

Practice of *Ahimsa* in Buddhism

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The concept of "*ahimsa*" or no killing / non-violence is a difficult practice to adhere to even today. Since the 9-11 tragedy in New York, *ahimsa* has been challenged in our society. For Buddhists, *ahimsa* or non-violence is an essential practice. I have been re-examining the meaning of *ahimsa* in Buddhism as I have participated in the many peace activities in New York. How important is *ahimsa* in Buddhism, especially in my particular tradition of Jodoshinshu Buddhism?

In this paper I would like to discuss the meaning of *ahimsa* in Buddhism, and try to show that it is at the core of Buddhism. It is closely linked to the fundamental concepts and practice of Buddhism. I would like to present the basic concept of *ahimsa* in Buddhism based upon the Buddhist scriptures from the *Theravada* and *Mahayana* sutras, because *Theravada* Buddhism and *Mahayana* Buddhism are considered to be the two main divisions of Buddhism.

First, I would like to briefly define the term *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa*¹ consists of two parts, that is, "a" plus "*himsa*." "a" is a negative prefix, simply "no" or "not." "*himsa*" is a derivation from the root "*han*", meaning "to kill" and "to injure." Therefore, "*ahimsa*" means "not to kill" and "not to injure."

Buddhism was founded by the Gautama or Shakyamuni Buddha, in the 5th or 6th Century B.C.E. in India. Based upon the enlightenment experience by Shakyamuni Buddha, the teachings were spread throughout India, then China and other Asian countries, and now all over the world. The main idea is based upon the interdependence or interconnectedness of all existence: therefore, everything is constantly changing; there is no self which exists totally independent; "Enlightenment" can be realized by true awakening to the universal nature of interdependence.

The Buddha-Dharma can be understood as the Buddha's Teaching as well as the Teaching to become a Buddha. "The Buddha's Teaching" emphasizes the teachings personally taught by the Shakyamuni Buddha, which is emphasized by the *Theravada* tradition of Buddhism. "Teaching to become a Buddha" emphasizes the teachings that lead us to Enlightenment, which is stressed by the *Mahayana* tradition of Buddhism. *Theravada* or "Way of Elders" is a surviving school of the older branch of Buddhism and focuses to this day on preserving and perpetuating verbatim the original words of the historical Buddha. The Four Noble Truths, which were emphasized as the main teaching of the Buddha, are an aspect of self-benefit. *Theravada* Buddhism spread to Burma, Sri Lanka, Laos, Thailand, Bangladesh Afghanistan, and other places in South and East Asia. *Mahayana* or "Large Vehicle" took the broader approach to spread the Teaching of the Buddha, following the heart or intention of the Buddha. Emphasized are the idea of

¹ Malasekera, G.P. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. 1961-65. (volume I, page 287)

upaya or "Skillful Means," the Six *Paramitas*, and *Bodhisattvas* who decide to remain in the world of delusion because of the compassion for all beings, which are aspects of benefiting others. *Mahayana* Buddhism spread to China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Vietnam and some other Asian countries.

In *Mahayana* Buddhism, we find different schools of Buddhism such as Zen, Pure Land, Nichiren etc. Each school has developed its unique teachings, but we always find a common basic foundation of Buddhist teachings, as all of the Buddhist sects are based upon the Buddhist sutras or scriptures, which reveal the world of Enlightenment.

(1) Nature of violence in Buddhism

Why did violence arise? It is a anger, hatred and the feeling of revenge etc. that causes violence and war.

"He reviled me! He struck me! He defeated me. He robbed me!" In those who do not gird themselves up with this, hatred is quelled. In this world, hatred never yet has dispelled hatred. It is the absence of hatred that leads to peace. This law is ancient and will last forever. (Dhammapada², Chapter 1)

This is a passage that I have used on many occasions at peace gatherings since the 9-11 tragedy. Whenever I am invited to Interfaith Peace gatherings in New York City or asked to share Buddhist perspectives on war with others, I always quote this passage. Attachment to anger and hatred need to be avoided from the aspect of the Buddhist teaching of *sunyata* or emptiness. Anger and hatred may be much escalated when we are attached to them. Violence is not the answer to violence. Hatred is not the answer to hatred. This is the wisdom of the Buddha concerning anger, hatred and violence. Practicing *ahimsa* is the answer in the time of "*himsa*" or violence. Practicing patience as in the six *paramitas*, practicing compassion and loving kindness are the answer for Buddhist practitioners, when confronted by "*himsa*."

