

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF KARMA FOR WORLD PEACE

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Introduction: Inner Universalism

Many viewpoints are possible when we discuss the relationship of Buddhism to the problem of peace. Here, however, I would like to focus on the Buddhist concept of karma in order to show how pacifist thought in Buddhism is inherent in and can be derived from the concept of karma.

Before beginning the main discussion, I would like to touch upon a peace proposal that Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), made in January 1989 under the title "Toward a New Globalism." In his proposal, President Ikeda set forth the concept of "inner universalism" from a Buddhist perspective as the key to solving the problem of nationalism. The term, "inner universalism" contrasts with the concepts of "external universalism" and "transcendental universalism," found in the ideologies of communism and liberal democracy. Whereas the latter two concepts approach human existence from an external or transcendent perspective, inner universalism is a method for searching the inner self to find a universal value within it. As a matter of course, Buddhism is a method of

probing the depths of life, addressing the levels of human life, race, nation, biosphere and earth, leading to an understanding of original life force as ultimately fused with the universe itself. Therefore, this search into the internal, latent domain ultimately arrives at the truth of a transcendent reality existing beyond the world of external phenomenon, the truth of the universe itself. In Buddhism, "the internal search produces transcendence" and conversely "transcendence returns to the inner existence." The search for universal values in the depths of life corresponds to Buddhist wisdom (*prajna*) while the transcending of the self to reach out to external existence corresponds to the practice of compassion (*maitri-karuna*) in Buddhism. Furthermore, Buddhism holds that "wisdom equals compassion" meaning that wisdom itself contains the potential to act with compassion, and compassion needs brilliant wisdom to guide it. In the practice of Buddhism the universal values of internality and transcendence are brought together while a kind of paradoxical tension is maintained between them. The attempts made by conventional ideologies such as liberalism and socialism to transcend the framework of nation or state through their external or transcendent orientations have contributed historically to the creation of various evils in society. Thus the presentation of a concept of inner universalism is very significant.

Mr. Ikeda discusses inner universalism in two ways: in terms of his view of humankind and in terms of its practical applications. Concerning his view of humankind, he says: "A thorough search into the depths of life itself leads to this realization of the absolute equality and the sanctity of all human beings. Because this view of man is internally generated it leaves no room for distinctions on the basis of such external factors as nation and race." In his proposal, he suggests that there is universal wisdom inherent in life which is common to all people irrespective of nation and race.

When this wisdom is put into practice based on compassion in the phenomenal world, it becomes necessary to discuss the ideas of practice and movement. In this regard, Mr. Ikeda says:

Universal value is assumed to be inherent in each and every person, who must seek and develop it within his or her own life. This value is, by its very nature, *one* that cannot be imposed by force from outside. The *strategy* that logically derives from this concept of inner universalism is characterized by gradualism, as opposed to radicalism. Whereas radicalism is driven by force, gradualism is propelled by dialogue. The use of force is invariably a product of distrust; dialogue, by contrast, is based on mutual trust and respect.

Gradualism through dialogue is none other than *bodhisattva* practice or a manifestation of compassion. Now I would like to explain in terms of the logic of karma how the *bodhisattva* practice, symbolized by dialogue as gradualism, can nurture mutual trust and reveal the universality inherent in life. This, I believe, sheds light on how pacifist thought can be derived from a discussion of karma.

Globalism as "Common Karma"

The internal domain of human life is a "great cosmos" which encompasses past, present and future. Its movements are indivisible from the physical and phenomenal universe. As is well known, the Consciousness-Only School (*vijnapti-matrata*) developed the concept that this internal domain contained the *mano*-consciousness (*mano-vijnana*) and *alaya* -consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*), which underlie the five sensory consciousnesses and the sixth consciousness. This integrates the sensory input to form coherent images. Needless to say, according to Buddhism, karma, the record of all physical and spiritual actions, is stored in the eighth, *alaya*-consciousness. As the repository of all "seeds

of karma," the eighth consciousness contains not only the seeds of all the karma that an individual has accumulated, but also the seeds of the karma of his people, race, country, humanity, and species, as important components of his karmic identity. If the concept of "seeds of names and words" (which are also projected into *alaya*-consciousness) is added to the concept of seeds of karma, then the workings of the *alaya*-consciousness seem to parallel the workings of C.G. Jung's collective unconscious and archetype.

