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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa

Summary

This article includes some of the Buddha's Teachings on peace which show that peace is the heart of what it means to understand and practice Buddhism. The Buddhist way of life is to create peace, both within ourselves and in all our dealings with the world we live in.

Many of the quotes in the Buddha's words show us that an individual's true long-term wellbeing and happiness can only be achieved through harmlessness with understanding.

Buddha's Teachings on Peace from the Buddhist Scriptures

The Buddha's Teachings on peace can be found throughout the Buddhist scriptures or Buddhist canon. The original collections of Buddhist scriptures are vast and exist within each of the three major traditions of Buddhism.

The oldest collection of these scriptures, some dating from just after the Buddha passed away, is known as the Pali Tripitaka and records the life and Teachings of the Buddha. The word Pali refers to the Pali language spoken at the time of the Buddha.

The Pali Tripitaka consists of 40 volumes divided into three types of Teachings.

The first collection of the Tripitaka is known as the Vinaya or monastic rules of training and discipline taught by the Buddha to His Monks and Nuns. The second collection is known in the Pali language as "sutta's" or more commonly referred to as sutra's which is the Sanskrit name.

The sutta's are a historical record of many Teachings given by the Buddha to his community of Monks and Nuns who we call the Sangha, and his layperson disciples, and others, such as heavenly beings or Devas who came to The Buddha to ask his advice and learn about His Teachings.

The Third collection is known as the Abhidhamma. The Abhidhamma is a series of texts which set out the Buddha's Teachings in the form of an analysis of the absolute nature of the physical world or as we would say "materiality", and the absolute nature of the mental world including all types of mental phenomena, or as we would say "mind".

It is the second of these groupings, the sutta's or sutra's which will be the source scriptures used for this discussion about the Buddha's Teachings on peace. As the sutta's are our historical record of the Buddha's Teachings in his own words most of the quotes that follow are what the Buddha himself said regarding peace.

The Buddha lived in Northern India about 2,600 years ago. He was born as a Prince in the Kingdom of Kapilavastu and his family was from a warrior caste.

By way of introduction to his Teachings on peace, it is emphasized that peace is the central tenant of the religion of The Buddha, who came to be known as the "santiraja" or Prince of Peace.

To quote Professor K.N. Jayatillake in his publication title "Buddhism and Peace" first printed in 1962:

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 nibbana" (or in Sanskrit nirvana). On the other hand, the practice of the good life is said to consist in "sama-cariya" or "harmonious, peaceful living", with one's fellow beings'.

The Buddha preached non-violence and peace as a universal message. He did not "approve of violence or the destruction of life, and declared that there is no such thing as a "just" war. (1)

From the Dhammapada we read the Buddha's words:

"Victory breeds hatred,
The defeated live in pain.
Happily the peaceful live,
Giving up victory and defeat." (2)

Also from the Dhammapada we read:

"Not by hating hatred ceases
In this world of tooth and claw;
Love alone from hate releases
This is Eternal Law" (3)

And from the Sangama Sutta we read :

“Killing you gain your killer,
Conquering, you gain one who will conquer you;
Insulting, insult;
Harassing, harassment” (4)

This last quote from the Sangama Sutta introduces a fundamental Teaching of the Buddha which is the Law of Karma.

The Buddha had witnessed at the time of His Enlightenment that the whole process of birth, life and death was being governed by natural laws. Just as we have identified in detail through science the physical laws of nature which determine much of how our physical world operates, the Buddha's

Enlightened mind perceived directly the highest reality - that mind and life itself operate according to natural laws, including the Law of Cause and Effect, or karma.

The Law of Cause and Effect as expounded by the Buddha states that all our actions of thought, speech and body create karma or causes that will be inherited at some future time. The Buddha's Teachings on peace follow directly from this understanding.

We read his words as follows (SN):

“And so, through the cycle of action,
He who has plundered
Gets plundered in turn.

A fool thinks,
Now is my chance,”
As long as his evil has yet to ripen.
But when it ripens,
the fool falls into pain” (5)

Any actions done by an individual or group of individuals (such as a government for example) which cause harm or suffering to others will lead to suffering for the doer or doers of the action. The Buddha advises the only thing that will cease hatred is love. This is the ultimate basis of peace according to the Buddha.

