



Mr. Jamie Cresswell

Symposium Session 1:
Education and Global Citizenship:
A Buddhist Perspective
Speaker

Brief Bio-data

jc@appliedbuddhism.org.uk
Director -The Centre for Applied Buddhism
President – European Buddhist Union

At present I am the Director of the '*Centre for Applied Buddhism: Buddhist Philosophy and Contemporary Life*' (*CfAB*)

The CfAB is an educational centre which focuses on Buddhism and its application to people's lives, in order to understand and develop our place in the modern world. We run a variety of talks; conferences and events open to the public. We also carry out research and have a substantial library of Buddhist studies.

In this role I run sessions on Buddhism for the public and I visit schools to talk to young people about the philosophy of Buddhism and how Buddhist ideas may be used in individual lives.

Prior to this I was Director of the *Institute of Oriental Philosophy – UK*. This institute was an academic research centre for Buddhism and Asian religions. I ran this institute from 1989 until the end of 2010 when it had to close due to lack of funding. Since then I have set up the *CfAB*



I studied at the ***School of Oriental and African studies, London University***. I was awarded a first class honours degree in Buddhist Studies.

I have also carried out study and research on Buddhism at the Sharpham college of Contemporary Buddhism and with a variety of Buddhist teachers from different Buddhist traditions.

My interest includes the development of Buddhism in the west and Buddhism and its relevance and importance in contemporary society.

At present I am organising a conference called ***Transforming Conflict: Buddhist inspired ideas for personal and social change***. This will take place in August this year in the UK.

In addition I am involved in a number of Intra Buddhist developments.

I am the President of the ***European Buddhist Union***.

I am the Chair of the ***Network of Buddhist Organisations – UK*** and I am a trustee of ***Religions for Peace – UK***.

Last year I was appointed the Buddhist representative on the ***European Council of Religious Leaders***, which is part of Religions for Peace international.

Education and Global Citizenship: A Buddhist Perspective

Jamie Cresswell, President, European Buddhist Union.

Abstract

Global citizenship can be defined as a genuine concern for the peace and prosperity of the entire world. Global citizens are those people who have the capacity to find meaning, no matter what the circumstances, to contribute to the well being of others and to enhance one's own existence. As ordinary people, the inner transformation process and the continual struggle to rise above one's own egoism and to live with a spirit of altruism, are central to global citizenship.

Fostering global citizens must concern us all. Laying the ethical and conceptual foundations of global citizenship is a vital project in which we are all participants. Meaningful education for global citizenship should be undertaken as an integral part of daily life.

The Buddhist worldview of interrelatedness forms the basis for the essential elements of global citizenship, namely the qualities of wisdom, courage and compassion.

This paper will further develop these ideas and will consider how humanistic education can be at the heart of global citizenship.

Education and Global Citizenship: A Buddhist Perspective

Jamie Cresswell, President, European Buddhist Union.

If we define Global citizenship as a genuine concern for the peace and prosperity of the entire world, we can rightly admit that we ourselves, no doubt, have some way to go before we can honestly say that we are Global Citizens. We may also be aware that the world's citizens, certainly in these difficult times, understandably seem more likely to be concerned with their own prosperity and peace than that of the rest of the world.

When we consider the situation in the world today, whether that be economic, political, religious or social, we may well feel disheartened if not anguished about the situation. We have emerged from the century of war. A century which included two world wars the Nazi

Holocaust, the Soviet gulags, the plight of Palestinians and many other refugees, widespread massacres in Cambodia and parts of Africa, ad infinitum. There has been much misery and much reason to be disheartened.

However where does the failure lie. The problem lies in the failure of human wisdom.

As Mikhail Gorbachev has written ' the true tragedy of the century has been that people do not listen until it is too late'

We may also see around us huge global problems in terms of the environment and global changes in weather. Somehow we must bring to a halt the accelerating tendency toward extremes, which will eventually result in the self destruction of the species.

But the real problem lies not in our ailing earth but in the malaise of humanity itself. There is a dire need for a strong, sustained and broad based spirituality among people and a pressing need for a "human revolution". Only this can unearth each person's inner potential and enable us to feel fully what we really are, and so behave accordingly.

We cannot sit passively by. Likeminded people must unite in solidarity in order to show proof in our time that nothing can defeat the courage and wisdom of the human being. Is this not the greatest heritage we can bequeath to the future? (Ikeda, D, The Challenge of Global Citizenship.)

