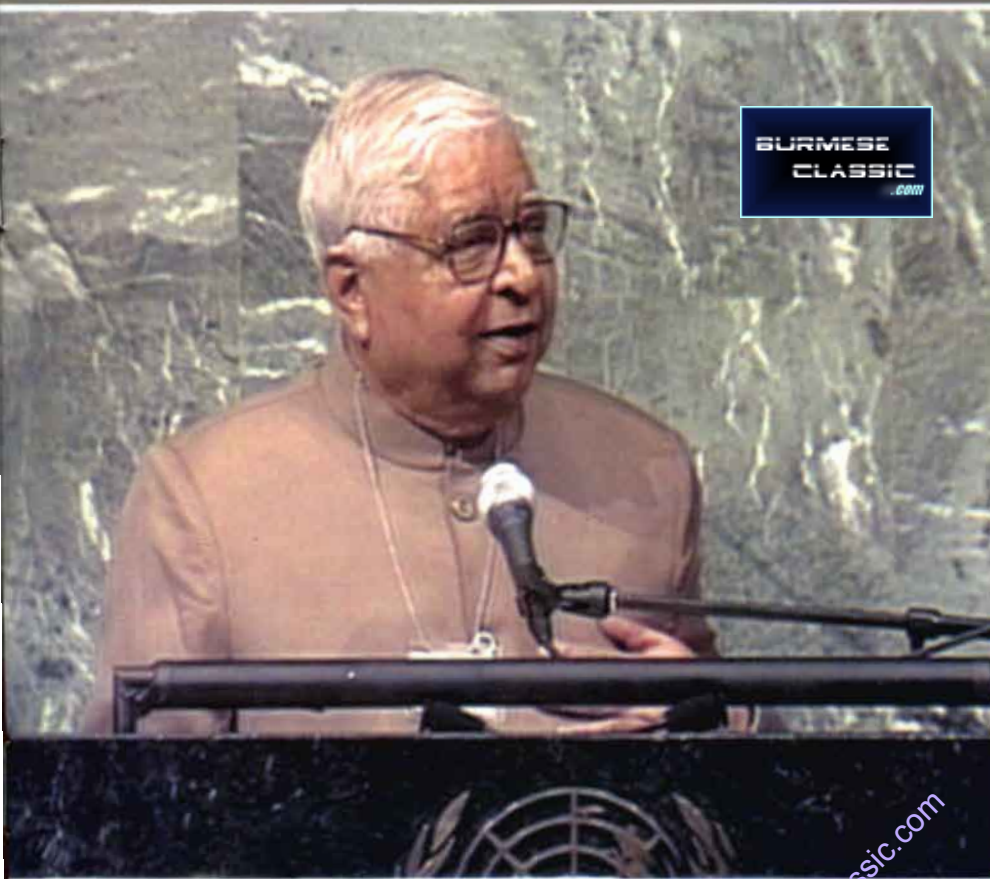


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Inner Peace For World Peace

In late August 2000, Goenkaji participated in the Millennium World Peace Summit—a gathering of 1000 of the world's religious and spiritual leaders, held at the United Nations under the auspices of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The purpose of the meeting was to promote tolerance, foster peace, and encourage inter-religious dialogue. With the many different viewpoints represented, the potential for disagreement was strong. In his presentation to the delegates, Goenkaji tried to highlight what they, and all spiritual paths have in common: the universal Dhamma. His remarks were received with repeated ovations.

Friends, leaders of the spiritual and religious world:

This is a wonderful occasion, when we can all unite and serve humanity. Religion is religion only when it unites; when it divides us, it is nothing.

Much has been said here about conversion, both for-and against. Far from being opposed to conversion, I am in favor of it—but not conversion from one organized religion to another. No, the conversion must be from misery to happiness. It must be from bondage to liberation. It must be from cruelty to compassion. That is the conversion needed today, and that is what this meeting should seek to bring about.

The ancient land of India gave a message of peace and harmony to the world, to all humanity, but it did more: it gave a method, a technique, for achieving peace and harmony. To me it seems that if we want peace in human society, we cannot ignore individuals. If there is no peace

in the mind of the individual, I do not understand how there can be real peace in the world. If I have an agitated mind, always full of anger, hatred, ill will and animosity, how can I give peace to the world? I cannot because I have no peace myself. Enlightened persons have therefore said, "First find peace within yourself." One has to examine whether there is really peace within oneself. All the sages, saints, and seers of the world have advised, "Know thyself." That means not merely knowing at the intellectual level, or accepting at the emotional or devotional level, but realizing by experience at the actual level. When you experience the truth about yourself, within yourself, at the experiential level, the problems of life find their solution.

