

## **From Inner Peace to World Peace: Buddhist Meditation in Practice**

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### ***Abstract***

*The concept of 'peace' is defined and understood in various ways. Understanding peace as absence of violence is a limited vision. Peace encompasses happiness and harmony among living beings. In a wider understanding, peace is the nature and goal of every sentient being. Being peaceful is living in friendship with oneself and with every creature. Peace is indivisible but peril anywhere can be a threat to peace everywhere. Buddhism envisions peace as inner state of mental tranquility which spreads outward. Attaining a state of inner peace could be an inspiration to all. Buddha attained inner peace by the practice of meditation, which inspired him to work for world peace. In most of his teachings, Buddha has emphasized that the practice of vipassanā uproots mental defilements, which are, according to him, the causes of suffering and restlessness. Once a person overcomes suffering, he realizes inner peace. Inner peace projects itself outward, towards the family, friends and the larger society. This ensures peace and harmony in the outer world. Thus, world peace can be achieved through inner peace. This article presents the existing potential of this postulation based on Buddhist understanding. Buddha became a source of inspiration to all humanity as he attained peace of mind. This research talks about how mental defilements can be uprooted, how a person finds the peace of mind and how inner peace may lead towards world peace.*

*Key words: Inner peace, world peace, Buddhist Meditation, Suffering, Compassion.*

## **Introduction**

Buddhism has long been associated with inner peace and world peace. Every image or statue of Buddha sitting in meditation inspires harmony and peace. Buddhism is widely regarded as one of the annals of peace studies in the academic arena. *Ahimsā* (non-violence) is the very first precept for anyone who is willing to practice Buddhism. Buddhist canonical texts report Gautama Buddha asking his awakened disciples to visit places and spread the message of peace and non-violence. A good amount of research has been conducted exploring the association of Buddhism with peace. Schools and colleges have introduced Buddhism in their academic syllabus. However, most of the people are still far from reaching the envisioned peace of mind and there is a lot violence going on in society. This research attempts to bridge this gap, at least in the conceptual framework.

Hence, the research questions: Why are people unable to experience peace of mind. What are the causes of suffering? Why is there restlessness and violence within an individual and the society as a whole? There are institutions, which focus on social peace building. Government agencies are much concerned about peace. However, the security sector alone is not able to maintain social peace. Why are all these applications not working as expected? This research attempts to uncover the missing link.

The objectives of this study are to identify the causes of suffering and restlessness in human beings; to explore how Buddhist meditation could uproot the sufferings and help people realize inner peace; and to explain how peaceful individuals willingly work for world peace.

In Buddhism, *Vipassanā* meditation is regarded as the source of inner peace. *Vipassanā* practitioners, during their practice, go deep down into their own mind, analyze things in detail and discover the actual causes of suffering and the methods of uprooting it. Once the root causes of suffering are uprooted, peace, harmony and happiness are revealed. Once the practitioner experiences inner peace, it reflects in the person's being and in his/her dealings with the outside society. As a person experiences peace of mind, it will thus contribute to social peace and, ultimately, to world peace. Buddha is the epitome of this postulation.

This study is based mostly on library research. Related research works, Buddhist scriptures and scholarly articles are explored to identify and locate the information relevant to the research question at hand, analyze the findings and meet the objective of the research.

## **Understanding Peace**

The concept of 'peace' has been defined in various ways in the academia. "Perhaps 'peace' is like 'happiness', 'justice', 'health' and other human ideals, something every person and culture claims to desire and venerate, but which few, if any, achieve, at least on an enduring basis. Why are peace, justice and happiness so desirable, but also so intangible and elusive? But, perhaps peace is different from happiness, since it seems to require social harmony and political enfranchisement, whereas happiness appears, at least in Western culture, to be largely an individual matter" (Webel and Galtung 2007: 5).

