Buddhist Propagation for World Peace¹

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We have assembled here for the Buddhist Summit, the Second World Buddhist Propagation Conference (WBPC), to explore ways and means of propagating Buddhism for the sake of world peace. Buddhism originated in India and then spread over the world so that today there are Buddhists of many different nationalities and languages. Our similarities make it easy for us to come together, like we have done today. I am very happy to stand before my many Buddhist brothers and sisters. This conference is like a family reunion.

We all come from different countries and regions; this shows that Buddhism has traveled from its birthplace in India, to many parts of the globe. This phenomenon has developed over the last 2,500 years. If the Buddha and his followers had not propagated their teachings, the world would not have received the nourishing waters of noble Buddhist civilization. The propagation of Buddhism has brought great benefit to the people of the world, but this humanitarian effort has not been, at all, easy. As the Buddha taught, through the famous words in the Dhammapada:

Kiccho manussapatilabho Hard is it to be born human Kiccham maccana jivitam Hard is the life of mortals

Kiccham saddhammasavanam Hard is it to hear the sublime truth

Kiccho buddhanamuppado Hard is the arising of the Buddhasⁱ

The Necessity of Propagation with Compassion

It is difficult to hear the Buddha's teachings because hearing those teachings requires that they be propagated. The teachings can be propagated only after the appearance of a Buddha in the world. The appearance of a Buddha gives the light of the Dhamma to the people of the world. The Buddha likened the arising of a Buddha to that of the Sun and the Moon in the sky when he said:

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So long as the moon and the sun arise in the world, then is there a shining forth of great light, of great radiance. At that time there is no more gloom and darkness, no more of the murk of gloom and darkness, but one can tell whether it is night or day.

Just so, Bhikkhus, so long as the Buddha arises in the world, then is there a shining forth of great light, of great radiance.ⁱⁱ

This saying likens the birth of a Buddha to the appearance of the Sun and the Moon. The Nenbutsushu Buddhists Sect of Japan has selected the Sun and the Moon as its symbol – and now we know that it symbolizes the meaning of this saying: the Sun and the Moon point to the Buddha himself.

Even though the Buddha did arise in the world, hearing the teachings of the Buddha would not have been easy if he had not propagated them; the people of the world would not have encountered the light of the Dhamma. Even though the Buddha did propagate his teachings at first, if the succeeding generations had not worked together to propagate that Dhamma, Buddhism would not have been passed down to our generation. Just so, to propagate Buddhism today is to extend the Buddhist Era and to help sustain Buddhism in the World.

Buddhist propagation begins with a heart filled with the compassionate wish to help all living beings go beyond suffering through the light of the Dhamma. If there were no suffering in the world, there would be no need for a Buddha to arise; there would be no need for the light of the Dhamma to shine forth. However, since there is suffering in our world, the Buddha arises, the Dhamma shines forth.

Not long after His Enlightenment, the Buddha pondered his discoveries, and thought that these enlightened truths were subtle and difficult for anyone to know and follow, and so he hesitated to propagate the Dhamma. As he told the story:

At that tine, Brama Sahampati, knew what was in my mind... He spoke to me thus, 'Venerable Sir, let the Lord teach Dhamma, let the Well-farer teach Dhamma; there are beings with little dust in their eyes who, not hearing Dhamma, are decaying, but if they were learners of Dhamma, they would grow.

The Buddha accepted the invitation of this Brahma and, with his mind full of compassion for all beings, began to preach the Dhamma for the world. In fact, it was out of his compassion for all living beings that the Buddha propagated the Dhamma. Compassion, then, is an important virtue for those who propagate the Buddha's teachings.

For his first sermon, the Buddha delivered the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta to the five ascetics. That sermon was the first turning of the Dhammacakka - the Wheel of

Dhamma. Since then, the Dhammacakka has been steadily in motion. No one can stop it. As it is said at the end of the sutta:

'When the Buddha had rolled the Dhamma wheel, gods made this sound heard: 'The supreme Dhamma wheel, rolled thus by the Buddha at Benares, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, cannot be rolled back by a recluse or a Brahmin or a god or by Mara, or by Brahma, or by anyone in the world. 'V

The Wheel of Dhamma has turned throughout the world due to the efforts to propagate Buddhism in many directions by many generations of missionaries. These efforts have led Buddhism to thrive beyond India.

