

BUILDING A HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

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It is a great honor to have been invited to address the great gathering on the exceptionally pious day. I was asked to speak on the topic of Building a Harmonious Society. At the onset, I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the honorable members of the Organizing Committee of the UN Vesak celebrations: 2011

We all know Buddhism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It is more than two and half millennium development; the contribution of Buddhism towards world culture is indeed great. I am being a humble Buddhist monk, few points will be put forward in the context of this conference will be mostly in Buddhist perspective. I am though conscious of the fact that all religions have served humanity for centuries. What I will say will be primarily to make aware the positive aspects of Buddhism and like to recapitulate the today's global scene.

As human beings, we have achieved a high level of material progress we would not have even dreamed of barely a century ago. The marvels of modern technology have given us enormous power over the forces of nature. Despite the miraculous achievement made by scientists and technologists, the suffering and miseries of humanity have not become less. On the contrary, violence, aggression, conflict, hatred, mistrust have manifested at an alarming rate. Countless human beings are tortured and killed every day across the world. No day goes by without fighting and killing. 50% of the world's economic resources are being spent for manufacturing war equipments for destructive purposes. At the same time, it is estimated that about 40,000 children die of hunger or hunger related disease every day, and more than 700 million people in the world are malnourished. Now we are competing in producing nuclear weapons, which is a plan to destroy the whole world - global destruction.

In the past, wars were fought to win but now in the nuclear wars, there will be no winner or loser left, all of us will perish. Despite amazing breakthroughs in medical science, diseases like AIDS are threatening to swamp mankind. Mental illnesses, stress and loneliness are some of the serious problem we now face in our modern society. To satisfy human greed, most of the world's forests are mercilessly being destroyed. Industrialists are polluting the air, rivers and oceans everywhere in pursuit of profits. They are ready to pollute and destroy the whole environment for their own selfish ends. This has resulted in weather conditions and the ecological balance being disturbed. Global warming (the direct result of deforestation and toxic emissions) has resulted in the rise in global temperatures, and the icecaps and glaciers are melting very quickly. Some parts of the world are experiencing deadly floods while other areas are crippled by drought. Innumerable species of wildlife have been driven to extinction because of man's lack of consideration and thought for others. In short, the growth mania has led to intensive depletion of natural balances and has upset the ecosystem resulting an insurmountable man made Dukha.

The Universal Loving Kindness and compassion is the only Panacea for the ills of today's world. The development of loving kindness softens people's hearts. In the organizations of nations, instead of providing military aid, we should give the pure aid of loving kindness to the helpless world. It is defined as the sincere wish for the welfare and genuine happiness of all mankind without distinction between others and us. "Just as a

mother protects her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so one should cultivate boundless loving-kindness towards all living beings.” This is the advice of the Buddha.

Therefore, loving kindness is not the passionate love of mother towards her child. Even so, our love towards the other nations, countries must be a sincere wish and pure love for the genuine peace and welfare of the world. We should extend the boundless universal brotherhood spirit embracing all nations, all races, all classes, and all countries without barriers in the differences of political views.

Loving-kindness (Metta) is not mere religious brotherhood spirit either. Owing to the limitations of religious disputes and the so called holy wars, are waged without the least of compassion; sincere outspoken men and women have been roasted and burnt alive. Many atrocities have been perpetrated which baffle description. Cruel wars have been waged in the marring historic pages to world history. To establish genuine peace and happiness amongst mankind, a sincere religious awakening and harmony are necessary in morally bankrupt world. So we must carefully establish a pure and useful life of love, reason and justice based on the noble principles of their respective teachers and leaders.

