

## World Peace a Buddhist Perspective

*“Victory breeds hatred,  
The defeated live in pain;  
Happily the peaceful live,  
Giving up victory and defeat.”*

*Dhammapada 121  
Gotama Buddha 6th century BC*

Members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association of Winnipeg, Panel of distinguished speakers and guests, thank you for inviting me to address the Buddhist Perspective of World Peace at the World Religions Conference. I would like to commend the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association for their efforts in bringing peace and harmony between religions through education and sharing. This is the second world religions conference that they have organized in Winnipeg and the 170<sup>th</sup> in Canada. I agree with them that it is by learning from each other and adopting the good and the truths that have worked for others that we can really make a difference.

World Peace has always been one of the most talked of goals and aspirations of humankind and yet despite the number of persons who want world peace it is an illusive goal that seems to grow further and further away from our reach. According to the latest statistics published by the Global Armaments website the world spend on armaments and machines of death now exceed \$1.2 trillion per year<sup>1</sup>. And in the last century over 100 million of reported deaths were as a result of war<sup>2</sup>.

In this world we have one race; One race known as the human race. Every member of this race has one common goal - the pursuit of happiness. Every member of this race feels pain and mental anguish. Every member of this race wants happiness not suffering. As such, every member of this race is afraid of untimely death. No one wants to die of a gunshot wound or a bomb blast. Despite the fact that such a death is not what we want for ourselves or for those we love and call ‘mine’ we continue to kill our fellow human beings with weapons of war.

Dr. Oscar Arias, former president of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace prize winner, gave some startling statistics in his speech, *“Moral Governance and Public Service: Lessons from the Central American Experience,”* which he presented in Winnipeg, Canada in June, 1999. He said that Four percent of the world’s annual military budget would reduce world global illiteracy by half. Eight percent would stabilize the world population by 2015. Twelve percent would ensure the health care of the entire world population. Since 1999, when Dr. Arias gave this talk, we have increased our spending on armaments from \$800 billion to \$1.2 trillion. Just 25% of the world military spending in 1999 would have solved the world problem of illiteracy, starvation and healthcare over a period of 15 years. Instead in less than ten years we increased our military spending by 50% to \$1.2 trillion.

All world religions condemn the killing of humans and the destroying of their homes and community. And yet everyone knows that the manufacture of bombs, guns, tanks and mines lead to destruction and death. The Buddha went so far as to direct his followers to stay away from the manufacture of instruments of death. He called this inappropriate livelihood because it was not a

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1 Global armaments website.

2 A New Earth Awakening to your Life’s Purpose page 11

livelihood that led to the benefit of humankind but rather one that led to the destruction and suffering of humankind.

Why then are we failing so miserably to fulfil this common mandate of all religions? What then is the cause of this madness? In my opinion, the causes of war are the man made divisions based on religion, nationality, creed, colour and ideology. Instead of celebrating the oneness of humankind and our unique contributions to the mosaic we call humanity we divide. We divide and segregate and then operate under the delusion that we and our kind are superior to others. Our egos fed by power, wealth and greed have bred a new generation of humankind; A generation that places a greater value on the lives of their own kind.

World peace is a very noble goal. Many well-meaning persons want to change the world so that we could have world peace; Politicians, religious leaders and community leaders all mean well and start big. Soon they realize that they have taken on too much and so they decide to begin by changing their country. But even this is too great a challenge and so they decide to change their community. When they find that they cannot change their community they start on their family.

The intrinsic belief in this thinking is that the problem lies outside of oneself. It is by correcting others that we can resolve this issue. I and those that are mine are blameless; it is these others that harbour false views. They are the cause of the problem.

Over 2500 years ago the Buddha showed us a path to peace. But you did not start with the world, your country or your community. You started with yourself. The Buddha felt that the problem to conflict lay within us. He felt that it was the delusion of self and this power building of the ego that resulted in conflict and suffering. As such he gave us a path to breakthrough this delusion of self. In the Buddha's Path you begin by changing your self (consciousness). And then, once you have changed, you influence others to change with love, compassion and through example. By practising the Buddha's path to peace you achieve inner calm and peace for yourself. Then, by example and compassion, you help to change your family, your community, your country and the world.

Buddhism is often known as a philosophy, a way of life with a comprehensive moral foundation based on one's own effort as opposed to a religion that depends on external or divine intervention for salvation. The goal of Buddhists is not heavenly birth achieved through the salvation and grace of a personal God. It is freedom from suffering achieved through one's own effort.

Placing the mind as the forerunner of all good and evil, the Buddha concentrated on developing and purifying the mind to see truth which he claimed is veiled by a mist of delusion and not knowing. Starting with selfless generosity the Buddha taught a comprehensive practice of virtue that led to boundless compassion towards others. The Buddha then built on this strong foundation through the practice of mindfulness and insight meditation. He penetrated the veil of delusion that clouds the mind and destroyed the ego or belief in a permanent self.

