in political education, as a result of which they instinctively attempted to avoid horrors of war and violence. Due to social control, the majority of the people not being reduced to states of abnormality still were on the side of sanity, and they were not ready to act on impulse. Their influences on the rest of the population were of a restraining nature. The overriding respect for law and justice was not completely eroded from the people's mind. A wise leadership found in society in times of great strain co-operated with the people who through such leaders were made to realize their own responsibility. Violence, when it erupted, often involved sections of people who do lack: (1) maturity of purpose and (2) training in disciplined action; and (3) who have alleged or immediate causes for complaints.

If the economic, social and political conditions were stable, there is no reason for people to seek refuge in violence to overthrow a system. In the majority of occasions, the fault was with the king or rulers, and if violence was used, it was aimed at removing them. Today's violence has assumed a complexity and intensity because it is often aimed at the total system. Buddhist teachings emphasize the development of the individual and society to a stage by means of which intense violence could be minimized. Perhaps by such means it would not be able to eradicate violence altogether. But when it is thus controlled or restrained, it would not lead to a total disruption of an entire society.

Insights from Buddhist teachings would help us to identify the causes of violence and utilize strategies to bring violence and terror under such control.

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(1) Economic measures to reduce dire poverty and ensure everyone living of his or her satisfaction of basic needs.

(2) A social system where the access to social resources is made possible for all.

(3) A political system in which all shades of opinion are allowed to be expressed and utilized for important decision-making.

(4) Establishment of Dharma (the Law) and the commitment of rulers and administrators not to violate it under any circumstances (respect for human rights).

The best antidote for violence and terrorism is seen in this commitment to Dharma (Law and justice) by the rulers of a country. Perhaps it was the socio-political implication of the Buddhist saying: “Law or Dharma itself protects the person who practices it” that motivated this commitment to Dharma or the Law.

“At any time

For hatred does not cease by hatred

Hatred ceases by love

This is an eternal law”²

“This is Buddha’s doctrine; not to cherish enmity, not to fight, not to abuse.”³

“The mind is easily upset and runs wild and is difficult to keep controlled. When it runs wild it is like a violent elephant; one thought follows another with the quickness of lightning; when the mind loses its composure it moans like an agile and thus becomes the origin of all evils.”⁴

The concept of *Ahi sā* involves non-injury to all forms of life or avoidance of hurt or harm, cruelty or oppression and depreciation. It is not confined only to the first precept in the Five Precepts, i.e. abstaining from killing living beings. It embraces the other precepts too. Cultivating relationships with women (or men) who are other people’s wives (or husbands) involves injury to others. Uttering falsehood

² Dhammapada Sutta, Yamaka Vagga, version N.5.

³ Ratnakarandakavyuha Sūtra.

⁴ Nirvā a Sūtra.

could lead to various complications perhaps ending with psychological or physical injury to oneself and others. It asserts that the rights of man are grounded in a law superior to the laws of state. It forbids us to commit crimes against humanity including such things as the denial or the exploitation of others.

The main thought of Buddhism is the idea of Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva always practices *Pāramitā* (Six Perfections), giving (*dāna*), ethics (*sīla*), patience (*ksānti*), effort (*vīrya*), concentration (*dhyāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*). The nucleus of the idea of Bodhisattva is compassion. The compassion itself helps the Bodhisattva to complete his vows.

“A Bodhisattva should be diligent so as not to be disturbed by lust, ignorance, haughtiness, annoyance, envy, enmity, hatred, flattery, and shamelessness. A Bodhisattva should always think in this way: I always practice diligence because I do not wish to cause suffering to any beings, because I wish to know all beings and the way they are born and pass away. I practice diligence because I want to know Buddha’s true law, have wisdom, and know how to use skilful means in order to procure the happiness of *Nirvāṇa* for all beings. I practice diligence because I wish to suffer the sufferings of hell for the sake of all beings, so as to make them come to the realization of Enlightenment.”⁵

The Buddhists developed the bodhisattva ideal to such an extent that it became the single most important element in Buddhist ethics. Buddhist’s purpose is to help others. “The bodhisattva’s salient trait is altruistic compassion for all sentient beings.” In helping others, a Buddhist aids others in achieving spiritual release and well as attaining material riches. In order to help others, though, a Buddhist must refuse to enter *Nirvāṇa* (state of supreme happiness), for if he entered *Nirvāṇa*, he could be of no help to those who are still in *samsāra*, who is the cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth. To prevent himself from entering *Nirvāṇa*, the Buddhist takes a vow such as the following: “I shall not enter into final *Nirvāṇa* before all beings have

⁵ Avataṣaka Sūtra.

been liberated.” After taking the vow, the Buddhist goes through disciplined development which lasts practically forever. During the course of development, the Buddhist goes through successive rebirths, each time gaining more power, strength, and wisdom. This development continues, the Buddhist all the while progressively reaching a state of perfection.

