

Tolerance and Peace the essence of Buddhism

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Shakya
Asst. prof. Philosophy
Govt. Hamidia Arts & Commerce College,
Bhopal M.P. (India)
Email: rajendraprasadshakya@gmail.com

Tolerance is one of the most desirable traits for all human beings. It is a sign of our strength and not weakness as usually understood by some people. It is not only ethical or moral code it also represents one of the highest religious virtues. The religious tolerance springs from the fountain of love and sympathy inherently present in the heart of all human beings. Though usually lying dormant, it occasionally wells up from the heart of even bad and wicked people. Our history is replete with stories of tolerance of kings like Emperor Ashoka. In our ordinary life also we often come across cases where people have sacrificed their lives to save the lives of others. All such examples demonstrate the importance of supreme sacrifice and tolerance.

In the history of different religions the feeling of tolerance is all the more desirable. Needless to say, the absence of religious tolerance is responsible for all the wars in the history of religions which have seen the highest account of bloodshed in the human world. In my view tolerance or acceptability means that we should have equal regard and respect for all religions.

Lord Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, himself was a person of wonderfully tolerant nature. He always overlooked the insults and injuries that his religious advisories inflicted upon him. He was a broad minded person beyond imagination. "He aroused the human from their slumber of ignorance and awakened them to a realization of the truth through his self sacrificing zeal, tremendous love, kindness and tolerance combined, with his remarkable personality." (1) Buddha Dhamma, the Buddhist way of life is good conduct brought about through mental development, training and leading to a Perfect Peace." (2) The Buddha's principle was important element of sila or morality which is the first step on the path of Buddhist religion.

The spirit of tolerance should be the basis for the collaboration of different religions for the cause of peace, as interpreted in the great king Ashoka's inscriptions. Ashoka was the follower of Buddhism. Ashoka's twelfth Edict has propagated the mission of tolerance.

“King Piyadasi, beloved of the Gods, honours all sects, both recluses and layman; he honours them with gifts and with every kind of honour. But the beloved of the gods attaches not so much weight to alms and honours as to (the desire) that the good name and (the moral virtues which are the essential part of teaching of all sects may increase. Now the prosperity of this essential part of the teaching of all the sects involves great diversity but this is the one foundation of all (that is to say) moderation in speech; that there should be no praising of one's own sect and decrying of other sects; (3) That they should be no depreciation (of others) without cause, but on the contrary a rendering of honour to other sects for whatever cause honour in due. By so doing, both one's own sects will be helped forward and other sects will be benefited; by acting otherwise one's own sect will be destroyed in injuring others. Whosoever exalts his own sect by decrying others.” (4)

The influence of Buddhism on the lives of rulers is exemplified in the life of Emperor Ashoka. The famous inscriptions that have been left on stone pillar scattered all over India bear testimony to his noble character of tolerance. The teachings of Buddhism, in its long historical journey, have made more followers than that of any other faiths in Asia and South East Asia.

After the war of Kalinga he abandoned his thought of expansion of Empire. As a result he could maintain and spread peace and security in the neighbouring kingdoms. Instead of conquering them by force he sent messenger of truth to teach morality, kindness and goodwill. It was the Buddhist way of living that brought about this wonderful change in the life of Emperor Ashoka. He was the great follower of the doctrine of Ahimsa or non-violence and practised the positive Buddhist virtues of Maitri (friendship) or compassion towards living being.

Tolerance must be practised if peace is to come to this earth and forceful compulsion will only create intolerance. To establish peace and harmony among mankind each and every one of us must learn to be tolerant discard and detach oneself from greed and hatred which is the root of all evil forces.

The concept of peace expressed by the word 'Shanti', is described as the ideal state of man in Buddhist literature. We can say that Buddhism has aimed at peace in its long history. Today its followers have a special duty to work for establishment of peace in the world and set an example for others by following their master's advice.

“All tremble before punishments,

all fear death.