The above quotation has played an important role in history and life. It was used when Japan lost World War II. When it was stated by Sri Lanka, Japan was able to avoid becoming a territory of another country.

It also played an important role in Japanese Buddhist history. It was the passage that guided young *Honen* into the path of the Buddha, a path which led him to create a new school of Buddhism, called *Jodoshu* or Pure Land Buddhism.

In the *Kamakura* Era in Japan, various new Buddhist sects were formed in Japan, such as *Jodo* (Pure Land) -*shu*, *Jodoshinshu* (Shin Buddhism), *Zen* (*Rinzai-shu*, *Soto-shu*, *Obaku-shu*) and *Nichiren-shu*. Among them, *Jodo-shu*, founded by *Honen Shonin* (1133-1212) was the first new school in Buddhism in the 12th Century. The story about *Honen* and

² Nakamura, Hajime. *Shinri no kotota, Kanko no kotoba*. Iwanami Shoten 1978 (page 10)

why he began to walk the path of Buddhism, and then created Pure Land Buddhism in Japan is well-known.

When *Honen* was young, his father *Tokikuni Uruma* was killed in front of *Honen*. Young *Honen* told his father that he would take revenge, *Tokikuni* said to *Honen* in his last words, "If you take revenge in *Gennai Akashi* (who killed *Tokikuni*), his children will take revenge upon you later. There is no way to cease anger and hatred from generation to generation. I want you to learn the Buddha-Dharma and find a way to overcome such a cycle of revenge."

Ordained at the age of 15, *Honen* studied and practiced various paths of Buddhism for almost thirty years in order to find the answer to overcoming anger and hatred in ordinary people. Then, when he encountered the passage³ of *Shantao*, a Chinese Pure Land master, he found the answer to be the path of *Nembutsu* to liberate us equally.

The *Nembutsu* is the path by which all sentient beings experience the Buddha's Boundless Wisdom and Compassion, particularly those who have suffered from the blind passions of anger, hatred, greed, and ignorance. It is this wisdom which makes us aware of suffering and pain arising from attachment to blind passions. It is this compassion which embraces the anger and hatred and transforms them into virtues.

Here, we see that the essence of the *Nembutsu* teaching in Pure Land Buddhism is deeply rooted in the idea of *ahimsa* found in the *Dhammapada*. Thus in Pure Land Buddhism, practicing the *Nembutsu* path means to practice *ahimsa*. *Shinran Shonin* (1173-1262) who was a disciple of *Honen*, and a founder of Pure Land Shin Buddhism stated:

Those who feel uncertain of birth should say the *Nembutsu* aspiring first for their own birth in the Buddha Land. Those who feel that their own birth is completely settled should, mindful of the Buddha's benevolence, hold the *Nembutsu* in their hearts and say it to respond in gratitude to that benevolence, with the wish, "May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha's teaching spread!"⁴

Practicing the *Nembutsu -Dharma* means to cultivate the mindful heart of "peace."

In terms of dealing with anger, the Buddha showed an interesting example when Brahmin *Bharadvaja* blamed the Buddha.

³ "Single-heartedly practicing the saying of the Name of Amida alone –whether walking, standing, sitting, or reclining – without regard to the length of time, and without abandoning it from moment to moment: this is called "the act of true settlement," for it is in accord with the Buddha's Vow." In particular, the last phrase "for it is in accord with the Buddha's Vow" moved *Honen* so deeply. He realized the *Nembutsu*, saying the Amida's Name, is the great path selected by the Buddha with Inconceivable Wisdom and Compassion in order to liberate all beings equally.

⁴ *Collected Works of Shinran*, Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha 1997 (page 560)

Brahmin Bharadvaja angrily criticized the Buddha, who then said to him, "Brahmin, what do you think? Do your friends. Allies, relatives, or guests come to your home?"

"Gautama. Yes, they sometimes come."

"Brahmin, what do you think? Do you sometimes serve soup, or delicacies?"

"Gautama, Yes, I do."

"Brahmin, if they do not accept it, then to whom does the food belong?"

"Gautama, if they do not accept it, it belongs to us."