You start understanding the universal law, the law of nature—or, if you prefer, the law of God Almighty. This law is applicable to one and all: When I generate anger, hatred, ill will, or animosity, I am the first victim of my anger. I am the first victim of the hatred or animosity that I have generated within. First I harm myself, and only afterwards do I start harming others. This is the law of nature.

If I observe within myself, I find that as soon as any negativity arises in the mind, there is a physical reaction: my body becomes hot and starts burning; there are palpitations and tension; I am miserable. When I generate negativity within me and become miserable, I do not keep the misery limited to myself; instead I throw it on to others. I make the entire atmosphere around me so tense that anyone who comes in contact with me also becomes miserable. Although I talk of peace and happiness, more important than words is what is happening within me.

When my mind is free of negativity, again, the law starts working. The moment there is no negativity in the mind, nature—or God Almighty—starts rewarding me: I feel peaceful. This too I can observe within myself.

Whatever one's religion or tradition or country, when one breaks the law of nature and generates negativity in the mind, one is bound to suffer. Nature itself provides the punishment. Those who break nature's laws start feeling the misery of hellfire within, here and now. The seed they sow now is a seed of hellfire, and what awaits them after death is nothing but hellfire. Similarly, according to the law of nature, if I keep my mind pure, full of love and compassion, I enjoy the kingdom of heaven within here and now. The seed that I sow will have as its fruit the kingdom of heaven after death. It makes no difference whether I call myself a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian or a Jain: a human being is a human being; the human mind is the human mind.

The conversion that is needed is from impurity of mind to purity of mind. This conversion changes people in wonderful ways. It is no magic or miracle; this is a pure science of observing the interaction of mind and matter within. One examines how the mind keeps influencing the material body, and how the body influences the mind. Through patient observation, the law of nature becomes so clear: whenever one generates mental negativity, one starts suffering; and whenever one is free from negativity, one enjoys peace and harmony. This technique of self-observation can be practiced by one and all.

Taught in ancient times by the Enlightened One in India, the technique spread around the world. Today also, people from different communities, traditions and

religions come and learn this technique, to obtain the same benefit. They may continue to call themselves Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian. These labels make no difference; a human being is a human being. The difference is that through their practice they become truly spiritual people, full of love and compassion. What they are doing is good for themselves and for all others. When someone generates peace in the mind, the entire atmosphere around that person is permeated with the vibration of peace and anyone who encounters that person also starts enjoying peace. This mental change is the real conversion that is required. No other conversion has meaning.

Permit me to read you a benevolent message from India to the world. Inscribed in stone 2300 years ago, these are the words of Emperor Ashoka the Great, an ideal ruler, explaining how to govern. He tells us, "One should not honor only one's own religion and condemn other faiths." This is an important message for our time. By condemning others and insisting that one's own tradition is the best, one creates difficulties for humanity. Ashoka continues, "Instead one should honor other religions for various reasons." Every religion worthy of the name has a wholesome essence of love, compassion and goodwill. We should give honor to the religion because of this essence. The outer form always differs; there will be so many variations in rites, rituals, ceremonies or beliefs. Let us not quarrel about all that, but instead give importance to the inner essence. Ashoka says, "By so doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and also renders service to the religions of others. In acting otherwise, one digs the grave of one's own religion, and harms other religions as well."

This is a serious warning for us all. The message says, "Someone who honors his own religion and condemns other religions may do so out of devotion to his religion thinking 'I will glorify my religion,' but his actions injure his own religion more gravely."

Finally, Ashoka presents the message of the Universal Law, the message of Dharma: "Let all listen: Concord is good, not quarrelling. Let all be willing to listen to the doctrine professed by others." Instead of disagreeing and condemning, let us give importance to the essence of the teaching of every religion. Then, there will be real peace, real harmony. ☸

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Buddha: The Super-Scientist of Peace

Goenkaji was invited to give the keynote speech at the Celebration of the International Recognition of the Vesakha at the United Nations, on the occasion of Vesakha, the full moon day of May, which honors the birth, enlightenment and final passing away of the Buddha. The event was hosted by the Permanent Mission of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations on 29 May 2002. Ambassadors of the Permanent Missions of Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Myanmar spoke briefly before Goenkaji's keynote speech.