Comparing others with one self,

one should not slay nor cause to slay.” (5)

Peace is always attainable. The way to peace is not only through prayer and rituals. Peace is the result of mind's development, harmony with his fellow beings and with his environment. The peace that we try to introduce by force is not a lasting peace. It could be linked to a truce between the conflict of selfish desire and fleeting worldly conditions.

Venerable K.Shri Dhammananda's views are most important that peace cannot exist on this earth without the practice of kindness and tolerance. (6) To be tolerant one must have proper understanding with unbiased mind.

“No enemy can harm one so much as one's thoughts of craving, hate and jealousy.” (7)

In today's world wars, rivalries and hatred are the result of desire, greed and craving. In [pali it means *Tanha* and in Hindi and Sanskrit *Trsihna*]. The craving is the bottom of all troubles of this world. It is the root cause of avarice, anger, hatred, malice, rivalry, jealousy, envy, hypocrisy, deceit, pride, arrogance and ignorance and has ruined individuals and nations. The Dhammapada says:

“The craving of the man addicted to careless living grows like a Maluva (A king of Parasite) creeper; he leaps from existence to existence, like a monkey in the forest looking for fruits. Whosoever in this world is overcome by this wretched clinging thirst, his sorrow, his unhappiness, flourish like Biranagrass after rain.” (8)

The craving which is present in our hearts, no amount of prayer will remove it, no belief in any doctrine will eradicate it. No outward agency can remove it. It can be removed by our own self-understanding and self- purification.

Lord Buddha laid down the noble eight fold path for the self purification. The eight steps of this path are:-

1-Right Understanding 2- Right Thoughts 3- Right Speech 4- Right Action 5- Right Livelihood 6- Right Effort 7- Right Mindfulness 8- Right Concentration (9)

Right understanding the key note of Buddhism is explained as the knowledge of four noble truths. To understand rightly means to understand things as they really are, not as they appear to be. In Buddhism right understanding has matured into perfect insight leading directly to the stage of Sainthood.

Right thought consists of thoughts of renunciation that are free from aversion and thoughts that are free from violence. It is called right thought.

Right Speech means abstaining from lying slander, abuse, harsh words wrong speech that has brought great unhappiness in this world.

Right action Right speech must be followed by right action. Right action means not to kill, not to steal and not to get involved in sexual misconduct but to have positive attitude and be kind and helpful.

Right livelihood comprises living by honest means. The spiritual pilgrims try to purify their livelihood by refraining from the five kinds of trade which are forbidden to a lay disciple i.e. trading in arms, human trafficking animal slaughter and any kind of intoxication.

Right efforts mean suppressing evil thoughts and stimulating good ones. Right effort is a fourfold path:

- 1- The Endeavour to discard evil that has already arisen;
- 2- The Endeavour to prevent the arising of evil;
- 3- The Endeavour to develop unawakened goodness;
- 4- The Endeavour to promote the good which has already arisen.

Right mindfulness is constant mindfulness of the body, the nature of feeling, pleasure, pain, and mind objects. This develops the quality of awareness.

Right concentration:

It is the last step of eight fold path. This step is absolutely necessary for the realization of Nibbana. It is the highest stage of development in the Buddhist way of life through which one comprehends the peace of Nibbana.

Thus the eight fold path is very beneficial as it is conducive to mental peace and happiness.

This path consists of spirituality through right understanding. It is noble in the sense that anyone who walks on this path diligently becomes a noble person, a saintly person, a pure hearted person. In this light the eight fold path is the inner core of Buddhism.

Buddha is a pioneer who struck the roots of his own inner light, his personal experiences and practical ethics. The truth realized by him was that happiness lies in extinguished fire. He said to himself.

