

BUDDHISM AND NONVIOLENT GLOBAL PROBLEM-SOLVING

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There was general seminar agreement on five problem-solving principles: (1) since global problems are interconnected, solutions cannot be sought in isolation, (2) the principle of respect for life, ahimsa, nonkilling, provides a fruitful basis from which to seek problem solutions, (3) human capacity to develop mind, body and thought gives confidence that solutions to problems can be found, (4) to discover and implement solutions, global reality must be understood as it is, without illusions, drawing upon all sources of scientific and humanist knowledge, and (5) by extending universal friendliness, compassion for suffering, sharing of joys, and steadfast commitment to improving the quality of life for everyone, Buddhism can contribute to liberation from suffering of all humankind. With respect to the five major problem areas to which seminar attention was directed, the following insights, drawing upon contributions by all seminar members, can be offered.

Disarmament

The Buddhist approach to disarmament is based upon the principle that we should not kill or cause others to kill. Furthermore, according to the principle of right livelihood we

should not engage in occupations that kill, make weapons that kill, or sell weapons that kill. Since the origin of killing and armaments is in our minds (greed, hatred, and ignorance), disarmament efforts must effectively change them. Buddhist peacemaking experience in various contexts shows that this change of mind can be achieved when we develop a calm and tranquil mind within ourselves and then persuade others to abandon violence through a dialogue that combines feelings of respect for life with reason.

The effectiveness of Buddhist contributions to disarmament can be measured by such things as abolition of nuclear, biochemical, and other weapons; removal of foreign bases; reduction of armed forces; reduction of military budgets; legal recognition of the right of conscientious objection to military service; and the building up of alternative nonviolent forces for domestic and international security.

Economic Justice

Since Buddhism is based upon the principle of equality, it regards great and increasing gaps between rich and poor to be unacceptable. Buddhist compassion for the suffering of all beings also makes economic deprivation intolerable. Therefore Buddhism urges restraint and cooperation to ensure the well-being of all. Buddhism must not be passive in the face of economic injustice. It must oppose the overindulgence of the rich and remove the deprivation of the poor. At the same time, it must offer all a reasonable and practical path of liberation from greed, hatred, and ignorance--both individual and collective--that obstruct efforts to realize global material sufficiency.

Buddhist contributions to economic justice can be measured by conversion of military resources to serve civilian needs; provision of basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and health care for all; elimination of such evils as malnutrition,

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prostitution, and child labor; and steady reduction of the gap between rich and poor within and between nations through both governmental and private action.

Human Rights

Buddhism affirms both of the great human values of equality and freedom and is committed to realizing them by nonviolent means. Buddhism affirms human rights to life, material justice, and to freedom from oppression based upon belief, biology, caste, nationality or any other distinction. It realizes that the world can be understood as it is only by liberation of the human mind from prejudice and ignorance. However, Buddhist tolerance does not extend to greed, hatred, willful ignorance, selfishness, destructiveness, and other violations of life and nature. It encourages and defends service to others by nonviolent means, including celebration of life through artistic expression. In seeking liberation from all forms of mental and material oppression, it stresses reason combined with respect for life. It does not impose its views on others by threat or use of force.

Buddhist contributions to human rights can be measured by the use of gentle and skilful means to achieve abolition of the death penalty, the elimination of torture, release of all political prisoners who have neither used nor advocated violence, fair and open trials for all, and affirmation of freedom of creative expression in the arts, politics, religion and other areas without harm to others in thought, word, or deed.

Environmental Protection

Buddhism can make a strong contribution to global environmental protection because its concept of the oneness and interdependence of all life--encompassing humans and nature--is completely compatible with modern ecological science. In turn,

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Buddhism is supported by genetic science discoveries that humans, plants, and other nonhuman things share certain common elements. Furthermore, Buddhism fosters love for nature beginning with the Buddha's enlightenment under the bodhi tree, through the characteristically close relations to nature of temples, to affection for the earth as the "Mother of human beings." Buddhism understands the poisoning of land, air, and sea, species loss, exhaustion of resources, and other threats to survival as the result of the greed, hatred, and ignorance of egoistic individuals, profit-seeking enterprises, and power-seeking governments. To preserve the environment so as to sustain present and future life, Buddhism urges restraint, renewal, recycling, and encouragement of productive creativity of the highest order. Working with the world's most knowledgeable scientists, it must assist global understanding of both harmful and beneficial environmental practices.

The results of Buddhist environmental concern can be measured by patient efforts to persuade both leaders and the public to replace destructive practices with life-enhancing ones, to educate oncoming generations in the interdependency of all things, and to create non-polluting cycles of production and renewal of resources needed for global well-being.

Universal Human Cooperation

Buddhism affirms and celebrates the great diversity of human beings within the common circle of humanity. It approaches all in a friendly spirit. It considers the sufferings and joys of others to be its own. At the same time it maintains a calm and steady commitment to remove the causes of suffering and to join with others to realize a happy life for all. In seeking to solve global problems such as those of disarmament, economic justice, human rights, environmental protection, ozone depletion, and AIDS, Buddhism encourages cooperative action among all the peoples of the earth. Because Buddhism views all

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life as an interdependent whole, it urges the combination of global problem-solving consciousness and specific solution-seeking actions. This means it urges cooperative action to save life even though one's own well-being may not be perceived as directly threatened. For harm done to one part of the human community or to one part of its planetary home ultimately threatens the life of all.

Indicators of increasing human cooperation are greater participation by Buddhists in public and private problem-solving efforts; removal of barriers that prevent more effective cooperation within, between, and across nations; and increased support for the problem-solving actions of such global institutions as the United Nations.

Summary

Overall a Buddhist approach to global problem-solving combines patient dialogue, universal education, and compassionate nonviolent action. It can be summarized as problem-solving "by gentle and skilful means based on reason." This means dialogue with leaders and others whose decisions critically affect the problems, mass education of all in understanding their causes and how to prevent them, and engagement in direct nonviolent problem-solving action, both alone and in cooperation with others. The effectiveness of these efforts can be measured by ever increasing respect for life and creativity in its expression by present and future global generations.