"That's correct. Brahmin, you criticized us even though we don't speak ill of you. You became angry at us who do not get angry. You became argumentative to us who are not argumentative. However, we do not accept it. Brahmin, therefore, it belongs to you...." (*Samyutta-Nikaya*, Chapter 7)⁵

(2) *Ahimsa* from the aspect of Precepts (*sila*) in Buddhism

Ahimsa is the first of five precepts or ten precepts that the Buddha taught - "do not kill."

The five precepts⁶ are recited in Buddhists in *Theravada* tradition. The phrase "Panatipata Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami (I observe the training rule to abstain from killing)" is the first precept of "do not kill" or *ahimsa*.

All beings fear violence; all fear death. If you take yourself as the measure, do not kill and do not let others kill. All beings fear violence; all love life. If you take yourself as the measure, do not kill and do not let others kill. (Dhammapada⁷, Chapter 10)

Do not kill living beings. Do not let others kill. Do not allow others to kill. One needs to control violence toward all living beings whether they are strong and powerful in society or they are fearful and weak. (Sutta-Nipata⁸, Chapter 2, #14)

"Do not kill" also includes "Do not let others kill." This means that Buddhism is basically against any kind of killing. The Buddha Shakyamuni himself faced several wars. One of them was the dispute between *Kapilavatthu* and *Koli*⁹ over irrigating water.

⁵ Nakamura, Hajime. *Akuma to no Taiwa*, Iwanami Shoten 1986 (page 128-129)

⁶ Five precepts are:

Panatipata Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami I observe the training rule to abstain from killing.

Adinnadana Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami I observe the training rule to abstain from stealing.

Kamesumicchacara Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami I observe the training rule to abstain from adultery.

Musavada Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami I observe the training rule to abstain from lying.

Surameraya Majjapamadatthana Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami I observe the training rule to abstain from intoxicants, which cause heedlessness.

⁷ Nakamura, Hajime. *Shinri no kotota, Kanko no kotoba*. Iwanami Shoten 1978 (page 28)

⁸ Nakamura, Hajime. *Budda no kotoba (Suttanipata)*. Iwanami Shoten 1984 (page 81)

⁹ *Buddha-Dharma*, Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research 1984 (page 96)

A long dry spell had persisted, causing the rivers to trickle little water, which in turn created irrigation problems. The two cities of *Kapilavattu* and *Koli* saw struggles arising over the limited waters of the River *Rohini* flowing between them. The tight water situation caused the farmers of both banks to speak ill of those on the opposite bank until finally, armed with clubs and swords, blood was shed in the strife. When the Buddha heard this, he came to *Kapilavattu* in time to position himself between the two opposing armies. The Buddha asked,

Why do you congregate here? Why are you about to engage in battle?

.....It was over water needed for irrigation!

Compared to a human life, how valuable is water?

.....When comparing water to human life, the value of water was almost nil.

Why, then, is it for water, which has such little value, you all are trying to destroy invaluable human life?

.....

After the Buddha's intervened, it was settled. The Buddha was able to stop the people from killing each other. The Buddha practiced *ahimsa* even when the war was going on. The Buddha was *ahimsa* itself. He never participated in warfare, and he tried to prevent war¹⁰.

Precepts are one of the Three Learnings¹¹ of Buddhism, namely precepts, meditation and wisdom. All the practitioners of Buddhism should learn these three basic categories. They are considered to embrace all aspects of Buddhist doctrine and practice.

In *Mahayana* Buddhism, *sila* is one of six *Paramitas*¹². The *paramitas* are the six kinds of practice by which bodhisattvas are able to attain Enlightenment in *Mahayana* traditions. *Paramita* means reaching or fulfilling the other shore of enlightenment.

A disciple of the Buddha shall not himself kill, encourage others to kill, kill by expedient means, praise killing, rejoice at witnessing killing, or kill through incantation or deviant mantras. He must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of killing, and shall not intentionally kill any living creature.

As a Buddha's disciple, he ought to nurture a mind of compassion and filial piety, always devising expedient means to rescue and protect all beings. If instead, he fails to restrain

¹⁰ There was another incident in which the Buddha was directly involved. The Buddha intervened with the army of King *Vidudabha* of *Kosala* who attempted to attack the *Sakya* clan, the Buddha's original clan. The Buddha sat three times before the *Vidudabha*'s army and was able to stop them, but at the fourth time, the Buddha was not there, because the Buddha saw the past deep karma that the *Sakya* clan had created. The *Sakya* clan was destroyed, and all of the people were killed.