The address was given at the Dag Hammerskold Library Auditorium to an audience of ambassadors, other United Nations dignitaries and associates, venerable monks and a few Vipassana meditators. The talk, which put the teaching of the historical Buddha in a modern perspective, was extremely well received by the entire audience.

Venerable monks and peace-loving friends:

I thank the United Nations and the organizers of this magnificent *Vesakha* celebration, especially the Myanmar and Sri Lankan delegations, for the opportunity offered to me to address this distinguished gathering.

One feels so sorry when one looks at what is happening in the world. Man has become the enemy of man. There is no personal enmity; people are being killed only because they belong to a particular sect or community, a particular ethnic group or country. Such is the level of cruelty that a person kills other human beings even if they are innocent, even if they are helpless women and children. Modern technology makes this tragic violence terrifyingly

devastating—perhaps worse than ever before in human history. Therefore, more than ever before, a basic change is needed today to protect humanity from these inhuman, heinous crimes arising out of negative emotions.

The world is afflicted with the malady of hatred, anxiety and fear. It needs a remedy from an extraordinary physician. The Buddha was such an extraordinary physician, a great physician of peace and happiness. His teaching of peace and harmony is as relevant today as it was twenty-six centuries back, when he set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma, the Wheel of Peace. Indeed, it is much more relevant today. We have gathered here this afternoon to honor the teaching of this outstanding person in human history. Let us see how his teaching eliminates the negative emotions that are at the root of cruel violence, and how these can be changed to positive compassion. Most of the time, blind belief and strong attachment to one's views cause negativity, which in turn produces such atrocities.

I came in contact with the Buddha's teaching when I took my first Vipassana course in my motherland of Myanmar. I remember that before the course started, my teacher gave me a booklet to read. It began with a quotation from a discourse of the Buddha to the Kālāmas.

The Buddha advises:

Don't accept something:

- because you have heard it many times;
- because it has been believed traditionally for generations;
- because it is believed by a large number of people;
- because it is in accordance with your scriptures;

- because it seems logical;
- because it is in line with your own beliefs;
- because it is proclaimed by your teacher, who has an attractive personality and for whom you have great respect.

Accept it only after you have realized it yourself at the experiential level and have found it to be wholesome and beneficial to one and all. Then, not only accept it but also live up to it.

This message was like a magnetic pull. I was born and brought up in a different tradition, where I was taught to accept the words of the scriptures and the teacher without asking any questions. At the age of thirty-one, these were the very first words of the Buddha that I came across. I was thrilled to read them.

This was perhaps the first charter of freedom of thought in human history. It became clear to me that there is no scope for blind belief or blind faith in the teaching of the Enlightened One. I decided to give it a fair trial with an open mind, accepting the truth as I experienced it. As I walked on the path, the experience of each day convinced me that the path is rational, pragmatic and scientific. There is no need for any blind acceptance. There were no doubts, as I was told to accept a truth only after I had experienced it. I also found that every step on the path is universal and non-sectarian. This gave me great confidence.

At the end of the ten-day course, I found the teaching to be completely results-oriented. It proved so beneficial to me physically, mentally and spiritually. Therefore, I accepted it wholeheartedly, and thereafter, I continued to walk on the path as taught by the Enlightened One.

After about fifteen years, I was authorized by my teacher to teach Vipassana courses in India and throughout the world. Hundreds of thousands of people from different countries, belonging to different sects and various traditions, have achieved the same good results. The teaching attracts people from all walks of life because they find that it is totally non-sectarian and results-oriented.

The Teaching: The Dhamma

The qualities of the path given by the Buddha are:

1. *Svākkhāto*—It is simple and well defined so that anyone can practice it without any confusion in the mind.
2. *Sanditthiko*—Every step is based on the reality of this moment. There is no imagination, no speculation, no autosuggestion or outer suggestion.
3. *Akāliko*—Every step gives wholesome results here and now in this very life. No effort on the path goes waste.
4. *Ehi-passiko*—The teaching invites you to come and see for yourself, to experience the truth yourself.
5. *Opaneyyiko*—The path is straight; every step on it takes one nearer and nearer to the final goal of liberation from all misery.
6. *Paccattam veditabbo viññūhi'ti*—It is for every sensible and rational person from every community to experience the truth within oneself by oneself.

