

# **FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW GLOBAL MORAL ORDER**

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As humankind is reaching the threshold of the twenty-first century, a question of global character is on the minds of many people: "What new era will be awaiting us in the history of humankind?" In the years that hinge the two centuries what kinds of experiences and lessons are we having that make us feel more secure and more confident?

First of all, we have realized the global character of a number of crucial problems that are confronting us. Thus, we will be able to mobilize the wisdom and the strength of the peoples of the whole world to solve them in a better way. Examples are the problem of war and peace, the problem of building up a new economic order and a new world moral order, the problem of protecting our environment and so forth. The scope of these problems surpasses each and every nation and outreaches the hands of the specialists and authorities. A problem such as war which concerns the survival of humankind cannot be entrusted to a handful of militarists and politicians. This explains why the world peace movements were and are attracting a large number of people from many different strata. Nearly every country in the world, all continents, all races, all age groups, all professions, all political ideologies and all religious denominations have representatives in the peace

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movement. Only such a peace-protecting force, so mighty and so dynamic, has the power to stop the danger of a nuclear war, to fight against devilish warmongers, and to guarantee the victory of peace and progress. Only with such a global outlook towards the problem of war and peace can the peace movements score such an historic victory.

The danger of a global nuclear war has mobilized the world peoples' force against its occurrence. The last years of the twentieth century were and are witnessing some historic steps towards an era without nuclear and chemical weapons. Humankind seems relieved by the agreement on disarmament of medium-range missiles between the Soviet Union and the United States. But we cannot lessen our vigilance. Although the danger of a nuclear war has been lessened, wars with all their cruel and inhuman manifestations are still prevalent. Political and military violence persists among a number of nations, among peoples of racial differences and even among peoples of the same ideology and of the same political outlook, among comrades and friends in arms. In recent years, the relations between nations have undergone a major change, being characterized more and more by "peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, negotiation instead of confrontation, market frontiers rather than war frontiers." As to the internal political situations of many countries there has been a positive trend towards more democracy, the avoidance of oppression and cultural and intellectual coercion, and more respect and understanding towards different ways of thinking. We earnestly hope that this trend towards more democracy and towards more humanism in politics in the national and international relationship will be strengthened and deepened from now till the year 2000. Thus we are preparing for an era of real peace, peace for the whole planet, not only for some regions, but peace for all human beings. All kinds of wars, not only nuclear war, should be banished. All these manifestations of violence should be done away with forever.

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We see that, and this is our second lesson, every crucial and critical problem of global character should be solved not only with a global outlook and a global force, but deeply and thoroughly from within every being. And here, with its special deep psychology and deep insight, Buddhism can offer many contributions.

First of all, Buddhism welcomes all peace movements and exhorts its practitioners to participate in these movements. To protect peace is to protect life and that is to put into application the first moral precept of Buddhist ethics. Buddhism is against all expansionist wars, which always include annexation of territory and wealth and interference into the internal affairs of other countries and nations. This is a violation of two very important moral precepts of Buddhist ethics: not to take what is not given, and not to commit actions that bring demerit. Buddhism denies all violent actions and manifestations under any pretext except in legitimate self-defense. All remember the following teachings of our Lord Buddha, Gatha Number Five, in the Dhammapada:

Hatred cannot put an end to hatred,  
In this world this never happens.  
Only non-hatred can bring hatred to an end,  
This is an eternal law.

Buddhism advocates any collective or individual endeavor which aims to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, trust and respect among people, nations and human beings. Buddhism encourages dispelling prejudices, inferiority and superiority complexes, all of which are very harmful to human dignity and human values.

We Buddhists consider it of primordial importance to build up a new economic order and a new moral order which would mitigate the anger and turmoil of the present international

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political atmosphere. We envision a healthier more humane and more meaningful era.

We think that the current economic situation polarized between a few industrialized, well-developed and wealthy countries, and many poor countries, famished and underdeveloped, is built upon unfair trade, with raw materials purchased at a very cheap price, and with manufactured goods sold at a very high rate. This unfair trade cannot be continued any longer because it nurtures war and violence.

We believe that to wipe out this present polarized economy and to build up a new world economic order with more justice and equality we should set up a new moral order based upon a new way of thinking and on some humanitarian principles readily accepted by humankind.

Without a world moral order serving as an ethical foundation it would be very difficult to successfully establish a new world economic order. Even if it were to be successful, it would not be able to last long. The polarized situation would re-establish itself once again, even worse than before. That is why, to our thinking, priority should be given to establishing a new moral order based upon some basic humanitarian principles accepted by the world community. In the current crisis, Buddhism with its tradition as a religion for peace will be able to offer its worthy contributions.

We think that one of the greatest contributions Buddhism can make to a new world moral order is its theory of "no self." This theory plays an important positive role towards building up a moral way of life for the person of our times. The sickly psychic tendency of the modern person is to seek sensual pleasures and the accumulation of wealth. In order to guarantee individual enjoyment one tries to secure as much material property for oneself as possible. However, material property is

limited while the greed of humans is unfathomable. That is why there is no way to escape from disputes and fights between human and human, between nation and nation, between people and people. And in this lies the root cause of war. With the theory of "no self," we can say that Buddhism has dug up the very root of wars, conflicts and contentions. With an insight into "no self" a Buddhist once enlightened will escape the grip of both greed (*lobha*) and anger (*dosa*). One is greedy of something for oneself, but when the self is not there greed loses its target and has no incentive to exist. The same goes for anger. When the self is contradicted unsatisfied anger will arise. But when the self is not there anger will automatically disappear.