¹¹ *Sila* (Precepts) are for stopping evil and practicing good. *Dhyana* (Meditation) is to practice concentration by calming down one's mind and body, and gaining single-pointedness without wavering of mind. *Prajna* (wisdom) is to understand true reality of things and see things as they are.

¹² The six *paramitas* are *Dana-paramita* (giving), *Sila-paramita* (precepts), *Ksanti-paramita* (perseverance), *Virya-paramita* (efforts), *Dhyana-paramita* (meditation), and *Prajna-paramita* (wisdom)

himself and kills sentient beings without mercy, he commits a Parajika (major) offense. (Brahman Net Sutra¹³)

In the *Mahayana* text, you see more detailed explanations of *ahimsa*, applied not only to ongoing wars, but also to removing conditions which may cause killing later. Trying to avoid hurting yourself as well as others is the precept that the Buddha established.

(3) Knowing yourself

There is nothing more lovable than myself in all directions. In the same way, for other people, they themselves are most lovable. Therefore, treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. (Udana-Varga,¹⁴ Chapter 5)

All beings fear violence; all fear death. If you take yourself as the measure, do not kill and do not let others kill. All beings fear violence; all love life. If you take yourself as the measure, do not kill and do not let others kill. (Udana-Varga,¹⁵ Chapter 5; Dhammapada,¹⁶ Chapter 10)

Buddhism is the religion that centers the Enlightenment Experience that the Buddha achieved through his deep meditation. To know who you are and what you are is essential in any form of Buddhism. Instead of looking outside, the Buddha emphasizes looking inside of ourselves. Once one realizes the importance of himself or herself, one should be able to understand the importance of others.

There is a concept called “Buddha-nature” (*Buddhata* or *Tathagata-garbha*). It means that all sentient beings have the possibility or potentiality to be awakened and to become Buddha. Many times Buddha-nature is clouded by blind passions. Truly realizing one’s Buddha-nature leads to the realization of the Buddha-nature of others.

Do not reflect upon missteps of others, their deeds and misdeeds, but rather look upon what you yourself have done and left undone. (Dhammapada, Chapter 4¹⁷)

“Knowing yourself” has two aspects. One is the aspect the enlightened quality of Buddha-nature, and the other is the aspect of deluded existence caused by blind passions. To know yourself means to realize what selfish and ill-willed beings each of us is. In Mahayana Buddhism, especially Buddhism in Japan, it is very important to be aware of

¹³ *Kokuyaku Daizokyo*: Kokumin Bunko Kankokai 1917 (Volume 3 Bonnmokyo page 7, 8)

¹⁴ Nakamura, Hajime. *Shinri no kotota, Kanko no kotoba*. Iwanami Shoten 1978 (page 179)

¹⁵ Nakamura, Hajime. *Shinri no kotota, Kanko no kotoba*. Iwanami Shoten 1978 (page 179)

¹⁶ Nakamura, Hajime. *Shinri no kotota, Kanko no kotoba*. Iwanami Shoten 1978 (page 28)

¹⁷ Nakamura, Hajime. *Shinri no kotota, Kanko no kotoba*. Iwanami Shoten 1978 (page 17)

ordinariness. We are ordinary beings who make many mistakes and do not know what is right and what is wrong. Master *Saicho* of the *Tendai* Tradition described himself as “lowest ordinary being Saicho,” Master *Honen* of the *Jodoshu* Pure Land Buddhism called himself “foolish ignorant Honen-bo,” and Master *Shinran* of the *Jodoshinshu* Buddhism called himself “foolish and stubble-haired Shinran.”

Prince *Shotoku* (573-622) contributed a great deal to Buddhism in Japan, and clearly stated his policy based on *ahimsa*. Prince *Shotoku* was considered as the Shakyamuni Buddha in Japan. He is known for establishing a centralized government based on Buddhist principles. His ideals of government were stated in the “Seventeen-articles Constitution” written in 604 by Prince *Shotoku*.