In “Buddhism and Peace” Professor K.N. Jayatillake writes that:

“When the Buddha's disciple Ananda suggested to him that half of the religion of the Buddha consisted in the practice of friendliness, the Buddha's rejoinder was that it was not half but the whole of the religion. It was this emphasis on compassion which made it possible for Buddhism to spread its message over the greater part of Asia, without resorting to military force or political power.

It is the proud boast of Buddhism that not a drop of blood has been shed in propagating its message and no wars have been fought for the cause of Buddhism or the Buddha". It was able to convert people to its view by its reasonableness and the inspiring example of those who preached it". (6)

From the very first when Buddha sent his first missionaries out to work for the welfare of mankind, he spoke these words:

"Go forth, O Monks, and wander for the gain of many, for the welfare of the many, in compassion for the world, for the good, for the welfare of gods and men, proclaim the Dharma, the doctrine, preach a life of homelessness, perfect and pure." (7)

"According to this advice, the Buddha wanted to tell people the difference between good and bad and he wanted to teach them how to lead a happy, peaceful and righteous life. But he never mentioned his disciples should go and convert them to Buddhism." (8)

The Buddha also gave his advice for a peaceful harmonious society to some of his followers who were kings and rulers at the time in the form of guidance for governing which would bring about a peaceful society. The Buddha stated there is no happiness without peace.

"In the Kutadanta Sutta, the Buddha suggested economic development instead of force to reduce crime. The government should use the country's resources to improve the economic conditions of the country. It could embark on agricultural and rural development, provide financial support to entrepreneurs and business, provide adequate wages for workers to maintain a decent life with human dignity.

In the Jataka Tales, the Buddha had given ten rules for Good Government, known as "Dasa Raja Dharma". These ten rules can be applied even today by any government which wishes to rule the country peacefully. The rules are as follows:

1. Be liberal and avoid selfishness
2. Maintain a high moral character
3. Be prepared to sacrifice one's own pleasure for the well-being of the citizens
4. Be honest and maintain absolute integrity
5. Be kind and gentle
6. Lead a simple life for the citizens to emulate
7. Be free from hatred of any kind
8. Exercise non-violence
9. Practice patience, and
10. Respect public opinion to promote peace and harmony" (9)

One of the greatest rulers recorded in the history of humanity ruled over a kingdom of sustained peace and prosperity in ancient India from circa 269 BCE to 232 BCE. This was King Asoka.

“Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history. They shone for a brief moment and quickly disappeared. But Ashoka shines and shines brightly like a bright star”

- HG Wells, British Historian.

King Asoka based his government on the guidelines set out by the Buddha and dedicated his reign to the betterment, wellbeing and happiness of his people.

“The Venerable King Asoka repeatedly declared, he understood Dhamma to be the energetic practice of the socio-moral virtues of honesty, truthfulness, compassion, mercifulness, benevolence, non-violence, considerate behaviour towards all, “little wrong and many good deeds” non-extravagance, non-acquisitiveness, and non-injury to animals.” (10)

However, the thrust of Buddha’s Teachings is not directed to the creation of political arrangements or equitable sharing of resources. In the words of one great contemporary Buddhist Monk the Late Venerable K. Sri Dhammanada:

“No political system can bring about peace and happiness as long as the people in the system are dominated by greed hate and delusion.... Freedom cannot be found in any system but only in minds which are free.... To be free people will have to look within their own minds and work towards freeing themselves from the chains of ignorance and craving” (11)

The central message of the Buddha to the world in his words is :

“To avoid all evil
To cultivate good
Purify your mind
This is the Teaching of the Buddha’s”. (12)

Again from the Dhammapada we read in the Buddha’s words:

“All phenomena are preceded by (the activity of) the mind, have as their chief agent, the mind; and are made up of the mind. If one were to speak or act with a polluted mind, sorrow follows one even as the cart-wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the cart.

All phenomena are preceded by (the activity of) the mind, have as their chief agent, the mind; and are made up of the mind. If one were to

Speak or act with a pure mind, happiness follows one even as the shadow that never leaves one. (13)

In these words are the essence of peace as described by The Buddha. The peace we produce within ourself.