According to Buddhism, the seeds of karma are classified into two categories: "common karma" and "individual karma." Common karma is formed by many people who act as a group, and its result is also borne collectively; individual karma, on the other hand, is formed by an individual and the result is borne by him alone. The seeds of karma produced by a group such as a people, race, country, or humanity are included under the category of common karma as opposed to individual karma. In this way, the many kinds of karma, produced on various levels from that of the individual to that of all living beings, are contained in the *alaya*-consciousness. At the same time, in reality, all karma contained in the *alaya*-consciousness, regardless of its type, is fused into a single entity. With these ideas as background, we acquire a global view which encompasses the realm of humanity, laden with common karma, as well as the individual existence of all living beings.

The *Shoen-gyo* or *Xiaoyuanjing* (corresponding to *Annanna-suttanta*) of the *Jo-agon-gyo* or *Changahanjing* (*Dirghagama-sutra* corresponding to *Digha-nikaya*) aptly explains the origin of common karma stored in the country and society. Through explaining the origin of the four cases, the sutra shows the process whereby common karma was produced. The following is a summary of the sutra. At the beginning of the world, living beings harbored greed and attachment to food, then the number of beings increased and larceny and thievery

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occurred. Rancor, reproach and violence was brought to bear upon the culprits. The people's malice gave rise to conflict, and they elected as king a virtuous man who was expected to hold a fair court. The king became the first man of the Kshatriya caste. Among the people, there was a person who renounced the world and practiced meditation in the forest. He became the first Brahman. Others who were proficient at commerce and technical skills became Vaisya and Sudra, respectively. This sutra explains the process by which people's *klesas* or negative inclinations such as greed, stealing and violence, were engraved in the depths of the consciousness of the country as evil common karma from ancestors to descendants. This common karma produced the social inequalities of caste. This episode demonstrates the Buddhist belief that there is a vast amount of energy stored in the *alaya*-consciousness of nations and of humanity as a whole. This karma manifests not only in the form of individual's direct violence but also in the structural violence of whole societies.

On the other hand, the *Tenrinjoo-shugyo-kyo* or *Zhuanlunshengwang-xiuxingjing* (corresponding to the *Cakkavatti-sihanada-suttanta*) of the *Jo-agon-gyo* relates the following story in which common evil karma is turned into common good karma. As a result of the faulty rule of a king, the people become poor and rob one another. Although the king opened the coffers of the state in order to save the people from a famine, they continued to steal. In an attempt to chastise the robbers, he had to resort to violence as a means of punishment. At that time, there was a wise man among the people. He appealed to the people saying: "As I do not inflict injury unto you, you should not do harm to me." Touched by the wise man's behavior and his strong will, people joined his cause and the number of people who mutually respected the dignity of life and supported the principle of nonviolence increased. This is an example of how people can turn evil common karma into good common karma and thereby realize a peaceful society.

The common karma of groups of people is continuously engraved in the collective consciousness of the respective peoples and countries since the time of their ancestors. In the above story, the wise man's behavior which was based on nonviolence and trust provided the key to changing the common karma. The behavior of this wise man is called *bodhisattva* practice. Good will and benevolent conduct, represented by nonviolence and dialogue, are not only engraved in the individual's *alaya*-consciousness but are integrated into the common karma of the people and country, influencing to some degree the consciousness of other living beings and all humanity. In this way, the *bodhisattva* practice based on compassion effects the individual and the nation, thus helping to make manifest the universal wisdom that is inherent in humanity.