Peace is commonly understood as absence of hostility. Social peace is often defined as the lack of conflict or violence in a society. After overcoming ten years of political violence, Nepal has defined peace in its own understanding. Resolving "existing class-based, ethnic, regional and gender problems... leads towards long-term peace. Full commitment towards democratic norms and values including competitive multiparty democratic governance, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, full press freedom and the concept of the rule of law is the way to social peace" (Comprehensive Peace Accord 2006).

The above understanding reveals that peace is the linchpin of social harmony, economic equality and political justice. However, the objective of this study is to analyze the link between inner peace and world peace.

Peace begins from within and it spreads everywhere. This is the core understanding of Buddhist meditation. Buddhist meditation is probably older than Buddhism itself. Buddha has said that he discovered meditation as a direct way to uproot mental defilements and thus experience inner peace.

"Through inner peace, genuine world peace can be achieved. In this quest, the importance of individual responsibility is quite clear; an atmosphere of peace must first be created within ourselves, then gradually expanded to include our families, our communities, and ultimately the whole planet" (Lama 1989: 4).

It is in the mind that peace, love, hatred, harmony or violence start. The mind is like a garden, as one sows so he or she will reap. An Indian spiritual master, Sri Chinmoy, has talked about how eastern spirituality contributes to the vision of world peace. Chinmoy argues, "Peace is first an individual achievement. Then it grows into a collective achievement. Finally, it becomes a universal achievement" (Dorn 2001: 156-166)

Peace is something people make with their adversaries, not with their friends. Here, peace is

understood as something between a person and his enemies. This is mostly the Western way of understanding peace. The Eastern understanding is, peace begins within and it reflects outwards.

In "International Journal of Peace Studies," Theresa presents the Buddhist vision of peace in the light of peace studies. The author has stated, "Buddhism has long been celebrated as a religion of peace and non-violence" (Theresa 2006). The author further states, "The true value of non-violence, compassion, and altruism advocated by Buddhism would also inspire all people on the path of peace" (Theresa 2006). Theresa has applied Buddha's key principle of understanding life and the world, namely the teachings of Dependent Origination. Understanding this concept would help people see things as they are and, consequently, they abstain from violence.

Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thich Nath Hanh, who is actively working for maintaining social peace, says, "The peace we seek cannot be our personal possession. We need to find inner peace, which makes it possible for us to become one with those who suffer and to do something to help our brothers and sisters" (Hanh 1988: 127). Peace begins in an individual and it expands to the family, the neighbors and to the larger society. Spiritual quests focus on how to generate peace in an individual.

The Buddhist approach from inner peace to outer peace has yet to be explored in its overall dimensions in academic research. It is worth exploring from where peace emerges and how this happen inside a person and how it ultimately reflects to the outer world. In the west, this concept is emerging in the writings of a few authors. "A philosophical theory of 'outer' peace and a depth psychological comprehension of 'inner' peacefulness seem as desirable today as they did thousands of years ago" (Webel and Galtung 2007: 5). The modern peace and conflict studies identifies structural mechanisms responsible for violent and nonviolent behaviors in a society. Social differentiation and inequality in the variety of concerns play a significant role in violent and nonviolent behaviors. "Peace is a linchpin of social harmony, economic equity and political justice, but peace is also constantly ruptured by wars and other forms of violent conflict. Like happiness, peace remains so near ...and yet, like enduring love, so far..." (Webel and Galtung 2007: 5-6).

### **Buddhist Inner Peace**

According to Buddha (Jotika and Dhamminda 1986), the "only way" to attain inner peace is the practice of *samatha* and *vipassana* (tranquility and insight) meditation. "This is the only way for

the purification (of the minds) of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the cessation of physical and mental pain, for attainment of the Noble paths, and for the realization of *Nibbana*. That (only way) is the four *satipatthanas*."

On other occasions, Buddha says, "Two things are conducive to knowledge: Tranquility and insight. If tranquility is developed, what profit does it bring? The mind is developed. If the mind is developed, what profit it brings? All lust is abandoned." (Nyanaponika and Bhikkhu Bodhi 2000). As the mind becomes free from cravings, an inner purification takes place. This purification of mind is the very ground for a state of peacefulness.

