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Transcending Power and Politics: Buddhism as a Foundation of Universal Peace and Harmony

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Abstract: Peace and harmony, like health at the individual level, are essential conditions for collective well-being at the social, national, and international levels. While advances in medical science continually strive to alleviate physical suffering, similar efforts are being taken to sustain political stability and global security through new international institutions and peacekeeping mechanisms. Yet, the challenges of modernity, which are marked by imperialistic ambitions, cultural tensions, and looming civilizational conflicts, reveal the inadequacy of conventional political and militaristic approaches to conflict resolution. History has repeatedly shown that attempts to establish peace through war remain fragile in a world affected by mass migration, erosion of trust, and disproportionate investment in defense.

An alternative approach lies in examining religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions that have sought durable peace through inner transformation. Buddhism, with its emphasis on self-cultivation, compassion, mindfulness, and universal fraternity, provides one of the most profound paradigms for addressing conflict at multiple levels. The Buddha's teachings and the Buddhist tradition at large emphasize the transformation of the mind, the cultivation of nonviolence, and the realization of interdependence, values that transcend individual differences and foster social harmony.

This paper examines the Buddhist concept of peace and its relevance to contemporary man, ranging from the individual to the global sphere. It argues that Buddhism offers not only an ethical and spiritual foundation for universal peace but also a practical framework for conflict resolution, making it a compelling alternative to political and militaristic paradigms of harmonious living.

Keywords: *Buddhism, peace, harmony, conflict-resolution, imperialism, universal fraternity*

Introduction

The challenge of modernity, the rise of imperialistic temper threatening harmony in the neighboring regions, across international borders, and impending civilizational clashes, calls for a solution that cannot be found in traditional political discourses. Historical experiments have shown that establishing peace through war is often ineffective in this conflict-ridden world, characterized by global migration, lack of trust, and a massive increase in defense budgets, leaving very little possibility for bringing about peace and resolving conflicts. The

Buddhist conception of peace can be viewed as an alternative to existing paradigms, and this may have the potential to provide a strong foundation for building peace and amity at all levels, emerging as a tool to transform individuals as well as nations by protecting human dignity. It also calls for an inner transformation of the individual, which gets reflected in society and the world. It is in this context that we can view Buddhism as offering a holistic approach, grounded in self-discipline, compassion, and an understanding of interdependence, working as tools for lasting peace and harmony.

Beginning with Gautama Buddha, Buddhist literature is rich in numerous ideas that contribute to the maintenance of peace within individuals and societies. The Theravada canonical insights, like those of their Mahayana counterparts, contribute to the ideal of universal peace through their philosophical tenets. It argues that the Buddhist approach, through the transformation of consciousness, cultivation of compassion, and establishment of ethical reciprocity, offers a viable foundation for addressing conflict at all levels. Not being limited to religious practices, these ideals present a universal model for peace and harmony that transcends cultural and geopolitical boundaries. The experimentation conducted by the Buddha and Buddhists in this direction is significantly notable, as it not only addresses the problem of conflict resolution but also helps people understand the inner connectivity between them, irrespective of the visible differences they are often subjected to.

Catur-āriya-sacca – Its Implication for Peace

One of the major contributions of Buddha lies in his profound understanding of the human condition and its place within the empirical world, which he diagnosed as being permeated by suffering (*dukkha*) and disharmony. His search for peace and happiness began with the recognition of suffering as a universal phenomenon and culminated in a path for its cessation. The Buddha's analysis of the human predicament was not merely speculative but practical, modeled after the medical sciences: identifying the disease (*dukkha*), diagnosing its cause (*samudāya*), proposing its cure (*nirodha*), and prescribing a therapeutic path (*magga*), through the Four Noble Truths.¹ This explanation of *dhamma* was addressed for the “welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many,” underscoring its universal scope and inclusivity.² The Buddha's vision of liberation was never confined to a select elite or bound by ritualistic or hegemonic frameworks; instead, it was a path open to all, grounded in the *magga* (ethical living), *jhāna* (mindfulness), and *paññā* (wisdom).

Equally significant is the pragmatic orientation of the Buddha's teaching. At a time when religious life in India was deeply entwined with ritualism, caste divisions, and speculative metaphysics, Buddha emphasized lived experience and rational inquiry over reliance on dogmatic beliefs. His teaching was *ehipassika*, an invitation to “come and see”³, a principle that encouraged verification through personal experience rather than blind adherence to authority. He rejected the belief in supernaturalism and ritual sacrifice, offering a practical ethic of coexistence, compassion, and peace instead. This universal appeal lay in the possibility of living together in amity (*samagga-vihāra*), an idea that resonates strongly in texts like the *Sigālovāda-sutta* (DN 31), where mutual duties and responsibilities are emphasized as the basis for social harmony. Philosophically, Buddha criticized Vedic rituals and spoke against the conception of an eternal, trans-empirical reality, warning against getting lost in the “jungle of views” (*diṭṭhi-gahana*, MN 72, *Aggi-vacchagotta-sutta*). Instead, he advanced a rational and empirical method of inquiry directed toward the cessation of suffering. This rationality was not abstract but oriented towards the well-being of all sentient beings, transcending social and cultural divisions.