Today, the Buddhists of the world accept the Dhammacakka or the wheel of Dhamma as the symbol of the propagation of Buddhism.

Propagation in Peace – for the Welfare of All:

The monks who have taken on the task of spreading Buddhism must have, as their foundation, hearts filled with wholesome desire for the benefit and happiness of all people. In doing this, they follow the injunction with which the Buddha sent forth his first group of sixty Arahant-monks to propagate the way of Buddhism, "Bhikkhus! May each one of you go forth for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the benefit and the happiness of gods and humanity."

The Buddha's intention in sending out his followers to propagate Buddhism was for the benefit and happiness of the people and for the welfare of the world. There was no use of force to convert people to Buddhism. The approach is to persuade people to have faith in the way of the Buddha; that is to be 'without evil speech, without evil actions', as the Buddha instructed his followers in the Ovadapatimokkha. In other words, missionary monks must go about their work peacefully, even in situations which would normally incite violence. They must have the highest degree of tolerance and self-restraint. The Buddha encouraged his monks to have the virtue of tolerance, as with the following story of Punna Bhikkhu:

One time, a monk named Punna came to the Buddha and respectfully said farewell; he intended to go and to teach the people of the country named Sunaparanta.

The Buddha said to him, "Punna, the people of Sunaparanta are fierce and rough. If they threaten and abuse you, what will you think about that?"

Punna respectfully replied, 'Venerable Sir, if the people of Sunaparanta threaten and abuse me, I shall think, 'These people of Sunaparanta are excellent in that they did not attack me with the fist.'

The Buddha then said, 'Punna, suppose [they] attack you with the fist, what will you think about that?'

Punna replied, 'Venerable Sir if [they] attack me with the fist, I shall think: 'These people of Sunaparanta are excellent, in that they did not attack me with the clod.'

The Buddha then said, 'Punna, suppose [they] attack you with the clod, what will you think about that?'

Punna respectfully replied, 'Venerable Sir, if [they] attack me with the clod, I shall think: 'These people... are excellent, in that they did not attack me with the stick.'

The Buddha then said, 'Punna, suppose [they] attack you with the stick, what will you think about that?'

Punna respectfully replied, 'Venerable Sir, if [they] attack me with the stick, I shall think [these] people... are excellent in that they did not attack me with the knife.'

The Buddha then said, 'Punna, suppose [they] attack you with the knife, what will you think about that?'

Punna respectfully replied, 'Venerable Sir, if [they] attack me with the knife, I shall think [these] people... are excellent in that they did not take my life with a sharp knife.'

The Buddha then said, 'Punna, suppose the people of Sunaparanta do take your life with a sharp knife, what will you think about that?'

Punna respectfully replied, 'Venerable Sir, if the people of Sunaparanta do take my life with a sharp knife, then I shall think thus: 'There have been disciples of the Buddha who, being repelled, and disgusted by the body and by life, have sought weapons to commit suicide. But I have obtained this weapon and have been killed without making any effort.' Then, I shall think thus.

"Good, Good, Punna! Possessing such self-control and peacefulness, you will be able to live in the Sunaparanta country."

[It is mentioned that Arahant Punna gained a thousand disciples in the Sunaparanta country, but was later murdered].

Buddhism, the Religion of Peace:

This story in the Pali Tipitaka indicates that the Buddha encouraged his followers to propagate Buddhism in a peaceful way. The main message that the Buddha has sent to the world through missionary monks is peace (Santi). Peace is the goal of the good life in Buddhism. As the Buddha said, "natti santiparam sukham" – 'there is no higher bliss than peace.' Buddhism therefore is a religion of peace. Sunderland has pointed out, "Buddhism has taught peace more strongly among its followers, more effectively, during all its history, than has any other great religious faith in the world."