Buddha has used peace and *Nibbana* synonymously. He says, in Dhammapada (285), "Cut off your affection in the manner a man plucks with his hand an autumn lotus. Cultivate only the path to peace, *Nibbana*, as made known by the Exalted One (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 1998).

In *Metta Sutta*, Buddha indicates peace and *Nibbana* are the states of awakening. "If a person who fully knows the real advantages that can be accrued, [is] desirous of achieving and realizing the peaceful and blissful *Nibbana*, [he] must invariably indulge himself in the practice of *sila* (morality), *Samadhi* (concentration), and *panna* (insight wisdom). He must be capable of taking up this practice" (Sayadwa 1996-2012).

Buddha worked for peace until his last breath. A famous saying of Buddha from *Vinayapitaka, Mahavagga* represents Buddha's concern for peace. "*caratha bhikkhavē cārikām bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya lōkānukampāya,*' go forth, oh Bhikkhus, on your wandering for the good of many, for the happiness of many, in compassion for the world" (Anandabhumi, 2036).

The engagement in mindfulness capacitates the practitioner to develop the ability for moment-to-moment awareness of the internal states of mind such as feelings, emotions, thoughts, and attitudes. Instead of being controlled by habitual behavioral patterns, emotions and thoughts, the practitioner can turn the contents of his or her consciousness, thoughts, feelings and reaction into objects of reflection and analysis. The resulting state is inner peace and tranquility.

In his Nobel Lecture, Dalai Lama said, "Peace, for example, starts with each one of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share that peace with neighboring communities and so on" (Nobel Peace prize Lecture 1989).

There are considerable number of articles in the academia exploring the dimensions of Buddhist inner peace. "The dynamics of peace arise from interior self-transformation, which is, transcending the fixed ego-self and freeing the self for others, to realize and enact compassion." (Tanabe 2016) This article examines interdependence between inner peace and outer peace. Explaining Buddhist inner peace, Tanabe writes, "Inner peace means an awakening to an ultimate inseparability between our own well-being and happiness and that of others, which inspires us to make an effort to gratify the basic needs of all and promote our freedom and justice and that of others equally".

In the canonical text of *vipassanā*, Buddha clearly indicates the root cause of suffering. "And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering? It is this craving that occurs again

and again and is bound up with pleasure and lust and finds delight, now here, now there. That is, the craving for sensual pleasures, the craving for repeated rebirth and the craving for annihilation" (Mahasatipatthana Sutta 2016).

### **Inner peace to World peace**

The Buddhist approach to attain peace in the outer world is first by attaining it within oneself. One cannot share something, which one does not have. One cannot teach something, which one does not know. One cannot train others if he or she is not trained in the first place. The logic applies in the case of peace as well. If one has not experienced peace inside, he or she cannot teach, train or share peace. In Buddhism, an individual experiences peace in the course of practicing *vipassanā* meditation and, thereby, he or she is able to share it with the outer world.

Meditation is an individual practice. A practitioner can have different experiences. However, there are some basic understandings that each practitioner should keep in mind and stay observant about. Some of the reflections about meditation are the researcher's personal, practical experiences, although the point has been made to relate them with standard Buddhist doctrines.

Meditation, like carpentry, sailing or any other skill, has its own vocabulary, which, to the beginner, is bound to seem like a code. One of the challenges is that most of the terms are in Pali, the language Buddha's teachings were documented for the first time. Other terms were developed by Nagarjuna, Asanga and other scholars in Sanskrit. In this essay, an attempt has been made to decipher Lord Buddha's terms, phrases and quotes in original Pali and those from Sanskrit sources.

*Dhyana* is a Sanskrit word, the Pali form of the term is *jhana*. It has found its way into Chinese as *chan*, into Korean as *Seon*, into Japanese as *Zen*, and Vietnamese as *thien*.