Increasingly in the West there is a spiritual anxiety taking place. People are reexamining the significance and the role of religion. Often religion does not come out well, and people are turning away from their long held beliefs and from religious institutions and towards other more secular ways and means. Some of these ideas may indeed be of value. However, how can religions and wisdom teachings respond to these deep rooted insecurities and fundamental needs of people? What is the role of a living religion in today's society. Indeed Is there any role at all. As individuals and members of religious institutions we must carefully consider such questions. It may be that the secularism should be left to take over. However at the same time as so called secular thinking is coming to prominence it is also clear that people are searching for a spiritual connection, which apparently they have failed to find in the major religions of our time.

What are the core philosophies and guidelines for a world religion for today? What is the spirit with in which we, as Buddhists, must live by.

I believe that this lies in a humanistic philosophy of deep respect for the sanctity of life and of all-encompassing compassion. Within a teaching which enables individuals to cultivate and to bring forth their inherent wisdom, and to nurture the creativity of the human spirit, in order to surmount the difficulties and crises facing humankind and so realize a society of peaceful and prosperous coexistence.

Buddhism must always be in a position to protect the sanctity of life and the freedom of the human spirit. We must be prepared to protect those people whose rights are in danger and who may be threatened by tyranny or oppression, even if their beliefs and opinions differ from ours. We should therefore protect all those who practice different religious faiths as well as those who hold systems of thought that deny religion altogether, because this is the natural outgrowth of the core tenants of Buddhism, which extols the dignity of life.

As it says in the Nirvana Sutra, 'The sufferings of all living beings are the sufferings of the Buddha.'

You can see from my preliminary remarks that I consider the challenge of global citizenship an important and extremely valuable, if not absolutely necessary, struggle for peoples of the world to take on if we wish to see any sort of future for our world. However it is in no way straightforward.

What do we mean by Global citizen? A person who is recognized as a citizen of a nation has special rights and duties prescribed by government. Global citizens cannot be considered in this way. We could describe in terms of removal of barriers to free trade and national economies. In this case global citizens are those who travel and work anywhere in the world. This concept has led to protests against globalization. Indeed this approach can lead to economic injustice, and has led to practices which threaten the physical environment. This wave of globalization in many areas of contemporary society, communications, science and technology, market economies, and so forth, is a contrast of light and dark. On a positive note the potentials of democratization and the spread of awareness of human rights are to be welcomed. However the negative aspects of war and conflict, economic disparities, obliteration of distinctive cultures, the spread of weapons and the destruction of global economy are extremely concerning.

These shadows in the current process of globalization have led to malice and mistrust and can provoke very deep crisis of identity in the human spirit. A growing movement of people who work to transform this bleak spiritual landscape is required in order to create concrete measures and meaningful results on an international level.

The creative harmonization of diversity can be expressed through a Buddhist analogy with various flowering trees: the cherry, plum, peach and damson. Like these trees, we are all replete with our own particular characteristics and possibilities. By mutually recognizing and respecting these differences, the unique capacities of each individual can be brought to full and equal bloom, ultimately creating a beautiful, peaceful and harmonious world.

For Buddhists this deep understanding and appreciation of interdependence is central to the teachings. Nothing can exist in isolation, and each aspect plays its own part in the workings of life. Each aspect deserves respect.

Let me now mention three qualities which I consider to be required of global citizens.

The first is wisdom – the ability to perceive the interdependence of all life, "to abolish the darkness of delusion" as the *Visuddhimagga*, states, and the understanding of outcomes based on understanding dependent origination.

The second is courage – the courage to respect each other's differences and use them as an impetus to creative living, rather than rejecting, or excluding others on the basis of differences of culture, nationality and race. This is embodied in the character and ideal of the bodhisattva.

The third is the ability to empathise with and share the pain of every person and all of life. This ideal of compassion means being a true friend who hears the anguished cries of others, and strives with them to overcome and surmount suffering.

So for me a global citizen is a person who fully lives these qualities. However his identity of a global citizen needs to be considered on three levels, local, national and global community. Tsunessaburo Makiguchi (1871- 1944) the Japanese educator, developed such an educational process, rooted in and starting from the local community and expanding its scope of concern to the national and global levels. The character of a global citizen then can be created through a dynamic harmonization and development of these three levels. Growth, for an individual will take place through the experiences of the local community, expanding to a national and then a global scale. In this way humanitarian contributions to one's community and country will further the cause of world peace; at the same time, contributing to global humanity on a world level reverberates back to the national and local levels.

The key to the formation of global citizens is education. The teacher is the most important element in the educational environment. The interaction between different personalities – teacher and learner, holds an enormous potential wherein the deepest realms of life itself may be fully developed. Makiguchi held that the ultimate purpose of the state is therefore the pursuit of the prosperity of human civilization and the enhancement of human reason. To this

end, states should shift from competition in military, political and economic spheres to what he termed a “humanitarian competition” of contribution to human happiness.