

BUDDHIST PATH FOR WORLD PEACE: HUNGARIAN PERSPECTIVE*

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Abstract

The *Magga* or path is always in a particular context. We may try to put it into a universal perspective, nevertheless, it retains its unique character, or, a 'space' within the ever existing *here and now*. However, it is also leading *from* somewhere to a point still in a distance. Thus walking the *Path* is a process. Last year the topic of 1st MCU International Academic Conference was "Buddhism and World Crisis"; that may be taken as a point of departure. Our conference today gives a point we are all aiming at, *i.e.* world peace. While analyzing the subject it is striking for the author how far his understanding is influenced by his local, or, national background. Superficial knowledge about the *Dhamma* and the way how to practice it in Hungary is a new phenomenon, not older than around two hundred years. The institutional presence of *Sangha* has even a much shorter history, just about 60 years. The paper will interpret the consequences of it regarding the subject of the conference in that context.

Thus, in case we see the issue of world crisis and world peace that are both evidently part of the same *samsāra* (its endlessness and inevitableness are both well reflected in the *suttas* 3), we can assume it to be a futile exercise to find the *a priori* origin of it. The challenge is the determination of any possible and necessary actions today, here and now, for us, Buddhists, and for every sentient being on Earth who wish to reach the state of *santi*, *i.e.* peace, calmness and tranquility.

Keywords: Buddhist Path; World Peace; Hungarian Perspective

Introduction

A recent thesis made a fresh attempt to define the theoretical meaning of *Santi* and came to the conclusion that ‘... peace according to Buddhist philosophy is “Santi” that its meanings encompass two levels of peace: Lokiya Santi or mundane peace and Lokuttara Santi or supramundane peace; and three kinds of peace: external or social peace, peace of mind, and supreme peace, Nibbana. These kinds of peace are classified into two types— external and internal; Buddhist philosophy puts an emphasis on internal peace rather than external peace’ (Sudhamma, 2012). It is not the wright place and moment to discuss the theoretical problems behind this interpretation; however, it is worthwhile to put it into a less static, more dynamic framework. The ‘levels’, ‘kinds’ and ‘types’ are also seeming to us in search of a more flexible structure that could provide elbow room for actions within the process of reaching that desired state of *Santi*.

Since our intentions might be very different. We may have an intention to act for appeasing, or, act for pacification *i.e.* *Santikamma* In both cases, those who are feeling that their social status is unbearable may wish to act with desperation. They are the hundreds of thousands of migrants who leave the zones of war in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, or, distressed by natural calamities, hunger or diseases in areas, like Bangladesh, Myanmar, or Libya, and move towards Europe, or other parts of Southeast-Asia. Neither intervention into those wars, nor money sent to those countries of origin, or transition will bring meaningful results on a short term, but rather increase tensions. However, fear of those moving into countries with different cultural heritage, wealth, ethnic composition or religion steers a course for anger, hatred and acts of violence on both sides. Generally, we may realize that a strong and devastating process of centripetal and centrifugal forces are shaping the life of societies on a global, regional and local scale; expansion and collapse of our universe goes on at the same time. Thus no action is also an action, or, more bluntly, turning inward will not prevent violence and hatred around us. Shall we just ‘let it go’, or, let it happen?

Actually the thesis we just referred to interestingly enough compares those theoretical assumptions with the life and actions of the world famous Vietnamese Zen master, the Most Ven. Thich Nhất Hạnh. The author recognizes the importance of the process when states that ‘Buddhist philosophy stresses on the process of solving the problem of peace via the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, especially the causes of having no peace.’ Even by emphasizing that the Vietnamese Master ‘stresses to show the value and importance of peace especially

internal peace or peace in oneself. According to him, real peace is possible; peace is everywhere; peace is every step; peace is every breath; and peace is the seed inherited in our mind. For approaches to peace, he proposes the practice of mindful living, mindful breathing, mindful walking, Deep relaxation, Beginning Anew, and Peace Treaty, and the Five Mindfulness Trainings.’