We see that the Bodhisattva thought is the highest thought. It not only avoids the hurt or harm, cruelty or oppression and depreciation but also wishes to help all beings to escape from the sufferings in the *samsāra*. “The Bodhisattva’s great compassion is awakened in ten ways; when he sees beings without refuge, when he sees them led into a wicked way, when he observes them poor and without a stock of merit, when he sees them sleeping in the midst of *samsāra*, when he sees them practicing evil, when he sees them bound by desire, when he sees them drowning in the ocean of *samsāra*, when he sees them suffering incurable diseases, when he sees them showing no ambition to do good, and when he sees them altogether going astray from the Dharma of all Buddhas.” (*Avata saka Sūtra*)

Violence is potential in most situations in human life. It could be avoided by the development of compassion of Bodhisattva. From the compassion, we are sympathetic and full of forgiveness. Altruism was stressed, based on the virtue of compassion. In today’s society, which the conflict between countries, religions is developing, the compassion, the forgiveness is what saves us. In the world situation driven by terrorism, the love, the forgiveness abolishes the hatred of man by man. The society when it is advanced and when individuals are disciplined made knowledgeable, skilful and wise invent and resort to numerous alternatives eschewing violence. The Buddhist way of life emphasizes the provision of sufficient room for such alternatives in practical life instead of encouraging the selection of violence which brings with it a train of consequences causing the destruction of both oneself and others.

SOLUTION FOR ENVIRONMENT CRISIS

Buddhism view about animals is quite different from that of other religions, in which animals are considered as existing only for the use of man and having no rights of their own. However individual animals may be treated in the East, often thoughtlessly and cruelly, it is true, the teaching concerning them in Buddhism is that they also are possessed of the Buddha-nature, and in due time destined for Buddhahood. It is for this reason that their spirits as well as those of human beings are remembered in memorial services for the dead. Just as man has to suffer in this world and often has to sacrifice himself and all he holds dear, so with animals. In this aspect of the universe called *samsāra* they cannot escape suffering, yet it is our duty as Buddhists to recognize and respect their Buddha-nature and to treat them as kindly as possible. Not only animals but plants, and indeed all forms of life, possess the Buddha-nature. Mercy and compassion in Buddhism are to be practiced towards all sentient beings, whether human, superhuman or subhuman. In Buddhist teaching we read that the Buddha himself takes the form of an animal when skilful means seems to require it. This is a beautiful conception of Buddhism. It is to be desired that all Buddhists bear it in mind and practice the *Pāramitās* in their thoughts and actions to the outside world, including animals and plants.

Environmental crisis is a big problem people in the world. In the sphere of economic activity, neither free markets nor centrally controlled economies have been reliable able to stop the increase in environmental pollutions that threatens the health of the earth. The profit motive that drives the world's economies can do little to stop the dangerous national rivalries and social inequities that threaten the viability of human civilization. Economic activity based on greed and competition can never be the basis of a peaceful, healthy and happy world. This is also the result of the dark side economic development, which is very harmful; because it is the result of the lack of responsibility toward environment of people which may bring mass-destruction to human beings in a dark perspective future. So the protection of environment is the necessary work.

Twentieth-century society aimed for affluence. This was affluence in terms of the values of industrial society, which is, material affluence, economic affluence. The big problem is the way that economic affluence has dramatically enlarged global disparities. In some countries each family member own a car and people use oil like water; but there are also people who live in absolute poverty and do not know where their next meal is coming from. Can such a world actually be called affluent?