It begins with the importance of harmony, saying

Harmony is to be valued, and an avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored. All men are influenced by class-feelings, and there are few who are intelligent. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers, or who maintain feuds with the neighboring villages. But when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, and there is concord in the discussion of business, right views of things spontaneously gain acceptance. Then what is there which cannot be accomplished! (Article 1)¹⁸

We can see clearly in the Constitution the importance of harmony, and trying to avoid violence. How can this harmony be achieved? It is the teachings of the Buddha which can provide guidance. So, in Chapter 2, it says:

Sincerely revere the three treasures. The three treasures: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are the final refuge and are the supreme objects of faith in all countries. Can any man in any age ever fail to respect these teachings? Few men are utterly bad. They may be taught to follow it. But if they do not go to the three treasures, how shall their crookedness be made straight? (Article 2)¹⁹

Chapter 10 talks about the awareness of ordinary beings, who don't know what the true reality is all about and are deluded by their blind passions. When we are attached to one view, we tend to become just, right, sage or/and wise, and consider others as unjust, wrong, evil or/and foolish. Human beings ultimately do not know what is just and what is right. Therefore, it is very important to attain enlightenment so that we can see things as they are. It is equally important for us to realize what we see is not necessarily ultimate truth, just, right etc. Recognition of foolishness and ordinariness is very important wisdom that we should have within us.

Let us control ourselves and not be resentful when others disagree with us, for all men have hearts and each heart has its own leanings. The right of others is our

¹⁸ *Jodoshinshu Seiten*, Hongwanji Shuppanbu 1988 (page 1433)

¹⁹ *Jodoshinshu Seiten*, Hongwanji Shuppanbu 1988 (page 1433)

wrong, and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary men. How can anyone lay down a rule by which to distinguish right from wrong? For we are all wise sometimes and foolish at others. Therefore, though others give way to anger, let us on the contrary dread our own faults, and though we may think we alone are in the right, let us follow the majority and act like them. (Article 10)²⁰

In my view, the above articles by Prince *Shotoku* are an example of profound wisdom that based on the Buddhist teachings.

(4) Practice of compassion

How do we approach violence? It is by the practice of compassion or loving-kindness directed to any violence. Cultivating the mind of compassion will control anger, hatred and aggression, and from this sequence, one will control violence that comes out of anger, hatred and aggression.

May all beings be happy and secure; May their hearts be wholesome. Whatever living beings there may be, feeble or strong, tall, fat, or medium, short, small, or large, without exception, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born or who are to be born, may all beings be happy.(*Sutta-Nipata*,²¹ Chapter 1, #8)

Let none deceive another, not despise any person whatsoever in any place. Let him/her not wish any harm to another out of anger or ill-will. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him/her cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let his/her thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world: above, below and across without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity. (*Sutta-Nipata*,²² Chapter 1, #8)

The Buddha's Mind is great compassion and loving kindness. It embraces sentient beings with unconditional benevolence. (*Meditation Sutra on Amitayus*²³)

I became ill, because sentient beings are in suffering. (*Vimalakirti Sutra*,²⁴ Chapter 5)

Encouraging the performance of wholesome acts is very important in Buddha's teachings. *Metta* or the loving kindness meditation is essential in Buddhist practice. When the Buddha talks about actions, there are three kinds of actions: action with the

²⁰ *Jodoshinshu Seiten*, Hongwanji Shuppanbu 1988 (page 1436)

²¹ Nakamura, Hajime. *Budda no kotoba (Suttanipata)*. Iwanami Shoten 1984 (page 37)

²² Nakamura, Hajime. *Budda no kotoba (Suttanipata)*. Iwanami Shoten 1984 (page 37, 38)

²³ *Kokuyaku Daizokyo*: Kokumin Bunko Kankokai 1917 (Volume 1, Kanmuryojukyo, page 18)

²⁴ *Kokuyaku Daizokyo*: Kokumin Bunko Kankokai 1917 (Volume 10, Yuimakyo, page 53)

physical body, action with the mouth, and action with the mind. This is the practice of compassion, or cultivating the mind of loving-kindness for all beings. The practice of compassion or thinking of others' happiness, peace and well-being is based on the idea of the interdependence or interconnectedness of our existence. One exists because of everything else, and nothing exists independently. The benefits that Buddhism talks about are always of two aspects – self-benefit (or wisdom) and benefiting others (or compassion). Both are important.