Buddhism defines peace in its own way. Buddhism believes that peace begins from within and it expands to the outer society through the practice of compassion. By knowing *anitya*, *dukkha* and *anātma*, a person's suffering gradually comes to an end; as a result, he/she realizes inner peace. Buddha, as quoted in Dhammapada (195), says "All conditioned phenomena are impermanent; when one sees this with insight-wisdom, one becomes weary of dukkha (i.e., the khandhas). This is the path to purity" (verse 277).

While overcoming suffering, one becomes sensitive, or feels concerned, towards others, who are still suffering. The practitioner becomes compassionate towards all living beings. Then the

compassionate person helps others get rid of suffering. As inner peace in a person grows, people around him would be inspired. Inner peace begins spreading to the outer world. Inner peace has a ripple effect; it expands into social peace.

### ***Vipassanā* meditation and peace**

In Buddhist studies, it is established as unquestionable fact that peace follows meditation, as surely as night follows day. An extended study will be presented in the following pages to explain in detail and clarify the ways to peace through meditation. The classical understanding of meditation may be equally important as the modern understanding of the fact. The scientific and sociological research approving the classical thoughts on meditation will also be equally important. This study attempts to present these three dimensions. How *vipassanā* meditation is applicable in maintaining the social peace is the focus of the research.

*Vipassanā* meditation helps a person attain peace only when he or she practices it in a systematic way. Knowing everything about meditation may not help until and unless the person applies it in practical life. If a person simply reads the recipe for preparing a meal, even if he understands all the terms, he cannot get any flavor or nourishment from it. In the same manner, reading theories or techniques of meditation will not assist a person realize peace. From reading, one can acquire *śrutamayī prajñā*, i.e., wisdom acquired from outside. This may not help one to attain inner peace. For experiencing the peace of mind, one has to attain *cintanamayī prajñā* that is, thinking, contemplating and analyzing the wisdom read in books. Finally, one has to attain *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*, i.e., wisdom acquired by experience. *Vipassanā* meditation helps the practitioner to attain *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*, which is the source or origin of experiencing inner peace. Attainment of such wisdom begins with the application of mindfulness, i.e., *satipatthana*" (Piyadassi 1978: 35).

The core practice of *vipassanā* is being mindful of four domains: Mindfulness of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), mindfulness of feelings (*vēdanānupassanā*), mindfulness of the mind or consciousness (*cittānupassanā*) and mindfulness of Dhamma or phenomena (*dhammānupassanā*). While practicing *vipassanā*, the practitioner is expected to observe his or her sensory experiences constantly, in order to prevent cravings from arising, as they would power the future experience of rebirths.

All one learns in meditation is not to identify oneself with anything, but to stay aloof and detached from worldly experiences. The benefit from this is constant realization of infinite peace and bliss. The realization of Oneness with everything is like falling in love with



everything. It feels like being with one's lover or beloved, in each moment. The practitioner feels intimacy and love with everyone. Nothing other than meditation gives a clearer picture about what is real or significant in life and what is mere illusion. *Dhammapada* (1995) quotes Buddha: "A hundred years of life of a heedless person is less worthy than a meditative person's life of one single day" (Verse. 110).

*Vipassanā* meditation may directly or indirectly lead to peace, happiness, social justice and harmony -- a sense of oneness with existence. However, our specific focus is the context of social justice and peace. Here, it is obvious that the one common thread connecting all of it is the practice of meditation. What kinds of hearts and minds are brought into this interconnected work for change? The focus of practice should be on how a person continually intertwines himself or herself with both inner and outer liberation.

When one reads Buddha's sermons, one comes to see that real wealth is not material wealth and real poverty is not just the lack of food, clothing or a house. Real poverty is something else. It is common belief that the purpose of life is to acquire wealth, to own things or achieve higher posts. As Buddha suggests, real wealth is not the possession of property, but the recognition that our deepest need as human beings is to keep developing our natural and acquired power to relate to fellow human beings. Monk Thich Nhat Hanh applied this motto in the course of his whole life: "Peace in oneself, peace in the world." The richness of the motto and the energy in the words lead the reader to think about the lives of people who they admire. These inspiring words motivate readers to apply them in their own on-going spiritual journey.

