

Beyond Tolerance and Pleasure

By P. A. Payutto (Phra Dhammapitaka)

Dear honorable participants of this World Summit:

It seems that human civilization has arrived at a turning point. This turning point is a summit that we cannot move further up, but only come back or go down. We should make a stop to ponder what to do. If the top is spacious and nice, it might be good for us to stay and thrive.

The Summit of All Summits

Due to scientific progress, human beings can now enjoy all kinds of pleasure and extreme prosperity through technology. Alone at home or anywhere, however remote, a person can learn of almost everything happening in the world or take part in almost every activity going on elsewhere. However, people also begin to feel that no one, anywhere on earth, however well-protected and sound, can really be safe and secure. The same globalizing technology that has brought about the New Economy has also made possible the 'new kind of war'.

It has long been realized that modern scientific and technological progress does not lead to real peace and happiness. Albert Einstein wrote 71 years ago, in his message to The 1932 Disarmament Conference:

As it is, the hardly bought achievements of the machine age in the hands of our generation are as dangerous as a razor in the hands of a three-year-old child. The possession of wonderful means of production has not brought freedom—only care and hunger.

“Worst of all is the technical development which produces the means for the destruction of human life, and the dearly created products of labor...

In our 'so-called' civilization, humankind has created, along with law and order, wars and conflicts. Peace has been broken easily and frequently. The advances of civilization have also generated tools of destruction that are higher developed and more effective than those made for constructive purposes. Moreover, economically, more wealth has been exploited for war and defense than that used for the promotion of human welfare, far more beyond comparison.

In spite of all that we have developed in the name of civilization, human beings still cannot live peacefully amongst themselves. With more advances in civilization, economic and social development thrives at the expense of the environment. Now, humans cannot live peacefully with nature. Threatened by the degeneration of the ecosystems, people have gathered for two Earth Summits, both of which have produced doubtful results.

Moreover, in spite of all the development and advances, a human being, as an individual, cannot live peacefully and happily with himself or herself. That is, he or she does not find peace and happiness inside. In the midst of all kinds of pleasures, equipped with comforts and conveniences, civilized people are not really peaceful and happy.

In reality, the lack of this internal peace and happiness has forced people to search for insatiable external pleasures and thus come into conflict with one another and exploit nature. It is this wrong way of life that has led to 'unsustainable development', to advancement at the expense of peace and happiness, both inside and outside, both social and

environmental. Since development is the core of current civilization, unsustainable development leads to unsustainable civilization.

However, as the above-mentioned lack of internal peace and happiness is the result of human misdirected development, we still have hope that a redirection of education can solve the problem. But, when an individual finds no place or time to feel secure, he loses the last vestige of internal peace. It is as if the loss of external peace recoiled to root out internal peace. The loss of peace can be at the point of no return. This is the failure and utter ruin of civilization. Here, one can imagine how very important it is to find a solution. That is why we are now at the summit of all summits.

The Three Motives Adverse to Peace

Even though the problem is now very serious, a solution is possible. Before all else, it must be realized that internal peace of mind is the foundation of external world peace. At the same time, we must admit that external organization and arrangements are necessary for, or at least, favorable to, the cultivation and the maintenance of an inner peace of mind.

Fundamentally, inner peace is stirred or broken by the three kinds of selfishness:

1. Craving for wealth and pleasures (*Taṇhā*).
2. Desire for power and authority (*Māna*).
3. Clinging to view, theory or ideology (*Diṭṭhi*).

These three motives, if mismanaged, will not only break inner peace of mind, but bring one into conflict with neighbors or lead one to exploit or cause troubles to others. Throughout history, innumerable wars and armed conflicts between nations and states, however ostensibly claimed, have almost all originated from the motives of craving for wealth or power or both.

In 1910, William James, a highly respected American philosopher and psychologist, said in his pacifist statement, “The Moral Equivalent of War”:

History is a bath of blood... Greek history is a panorama of jingoism and imperialism – war for war’s sake... Those wars were purely piratical. Pride, gold, women, slaves, excitement, were their only motives... Our ancestors have bred pugnacity into our bone and marrow... “Peace” in military mouths to-day is a synonym for “war expected.” ...the intensely sharp competitive preparation for war by the nations is the real war, permanent, unceasing; and that the battles are only a sort of public verification of the mastery gained during the “peace”-interval.

He also wrote:

Modern war is so expensive that we feel trade to be a better avenue to plunder;...

On a larger scale those wars and cases of bloodshed were waged in the name of faith and religion. Whether they were holy wars or religious persecutions, almost all were driven by the third motive of clinging to view and ideology.

Profit-oriented vs. Welfare-oriented

These three motives influence human beings not only at a national or tribal level, but at the inter-personal level of everyday life. Here, it is really global and, as it is here that the problem starts. It is here that the whole story should be understood and solution sought.