The destruction of the fabricated ego or delusion of self resulted in the duality of you and I melting away leaving a oneness of all beings. An oneness that is unconditioned, so beautiful and blissful that the Buddha called it awakening for it is a realization from within of the purity and oneness of all beings. It is an awakening from a fabricated selfish mind to a pure and compassionate mind that has experienced not self or the death of the elusive ego that leads to conflict and wars. It is the birth of a new consciousness that transcends the man made separations that result in conflict

Many of you may be aware of the recent world wide web cast by Oprah Winfrey where she discusses the book *A New Earth – Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* by Eckhart Tolle. The author

explains this complex concept of the fabricated ego or self eloquently in simple words. And so I quote from his book. (On page 27,) Tolle says, “*the word* I embodies the primordial error, a misperception of who you are, and an illusory sense of identity. This is what we refer to as the ego.... This “ego” or illusory sense of self is what Albert Einstein who had deep insights not only to the reality of space and time, but also human nature referred to as an optical illusion of consciousness.” Tolle then continues to lead his readers to break through this fabricated, illusionary ego that causes conflict and suffering. The Buddha said that this illusory misconception of self leads to misinterpretation of reality, all thought processes, interactions, and relationships. Because, with the fabricated concept of self comes selfishness and with selfishness comes greed, conflict and wars.

When a child cries because his toy has been taken away from him he is not crying for the toy. He is crying for that which is mine. After all would he cry if the same toy that belonged to his friend was taken away from his friend? By taking away that which is mine he perceives that you have diminished his self worth; his ego. As we grow older we continue to collect and accumulate wealth and possessions and equate our selves or our ego with what we have. Our land, our wealth our possessions and power then enhance our self image of who we are. When this illusionary sense of self is threatened or taken away we resent this invasion and react in anger and we have the beginning of conflict.

The ego’s fear and distrust of those that our different to us, its tendency to emphasize the ‘otherness’ of others by focusing on their perceived faults escalates conflict. And then the ego turns these perceived faults into their identity and equates them to evil and inhuman beings. A few years back the West perceived the Russians as terrible people just because they had a communist regime and an ideology that was not compatible with our way of thinking. The fact that the people of Russia were no different from us made no difference. Once this separation is made the mind justifies the resulting conflict and killing that follows as necessary and beneficial.

The Buddha stripped this fabricated image of a permanent self through self awakening. Then he showed others how to use awareness of the present moment and mindfulness to experience the truth of not self. (On page 28) In the book *A New Earth Awakening to your Life’s New Purpose* Eckhart Tolle explains this concept of destroying the ego and breaking through this ‘otherness’ as follows. “The good news is that if you can recognize illusion as illusion, it dissolves. The recognition of illusion is also its ending. Its survival depends on your mistaking it for reality. In seeing who you are not, the reality of who you are emerges by itself.”

The Buddha’s goal of awakening can be achieved by all persons, irrespective of and while adhering to their own religious traditions. It can be achieved by both men and women, by the young and the old and by any person of any nationality, colour or creed. Through awareness of the present moment, mindfulness and insight one can unleash the power within and destroy the delusion of self and awaken the true nature of humankind. The true nature that results in the acceptance of all beings.

The twentieth century was one of great destruction. The First World War broke out in 1914. When the war ended in 1918 the devastation left behind included 10 million deaths of human beings and many more were maimed and disfigured. But this was just the beginning. By the end of the century we had over a 100 million deaths. They died not only through wars between nations , but also through mass exterminations and genocide such as the murder of 20 million in the Soviet Union under Stalin, the unspeakable horror of the holocaust in Nazi Germany and the Khemer Rouge in Cambodia where quarter of the countries population was murdered<sup>3</sup>.

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3 A New Earth Awakening to your Life’s Purpose – Eckhart Tolle page 11

We now approach a new era where persons have the courage to voice their views and share their concerns through peace rallies, petitions to their elected officials and conferences such as this world's religion conference that has brought us all together. Among those who perpetrate the madness of killing our own we have those like you that realize that hatred is not appeased by hatred. It is a new era for there is a new recognition by many for the urgency of change.

Just the other day I saw a TV news clip that gave me great hope. US marines had assisted a young boy in Iraq who was critically ill by bringing him to the United States for an operation. This act of human compassion and kindness, that saved a little Iraqi boy's life, in my opinion, achieved more than all the money USA has spent on the war in Iraq. This resulted in a strong bond between the marines and the family of the little boy and in his fathers word "they (the marines) and the father were now brothers." The man made labels that separate nations such as religion, ideologies and colour had slipped away leaving behind the true pure nature of humankind; unconditional love and an oneness of all persons.

What we see in the world today could be the beginning of a new spiritual ideology. We are coming to the end of belief systems that divide. How spiritual you are has nothing to do with your belief system but everything do with your state of consciousness. The effort then should be directed towards breaking through this mist of darkness to release the true pure nature of humankind that lies buried beneath layers of conditioned beliefs and ideologies. With the melting away of the illusionary ego we move towards our pure nature and an awakened consciousness where the duality of you and I fade away to be replaced by the oneness and beauty of all beings. This is peace. This is real peace.

*Hatred is not appeased by hatred,  
Hatred is appeased by loving kindness;  
This is an internal truth*

*Dhammapada 5, Gotama Buddha 6th century BC.*

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