Buddha's words remind the meditation practitioner that he or she is not separate from the world. When they bring more peace to their mind and body, there is more peace in the world. Venerable Hanh writes in *The Heart of Understanding*: "When you produce peace and happiness in yourself, you begin to realize peace for the world. With the smile that you produce in yourself, with the consciousness you establish within yourself, you begin to work for peace in the world" (Hanh 1998: 65). This is an understanding that extends across religious traditions. A rabbi quotes Bible, Psalm, 38:3, "Our sages say: "Seek peace in your own place." You cannot find peace anywhere save in your own self. In the psalm we read: "There is no peace in my bones because of my sin."'" When a man has made peace with himself, he will be able to make peace with the whole world.

There is no way to peace. Peace is the way. A society may not maintain peace until the ends are



not cut off from the means. Ultimately, one cannot reach good ends through evil means, because the means represent the seed and the end represents the tree that grows from it. The tree always carries the quality of the seed. On a level of understanding, peace is defined in terms of what is not present. Peace is defined as the absence of conflict, tension or any kind of disturbance. Similarly, peace in the world is envisioned as the absence of war or violence. Spiritual understanding of peace is more appealing. Inner peace is the presence of stillness and certainty, an opening of the heart, encompassing reconciliation, goodwill and justice for all sentient beings.

According to Buddhist understanding, the only way to create inner peace is to practice meditation. By the practice of meditation, one realizes peace and happiness inside. Consequently, one will be in a position to share it with the outer world. If one has a smile in his or her lips, only then can it be shared with others. Buddha can smile because he sees things as they are; he is filled with compassion towards all who are suffering. The *Pali* texts relate Buddha enjoying the peace and happiness of awakening for seven weeks following his attainment of Enlightenment. Suffering does not overwhelm Buddha. Instead, he becomes aware of the suffering and retains his clarity, calmness and strength so that he can help transform others who are suffering. The ocean of tears cannot drown a person if *karuna* i.e., compassion is there in his or her heart.

Shifting the consciousness from a lower level to a higher level, one realizes that there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle. It is because one does not live single-issue lives. There is suffering and there are a lot of reasons for that. Human society has yet to manage equal distribution of resources. As a person goes into meditation, gradually, he or she can see a bigger picture, a larger context, of the efforts to redistribute wealth, power, and justice. This may ensure equanimity and peacefulness in the wider world. In this way, the practice of *vipassanā* helps the meditator to eliminate the roots of individual suffering. As soon as he or she is liberated and realizes inner peace, it reflects in the outer world. As peace begins within, it spreads outward.

### **The cessation of suffering**

Buddha has instructed *vipassanā* practitioners to contemplate on Four Noble Truths. The practitioner knows: 'This is suffering,' 'this is the cause of suffering,' 'this is the cessation of

suffering,' and this is 'The way leading to the cessation of suffering.' Human beings are in turmoil. The major cause of this turmoil is unsatisfactoriness due to mental impurities. Suffering creates turmoil and turmoil further intensifies suffering. Buddha identified the root cause of this suffering, the potential for its elimination and the practical ways through which suffering comes to an end. Four Noble Truths and Noble Eight Fold Path dawned on Buddha in a state of deep meditation. Buddha suggests that wisdom dawns in the mind while one is in a state of deep concentration and in a state of profound peace.