The Wisdom of Dependent Origination (*pratitya-samutpada*) and Ku (*shunyata*)

"Changing Tainted Consciousness and Acquiring Wisdom"

The Buddhist principle of "restoring tainted consciousness and acquiring [the four] wisdom[s]" elucidates the manner in which wisdom is relevant to global problems and can be used to ensure the survival of the human race and the peaceful coexistence and prosperity of all living beings. According to Buddhist theory, when common karma is gradually changed from hatred, destructiveness and distrust to compassion, creativity and trust, the *alaya*-consciousness, on each level from that of the individual to that of humanity, beams with the wisdom called the "great perfect mirror" (*adarsa-jnana*). Just as a great round mirror faithfully reflects everything exactly as it is, with this wisdom one can intuitively perceive the interdependence that underlies the existence of all beings and phenomena. Paralleling the viewpoint of ecologists spatio-temporal interdependence exists between human beings and other living beings, between other living beings amongst each

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other, and of living beings and non-living entities. On each level of existence--from that of the individual to that of all living beings--seeds of karma are created and stored as a result of interactions between an active "doer" and a passive "one to whom something is done." The wisdom that conceives the reality of interdependence is the "great perfect mirror wisdom." When this wisdom begins to shine like a clear mirror, the seventh or *mano*-consciousness, the self-consciousness, starts to transform accordingly. The *mano*-consciousness is the function of the mind that distinguishes between oneself and others and seeks to take advantage of other people in the interest of oneself. For example, the evil dispositions (*klesas*) of greed and violence attach to the *mano*-consciousness. The self-consciousness functions not only on the individual level but also on the levels of a people, country and race, thus giving rise to egoism on each of these levels, creating, for example, racial discrimination. If the light of wisdom based on the truth of interdependence illuminates this seat of the seventh consciousness, the negative dispositions are eradicated and the "wisdom of equality" (*samata-jnana*) appears. This wisdom enables one to perceive the equality of oneself and others as well as the universality of life. Furthermore, the power of compassion deriving from this wisdom of the truth of interdependence extends to the sixth consciousness, enabling one to make correct decisions and to reason; this faculty is called the "wisdom of wondrous perception" (*pratyaveksana-jnana*). It also extends to the first five consciousnesses, enabling one to acquire wisdom supported by five clear senses free from distortion; this faculty is called the "wisdom of accomplishing metamorphoses" (*krtyanusthana-jnana*).

The Buddhist concept of the "debt to all living beings" reflects the supposition that one's being able to live and enjoy life is due to the presence of other people and living beings. Our existence is supported by the common karma that our ancestors produced and the collective karma that the living beings of the present generation are making. When we understand, based on

the principle of interdependence, that everything with its respective capacity is contributing to the sustenance of our lives, a feeling of appreciation for the existence of others spontaneously arises in our hearts. This positive emotion, offsetting the negative desires, turns into altruistic compassion that motivates one to contribute to the happiness and well-being of others. Buddhism terms this process of gaining the four wisdoms "changing tainted consciousnesses and acquiring [the four] wisdom[s]." To actualize this process, one must understand the reality of the dependent origin of all existence in the universe, and the interdependence of all beings nurtured on the "spaceship Earth." This engenders the compassion to repay one's debt of gratitude to others. The purpose of the bodhisattva practice in Buddhism is to realize transformation of society in our daily lives through an extension of this process. When one tries to polish one's wisdom and understanding of interdependence and to repay his debt of gratitude to all living beings through the *bodhisattva* practice, his actions should accord with the times. Now let us move to the topic of what the *bodhisattva* practice should consist of in contemporary society, where the fate of all peoples is inextricably linked and the existence of life on the planet is in danger.

SGI Movement as the *Bodhisattva* Practice

In order to translate the concept of the bodhisattva practice into contemporary society, the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) has been carrying out various activities on a global scale as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) attached to several UN Agencies. Among the SGI's many activities, a number stand out as particularly noteworthy.

First, the disarmament exhibition "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World" was held in twenty-three cities in sixteen countries between 1982 and 1988. At present the SGI is working on a "War and Peace" exhibition the purpose of which is to present an

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integrated view of such issues as the development of modern weaponry and the realities of war. The exhibition will also address global problems related to the environment and human rights.

Second, the publication of war-time experiences has been carried out in an effort to hand down people's first-hand experiences of war to future generations. Volunteer participants in these projects include members of the Soka Gakkai youth and women's divisions. English editions of some books in these series have been published and highly acclaimed by readers in many countries.

Third, youth division members are involved in various humanitarian activities that include conducting fundraising drives for African and Indochinese refugees and holding seminars on the need to protect the environment.