Here, I would like to define compassion as it is perceived in Buddhism. Compassion as *maitri* (from the word “friendship”), and compassion as *karuna* (from the word “voice of suffering and pain”) are two basic meanings. As friendship works on the same level, there are no hierarchical differences in compassion. It works on the level of equality with trusting each other and helping each other. From this, *maitri* means giving happiness to others equally. As we hear the voices of suffering and pain, share and understand the suffering and pain. From this, *karuna* means to get rid of suffering and pain. In addition to these two definitions, compassion also means joy and happiness as well as non-attachment.

You can see by their definition that compassion and suffering are inseparable in Buddhism. Knowing the suffering and why there is suffering, and how we can overcome the suffering is the wisdom of the Buddha. Once realizing this noble truth, one cannot help but act with compassion. Therefore, compassion should be understood as wisdom in motion. Theravada Buddhism tends to emphasize the Four Noble Truths, or self-benefit aspect, and Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes compassion or the aspect of benefiting others.

(5) Concerning Weapons and War

The practice of compassion is the path by which to overcome anger and hatred. Maintaining compassion in any situation may be difficult but we always need to practice it. How do we practice compassion in wars?

Look at the people who are fighting to kill. Their fears rose when they took weapons to attack. (Sutta –Nipata,²⁵ Chapter 4, #10)

First, do not carry any weapon to hurt others. This is so simple, yet once we get weapons, it is difficult to throw them away. Abolishing weapons will be the simplest way to stop wars but having weapons also means possessing power to control others. All the fears come from existing weapons. Do not take any weapon from the start.

Bodhisattvas that abide in this stage are by nature completely free from the killing of living things. They are without brutality or the need to use weapons, and they do not harbor feelings of anger and resentment. With humility, they are full of good will and forgiveness towards living beings, only wishing for their welfare. These Bodhisattvas do

²⁵ Nakamura, Hajime. *Budda no kotoba (Suttanipata)*. Iwanami Shoten 1984 (page 203)

not even have thoughts of distressing living beings, much less think of turning these thoughts into doing actual harm. (Avatamsaka Sutra,²⁶ Section of Ten Stages)

When a war happens, (the Bodhisattva) raises the mind of compassion, and teaches the sentient beings to settle on the foundation of no-fighting. If the great war happens, (the Bodhisattva) raises the mind of equanimity to embrace both ally and enemy, and with his/her high spirit, controls people's anger, and makes them peaceful and secured. (Vimalakirti Sutra²⁷, Chapter 8)

Keeping the mind of compassion and controlling anger in any situation, including in time of war, is essential in Buddhism. One needs to remember that we are all living beings who have precious lives whether they may be your ally or your enemy.

Wherever the Buddha comes to stay, there is no state, town or village which is not blessed by his virtues. The whole country reposes in peace and harmony. The sun and the moon shine with pure brilliance; wind arises and rain falls at the right time. There is no calamity or epidemic, and so the country becomes wealthy, and its people enjoy peace. Soldiers and weapons become useless; and people esteem virtue, practice benevolence and diligently cultivate courteous modesty. (Sukhavativyuha Sutra²⁸)

There are various symbols that Buddhism uses to signify compassion and enlightenment. One well-known symbol is the lotus flower. It is a symbol of enlightenment which transforms evil into virtue. The lotus does not grow on the plain ground (peaceful ground), but grows in the muddy pond of suffering and pain. In the end, violence and evilness need to be transformed into peace and virtues, because of the practice of wisdom and compassion.

In the story of the Buddha's enlightenment in *Buddhagaya*, *Maras* or evil gods attempted to stop the Buddha from becoming enlightened. They sent a great army to force the Buddha to move from his meditating under the *Bodhi* Tree. *Mara's* torrents of rocks, swords, and fire rained down upon the Buddha, but they were all transformed into a crown of flowers, and changed into scented powder. They were scattered all over the ground.²⁹ This story reveals the transformational nature of Buddha's teachings. Here, you see that the Buddha's path is the way in which to transform *himsa*, violence and weapons, into *ahimsa*, non-violence and peace.

