

social and physical environment. To be truly religious is not to reject society but to work for social justice and change. Religion is at the heart of social change, and social change, in the end, is the essence of religion. The liberating essence of Buddhism is in recognizing that we suffer as individuals as a society, we are taught a path that leads us where suffering ceases.

## 2

### **Ahimsa (*Non-Violence*)**

Violence is not the result of pathological madness or a faulty political economy that prizes profits over people. Violence springs from a human consciousness that relies on specific images, symbols, representations and feelings to create and give meaning at the exclusion of others. Hence it is appropriate to describe a culture of violence as a culture of the production, normalization, homogenization and consumption of shared meanings. In this age of both pluralism and terror it is critical to elaborate on what constitutes a culture of *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa*, the Pali word for non-violence, may be considered the master precept of Buddhism and it is in this spirit that I reflect on the creation of a culture of nonviolence.

It does not take a genius to see that modern societies invest massively in war and violence. Every year the United States spends more on its military budget than Russia, China, France, England and Germany combined. We are hard pressed to find a so-called Third World country that is "Third World" militarily. Martin Luther King Jr.

spoke truthfully when he said, "our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men." If similar investments were made in peace and nonviolence, the results would be beyond most of our imaginations. We may well learn to imagine peace rather than war as the natural state of human affairs as Mahatma Gandhi predicted, saying, "We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence."

Glenn Paige's latest book, *Non-killing Global Political Science*, is an important move in the direction of the unknown, undiscussed, distorted, and misunderstood field of non-violence. Contrary to mainstream academic currents, Paige insists that a non-killing society and non-killing political science is possible. Paige paints a picture of a human society that refuses to disavow the possibility of peace and sustainable development. He writes that 73 of the world's 195 countries and territories had abolished the death penalty by 2000 and 27 countries were without standing armies by 2001. He also details the development of various political institutions and movements devoted to non-violence and non-killing like the Friendship Party of Britain, the Green Party of Germany, and spiritual groups like Jains and Quakers. Paige further highlights the importance of educational institutions like Deemed University in Tamil Nadu, India; and economic institutions like United Farm Workers of America and Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya led by A.T. Ariyaratne in Sri Lanka. Of course, there are also research institutions like the Albert Einstein Institution in Cambridge and the Gandhian Institute in Varanasi, and problem solving institutions like Amnesty International, Greenpeace International and War Resisters International.

Paige proposes non-killing transformation through education and training, building organizations to facilitate non-killing change, and creating methods of inquiry, analysis and action for such transformational tasks. Paige puts it well when he writes, "Violence-assuming political science tends to discourage non-violent creativity. By dismissing it in professional training as deviantly 'utopian', 'idealistic' and 'unrealistic', political science intellect is condemned to confinement in perpetual lethality. Non-killing creativity offers promise of liberation." Education, as is so often the case, becomes the factor that perpetuates injustice. An alternative education that is rich in Buddhism and is concerned with liberation must have non-violence at its core. It must address violence from both the spiritual and the structural levels, and see how they buttress or complement one another.

Education is not simply about learning and teaching, it is also about leading an appropriate way of life in society, supporting oneself and others, overcoming oppression and exploitation, and nurturing wisdom. Unfortunately, this meaning of education has all but disappeared. The brain and individual effort have been overemphasized at the expense of sensitivity, sensibility, and spirituality. From Plato to Descartes, a mind-body dualism is present in Western philosophy. The well-known Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) is exemplary. In this dualism, the mind is seen as enslaved by an alien body. The body is depicted as a traitor to or even an enemy of Reason, as it distracts the mind's pursuit of truth through lust, hunger, sickness, fatigue, fantasies, and other similar sensual experiences. Thus the body, representative of the uncontrollable "natural" world, threatens our ability to control.

The ultimate objective of control is transcendence; the triumph of the will over the body. This will eliminate

the body so we may attain the “view from nowhere,” or in a more theological terms, the Gods-eye view. Through the history of imperialism and colonialism, the mind became associated with the White Man (the true human type), and the body with the natives (irrational and hysterical mind-less bodies requiring care and deserving of exploitation.) So the mind-body dualism not only creates a hierarchy, but also prescribes the control and disciplining of the others in name of superiority and disembodied objectivity.

As I have said many times, “I breathe therefore I am” might have been the Buddha’s response to Descartes. Here the mind and the body are seen as one. There is no duality, no splitting. I am embodied, always acting from somewhere and I must be aware of this fact. The body may have its sensual attachments but it is not a prison for the mind, so it is not something to be punished, abused, tamed, and altered, rather it has to be understood through compassion and non-violence so we may live harmoniously within our own skin.