The Buddha addressed, “Hatred never ceases through hatred, but hatred ceases by love alone.” This is the essence of the ancient and eternal law. As the loving-kindness is a peaceful constructive force, it has the power to counteract destructive influences. Just as hateful thoughts can produce toxic effects in any system or policy, even so loving thoughts can produce healthy, wealthy mental and physical effects. The Buddha emphatically stated the importance of morality as a means to overcome all tensions and difficulties and to solve the problems of humanity. We should exercise tight thoughts of selflessness, Loving-kindness, harmlessness and non-violence. Today’s world is full of chaos, miseries, war-weariness and violence. Nations are arming themselves to their teeth. Human lives are in danger and people are frightened by the arms race between countries. These weapons are always ready to release and to kill many human lives at any moment. In fact, the world is absolutely in need of this universal loving-kindness, measureless compassion, sympathetic joy. Great tolerance and right vision require us all to live in one world of perfect peace and harmony like brothers and sisters.

According to law of dependent origination, all phenomena are dependently originated (Paticcasamupada). Buddhist see world as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. It is holistic because it sees the world as an integrated whole rather than a dis-associated collection of parts. The present globalization phenomenon is essential outcome of this theory. All people are equal before law is the dictum of democracy. As per Buddhist view, only law of cause and effect is equal to everyone, which is absolutely fair and impartial. Cause and Effect and Karmic retribution are inseparable as shape and shadow. No one can escape from the implacable Law of cause and effect in which, good is rewarded with good and evil with evil. Thus, nothing in the universe, from the world of nature to the world of sentient beings, from celestial body and mote of dust, can escape from this law. The law extends through the past, present and future and covers the ten directions. Faith, conviction, ethics, morality, health and economics – is related to the law of cause and effect. If a person does something immoral, he or she might escape from the worldly law but not the judgment of good conscience and the law of cause and effect.

In the third century B.C., the great Buddhist Emperor Ashoka of India, following this noble example of tolerance and understanding, honored and supported all other religions in his vast empire. In one of the Edicts carved on rock, the original of which one may read even today, the Emperor declared:

One should not honor only one's own religion and condemn the religion of others, but one should honor other religions for this or that reason. So doing, one helps otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honors

his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking "I will glorify my own religion". But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely. The great religions of the world trying to assume a global dimension. While aiming so, development of a true consciousness is need of a time.

Buddha always had friendly relations with other religious leaders and religious traditions. I would like to suggest some possible ways in which all religious leaders must come together on the converging point by highlighting the essential teachings of their respective religion. They should exercise maximum communication understanding and co-operation to change the existing chaotic state of the world to a world of total peace, progress and prosperity. Everyone wants to be happy and secured which cannot be achieved in isolation. We all should discuss and make sincere and conscious commitment to achieve a lasting world peace.

So concord is good: Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrine professed by others while maintaining respect and reverse to our own religion.. We should add here that this spirit of sympathetic understanding should be applied today not only in the matter of religious doctrine, but elsewhere as well. Instead of clinging to fixed ideas and rigid patterns, what is needed is a rediscovery of some of the insights of various religions and cultural traditions to have a quantum leap into a new spiritual dimension.

This spirit of tolerance and understanding has been from the beginning, one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilization. That is why there is not a single example of persecution or the shedding of a drop of blood in converting people to Buddhism, or in its propagation during its long history of 2500 years. It spread peacefully all over the continent of Asia, having more than 500 million adherents today. Violence in any form, under any pretext whatsoever, is absolutely against the teachings of the Buddha.

Let all embracing thoughts for all beings be ours and let us cultivate and all-embracing heart of love for all, throughout the world, in all its height, depth and breath, love that is beyond hatred or enmity.

May we always become:

- A Source of happiness for those who are unhappy
- A Source of water for the thirsty
- A Source of food for the hungry
- A Source of healing for those who are ill
- A Source of light for those in darkness
- A Source of companionship for those who are lonely
- A Source of protection for those without protection
- A Source of help and friendship for all in need
- A Source of crutches to the broken limbs
- A Source of parental love and care for the orphans
- A Source of shelter to the homeless
- A Source of asylum for those who have no safe place
- A Source of real warmth of love and compassion to those abandoned in cold of war and hatred.

May all beings be Happy and Well.