King *Asoka* (circa 273-232 BCE), who created the largest territory of the *Maurya* dynasty in the history of India, was transformed from violence to *ahimsa* and peace by the teaching of the Buddha. After his conquest of *Kalinga* kingdom, he truly realized the

²⁶ *Kokuyaku Daizokyo*: Kokumin Bunko Kankokai 1917 (Volume 8, Yuimakyo, page 208)

²⁷ *Kokuyaku Daizokyo*: Kokumin Bunko Kankokai 1917 (Volume 10, Yuimakyo, page 88, 89)

²⁸ *Kokuyaku Daizokyo*: Kokumin Bunko Kankokai 1917 (Volume 1, Dimuryojukyo, page 73)

²⁹ *Buddha-Dharma*, Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research 1984 (page 27-30)

tragic nature of wars, and governed the country with the spirit of *ahimsa* and compassion, taking refuge in the Buddha's teachings. He created rock-edicts and pillar-edicts in various places in his territories to let the people know about the Dharma in which King *Asoka* believed and encouraged the people to practice it.

Rock Edict XIII described the conquest of *Kalinga*:

The Kalinga country was conquered by King Ashoka in the eighth year of his reign. One hundred fifty thousand persons were carried away captive, 100,000 were slain, and many times that numbers died. Immediately after the Kalinga had been conquered, King Asoka became intensely devoted to the study of truth, to the love of truth, and to the understanding of truth. King Asoka, conqueror of the Kalinga, is moved to remorse now. For he has left profound sorrow and regret because the conquest of a people previously involved slaughter, death, and deportation.³⁰

King *Asoka* considered truth–conquest the most important conquest, instead of sword-conquest after the *Kalinga* war. Here the truth is the Dharma or Buddha's teaching.

The contents of the Edicts by King *Asoka* may be indexed³¹ as

- a. Forbidding slaughter of animals. Sacredness of all life.
- b. Establishments for the dispensing of medicine for men and for animals.
- c. Duties of royal executive officers. Instruction to be given by the Council.
- d. Practice of the Dharma.
- e. Appointment of Superintendents of the Dharma and their duties.
- f. Prompt dispatch of business of State.
- g. Equality of all men of all sects, except in their striving for perfection.
- h. Change in the nature of the king's pleasure.
- i. Virtue is better than ceremonies.
- j. Fame does not bring gain, but good deeds make one free from evil inclinations.
- k. The highest gift is the gift of the Dharma
- l. By tolerance of other sects one benefits one's sect.

King *Asoka* spread non-violence based upon the sacredness of all life. Rock Edict IV states:

For many hundred years in the past, slaughter of animals, cruelty to living creatures, discourtesy to relatives, and disrespect for priest and ascetics have been increasing. But now because of King Ashoka's practice of the truth, summoning the people to exhibitions of the chariots of the gods, elephants, fireworks, and other heavenly displays. King Asoka's inculcation of truth has increased, beyond anything observed in many hundreds of years, abstention from killing animals and

³⁰ Translation is from Nikam and McKeown, *The Edicts of Asoka*. University of Chicago Press, 1974

³¹ According to *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Malasekera, G.P.1961-65 (Vol. II page 183)

from cruelty to living beings, kindness in human and family relations, respect for priests and ascetics, and obedience to mother and father and elders.....³²

We see the transformation from violence to non-violence/peace when Buddhism enters different areas. Like the case of King *Asoka*, the Tibetan race used to be a war-loving race, but when Buddhism entered Tibet in 7th Century, they became a peace-loving race. The *Huns* in China attempted to invade with an army, but they stopped or decreased their invasion when Buddhism entered among their people.

(6) Conclusion:

Understanding *ahimsa* in Buddhism leads one to explore the fundamental principles of Buddhism such as wisdom and compassion. It means that *ahimsa* is imbedded in the core teachings and practices of Buddhism. Learning the Buddha's teachings and practicing the Buddha's path naturally guides us to act and think based upon *ahimsa*. Though violence may never disappear from human history, we need to continue to make efforts to practice non-violence, transforming violence into peace.

Recently there are movements of "Engaged Buddhism" which emphasizes that Buddhists should actively involve themselves in dialogue, social and political actions. Though such movements may still be small in scale, Buddhists definitely need to contribute more to the peace movement in this present world, as the teachings of the Buddha have a lot to offer in terms of non-violence and peace. Buddhists should actively share their wisdom with others, actively participate in various opportunities for peace, and should be more responsible to our world as members of the whole human race, as members of the race of living beings.

May peace prevail on the earth. May all beings learn to respect all lives. May we all practice *ahimsa* and compassion. May all beings be happy, well and peaceful.

³² Translation is from Nikam and McKeown, *The Edicts of Asoka*. University of Chicago Press, 1974

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