Buddhism urges us to be “awake” or what is often called “enlightened.” The objective of being awake is not attaining a view from nowhere (or a view from everywhere for that matter), but is about being mindful, about being aware of one’s limitations and prejudices, and about living in the here and now. According to a Buddhist story, a leader of a religious sect came to visit the Buddha one day and asked Him, “If I follow your Way, what will I do day by day?” The Buddha replied, “Walk, stand, lie down, sit, eat, drink....” The religious leader then inquired “I already do that every day, that doesn’t seem so special.” The Buddha answered, “It is indeed special. The ordinary man, though he walks, stands, lies down, sits, eats, and drinks, does not know he is walking, standing, lying down, sitting, eating and drinking. But when we walk, we know that we

are walking. When we stand, we know that we are standing....” It is this mindfulness that is vital when engaging with others and the world.

Many have pointed out that the modern social conception of the self, conditioned by mind-body dualism, leads to narcissism. We can easily become enamored by our monologues in our minds. Ken Jones captures this well in *The New Social Face of Buddhism* when he writes, “...there is in the culture of high modernity another influential perspective of the self, which focuses on narcissism .... [which] means a total self-absorption and self-preoccupation. The whole experience of the world is interpreted in terms of self-need, to the extent that valid boundaries between the self and the external world become indistinguishable. Self-need becomes no longer objectionable.” Viewing the world through this lens, we come to know our self as separate from the world, and we become entangled in a web desire for power that leads inextricable to killing. This knowledge here is what some call “knowledge that kills.” It is this narcissism, this uninhibited deference to self-need, especially when linked with power that breeds hostility, division, aggression, and war.

If, as David Loy suggests, “The world begins to heal when we realize that *its* sufferings are (also) our own”, then he and Buddhism are in agreement, for Buddhism urges us to substitute compassion and humility for narcissism, dialogues for monologues. In short, Buddhism teaches non-violent social engagement. We will never be able to know what the world is doing right here and now let alone attempt to heal its sufferings without engaging with it. There is no such thing as personal or individual salvation in Buddhism. The process of understanding life therefore cannot be realized by rejecting the world, but understanding can be attained by working for social justice

and change. As Christopher Queen of Harvard University has recently observed, "There's been a sea-change in the Buddhist tradition....Buddhists have gotten up off their cushions, recognizing that collective sources of suffering in the world must be addressed by collective action."

With compassion one will be able to enter in continuous and active dialogue with others and overcome dualisms that pit "us" against "them", human against sub-human, rich against poor, man against woman, and so on. Misrecognition of "otherness" can lead not only to aggression, but also to asphyxiating self-hatred. What others think affects one's identity, potential for self-realization, and social position because it also impacts the fair and equal distribution of resources and opportunities. Human beings are cultural beings, living in relation to others. As such, cultural identity becomes a relationship between individual and collective identity, so an attack on our culture is simultaneously an attack on the bearer of that culture because identity is dialogical not monological. The opinions of others impact our identity. Seeing identity as such, sources of injustice must also be addressed at the cultural or spiritual level, requiring cultural, discursive, and symbolic remedies.

With compassion, one becomes more open to the "may bes" and the "perhapses" that are inevitable in human life. They will become our partners in conversation and transformation, contributing to what some call a "fusion of horizons" or "transvaluation" that is vital for the coming incarnation of our community. This can only occur in the context of ongoing conversations that affirm rather than deny diversity and incommensurability, and that see agreements reached as contingent rather than fixed. "Keep going!" should be an important rallying cry. The end of a conversation is a harbinger of disaster. This approach is particularly useful for cross-cultural encounters and for deconstructing hegemonic value

systems, such as the presumed superiority of the Western lifestyle. In the process, hegemonic values may be de-valued and marginalized ones re-valued.

We must envision difference as a resource rather than an obstacle to dialogue. Modern societies are too pluralistic to begin with a presumption of unity of belief let alone even a common language. A plurality of voices will help break the monologue within each group or individual and strengthen objectivity and democratic participation across the whole. This process will help the members of each group to transcend their particularity, perhaps even facilitating constructive competition and augmenting the social knowledge of participating members.

Compassion is not incompatible with competition. His Holiness the Dalai Lama makes the distinction between two kinds of competition describing one kind of competition is only for individual glory and an other that includes an awareness that other people must also be nurtured or empowered to succeed. Competition can be beneficial if it inspires us to be the best we can in order to serve others. Rituals and games are often built on competition and can serve also to strengthen the spirit. This discussion of competition and achievement parallels the discussion among Buddhist scholars about the purpose of *nibbana*. For some, spiritual enlightenment is a personal quest. For others, such as those in the Engaged Buddhist community, true enlightenment is built upon wisdom and compassion and is intrinsically connected with the well being of all others. The Mahayana tradition is particularly emphatic that all beings must be liberated before the bodhisattva attains enlightenment. These discussions about the nature of competition and *nibbana* highlight how a seemingly minor difference in focus can shift the focus from an ego-centred attitude to a community-centred philosophy.