Having good credentials, Buddhists are well qualified to collaborate and to partner with the United Nations for the achievement of world peace. This idea came into my mind when I attended the historic World Peace Summit, wonderfully organized by our friends here, Dena Merriam and Bawa Jain, at the United Nations, 28-31 August 2000. Our Buddhist Summit, though being held independently, shares the same goals with the World Peace Summit – to make a united effort for the achievement of peace. The Buddhist leaders gathering here can join with the United Nations in 'the commitment to dialogue where there are differences, to refrain from violence, to practice compassion and respect, and to uphold the dignity of all life.'

The primary function of the Untied Nations, as is the mission of Buddhism, is the achievement of peace. The ultimate goal of the United Nations, according to their Charter:

...to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights... $^{\times}$

The term *peace*, here, has both negative and positive meanings. In its negative sense, peace is an absence not only of war and conflict, but also of 'structural violence' such as social injustice, social inequality, the violation of human rights, the destruction of ecological balance, etc. In its positive sense, peace means the presence of unity, harmony, freedom and justice. Thus the concept of peace encompasses within itself the absence of conflict as well as the presence of harmony. Viewed in this way, the five themes of our group discussions in the Buddhist Summit fall within the scope of peace; they are: (1) Buddhist Unity, (2) Buddhism and World Peace, (3) Buddhist Education, (4) Buddhist Propagation, and (5) Buddhism and Social Welfare.

The Environmental Crisis:

If Buddhists thoroughly followed the Dhamma preached by the Buddha, then there would be peaceful coexistence not only among human beings, but also among human beings, animals and the natural environment. We all realize that the world today is facing an environmental crisis arising from environmental pollution and over-exploitation of natural resources. This crisis has aroused the concerns of nearly every human being. If we allow the crisis to continue unchecked, not only will the beauty of the environment be gradually destroyed, but also its capacity to sustain life will be seriously threatened and human beings will be in danger of losing their humanity. In order to survive, humans have to change attitudes towards nature. The natural world does not need to change in order to survive. It will survive with or without humans.

Because of a growing concern with environmental issues, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was created in 1972. UNEP established, through the General Assembly, a World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983.

For Buddhism to be relevant to the world today, Buddhist leaders must be able to address ecological problems. It is time for us to join with the United Nations in the call for Buddhists communities to realize the urgent need to care for the natural environment and to ask that environmental protection and restoration be integral to all development planning and activity. The aim is for all kinds of development to be sustainable. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development, 'sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'^{xi}

One of the main causes of environmental crisis is humanity's search for mastery over nature. Industrial society was developed on the wrong assumption that nature must be conquered and made subservient to the satisfaction of human desires. Such an assumption has shaped human's aggressive attitudes towards nature. It is here that Buddhism can have a role to play in helping to reshape ecological world-views. Buddhism can provide the world with rich sources of material advocating harmonious and peaceful coexistence between humanity and the natural world. It is in this area that Buddhism is in a strong position to broaden human attitudes toward the natural world. This is due to the fact that Buddhism has taught its followers a view of human beings, nature, and their relationship that is fundamentally ecological. The Buddhist insight into the interdependence of all conditioned things is supportive of environmental care.

According to Buddhism, all things exist only interdependently, not independently. This is the gist of the Buddhist Law of Nature (Dhamma-niyama) governing the relationship and interdependence of all things. Is is also known as the law of dependent origination (Paticcasamuppada).

Buddhist Attitudes toward Nature:

Looking at the world as interdependent, Buddhists develop a sense of responsibility, gratitude and compassion toward nature. In order to cultivate harmonious and peaceful coexistence with the natural world, three virtues are to be developed in our minds^{xii}:

- 1. Wisdom (Panna) is the realization that everything in the world is interdependent.
- 2. Purity (Suddhi) is the state of mind purified of greed, which causes environmental pollution and over-exploitation of the natural resources.
- 3. Compassion (Karuna) is sympathy toward animals and the natural environment.