Another expression which has a similar connotation is "for the sake of others." Emphasis here is placed upon concrete help to others. A Buddhist who is imbued with the principle of "no self" would devote his thoughts, words and bodily activities towards bringing about the happiness and welfare of all sentient beings as his own aim and objective. During Lord Buddha's lifetime and even afterwards, in India, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, or in any other country where Buddhism had a presence, the ideals of "no self" and "for the sake of others" are the norms of a Buddhist moral way of life, whether one be a religious person or a lay person. As we all know, the Bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism is nothing but a continuation of the principle of "no self" and "for the sake of others" which was found in the original Buddhism. In the Pali-Nikayas Lord Buddha urged his disciples as follows:

Oh monks you should go forth, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of love and compassion for the world, for the happiness of the deities and men. . . . You should preach the Dhamma excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, complete in meaning and in words.

You should promote the holy life, extremely good and extremely pure.

Mahavagga 19

Furthermore, the Buddhist theory of "no self" has deep implications in substance and in emancipation. Everything in this world is impermanent, with no self, with no substance whatsoever. So in ultimate reality, be it of glorious beauty, be it of the highest fame, or be it of wealth in plenty like forest and ocean--all are impermanent with no self, with no inner substance. There is nothing to be greedy for; there is nothing worth securing or possessing for oneself. Any person who has delved deeply into the spirit of no self is an emancipated person. Although he or she lives in the world he or she will not be bound by the world, and in behavior will always be calm, serene, undisturbed and self-mastered.

Lord Buddha was venerated as a messenger of peace for excellence. When asked by the wanderer Dighajanu what the gist of his teachings was, he replied explicitly: "According to my teachings, among the world of the *Devas*, *Maras* and *Brahma*, with crowds of recluses and *Brahmanas*, deities and human beings, there will be no quarrel whatsoever with anyone in the world" (M.I. 109 A). Further, he declared: "Oh Bhikkus, I do not quarrel with the world, only the world quarrels with me. Oh Bhikkus, a speaker of the Dharma quarrels with nobody in the world" (*Tuong Ung* III, 165).

Lord Buddha made it very clear that his purpose in preaching the *Dhamma* was not to quarrel with other religious leaders nor to compete with any antagonistic doctrine. There was no quarrel in his teachings. He just showed the way out of suffering, the way to enlightenment and to liberation. To those who were beset with anger, he taught *metta* or compassion to subdue anger. To those who were prone to harmfulness he taught *karuna* or loving kindness to turn them into harmless

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ones. To those who were not happy over other peoples' successes, he taught *mudita* or joyfulness so that they knew how to share their happiness with others. To those who were addicted to hatred and enmity, he taught *upekkha* or equanimity so as to neutralize their vindictiveness. So he has specific cures for many mental diseases and ills of the world.

In the past in Vietnam under the Buddhist dynasties of Ly and Tran, there were kings who were Dhyana masters like King Tran Thai Tong. He had declared that he considered his royal throne as torn shoes, to be given up at any moment. Tran Thai Tong's grandson, King Tran Nhan Tong, after having gained victory over the struggle against the Nguyen Mong invaders, had donned the monastic robe and became the founder of the first Vietnamese Dhyana sect called Truc Lam Yen Tu. He composed a very famous poem in nom character which ended with four lines in Chinese characters. These lines clearly show his calm, undisturbed bearing when confronted with the ups and downs of the world:

In life, we enjoy religion, according to  
circumstances,  
When hungry we eat, when tired, we at once sleep,  
With a treasure within oneself, there is no need to  
go in search of it,  
When confronted with challenge, we keep our  
mind undisturbed and composed,  
So there is no need to ask for meditation!

The last two lines of this short poem show the undisturbed and composed behavior of the king. "When confronted with challenge, we keep our mind undisturbed and composed." This means that against the impermanent nature of the objective world the king's mind was always serene and composed, without any ripple. This sentence also clarifies a basic Buddhist belief that every human being already has a seed of enlightenment within himself/herself. In Buddhist terminology it is called

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Buddheity. He/she already has enlightened wisdom, shining and brilliant. So there is no need to turn outside to find happiness and enlightenment.

The basic shortcoming of humankind in our times is the trend to forsake one's true self and run after the false self with all its terrific thirst and insatiable longing. Although in this most materialistic civilization the modern person lives a life of material opulence his spiritual life and mental aspirations remain unsatisfied. One constantly feels insecure, disturbed, and unbalanced. Such a mentality leads many people to narcotics, to mental hospitals, and sometimes to suicide.