With compassion comes forgivingness and reconciliation. With compassion, there is nothing to fear from forgiveness even of the seemingly unforgivable. Forgiveness becomes the absence of fear. As some put it, tolerance is akin to invitation, while forgiveness connotes visitation. Forgiveness is active while tolerance is passive. We must remember that forgiveness must be unconditional in order to be worthy of its name. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is exemplary in this case. Some political acts are so damaging and horrendous that they seem unforgivable, such as the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the dreadful situation that continues to this day. Yet to have a simple monk like His Holiness insisting that we must learn to love and empathize with the Chinese people and to forgive the Chinese government which, in the Buddhist view, commits their atrocities out of ignorance and delusion, as well as greed and hatred, is profoundly illuminating. And many of the Tibetan people join their spiritual leader in this level of compassion. Forgiveness is possible.

Furthermore, if we internalize Loy's words, "The world begins to heal when we realize that its sufferings are our own", we have to critically reflect on our collusion in the sufferings of the world. Ideologically and practically, we need to question how we participate, through our actions and inactions, in perpetuating suffering. We must recognize our collusion as collusion, not as liberation. Not infrequently, we identify with the values and worldviews of the dominant, more powerful actor in a given situation, usually seeing them as emancipatory, not oppressive. This human tendency buttresses the patterns of hierarchy and segregation. Consequently, we have to interrogate our collusion in structural violence.

The objective of present day education has become utterly parochial. We obtain a degree in order to find a well-paid job. Present day education is disempowering,

for not only does it offer no tools to dismantle the violent social structures, mainstream education does not teach that there are violent social structures that need dismantling in the first place. Further, rarely is there any voice heard from below, from the peripheries or the margins. Education has thus become "a system of imposed ignorance" reinforcing the internalized power structures. We become immune to self-understanding.

If education does not want to become "a system of imposed ignorance" it has to be dialogical, inclusive, and compassionate. It has to heal the rift between the mind and the body. Buddhism has pointed to a way of doing so, and education about such healing is incorporated into its most basic practices. One such alternative educational practice that has been introduced to the West is mental training or meditation. Meditation practice is essential training for all Dhamma practitioners.

Meditation is used to re-construct the mind's winding paths in order to pursue what are considered to be the normal states of the mind. We spend most of our lives attached to our minds and our bodies, being consumed by everything ranging from our opinions to our appearances and to our possessions. This attachment manifests in the mediator as what is called the Five Hindrances: sensual desire, hatred, indolence (sloth and torpor), anxiety, and uncertainty (doubt). These thoughts and feelings inhibit and wither the mind and the body. Meditation is used to enliven and nourish the mind and the body because when we have learned to calm our minds there will be inner peace, and our demeanor will be humble and caring. We will no longer dwell in our internal monologues and will begin to engage with others compassionately. We will be able to give birth to true love that is not centred on lust and possessiveness, the natural products of greed, hatred and delusion.

In Buddhism the normal states of the mind are compassion, generosity, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Ideally, we are able to perceive non-judgmentally and be awakened from the various forms of mental domination rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion, all of which are manifested in capitalism, militarism, and compartmentalized knowledge systems. Meditation leads to wisdom; that is, the ability to know various states in their reality without self-attachment. This instills compassion, sympathy, and forgivingness in us. We can live in freedom.

So what does it mean to be a Buddhist these days? We must find the appropriate interpretations of the teachings of the Buddha in order to awaken us from domination. We must understand the complexity of modern society, especially structural injustice and violence. We must ask ourselves about the meaning of our lives: is it to have, to buy, to indulge, to possess, or simply to be? If we realized that the meaning of life is to *be* rather than to *have*, we will know our role and identity in society. We will know how to appropriately behave towards others and to the environment. Buddhist teachings do not have power in and of themselves and cannot deal with the malaise of 'developed' societies, of transnational corporations and global capitalism. We must not treat mental training as a form of escapism or personal salvation or some magic remedy. Rather the mental training of meditation must awaken our wisdom so we will be able to wisely engage with society and deal with the multiple crises of greed, hatred, and delusion in the present. Buddhist teachings do not have power in and of themselves, but they have the potential to awaken what may be most ultimate power known to human kind, a wise and righteous heart in search of justice.

## 3

## Understanding Social Structures and Structural Violence

**S**ocial structures are constructions; they are not permanent or natural phenomena. They evolve through political and historical developments and usually refer to organizations, institutions, laws, and ideologies that have materialized over time. Social structures influence or determine social action by creating frameworks of control for those within the structures.

The primary mode of control of social structures is psychological in nature. Each structure pressures the individual to adopt the desired dogma, creating what is considered normal, or more accurately, normative; the created standard. Each structure creates the boundaries of the acceptable and the unacceptable, the speakable and the unspeakable, the thinkable and the unthinkable. These normative boundaries become the boundaries of the truth, though we rarely see the truth as something that is bounded. Social structures define our worldview, and not recognizing our worldview as a constructed condition, we accept it without question. Our minds become the sites