Buddhism thus teaches its followers to act with compassion and gratitude toward the natural world. It is narrated in the Mahavanijja Jataka that a company of merchants once went astray in the forest without food or water, and after seeing a huge banyan tree with moist branches, they cut off a branch and water poured out, from another cut branch came food. Overcome by greed, they cut the tree from its roots to get even more. The merchants in this Jataka story were admonished by the Buddha, 'The tree that gives you pleasant shade, to sit or lie at need, you should not tear its branches down. One who harms his friend (the banyan tree) is cruel indeed.'xiii

It is interesting to note that the Buddha's life had a close relationship with trees. He was born under a sala tree, attained the Enlightenment under a bodhi tree and passed away under another sala tree. Before attaining Enlightenment, Siddhattha Gotama found that good environment helps to facilitate meditation practice and therefore chose a location with natural beauty suitable for practicing meditation. As the Buddha said:

Searching for the incomparable, matchless path to peace, I walked on tour through Magadha and in due course arrived at Uruvela, the camp township. There I saw a delightful stretch of land and a lovely woodland grove, and a clear flowing river with a delightful ford, and a village for support nearby. It occurred to me: 'Indeed, it is a delightful stretch of land and the woodland grove is lovely, and the river flows clear with a delightful ford, and there is a village for support nearby. Indeed, this place is good for the religious practice of a young man set on practice.' So I sat down just there, thinking: 'Indeed, this place is good for striving for enlightenment.**

The early Buddhist monasteries, during the Buddha's time, were located in the forest and in mountainous areas. Depending on nature, monks developed a great appreciation and respect for the beauty of their natural surroundings. They found that natural beauty was necessary for meditation practice. Even meditation centers in present-day Thailand are located in natural surroundings consisting of trees, rivers, mountains and animals. Natural beauty is very useful for cultivating mental purity. When a meditation practitioner looks yellow leaves falling from a tree, at that particular moment the yogi may realize the truth that all conditioned things are impermanent (anicca). Those who practice meditation in air conditioned rooms do not have such an advantage.

Buddhism teaches its followers to hold great respect for and to feel gratitude toward nature. Having cultivated wisdom, purity and compassion towards nature through the practice of meditation, one purifies the mind of the desire for mastery over nature and, as a result, can have a harmonious and peaceful co-existence with the natural world. Such a

friendly attitude toward nature is well expressed in the following story, drawn from a Japanese Haiku^{xv}:

When asked: 'what will you do if your cuckoo doesn't sing?' – three men gave different answers, in different ways.

The first man says: "The cuckoo doesn't sing – alright, kill it at once!"

The second man says: "The cuckoo doesn't sing – alright, I will make it sing!"

The third man says: The cuckoo doesn't sing – alright, I will wait till it sings!"

The first man in this story is very aggressive because his mind is full of hatred (dosa); whereas, the second man's mind is full of greed (lobha), or desire for mastery over nature. The third man, cultivating wisdom and purity of mind, holds respect of and compassion towards the bird; and therefore represents the Buddhist attitude toward nature.

Comprehensive Development:

Buddhists develop respect for and compassion toward the natural world because they look at everything as interrelated: nothing exists in isolation. According to the Buddhist law of nature, mind and body are interdependent. Both of them have to be developed together. For development to be sustainable, it must be comprehensive – it must take into account all the physical, social, mental, and intellectual aspects of human lives. The four aspects are^{xvi}:

- 1. Physical Development (kaya-bhavana) is the development of the body as well as its material or physical environment. It is to be realized by practicing the Buddha's teachings, which deal with physical, economic and environmental aspects of life.
- 2. Social Development (Sila-bhavana) is the development of a good and friendly relationship with other people in order that a desirable society with a food social environment may be established in the world. It is to be realized by observing the precepts (sila) and by following the Buddha's teachings on social justice.
- 3. Mental Development (Citta-bhavana) is the development of such good mental qualities as love, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, mindfulness, and concentration. The practice of concentrative-meditation (Samatha-bhavana) enables one to possess these mental qualities and purify the mind of all hindrances.
- 4. Intellectual Development (Panna-bhavana) is the development of wisdom or the faculty of knowing things as they really are. It is achieved through the practice of insight meditation (Vipassana-bhavana).