An excellent cut of the Gordian Knot could be found in the short article of Ven. Pramaha Somboon Uddhikaro on the term of ‘Socially Engaged Buddhism’ when he wrote ‘there is no dualistic split between spiritual and worldly domains, or an individual and a society.’ Analyzing the two prominent Thai scholars, the venerable Buddhadasa and the Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto) he concludes that ‘agree that socially engaged Buddhism is the original concept in Buddhism. While Phra Brahmaganabhorn’s view is based on the teaching of *silā* or *vinaya*, the Buddhadasa’s based on the teaching of “*Idappaccayatā*” or the teaching of interdependent arising.’ (Phramaha Somboon Uddhikaro, 2014)

Contemporary philosophers in the West try to find ways to describe, interpret or just understand better the on-going processes inside the human brain and outside in the world of phenomena. My impression is that literature and philosophy, fine art and philosophy, metaphysical and transcendental explanations, as well as discoveries made by natural and human sciences are also in the process of being compressed into one, or, at least interrelated more and more tightly. The new leap forward in quantum physics using Nagarjuna’s logics rather than Aristotle’s is also reflecting on the intangible, or ‘tacit dimension’ (Polanyi, 1958) of human understanding of macro and micro-universe. (Polanyi, 1966)

Ethical considerations are also signaling a process that forces to change from defining the exact content of eternal truth to mindful and careful expansion of responsibilities from individual and generational to global and multigenerational, *i.e.* long term, universal scope. Discussing the issues related to a new way of approaching the environmental ethics,

Hungarian philosopher and psycho-therapist summarized the process in this way: ‘Nowadays the estimated amount of energy used by an average human being is equal with that as if fifty slaves would have worked for each of them for forty hours a week. However, that relative comfort has a huge price. Numerous negative impact on the environment threatens not only other living creatures, but also directly endangers his own existence. By the recent estimates around 5-10 million species exist on Earth, and about 20 percent will disappear within a decade. Extinction of every specie, as Holmes Robson said, a kind of

‘super-killing’ since not only a certain discrete individual, but the near innumerable number of potential offspring also dies.’(Kovacs, 2008) Isn’t it true for human individuals as well? Is there any other way out but compassion? It looks like *Brahmavihāra* is still a complex but real answer for all of us. Let me quote one more time Prof. Kovacs, ‘Environmental ethics means expansion of traditional ethical systems and going beyond them at the same time. While traditional ethics basically deals with human relations, even within that mainly with responsibilities of those living at the same time towards each other, but environmental ethics considerably enlarges the scope of human responsibilities. Following the later we have not only responsibilities towards human beings, but also towards animals, plants, ecosystems, even towards the whole biosphere of the Earth, further on not only towards those who are living at the same age, but towards the future generations as well.

Buddhism in Hungary or Hungarian Buddhism

Last year I have summarized the process of distribution of Buddhism as follows. ‘In my home country, Hungary, within a very short period of two decades, from a handful of lay intellectuals the number of people who officially considers themselves to be Buddhist, and declares so during the national census, or, who are supporting Buddhist communities from their tax, raised to tens of thousands. It is a very small number in Asia, but a striking number in a mainly Catholic country that even wrote into The Fundamental Law of Hungary, adopted in 2011, that.

Christianity is part of its national identity.’ However, I have not emphasized the role of the Dharma Gate Buddhist College in that process. This unique institution in Europe is struggling to spread the Dhamma in a non-lineage dependent way for 25 years. The more than 2500 students who studied at the DGBC might also seem to most of you as a small number, nevertheless it has had a noticeable impact on Buddhism in Hungary, in general, and on the Hungarian Buddhism in particular. DGBC went through the national accreditation process third time in 2014. As a result, the curriculum was scrutinized by experts from the Hungarian government and several universities with internationally acknowledged departments of oriental studies; the Head of the On-site Commission was a leading scholar of Christian theology, himself is also a very active Roman Catholic priest. As a result, the number of subjects taught at the DGBC was reduced from 627 in 2008 to 106 in 2014. The main reason was the lack of lecturers with proper qualifications, *i.e.* Ph.D. diplomas. Remaining accredited by the Hungarian government is a vital issue since 98% of the income

of the DGBC is still coming from the state, while following the world-wide financial crisis we lost 50% of the state support. Thus the main thrust of our efforts today is concentrated on the encouragement of the new generation of our lecturers, 7 persons at the moment, to finish their Ph.D. studies.