“Conquest begets enmity;
the defeated lie down in distress;
the peaceful lies down in happiness,
giving up the both victory and defeat.
There is no fire like lust,
No crime like hatred,
There is no misery like the constituents of existence,
No happiness higher than the peace of Nirvana.” (10)

It is expressed that when the fire of lust is gone out then peace is gained, when the fire of hatred and delusion are gone out, then peace is gained. When the troubles of mind arising from pride, cruelty and all other sins, have ceased then peace is gained, sweet is the lesson this singer makes me hear for the Nirvana of peace.” (11)

This immortal peace, this untouchable state can be reached here on the earth, in Nirvana of Arahantship. It brings peace to more and more individuals. It is a practical approach to high moral values, to a society and nation, free from the various evils. It is necessary for peace because it insists on virtue like charity, purity, truthfulness and control over passions, non-injury to living and non-living.

Buddha is the pioneer in establishing discipline. He stood for peace and harmony by showing the path of Karuna (Compassion) and love to the humanity.

The text Sutta-Nipata's Sutta gives an unfailing formula to attain the peace or calmness of mind. The text says in Pali "Metham upevayam Karunam Vimukti Asevmano Mudita cha kale, Subben Loken Abiruddhachha Mano. (12)

These are brahmavihara or sublime station in Buddhism the way of Universal peace. Each Buddhist was accepted to develop Maitri (Friendship), Karuna (Compassion), Mudita (Sympathetic Joy) and *Upekshas* (impartiality).

Maitri is universal love, where there is Maitri there cannot be any ill-will. The spirit of Maitri given in the Maitri-Sutta: "Just as a mother would protect her only son even at the cost of her life so should one practice loving kindness towards all living beings. The most conspicuous illustration of it is the love of a mother towards her children

"Just as with her own life
A mother shields from hurt her own,
her only, child-
Let all embracing thoughts
For all that lives be thine
An all embracing love
For all the universe
In all its height and depths
And breath, unstinted love
Unmarred by hate within
Nor rousing enmity." (13)

The above passage illustrates that the disciple of Buddha is merciful, kind and compassionate towards every living creature. This means all embracing love. The nature of love is characteristic of devotion of welfare and peace.

Karuna is compassion for those who are in trouble and suffering. Compassion is limitless free from enmity and ill-will. Where there is compassion there cannot be indifference for the suffering of others.

Mudita is sympathetic Joy. It is to feel joy and happiness towards others where there is *Mudita* there cannot be any jealousy. Lastly the *Upeksha* means equality for all.

“Whosoever in this world destroys life, utters lies, takes what is not given, and goes after the wives of others are addicted to intoxicating, digs up one’s own roots in this very world”. (14)

The great Buddhist philosopher of world Acharya Vasubandhu says in *Abhidharma Kosa-Bhasya* especially in Karma-Nirdesa (Exposition of action) in Karika 16 A.B. about Sila (Morality). These are five as following:-

“Abstention from killing, stealing, unchastely, false speech intoxicating liquor the first four constitutes the member of morality (Silanga).” (15) One other abstention from into liquor all these five morality represent the first stage of Buddhism path.

We can say above punch Sila are necessary general interest for Layman and Monk in Buddhism. In details these are explain in following way.

(1) Abstention from killing (Non-Violence). It is not merely to imply the avoidance of murder but of all forms of injury to others whatever physical or otherwise. It involves the recognition of all lives as equal. It is doctrine of non-Violence of Buddhism.

Hatred never ceases by hatred in this world through loving, kindness it comes to an end. This is ancient law. (16)

(2) Steal not but help everybody to be the master of the fruit of his labour. This moral of refraining from taking what is not given suggests respect for others’ property and rights.

(3) Abstain from impurity and lead life of chastity. It means abstinence from excessive or unlawful indulgence. It is intended to promote social stability. It is a restrain on moral laxity.

(4) Lie not but be truthful. Speak the truth with discretion fearlessly. It means the avoidance of falsehood encourages mutual trust and develops the understanding between individuals and groups.

(5) Avoidance from intoxicants. Use of liquor leads to debauchery, drain of wealth, gambling and other social evils.

These Panch Sila or five morals can be extended to wider sphere of politics, economics and made the guide for the foreign policies of nations.