Under current social, political and economic systems and conditions, people are lulled to believe that the goal of a job or profession is to get rich. Making money is overstressed to the disregard of making a living. Even making a living is a personal end of an occupation,

whereas each occupation has also a social end, that is, to serve society or to benefit other people.

For example, making a living is the personal end of a medical doctor in doing his or her profession, but the medical profession also has the social end of curing people of disease or keeping them healthy. In reality, it is the social end that is the real result and true objective of the occupation. The personal end of earning a living is only a secondary result, a byproduct. Obviously, if members of a profession are true to the primary objective of their work, there will be a peaceful relationship between professional people and their clients. Society will benefit from this and peace will prevail.

In the opposite way, if professional people and jobholders, in disregard of the primary objective, make money to satisfy their personal ends, they will surely try to take advantage of their clients. They will not be true to their job or profession and will be insincere in their work. There will be problems in personal relationships and, in the long run, all of society suffers.

In the course of globalization, there have arisen a large number of multinational corporations. In international competition, most of them are seemingly compelled to be profit-oriented. To expand their trade or even to sustain market operations, many of these corporations tend to depend on the structure of international economy in which, through unequal exchange, developing countries are kept as sources of cheap raw materials and as markets for their expensive finished products. This process is, in turn, kept by indulging people of developing countries in consumerism and making them nonproductive recipients of assistance. Certainly, this is a kind of exploitation and taking advantage of the underprivileged, which is not conducive to world peace.

As all know well, wealth and power go together and are interdependent. It is easy to imagine how the amassing of wealth is intertwined with the pursuit of power. In the above-mentioned state of affairs, there is a fear of world domination rather than a hope for world unity. And in an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, peace will naturally never prevail.

To bring peace, there must be right understanding and right intention in action at all levels. For example, everyone must realize the fact that the true primary objective of an occupation is to do something for the benefit of other people or to meet some social end. At least, personal gains and social ends must be in balance. Businesses should be more welfare-oriented.

No Happiness Without Peace; No Peace Without Freedom

In the final analysis, peace begins in the mind and happiness is its concomitant. Thus, one who has peace of mind finds happiness in every place. This inner peace and happiness also asserts itself in everyday life and activities, so that the person lives peacefully with his or her neighbors. Also, he or she readily appreciates the peace and beauty of nature, feeling happy to be in the midst of the natural environment. Therefore, it is natural that one who has peace and happiness in the mind would not invade his or her neighbors and would not destroy the environment.

Fundamentally, inner peace and happiness in the mind is relatively independent of external material pleasures. This independence makes one free from the basic circumstances and conditions that bring one into conflict with neighbors or force one to exploit nature. On the contrary, peace and happiness inside enhances the happiness in friendly relations with one's neighbors and nature, thereby contributing more to the preservation of peace outside.

It is a pity that people in this age of globalization mostly lead their lives in dependent ways. Instead of human development towards independence and freedom, they make

progress in the way of causing their lives to be more and more dependent. For them, freedom has a narrow and often dubious meaning. By freedom they understand only social, economic and political freedoms such as freedom of speech and free enterprise. They think of being free as doing what they like or want to do.

Only some decades ago, modern people, following the idea of mastery over nature, were free to exploit natural resources, but now we are forced to restrain their abuses. People in developing countries may be free to criticize their government here, but, unknowingly and/or unconsciously, they must obey the restraints imposed by multinational corporations in another corner of the world.

Freedom is relative. True freedom is thoroughgoing and it is, at all levels, indispensable to peace. As the inner peace of mind is indispensable to peacekeeping outside, freedom of mind is indispensable to the maintenance of inner peace.

This inner or spiritual freedom consists in the ability to free one's mind of undesirable motives, especially greed, hatred and delusion. For example, one should always keep the mind free from the desire to exploit one's neighbors or nature and is able to do away with it whenever it arises. This includes the preservation of the mind cleared of the above three forms of selfishness, namely, craving for wealth and pleasures, desire for power and dominance, and clinging to view and ideology.

To realize true freedom, right human development is required. New generations of free people can be raised through right education. True education brings about a real change in human character. The three principal qualities of liberality, universal love and wisdom must be cultivated in place of greed, hatred and delusion. This means education must also be thoroughgoing. It is surely not the development of the ability to make money and is not merely training to make a living. It is not merely the development of human resources to serve social and economic development either. It is the transformation of humans from conquerors of nature into sustainers of global well-being.

Happiness That Is Independent of Pleasures

The way people seek happiness today is detrimental to peace. Under the influence of consumerism, modernized people seek sensual pleasures for happiness. In this way, they have made their happiness more dependent on external material gains. Instead of achieving happiness, they find themselves farther away from it. As their happiness become transient, these insatiable beings chase happiness and never find it. While more material pleasures are needed to kindle this transient happiness, it is natural that these people have been brought into more mutual conflicts and that natural resources have been exploited beyond the capacity of the earth's life-support system. In this way, unsustainable development results and world peace could never be realized.