As one continues to walk on the path and goes through the words of the Buddha, it becomes clearer and clearer that the teaching is not intended to convert people from one organized religion to another. The teaching itself is

not an organized religion. It can be practiced by one and all.

When one reads the words of the Buddha and the commentaries and sub-commentaries, one is surprised to find that throughout the literature, the words "Buddhism" and "Buddhist" are conspicuously missing. The Buddha never used these words. His followers also did not use these words for a number of centuries. He called his teaching the Dhamma—which means the Law, the Truth. He called his followers *Dhammi*, *Dhammattho*, *Dhammiko*, *Dhammacāri*, *Dhammavihāri*, and so on. In Indian languages, the word for "Buddhism" or "Buddhist" is *Bauddha*—a word without equivalent in the vast Pāli literature.

If the word "Buddhism" is used for the Buddha's teaching, it becomes limited to a particular community, but Dhamma is limitless—*appamāṇo Dhammo*. It is not for one particular community or religion. It is for all. We all know that the word "Buddhism" has now gained currency and is convenient to use. Many who use the word also understand that they are using it for the universal Dhamma or Dharma.

The Noble Eightfold Path

Let us understand what is the Buddha's teaching. It is the Noble Eightfold Path. The path is noble in the sense that anyone who walks on this path diligently becomes a noble person, a saintly person, a pure-hearted person.

The Noble Eightfold Path is divided into three divisions.

The first is *sīla*—morality, which is summed up as:

Sabba pāpassa akaraṇaṃ

Abstain from all sinful actions—that is, abstain from all unwholesome actions, physical or vocal, which hurt other

beings and disturb their peace and harmony.

The second part of the Path is *samādhi*—one-pointed concentration of wholesome mind, summed up as:

Kusalassa upasampadā

Perform wholesome actions with concentrated, wholesome mind.

The third part is *paññā*—wisdom or insight, summed up as:

Sacittapariyodapanam

Purify the totality of mind by developing insight.

These three trainings are the teaching of all the Buddhas of the past and will be the teaching of all the Buddhas of the future. That is why it is said,

Etam Buddhāna sāsanaṃ.

This is the teaching of all the Buddhas.

The Practical Teaching of the Buddha

To live the life of morality is the teaching of every religion. It is the quintessence, the inner core of every spiritual teaching. However, the Buddha was not interested in merely giving sermons to live a moral life. He taught us to take the next important step of *samādhi*—mastery over the mind. For this one needs an object of concentration. There are many objects by which one can train the mind. The Buddha himself gave many objects, and of these, one of the most popular was one's own respiration. He called it *Ānāpānassati*—developing the faculty of awareness of inhalation and exhalation. Respiration is common to all human beings belonging to any community. Nobody can have an objection to the practice of awareness of respiration. How can one label breath as Muslim or Hindu, Christian or Jewish, Buddhist

or Jain, Sikh or Parsi, Caucasian or African or Asian, male or female?

Ānāpānassati requires us to remain aware of the breath on the area below the nostrils and above the upper lip. It is one-pointed concentration at the middle of the upper lip—*uttarotthassa vemajjhappadese*.

As the mind gets concentrated on this small area, it becomes more and more sharp, more and more sensitive. After just three days of practice, one starts feeling physical sensations on this part of the body. Then, one turns to the next training of *paññā*—wisdom or insight.

One observes sensations throughout the physical structure, from the top of the head to the tips of the toes. In doing so, one notices that the sensations are closely related to what happens in the mind. It becomes clear that every time one performs an unwholesome action, one has to generate some impurity or other in the mind. Before one kills, one has to generate immense hatred. Before one steals, one generates greed. To indulge in sexual misconduct, one has to generate immense passion. One cannot do any harm to others without first harming oneself—*Pubbe hanati attānaṃ, pacchā hanati so pare*. Negativities such as anger, hatred, greed, ill will, jealousy, egotism and fear make a person unhappy, miserable and violent. One becomes agitated. When one is agitated, one doesn't keep this agitation to oneself: one starts distributing it to others, one starts harming others in society. One realizes this law of nature within the framework of one's own mind and body.

Someone may seem outwardly happy while performing unwholesome actions but their real situation is like burning charcoal covered with a thick layer of ash—

bhāsmacchannova pāvako. One is burning inside because of the mental negativities, and yet one is totally ignorant of what is happening inside.