Physical development and social development are necessary for the achievement of outer peace – peaceful co-existence with other human beings and the natural environment.

Mental development and intellectual development are necessary for the realization of inner peace or peace of mind. These four aspects of development have together so that we can achieve a balanced development in our lives. To emphasize only one of these aspects at the expense of the others may make us slip into one of two extreme positions. A person who is obsessed with physical and social development, neglecting mental and intellectual development, may fall into the extreme of sensual indulgence; whereas, a person obsessed with mental and intellectual development at the expense of physical and social development, may fall into the extreme of self-torture. The middle-way consists of the balanced development of these four aspects of life.

Viewed in this way, economic development, which belongs to the first aspect of development, cannot be ignored. The main reason is that if a person is hungry, then he will not be able to study and practice the Dhamma.

Once the Buddha went to Alavi to preach the Dhamma to a certain poor man. The poor man went to seek his ox, which was lost – and the Buddha waited for him to return. When he returned, the Buddha observing that he was hungry, directed that food be given to him. The monks questioned why the Buddha gave the order to feed the poor man. The Buddha explained that the man would not be able to realize the Dhamma when he was hungry. The Buddha then said, 'Hunger is the greatest of all diseases.'xvii

Sufficiency Economy as Advocated by His Majesty, the King:

To fight against hunger and poverty, the Buddha gave a set of teachings, which become a guideline for Buddhist economics. Following the Buddha's teachings on economic issues, His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand graciously delivered a Royal Speech on sufficiency economy to the entire nation in December of 1997. Since then, the principles of sufficiency economy have been followed by various agencies in Thailand to rescue the country from economic crisis. His Majesty, the King elaborated on the meaning of the word 'sufficiency' by saying that it means having enough to live on and to live for.

Having enough to live on and to live for means sufficiency. If everybody has enough to live on and to live for, that is good. And if the whole nation reaches that status, that is even better.

His Majesty, the King explained further, by contrasting his concept of sufficiency with the meaning of the word 'sufficiency' in English:

Sufficiency, in English, means that whatever we produce, we have enough for our own use. We do not have to borrow from other people. We can rely on ourselves, as people say: 'we can stand on our own two feet'. But sufficiency carries

a broader meaning. It means having enough and being satisfied with their needs, they will be less greedy. With less greed, they will cause less trouble to other people.

If any country values this idea of doing what is necessary just to have enough, being satisfied at a moderate level, being honest and not being greedy, its people will be happy.

Being sufficient does not restrict people from having much, or from possessing luxurious items, but implies that one must not take advantage of others. Everything must be within its limits. Saying what is necessary, acting just as needed, and working adequately.**

Sufficiency economy as advocated by His Majesty is based on Buddhist principles of self-reliance (attanatha), self-satisfaction (santosa), moderation (mattannuta), and the middle-path (majjhimapatipada). These are the principles of Buddhist economics. Majesty, the King's advocacy of sufficiency economy encourages the Buddhist community in Thailand to return to the main values of Buddhism and to realize that economic recovery for the country is to be obtained through the study and practice of the Buddha's teachings on economic issues. By advocating the sufficiency economy, His Majesty has shown to Buddhist communities that Buddhism can be relevant to the world today. Moreover, His Majesty has done a great service for the propagation of Buddhism by translating the Mahajanaka Jataka into Thai and English, with some modifications to suit contemporary society. The translation was completed in 1988 and published in 1996. The book became a best-seller and was very popular in Thailand. In this Jataka story, the Buddhist value of perseverance (viriya - also meaning 'effort' or 'energy') is emphasized. According to the story, King Mahajanaka practices ultimate perseverance without the desire for reward which results in his gaining a throne and bringing prosperity and wealth to his kingdom. The publication was timely, as it encouraged the Thai people to endure the economic crisis and strive for economic recovery through 'pure perseverance, sharp wisdom and complete physical health.'xix

His Majesty's advocacy of sufficiency economy and his translation of the Mahajanaka story have indicated that Buddhism can be relevant to the world today if Buddhists study the basics of the Buddha's teachings and interpret them with modifications to suit contemporary society. His Majesty has represented Buddhism as a form of religious teaching and practice that provides a basis for social, political, and economic life in the modern world.