Accordingly, The Buddha advises his followers to live a life of harmlessness as follows:

“Better, indeed, is the conquest of self than of all other folk” (14)

“The followers of Gotama (the Buddha’s name) whose minds are constantly bent on ahimsa (harmlessness) day and night, awake clear and alert. (15)

The Buddha’s Teachings advise that harmlessness is the root of all virtues:

“A person given to harmfulness has harmlessness to lead him upward” (16)

“Harmlessness has the characteristic mark of making one refrain from immorality which, on its part has the mark of harming. Hence harmlessness is an especially strong cause of morality; and morality, again, is the basis of concentration of mind, while concentration of mind is the basis for wisdom. In that way harmlessness (non violence) is the root of all virtues. (17)

In the Buddha’s advice to one of his Monks named Cunda on how he should practice to come to the correct view of reality the Buddha says:

“But herein, Cunda, effacement should be practiced by you: (effacement meaning to wipe out, to do away with)

Others will be harmful; we shall not be harmful here – thus effacement can be done.

Others will kill living beings; we shall abstain from killing living beings here - thus effacement can be done.

Others will speak harshly; we shall abstain from harsh speech - thus effacement can be done.

Others will speak falsehood; we shall abstain from false speech here - thus effacement can be done.

Others will have thoughts of ill will; we shall not have thoughts of ill will here – thus effacement can be done.

Others will commit wrong actions; we shall not commit wrong actions here; thus effacement can be done. (18)

And in one of the more graphic examples of Buddha's advice to his Monks taken from the Mahajhima Nikaya 21:

"Even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handed saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding. Even then you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of good will, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with good will and, beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with good will — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.' That's how you should train yourselves."

In another discourse, a local Indian ruler, King Pasenadi comes to the Buddha and reports his own independent observation:

"Those who engage in bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct leave themselves unprotected. Even though a squadron of elephant troops might protect them, a squadron of cavalry troops, a squadron of chariot troops, a squadron of infantry troops might protect them, still they leave themselves unprotected. Why is that? Because that's an external protection, not an internal one. Therefore, they leave themselves unprotected. But those who engage in good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct have themselves protected. Even though neither a squadron of elephant troops, a squadron of cavalry troops, a squadron of chariot troops, nor a squadron of infantry troops might protect them, still they have themselves protected. Why is that? Because that's an internal protection, not an external one. Therefore, they have themselves protected." (19)

And finally we read from the Dhammapada :

"Conquer anger by non-anger. Conquer evil by good. Conquer miserliness by liberality. Conquer a liar by truthfulness". (20)

"Let a man remove his anger. Let him root out his pride. Let him overcome all fetters of passions. No sufferings overtake him who neither clings to mind-and-body nor claims anything of the world." (21)

The Buddha was uncompromising in his Teachings to abstain from all forms

of harm and violence, not only to others but to ourselves. According to the Buddha suffering can be entirely overcome but only through a path of harmlessness to ourselves and others and practicing Buddhists put this first and foremost in how we live our daily life.

We can read and consider the Buddha's original words on how we can cultivate and develop loving kindness in our own hearts. It is called the Metta Sutta.

Metta Sutta

This is what should be done by one skilled in good,
Who would attain that state of peace:
He or she should be able upright truly straight,
And meek and gentle and not proud,
Contented, easy to support,
With few duties and frugal habits,
Calm in faculties and discrete,
Not puffed up, not greedy among lay supporters.
And let him or her not do even the slightest thing
That later on the wise may blame.
(He or she should contemplate;) may they be happy hearted.
Whatever living beings there are -
Weak or strong, omitting none,
Those which are long or great,
Middle sized, short, subtle or gross,
And those which are seen, or the unseen,
And those which dwell far or near,
Beings and those who wish to be -
All beings may they be happy-hearted!
Let none another deceive,
Or with anger or thoughts of hate,
Wish dukkha for each other.
Thus as a mother with her son,
Might guard with her life her only child,

in the same way with all beings
Unlimited one's mind should be developed.
Loving kindness for all the world -
Unlimited one's mind should be developed -
Above, below, and all around,
Uncramped without malice or enmity.
Standing or walking, seated too,
And lying while free from drowsiness,
He or she should stand firm in this mindfulness,
This is divine abiding they say.
And not going to views,
Virtuous and possessed of insight,
Having removed greed for sensual pleasures,
He or she will surely come no more to any womb.
May I be well and happy! May all beings be well and happy!

This article was compiled by Anita and Frank Carter

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