The craving for, or clinging to, impermanent states or things causes suffering. Clinging to impermanent things only breeds dissatisfaction and pain. This keeps them caught in an endless cycle of birth and death. Buddha found that this suffering, this cycle of *dukkha*, can be eliminated forever. Thus, he envisioned the Noble Eightfold Path to come out of suffering. Four Noble Truths incorporate the whole Buddhist philosophy. In most cases, suffering hides in the seeking of sensual pleasure. Craving and repulsion cause suffering in life. A fisherman goes to a pond and throws his fishing line into the water. A fish comes, bites the bait, and gets caught in the hook. The fish cannot see the suffering that follows. Looking from outside, the fisherman can see the whole picture. The fisherman knows what is going to happen to the fish if it bites the bait. However, the poor fish is unable to see it and, thus, is unaware of the hidden suffering. It is the same case with human beings who follow their endless desires. Buddha suggests practicing *vipassanā bhāvana* to be able to see the hidden perils that may lead to suffering.

Another simile expresses that even better. Ants, when they are already stuck in honey find their sense of pleasure is appealing and there is no incentive to get out either. Those ants do not even try to get out, because although they are already in the mire they are too busy enjoying the honey. Even those ants that are only lightly stuck in the honey, and can still move out of the honey if they try, they do not do so because they like the taste of honey too much for them to come out. Any living being, whether a human or the lowly worm, likes to indulge in pleasuring their sense. Thus, they get stuck. Being mindful, one develops a special observation skill. When one matures in this skill, he or she learns to see things with clarity. Seeing things with clarity may lead to see things as they are. Ultimately, it brings wisdom, compassion, love, connectedness and inner peace.

#### **Four Sublime States**

*Brahma vihāra* are the four sublime states of mind, which, according to Buddha emerge in the practitioner due to the practice of meditation. The four sublime states are as follows: *maitrī*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, *upēkṣā* (Love or loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, Equanimity).

Buddha suggests that the practitioner's mind starts dwelling in these four lofty and excellent abodes. And, this helps in two ways. The meditator grows calmer and more peaceful. On the other hand, these qualities would surely develop harmony in society if each and every person loves all beings equally without discrimination; is compassionate to all, rejoices at the happiness and success of others and is even minded, steady or level-headed in facing the difficulties of life.

Dwelling on these abodes, the mind reaches outwards, towards the immeasurable world of living beings, embracing them all in these profound emotions. These four emotions, 'are considered to be the ideal social attitudes, the springs of the ideal modes of conduct towards living beings. As great healers of social tension and conflict, builders of harmony and cooperation, they serve as potent antidotes to the poisons of hatred, cruelty, envy and partiality so widespread in modern life" (Nyanaponika, 1999: 14-20). As contemplation on these four lofty states advance, the subtle inter relationships reveal themselves. Deepak Chopra says that when we live from the level of pure being, some deepest values of life arise. Quoting the four Brahma-vihara, he states, "Eastern wisdom traditions list four of these values that are most harmonious to human existence" (Chopra, Deepak 2009: 53) These harmonious values may lead the society towards harmony and peace. In this way, the four sublime states emerging in a practitioner are equally beneficial for attaining peace and maintaining peace in the practitioner himself or herself and to the whole society as well.

The practice of *vipassanā* may change the very architecture of the practitioner's brain. The practitioner develops those areas of the brain that spread kindness, altruistic attitudes and non-violent perspectives. A thorough practice of *vipassanā* can help people detach themselves from what is pleasant and refrain from condemning what is unpleasant. In the present world, such states are widely relevant for world peace. Learning to be flexible in one's choices and desires can play a vital role in maintaining social harmony and peace.

## **Conclusion**

Vipassanā helps a practitioner to eliminate mental defilements and realize inner peace. And, inner peace ultimately leads to world peace. An analysis of the four states of mindfulness reveals that the surest way to realize inner peace is through the practice of *vipassanā* meditation. The Buddhist way of meditation helps practitioners to purify the mind by eliminating craving, aversion and ignorance. During the course of meditation, a practitioner realizes the nature of things as impermanent and leading to suffering and away from self. Seeing things as they are is

a great liberation. As a person realizes inner peace; his or her suffering ends. He or she starts dwelling in the four sublime states. This deepens the peace of mind. The practitioners thus devote themselves in creating harmony in society, or world peace.

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