Education, Propagation and Buddhist Unity:

His Majesty's success in popularizing the main tenets of Buddhism revives Buddhist leaders' interest in the promotion of Buddhist education and in the propagation of Buddhism. Without good education, and proper training in Buddhism, Buddhists cannot succeed in propagating Buddhism. Buddhist education is a precondition for success in the propagation of Buddhism. If we want our ordained members and laity to be competent in the propagation of Buddhism, then we will have to set up and develop Buddhist educational institutions to educate Buddhist scholars who are well-versed in Buddhist scriptures and who have religious experience through meditation. I would like to see cooperation among Buddhist educational institutions throughout the world in the exchange of teachers, students, researchers and academic works. This kind of cooperation will be possible when the Buddhist Summit becomes a coordinating center of exchange programs. Unity among us is a key to success. As it was said by the Buddha: 'The unity (samaggi) of the group is conducive to happiness.'^{XX} Is it possible for Buddhist leaders throughout the world to unite and to work together for common goals?

Prospects for Unity:

At first glance, it appears difficult to unify various Buddhist leaders in the world. Unlike the followers of other world religions, Buddhists have no supreme leader officially recognized by all the Buddhist countries. This is due to the historical fact that the Buddha did not appoint a successor before he passed away. He simply said to Ananda, 'The Dhamma-Vinaya, which I have taught and enjoined you to observe is to be your teacher when I am gone.'

After the Buddha passed away, Mahakassapa Thera convened an assembly of 500 monks to recite approved scriptures and to settle doctrinal disputes. This assembly is recognized as the first council in Buddhism. Nowadays, Buddhists no longer convene councils of leaders from different traditions. Unity is to be achieved through the invention of a common platform where the Buddhists of all traditions can join together in common work. The establishment of the World Buddhist Propagation Conference, as a permanent body can serve as such a platform. It is remarkable that in this Buddhist Summit, the World Buddhist Propagation Conference, the Buddhists from both Theravada and Mahayana traditions can cooperate despite differences in view. This is unity in diversity. Let us hope that the unity of the WBPC is further strengthened so that it becomes an international organization and plays a very significant role in the promotion of world peace.

Activities of the WBPC will have more relevance to the world if it actively pursues policies on contemporary issues like world peace, human rights, environmental preservation, education, and development. Buddhism today can have something to contribute to world peace if Buddhist leaders are united and if they join with the United Nations at local, national, and international levels in cooperative efforts to achieve lasting peace. Unless the leaders of the Buddhist world are united, it is not easy for them to promote world peace. Let us not forget these words of advice, 'United we stand, divided we fall'.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Dhammapada: Verse 182

ii Samyutta-nikaya, Vol.V, 442

iii Vinaya, Vol. 4, 4

iv Vin. Vol. 4, 11

^v Vin. Vol. 4, 21

vi Dhammapada: Verse 185

vii Majjhima-Nikaya, Vol. III, 268-9

viii Dhammapada: Verse 202

^{ix} Quoted from K. Sri Dhammananda, *Great Personalities on Buddhism*, B.M.S. Publication, Malaysia, 1965, p. 77

^x Quoted from Encyclopedia Britannica CD 2000

^{xi} The World Commission on Environment and Development, Our common Future, Oxford University Press, 1987

xii Paramatthajotika, 15/147

xiii Mahavanija Jataka, No. 493

xiv Majjhima-nikaya, Vol. I, 167

xv Illustrated Who's Who of Japan, Japan Travel Bureau, 1999, pp. 74, 78, 92

xvi Anguttara-nikaya, Vol. III, 106

xvii Dhammapada: Verse 203

xviii "Sufficient Economy", The Chaipattana Foundation Journal, August 1999, pp. 54-55

xix H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, The Story of Mahajanaka, Amarin Printing, 1998, p. 11

x Itivuttaka, 25/238

xxi Digha-nikaya, Vol. III, 154