Another is the “economization” of our society and our consciousness. Economic values make up only one aspect of the array of values. But from the “macro” level of international politics down to the “micro” level of personal identity, economic values have prevailed. The globalization now underway is, basically, economic globalization. Money rules the world, knowing no borders. If the world’s investors frown upon a particular country its stock prices fall, the economy slumps, and the government is endangered. Politics is subordinated to economy. The value of our life has also been economized. Our annual income is our value; our value as a commodity predominates. The harmful effects of our erosion by economy are vast. Annually in the world, there are more than some ten thousand people have committed suicide as it struggles with recession. About two-third of these suicides had been made redundant by their companies and killed themselves because they could not make ends meet. Almost, these facts occur in affluence countries. Why, in affluent area, do so many people have to commit suicide for such a reason? It is because of the economization of their self-awareness, their sense that as they were judged to have lost their value as commodities they had also lost their value as individuals.

The premise of the neo-liberal world is that equal competition exists and that those who win are entitled to take the spoils. In reality, however, there is no such thing as equal competition. In this period, people who are handicapped domestically or internationally are branded losers and their wretched status is judged to be their just deserts for having lost out in competition. We can say this is the spiritual crisis in the economy of global society. The harmful effects of these facts are the violence,

terrorism and suicide, which is happened and happening uninterrupted in the present world. In this circumstance, the compassion had the effect like solution to relieve injury. People, who were spiritual crisis, will feel relieved. Their mind had the sanctuary. They live the best and highest life, getting the most out of life.

In absolute poverty countries, the role of Buddhist monks is also very important. Bodhisattva idea itself helps them to fall in line with society. They can take part in social activities in order to help the society developing.

“Good man! In a certain world, the Seeing-World-Voice Bodhisattva takes the shape of a Buddha and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the Buddha. He takes the shape of a *Pratyekabuddha* and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the *Pratyekabuddha*. He takes the shape of a *Śrāvaka* and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the *Śrāvaka*. He takes the shape of King Brahman and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by King Brahman. He takes the shape of King *Śakra* and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by King *Śakra*. He takes the shape of the Liberty God and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the Liberty God. He takes the shape of a great general in heaven and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by a great general in heaven. He takes the shape of *Vaiśrava a* and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by *Vaiśrava a*. He takes the shape of the king of a small country and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the king of the small country. He takes the shape of a rich man and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the rich man. He takes the shape of a householder and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the householder. He takes the shape of a prime minister and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the prime minister. He takes the shape of a *brāhma a* and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the *brāhma a*. He takes the shape of a *bhik u* or of a *bhik u ī* or of an *upāsaka* or of an *upāsikā* and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the *bhik u* or *bhik u ī* or *upāsaka* or *upāsikā*. He takes the shape of a wife and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the wife of a rich man or of

a householder or of a prime minister or of *brāhmaṇa*. He takes the shape of a boy or of a girl and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the boy or the girl. He takes the shape of a god or of a dragon or of a *yakṣa* or of a *gandharva* or of an *asura* or of a *garuḍa* or of a *kimnara* or of a *mahoraga* or of a human being or of a nonhuman being and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by one or other of these living beings. He takes the shape of the *vajra-Holding God* and expounds the law to those who are to be saved by the *vajra-Holding God*.”

“Endless-intent! This Seeing-World-Voice Bodhisattva does these meritorious deeds. He takes various shapes, walks about many worlds, and saves the living beings [of those worlds]. Make offerings to the Seeing-World-Voice Bodhisattva with all your heart! This Seeing-World-Voice Bodhisattva *mahāsattva* gives fearlessness [to those who are] in fearful emergencies. Therefore, he is called the ‘Giver of Fearlessness’ in this *Sahā*-World.”⁶

The teaching of the Buddha is truly a message of peace and happiness for everyone in this world. It appeared and lived strongly over 2,500 years. No doubt its spirit has been absorbed by majority of people in the world. Its true values are the great contribution to human kind. These values are still preserved and develop in future. As Albert Einstein, a scientific genius, said: “The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It will have to transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Encompassing both the natural and the spiritual, it will have to be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, considered as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. . . . If there is any religion that could respond to the needs of modern science, it would be Buddhism. Buddhism requires no revision surrender its views to science, because it embraces science as well as goes beyond science.”⁷

⁶ Senchu Murano, *The Sutra of the Lotus flower of the wonderful law*, translated from Kumārajīva’s version of *The Saddharmapuṣṭaka-Sūtra*, Tokyo: Nichiren Shu Headquarters, 1974. Chapter 25, pp. 289-90.

⁷ Quoted by Thinley Norbu in “Welcoming Flowers” from *Across the Cleansed Threshold of Hope: An answer to Pope’s Criticism of Buddhism* (New York: Jewel Publishing House, 1997)