Naturally, Buddhism does not praise a life of poverty and asceticism. Nor does Buddhism extol a low and bestial way of life of running after material sensual desires which reduces one into a weakling in body and a dullard in mentality. On the other hand, Buddhism has great appreciation for mental joy and happiness, dedication to moral living, and an exultation of enlightened bliss and liberation. Buddhism advises people to return to their own true self, to their own true personality, and to a way of life in harmony with society. Harmony should be engendered between oneself and nature, body and mind, compassion and wisdom, and feeling and intellect. Buddhism affirms that all people are capable of achieving such a harmonious inner way if only one so desires and if one acts in accordance with Lord Buddha's teachings and in conformity with the Buddhist way of life of virtue and wisdom. It extols a way of life that avoids the two extremes of indulgence in vulgar, low sense desires and bodily mortification and asceticism--a way of life leading to lasting joy and happiness. This is a way of life that all people from the East and from the West, male and female, young and old, religious and non-religious are able to lead and enjoy. That is the most famous eightfold way of life--a way that encompasses virtue, meditation and wisdom.

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Such a moral way of life will bring about concentration of inner mind (meditation). Such a concentration of inner mind will guarantee the clarity of wisdom. And a person of wisdom will be able to look at things as they truly are. Thanks to such an attitude humans are in a position to be their own master, to be the master of objective things instead of being their slaves. It is regrettable that this message of virtue, meditation and wisdom of Lord Buddha has become a victim of man himself, who has covered it with a cloak of mysticism, superstition, rites, ceremonies and scholasticism to such an extent that the spirit and the wording of this shining and simple message has become distorted, deformed, and far from humanity.

Now it is time for scholars and Buddhists to return the basic principles of Buddhism to their original brilliance and simplicity. Thanks to this brilliance and simplicity, Buddhist principles can enter deeply into the hearts of people and are welcomed and accepted by a large portion of people in this world, becoming their basic principles of life. The principles are converted into their daily bodily, vocal and mental activities. They become an invincible material force to change this world of war and insecurity into a world of peace and happiness, and thus to convert the era of the twenty-first century into an era of humanity, an era in which humanistic values will be the yardstick, the criteria of all values. Happiness or unhappiness of humans will be the red thread, the dividing line, clearly distinguishing truth from untruth, victory from defeat, right view from wrong view--an era in which man himself will become the supreme enlightened judge evaluating all political and social systems. Humankind will decide which system is best and which most full of vitality, which will be ultimately outmoded and withdrawn from the historic arena.

The motto "inwardly-oriented," that is to say, the return, the coming back to oneself, to one's real self, should not be misinterpreted as a negative, pessimistic, and unsocial way of

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life. On the contrary, this is the most realistic guideline, the most vital and dynamic force for changing society and the world. Buddhism has also spoken of building a *Nirvana* in this very world. The whole problem hinges upon the question: *From whence to begin?* To begin with society to convert society? To begin with the world to convert the world? Buddhism is of the view that such a beginning is not realistic. It would be to put the cart before the animal. Buddhism is of the opinion that people should begin with themselves, making themselves thoroughly aware of themselves. One should understand oneself, convert oneself, purify oneself, and change oneself for the better in a tireless struggle every hour, every day, and in all aspects of one's life. Only then will society and the world become healthy, more lovely and more meritorious. If there are no healthy people, how can we expect healthy social relationships, morally good and lovely? If the thoughts of peace, happiness and harmony are not imbued deeply into the inner self of every human being, how do we expect to have a peaceful, happy and harmonious world?

Please allow me to quote some words of Lord Buddha, very simple words yet full of wisdom and loving kindness:

Victory brings out hatred,  
Defeat leads to suffering,  
To live an undisturbed and happy life,  
Leaving behind both victory and defeat.

*Dhammapada 201*

A Buddhist who understands thoroughly the doctrine of no self does not put himself into antagonistic relationships with others, nor does he enter into disputes with other people. This explains his balanced and serene attitude, standing above board, leaving behind all victory and defeat. The Buddhist considers it of utmost priority to be victorious over greed, anger and delusion which are still dormant. He/she considers them to be the three most dangerous enemies because they are enemies from within.

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Not only do they make oneself suffer, they also are the source of the unhappiness and suffering of others.

Better it is to conquer oneself  
Than to conquer others,  
None can undo the victory  
Of one who is self-mastered  
And always acts with self-restraint,  
Though one conquers in battle  
A thousand times a thousand men,  
Yet the greatest conqueror is  
One who conquers self.

*Dhammapada* 104-103

In conclusion, I would like to offer the following new moral order, formulated from the teachings of Lord Buddha and applicable to this modern age. Such a moral way of life will minimize the risk of a nuclear war and usher in an era in which peace, security and harmony will become the norm. All humane values will be appreciated and respected.

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First, dedication of our life to the welfare of all sentient beings, and to work for peace, disarmament and international brotherhood.

Second, the living of a frugal, healthy and contented life so as to devote more time and energy to peace and to the welfare of all living beings.

Third, abstinence from any action which leads to disputes and wars; performance of any action which leads to peace, harmony and international understanding.

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Fourth, respect for the life of all sentient beings, for the life of our planet, and for the purity of our environment!

Fifth, peaceful coexistence and mutual spiritual cooperation.