This is *avijjā*, *moha*—ignorance. For the Buddha, ignorance is not lack of knowledge of some philosophical belief; it is lack of knowledge of what is happening within oneself. One doesn't understand how one becomes miserable because of this veil of ignorance. No one wants to remain miserable and yet one continues to be miserable because one continues to generate *taṇhā*—craving and aversion—all the time; one keeps on reacting to the sensations. When ignorance is removed, as one starts looking inside, one realizes, "Look, I am generating misery for myself by generating *taṇhā* in response to these sensations. When they are pleasant, I generate craving and when they are unpleasant, I generate aversion. Both make me miserable. And look, I have the solution now. When I understand the impermanent nature of sensations and maintain equanimity, there is no *taṇhā*, no craving and no aversion. The old habit pattern of the mind starts changing and I start coming out of misery."

This is *vijjā* or wisdom according to the Buddha. It has nothing to do with any philosophical or sectarian belief. It is the truth about one's happiness and misery, which all people can experience within if they take steps on the path. The Four Noble Truths are not philosophical dogma. They are actual realities pertaining to myself that I start realizing within myself. They are Noble Truths only when one experiences them, and thus, starts becoming a noble person.

When one is working with sensations, one is working at the depth of the mind. Whatever arises in the mind is

accompanied by sensations within the body—*Vedanā-samosaranā sabbe dhammā*. Even the most transient thought that arises within the mind is accompanied by a sensation within the body—*Vedanā-samosaranā saṅkappavitakkā*. This was a great discovery of the Buddha.

Another great discovery of the Buddha was that we generate *taṇhā* in response to the sensations. This was not known to the other teachers before the time of the Buddha, at the time of Buddha or after the Buddha. The teachers before the Buddha and at the time of the Buddha kept advising people not to react to the sensory objects that come in contact with the sense doors—eyes with visual object, nose with smell, ears with sound, and so on. They taught, "When sensory objects come in contact with your senses, don't react by judging them as good or bad; don't react with craving or aversion."

This teaching was already in existence. But the Buddha said that, actually, you are not reacting to these objects. He gave the example of a black bull and a white bull (one representing the sense doors and the other the sense objects) tied together with a rope. Neither the black nor the white bull is the bondage; the rope is the bondage. The Buddha said that the rope of *taṇhā* is the bondage, and that one generates *taṇhā* (craving or aversion) in response to *vedanā* (sensations)—*vedanā paccayā taṇhā*. This was the great discovery of the Enlightened One. He became an enlightened person because of this discovery.

There were many other people saying that one should not react to the objects of the senses. But they didn't become Buddhas. There were teachers who taught that one should not generate *lobha* (craving) and *dosa* (aversion).

The Buddha explained that *lobha* and *dosa* would last as long as there was *moha*. He, therefore, advised us to come out of *moha*. And what is *moha*? *Moha* is ignorance. *Moha* is *avijjā*: You don't know what is happening inside. You don't know the real cause of *lobha* and *dosa*. You are ignorant. How will you come out of ignorance? Strike at the root of the problem and come out of misery by working with sensations.

As long as you are not aware of sensations, you keep fighting with outside objects, thinking, "This is ugly" or "This is not ugly." You keep working on the surface. You are thinking of the black bull or the white bull as the cause of the bondage. In fact, the bondage is the craving and aversion that one generates in response to sensations. An alcoholic thinks that he is addicted to alcohol. He is actually addicted to the sensations he feels when he drinks alcohol.

When one observes sensations objectively, one starts coming out of ignorance. By understanding the impermanent nature of sensations, one generates *paññā* in response to *vedanā*. This is the law of nature. *Dhamma niyāmatā* is the law behind the natural order of phenomena. Whether there is a Buddha or no Buddha, *Dhamma niyāmatā* remains eternal.

The Buddha said:

*Uppādā vā tathāgatānam anuppādā vā tathāgatānam,
thitāva sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā
idappaccayatā. Tam tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti.
Abhisambujjhitvā abhisametuā ācikkhati deseti paññāpeti
paṭṭhapeti vivarati vibhajati uttānikaroti. 'Passathā'ti cāha.'*

He said, "I have experienced this law of nature, the Law of Dependent Origination, within myself; and having

experienced and understood it I declare it, teach it, clarify it, establish it and show it to others. Only after having seen it for myself, I declare it."