Fourth, a wide range of cultural and educational exchanges on the grass-roots level are being undertaken. These include musical and artistic exchanges conducted by the Min-On Concert Association and academic exchanges by Soka University and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy. In the field of child education, an exhibition, "The World I Love: An International Celebration of Children's Art," co-sponsored by UNESCO and the SGI, was held this year in Montreal and Toronto.

Fifth, SGI President Ikeda has made various journeys for peace, holding dialogues with leaders and cultural figures in many countries, thus promoting education and culture.

The SGI movement is being conducted on the principle of gradualism. It mainly employs dialogue, exhibition and publications. We believe that through gradualism it is possible to realize transformation which penetrates the deepest level of peoples' lives, that is, transformation of the collective *alaya-*

consciousness that all people share. If the images people see at the exhibition--including those portraying the threat of nuclear arms, the hellish destruction wrought by atomic weapons, and the magnitude of environmental destruction that may be predicted for the future--could be imprinted in the *alaya*-consciousness of many people for life, then, like "seeds of peace" or "seeds of coexistence," they will be passed down in the repository consciousness of our descendants. These seeds of peace have global universality because they transcend nation and race and reach to the common basis of humanity and to the essential life force that is inherent in all living beings. The "seeds of peace" will become part of the common karma of all humanity and will be stored in the *alaya*-consciousness as the "seeds of names and words."

Seeds of karma (as opposed to "seeds of names and words"), are exclusively concerned with one's spiritual and physical moral behavior. The seeds of karma are produced as a result of a person's psychological condition which fluctuates between good and evil or positive and negative. "Seeds of peace" such as the images of nuclear destruction and of the tragedy of war are stored as the seeds of names and words. Simultaneously, these images often bring up emotions such as desire for peace, compassion for humanity and other living beings, and a sense of gratitude toward others. These emotions create seeds of karma. If these positive seeds are activated in the lives of a majority of people around the world, a common will for peace and the coexistence of all living things will arise, and negative desires will be overcome. Since dialogue is a form of communication that utilizes words, its contents are stored in the form of seeds of names and words. People's experiences are recalled in perception of such words and images, which then produce conception as the next stage of understanding. Therefore, living words uttered in an appropriate situation have a great effect that surpasses the effect of the words alone. Dialogue is an effort that puts common seeds in the *alaya*-consciousness of oneself and others. When

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one needs to use the repository, one sorts out relevant items of the seeds of names and words for thinking and understanding. Because words are one of the fundamental attributes concerned with human understanding and thinking, words seeking peace, words filled with good intention, words elucidating the truth of interdependence of the phenomenal world are stored as seeds of names and words which are common to all humanity and handed down to future generations. Exchanges in the area of culture, education and academic studies are a way to find and share common legacies kept in the collective *alaya*-consciousness. The various races that, along with their civilizations, have risen and declined in the course of history, have bequeathed legacies of universal values that are shared by all humanity; they built their civilizations based on the inspirations gained through communication with the transcendental reality of the universe in their own way. The cultural legacies are not only private, but also universal as they are based on the law of the universe which is common to all living beings. The legacies of the civilizations of various races that have been handed down to posterity are all equal in the sense that they all contain universal values for humanity. These legacies should be regarded as the "common seeds of names and words" of humanity. Through cultural exchanges between peoples, legacies of nations, which have appeared and declined over the course of history, can become common assets of humanity, common seeds stored in the *alaya*-consciousness. In this regard, the more opportunities there are to share the "common seeds of names and words" in people's lives, the more understanding of different civilizations and traditions between nations there will be. This will strengthen the solidarity of all humanity based on the consciousness that all are equal inhabitants of the planet. The transformation of the individual *alaya*-consciousness through the utilization of dialogue and imagery, as a means of bodhisattva practice will contribute to expanding the shared area of the common karma and common seeds, thus consolidating the consciousness of humanity as a kind of universal family. I would like to conclude by affirming

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my confidence that this process for transformation of society based on Buddhism, in combination with scientific peace studies in many fields, will serve to prepare a wide-ranging movement for a renaissance of humanity.