“Buddha’s dhamma has potential for compassion and Maitri (friendship) to unite all human beings.” (17)

Buddhism preaches us the concept of charity, humanity, peace and tolerance to become a better human being. Hence its principles get to be implemented in totality in this violence-stricken world. The teachings are also good solution to social, economical and political problems in today’s world. There is a strong need to imbibe the teachings of the eight fold path (*Ashtang Marg*), five moral teachings (*panchsheel*) and four sublime (*Brahma Vihara*) to spread peace and happiness around the world.

We must also be aware of the fact that this external peace depends on the mental peace of individuals since our external behavior is only an expression of our inner will and attitude towards life. Thus eight folded path, five morals, four sublime are the pillars of individual happiness and universal peace. Their cultivation would lead us to universal brotherhood. In this way we can say that tolerance and peace are the essence of Buddhism.

References:

- 1- The Lotus path, Dr. D.R.Thero, page,6.
- 2- The Lotus path, Dr. D.R.Thero, page,9.
- 3- Indian Buddhism, by T.W. Rhys Davids, Page 228.
- 4- Indian Buddhism, by T.W. Rhys Davids, Page 229.
- 5- Dhammapada meaning and message/Dhammapada/129, Edited by D.C.Ahir, Page 13.
- 6- Dharmadoot / Kartika Purnima, Issue B.E.2544, Edited by Dr. D.R.Thero, Page 32.
- 7- Dhammapada/ChittaVagga/42, Dr. Bhikku Dharm Raxit, Page 14.
- 8- Dhammapada meaning and message/Dhammapada/24/334-335, Edited by D.C.Ahir, Page 33.
- 9- The Lotus path, Dr. D.R.Thero, page,10.
- 10- Dhammapada meaning and message/Dhammapada/15/201-202, Edited by D.C.Ahir, Page 20.
- 11- Indian Buddhism, by T.W. Rhys Davids, Page 159.

- 12- Sutta-Nipata/1/3/29, Dr. Bhikku dharm Raxit, Page 16.
- 13- Sutta-Nipata/1/8/8, Dr. Bhikku dharm Raxit, Page 37.
- 14- Dhammapada/Malavagga/247, Dr. Bhadanta Anand Koussalayan, Page 60.
- 15- Abhidharma Kosa-Bhasya of Vasu Bandhu, Volume II, Gelong lodoro sangpo, Page 1329.
- 16- Dhammapada meaning and message / Dhammapada Yamak Vagga/5, Edited by D.C.Ahir, Page 7.
- 17- Buddha and his Dhamma by Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, Page 220.

Bibliography-

1. Abhidharma-Kosa-Bhasya of Vasubandhu Volume II, Translated into french by Lanis De la Vallee Pousson, English Translation by Gelong Lodero Sangpo, Published by Moti Lal Banarsidas PVT. Ltd. Delhi India, Eddition Ist, 2012.
2. Buddha and his Dhamma by Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, Published by Goutam Book Centre Shahadrah, New Delhi, Edi. 2011.
3. Dharmadoot By Kartika Purnima Issue B.E 2544, Editor in chief Dr. D.R.Thero, Published Maha Boddhi Society of India Sarnath U.P.
4. Dhammpada, by Dr .Bhadant Ananda Kousallayan Buddha – Bhumi Publication Nagpur, India, Eddition 7th 1996.
5. Dhammpada, by Bikku Dharma Raxit, Published by Moti Lal Banarsidas PVT. Ltd. Delhi India, Eddition IIIrd 1983.
6. Dhammapada meaning and message / Edited by D.C.Ahir, Published by Buddha's world Press Delhi, Edi. 2009.
7. Indian Buddhism, by T.W. Rhys Davids, Rachna Prakashan, 65-A. Khaleelabad, Allahabad-I, India Edi. 1st 1972.
8. The Lotus path, Dr. Dodangoda Rewath Thero, IIIrd Edi. 2000, Donated by Buddhist Library Singapur.
9. Sutta-Nipata by Bhikku Dharma Raxit, Moti Lal Banarsidas PVT. Ltd. Delhi India.