This is the bold declaration of a supreme scientist. Just as whether there is a Newton or no Newton, the law of gravity remains true. Newton discovered it and explained it to the world. Similarly, Galileo or no Galileo, the fact that the earth revolves around the sun remains true.

The feeling of sensation is the crucial junction from where one can take two paths going in opposite directions. If one keeps on reacting blindly to pleasant and unpleasant sensations, one multiplies one's misery. If one learns to maintain equanimity in the face of pleasant and unpleasant sensations, one starts changing the habit pattern at the deepest level and starts coming out of misery. The sensations are the root. As long as one neglects the root, the poisonous tree will grow again even if the trunk is cut.

The Buddha said:

*Yathāpi mūle anupaddave dalhe,
chinnopi rukkho punareva rūhati;
Evampi taṇhānusaye anūhate,
nibbattati dukkhamidam punappunam.*

Just as a tree with roots intact and secure,
though cut down, sprouts again;
even so, while latent craving is not rooted out,
misery springs up again and again.

Thus, this super-scientist discovered that to become fully liberated from mental defilements, one has to work at the root of the mind. Each individual must cut asunder the roots of *taṇhānusaya*.

When the entire forest is withered, each tree has to be nurtured, its roots cleared of disease, and then watered. Then, the entire forest will bloom again. Similarly, for the betterment of society, each individual has to improve. For society to become peaceful, each individual has to become peaceful. The individual is the key.

For the world to become peaceful, each country or society has to become peaceful. Here, I would again like to quote a very important exhortation from the Buddha to the Vajjian republic of Licchavis. The Buddha gave the following practical instructions, which would make the Licchavis unassailable:

- As long as they maintain their unity and meet regularly, they will remain invincible.
- As long as they meet together in unity, rise in unity and perform their duties in unity, they will remain invincible.
- As long as they do not transgress their ancient principles of good governance and their system of justice, they will remain invincible.
- As long as they revere, respect, venerate, and honor their elders and pay regard to their words, they will remain invincible.
- As long as they protect their women and children, they will remain invincible.
- As long as they venerate the objects of worship inside and outside their republic, and maintain monetary support for them, they will remain invincible.

There were many sects in those days too, with their own temples and places of worship. Wisdom lies in keeping all

people happy and satisfied. They should not be subjected to harassment, which compels them to become enemies of the state. Their places of worship should receive adequate protection. As long as the rulers provide protection and support to saintly people, they will remain invincible.

This wise counsel of the Buddha is also applicable today to maintain peace and harmony in the world. We cannot ignore issues related to religion if we are to be successful in bringing peace to the world.

It is the duty of every government to protect its people from external attacks, to do everything possible to make its people and territory secure. While this is done, it must be borne in mind that such measures give only short-term benefits. Goodwill and compassion alone can remove the hatred that lies at the root of all such acts performed by anyone belonging to any sect. In India, the United States and other countries where Vipassana courses are held in prisons, we already see how people change. The roots of terrorism lie in the minds of terrorists. We have seen how some hardened, violent criminals have been transformed in our prison courses. Anger, fear, vengefulness and hatred start dissolving, creating a peaceful and compassionate mind. We first ask some members of the prison staff to learn Vipassana and only then give courses for the inmates. This gives wonderful results.

In the Buddha's teaching, we will find a bridge that can connect various sects. The three fundamental divisions of the Buddha's teachings—morality, concentration of mind and purification of mind—are the essence of every religion and spiritual path. *Sila*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are the common denominators of all religions. There can be no

conflict over these three basic factors necessary for living a beneficial life. The whole emphasis of the Buddha's teaching is on the practice of these three in order to apply Dhamma in real life. This is the inner core of every religion. Instead of giving importance to this core, we keep on quarreling about the outer shell, which may be different in different religions.

History has proved that whenever the universal, non-sectarian teaching of the Buddha has gone to any place or community, it has never clashed with the traditional culture. Instead, like sugar dissolving in milk, the teachings have been gently assimilated to sweeten and enhance society. We all know how much the sweetness of peace and tranquillity is needed in the bitter world today. May the teaching of the Enlightened One bring peace and happiness to more and more individuals, thus making more and more societies around the world peaceful and happy.

May all beings be happy.

May all beings be peaceful.

May all beings be liberated. ☸

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