The number of Buddhist communities at the same period of the last 25 years has risen from one to 27, including 5 ‘Buddhist churches’ enjoying the approval of the Parliament as officially ‘acknowledged churches’, thus providing obligatory state support for their operation. Since Dharma Gate Buddhist Church is the only such institution with a high school and a higher educational institute that status of utmost importance for wide range spread of Dhamma in Hungary.

Conclusion

How these seemingly distinct issues may be related to each other, some of you may ask the question. To bring these issues closer I will quote the Ven. Bikkhu Bodhi (2015): “What is truly required is a new mode of perception, the acquiescence to a universal consciousness that transcends the narrow standpoint of egocentric or ethnocentric self-interest. This is a consciousness that regards the other as not essentially different from oneself, which detaches itself from the insistent voice of self-interest and rises up to a universal perspective from which the welfare of all appears as important as one’s own good.” That is a solid foundation to escape further mutual misunderstandings of intentions on both sides of emigrational crisis in Europe. “We must learn to see the other communities as essentially similar to our own, and entitled to the same benefits as we wish for the group we belong.” That was true during the early 70s in Thailand, when Buddhadasa “presented his concept at the time when Thai society fell in the situation that the social and political turmoil was resulted from incident on the 14 October 2516 (C.E 1973)”, and, it is true in Europe when hundreds of thousands of migrants and repeated terrorist attacks in the main cities challenge the tolerance and willingness of the population to provide shelter and jobs for those who run away from wars and violence at their homes.

How could the DGBC engage socially itself at this juncture of its development to contribute to the process of delivering the Dhamma to the broadest possible audience in the 21st century? For that we need a continuous presence of monastic community able to contribute to the education of the next generation of Hungarian Buddhists and secular students interested in the Dhamma. An important next step is the inauguration of the first Thai monastery in Budapest, Hungary in the middle of the next month. The Most Ven. Phra Ajahn Bunmee will bless Wat Thai Rattanaprathep, Budapest, Hungary, and then preach at the Dharma Gate Buddhist College about “The four Foundation of Mindfulness and liberation from suffering”. This process follows the idea expressed by the Most Ven. Bikkhu Bodhi just a few years ago: Western Buddhists often lack a solid knowledge of the texts, and thus are prone to bend the teachings to fit their own agendas and expectations. (...) the central focus of Western Buddhists will be on personal meditative experience as the way to inner peace and wisdom. (...) [for] the healthy growth of Buddhism in the West, we will need representatives of the Dhamma who are also living embodiments of the Dhamma.

On that solid basis we may proceed further and based on the humble experiences of the last 25 years of the Dharma Gate Buddhist College we could help “[if a monk is to go abroad to spread the Dhamma he needs a broad view of the history and schools of Buddhism, some knowledge of comparative religion, and fluency in English. He should also know, or be ready to learn, the language of the country in which he will work. (...) he will need the intellectual openness and acuity to comprehend the dispositions, attitudes, and worldviews of people from a different culture and relate to them in meaningful ways.”

All those issues will hopefully be on the agenda of the visit of the Most Ven. Brahmmapundit when he will come for the first time to the Dharma Gate Buddhist College, Budapest, during the next September. Thus global, regional and local issues of complex origin may be discussed and interpreted among representatives of the latest fruits of the Dhamma in Europe, and those who have learnt the Teachings of the Buddha based on experiences accumulated for thousands of years.

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