This is why right development and right education are needed. In the right process, we accept the fact that the basic minimum peace, even the inner one of the mind, is based on the fundamental freedom of being free from poverty and from life-threatening conditions. Average people need a number of external material pleasures for their happiness. By right education, their happiness becomes more independent of external material pleasures. They become materially easier and easier satiable. The more they are educated, the less material goods are needed to make them happy. At the same time, as they become materially more productive and less is needed to satisfy their material desire, they have larger surpluses of material goods for supplies to help their fellow beings, to further social well-being and to support cultural, moral, intellectual and spiritual advancement of the humanity.

In this system, the truth of relativity and interdependency is applied. Here we see the relative and interdependent relationship between human development and freedom, and that between material prosperity and spiritual accomplishment. One point of significance is that economic success is treated here as a means, not the goal. The more one is educated, the more one's happiness is independent of material pleasures. And the more one is developed, the more material surpluses society will have to sustain global well-being and the noble progress of humanity.

Described above is the way to bring lasting peace to the world. Without a doubt, religious and spiritual institutions have important parts to play to achieve this goal.

The Middle Way to Establish Peace

It is for the purpose of solving human problems that religions came into existence. Religion has been, throughout history, a potent force behind world events. Fundamentally, religion identifies itself with the role of delivering people from fear of the unknown or from the suffering of mundane life. In playing this role, religion works towards creating peace both inside and outside. The fundamental inner or spiritual peace is often emphasized more than the external one.

However, out of the motive of clinging to view or ideology, religious institutions and religious people have caused innumerable breaches of peace. A long list of religious wars and persecutions can be recited. Only through hard struggles has the current civilization secured a degree of religious freedom and tolerance. Surely, the maintenance of world peace would not be possible without universal respect for religious freedom and the observance of this tolerance. In spite of all the measures recommended and decided upon by the UN, breaches of peace on account of intolerance are sporadically witnessed. It seems that much more needs to be done to make sure that world peace can be strengthened.

Even the concept of 'tolerance' has yet to be clarified. There is a tendency to go to one or the other of two extremes.

One of these extremes is the attitude of monopolizing truth to the point of strangling people. This is, of course, intolerance, which may go so far even to be bigotry or fanaticism. An intolerant person thoughtlessly refutes others' ideas and assumes that all people must convert to his or her faith. They may develop hostility and a tendency to force others to adopt one's religion. This surely leads to conflict and persecution.

The other extreme is the attitude of pleasing people to the point of strangling truth. One may say that all religions teach the same thing or that the teachings of all faiths are right and true.

One should develop right attitudes toward people on one side and toward knowledge and truth on the other. Friendly relations with one's neighbors should be maintained. A compromise between people can be worked out by adjusting feelings, desires and interests. We can compromise with neighbors, but we cannot compromise with nature.

To maintain friendly relations among people who hold different views of Truth does not mean that they will have to compromise their views or to compromise Truth. To do so would amount to a human conspiracy to blind humanity. Truth is as it is. Things are as they are in the ways of the natural order. We have to learn to know them and treat them with knowledge. Of what we know it is right to say that we know. And of what we do not know, it is right to say that we do not know.

In short, one should treat neighbors with loving-kindness and compassion, but relate to nature and truth through learning and knowledge. This is the middle way for people to live

peacefully with one another, while at the same time being free to proceed to search for knowledge and truth.

Religious Harmony in Support of Freedom

Broad-mindedness is not merely the willingness to accept other people who hold different views of Truth and live peacefully with them. To be really broad-minded, people, while professing different faiths, must be willing to cooperate and work together to achieve global well-being. Peaceful and cooperative relations must help further the search for knowledge and truth through freedom of thought and discussion. This may be a step forward beyond mere tolerance.

King Asoka heralded a new era of religious freedom and harmony in support of intellectual freedom when he declared the following in his Rock Edict XII about 2,315 years ago:

...there should be growth in the essentials of all religions. Growth in essentials can be done in different ways, but their root is restraint in speech, that is, not extolling one's own religion and condemning the religion of others without good cause ... Concord (*samavāya*), therefore, is good, One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others...people of all religions should be well-learned...

The foundation of a lasting peace must be made firm by the strengthening of the two layers. The outer one consists of freedom from poverty and the absence of all the vices that threaten basic human security such as drug abuse, trafficking in humans, international unfair trades, and the exploitation of natural resources. Supported by favorable external conditions, the inner layer of inner peace and freedom, on which the outer one rests, must be reinforced.

This can be achieved only through right human development that creates truly free humans whose development is assessed on the basis of the ability to enjoy inner peace and independent happiness. These free people, whose happiness is relatively independent of external material pleasures, enjoy, amidst peaceful and friendly relations with their neighbors of all the faiths, the freedom of searching for knowledge and truth. Only on such a sound foundation can the perfection of the individual life be realized and the nobility of human civilization be attained.

It is the construction of this lofty foundation that the UN, assisted by or in cooperation with religious and spiritual leaders of all faiths, should carry on to assure the achievement of world peace.

Thank you.