Another striking as well as interesting feature of Buddhism is the way it spread peacefully across Asia. It is an achievement gained without military conquest or enforced conversion. Unlike many religious traditions that spread through political patronage or coercion, Buddhism expanded through persuasion, ethical examples, and the appeal of its ideals. One reason for this peaceful diffusion lies in Buddha's advocacy of the *Middle Path* (*majjhima-paṭipadā*), which avoids extremes of self-mortification and indulgence, and his consistent teaching of non-conflict. The *Araṇa-sutta* (Sn. 4.11) highlights this vision by encouraging a way of life that is “without conflict” (*araṇa*), in contrast to the destructive pursuit of victory (*raṇa*). Thus, peace for the Buddha relies on cultivating compassion, avoiding hatred, and realizing interdependence—a foundation as relevant today as it was two thousand five hundred years ago during the master's time.

Importance of the Middle Path in Promoting Peace

The Buddha's teaching of the Middle Path (*majjhima-paṭipadā*) represents a seminal contribution not only to the history of religions but also to the philosophy of peace. Far from being a merely ascetic or mystical doctrine, the Middle Path embodies a comprehensive vision of harmony that integrates individual self-cultivation with social well-being and, by extension, the possibility of universal peace. It is significant that Buddha's first sermon—the *Dhamma-*

cakkappavattana-sutta (SN 56.11) introduces this path not as a mere belief but as a practical solution to the existential predicament of suffering (*dukkha*). His rejection of the extremes of indulgence and self-mortification situates peace in the realm of balance, moderation, and ethical living.

Philosophical Foundations of the Middle Path

The Buddha's articulation of the Middle Path is rooted in the Four Noble Truths, not merely a metaphysical middle between "being" and "non-being," but a practical orientation towards life that avoids extremes. The *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* explicitly rejects *kāmasukhallikānuyoga* (the pursuit of sensual pleasures) and *attakilamathānuyoga* (self-mortification), both of which the Buddha had rejected as inadequate. This rejection has direct implications for the pursuit of peace, since indulgence fosters greed (*lobha*) and competition, while self-mortification can lead to sectarian rigidity and violence against both self and others. However, the middle path nurtures balance, equanimity (*upekkhā*), and a relational understanding of existence, which fosters harmony and discourages conflict.

This orientation differs from some Vedic-Brahmanical and other Sramanic traditions, which hold that extreme asceticism is the means to liberation. Buddha was of the view that self-mortification involves torture to the body and hence was violence to the body and therefore, required to be avoided. The Buddha's moderation can thus be read as both a philosophically corrective and a cultural critique. His Middle Path paved the way for the democratization of spirituality by making liberation accessible to householders and lay people, opening the doors of redemption to all and thereby promoting inclusive harmony rather than sectarian hegemony and elitism.⁴

Ethical Dimensions: Peace in Society

The Middle Path has traditionally served as a framework to elucidate the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*), which encompasses wisdom (*paññā*), ethics (*sīla*), and meditation (*samādhi*), thereby ensuring its relevance at both social and political levels. The ideal of non-violence (*ahimsa*), which involves avoiding killing, stealing, and lying, has direct implications for fostering trust, security, and social harmony. The *Sigālovāda-sutta* (DN 31) illustrates this with a pragmatic framework of reciprocal duties between parents and children, teachers and students, rulers and citizens, which serve as the foundation for peaceful communities. In modern terms, one might say that the Buddhist ethical code anticipates theories of social

contract, but without coercion, grounding harmony instead in voluntary understanding and recognition of interdependence.

Moreover, the cultivation of *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion) ensures that peace is not negative (the mere absence of conflict) but positive (the active promotion of mutual welfare). This resonates with Johan Galtung's distinction between "negative peace" and "positive peace" in Peace Studies, suggesting that Buddhist thought aligns with modern critical theories of peace.⁵

Psychological Dimensions: Peace Within

The Middle Path is also a psychological approach for overcoming inner conflict. By training the mind through mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*), individuals develop equanimity (*upekkhā*), reducing the destructive power of anger, hatred, and delusion. The *Araṇa-sutta* (Sn. 4.11) explicitly describes this ideal of how a person who is free from attachment and ill-will lives "without conflict" (*araṇa*). Here, peace is cultivated not externally but internally, through the transformation of consciousness. This insight supposes modern psychology's recognition that inner states such as resentment and aggression often result in social conflict. In Buddhist terms, the conquest of hatred is not through force but through non-hatred (*avera*), as famously stated, "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world; by non-hatred alone is hatred appeased." (*Dhammapada* - 5)⁶

This view may be criticized - this inward turn from an ordinary angle could be accused of quietism and retreating from structural and political injustices. Yet, as Engaged Buddhism demonstrates, the Middle Path is not apolitical; rather, it provides the inner resources necessary to engage conflict without replicating cycles of violence (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1987).

The Middle Path and Interdependence

Another aspect of the Middle Path is its grounding in the doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). By rejecting extremes as stated above in this paper, Buddha spoke about a middle way in which all phenomena arise interdependently. This metaphysical "middle" has ethical implications that may be worked out as follows: if all beings are interconnected, then harming others is ultimately harming oneself or self-defeating. The cultivation of universal *mettā* as enunciated in the *Mettā-sutta* (Sn. 1.8) describes this principle by urging practitioners to extend loving-kindness to all beings, "as a mother protects her only child."⁷ Peace, then, is

not an external imposition but a natural extension of insight into reality. This contrasts with modern political paradigms of peace, which often rely on balance-of-power models. While *realpolitik* assumes that peace is secured through deterrence, Buddhism suggests that it arises from a mutual recognition of interdependence. This difference highlights the uniqueness of the Buddhist contribution to the theory of peace.

Growth of Buddhism – Through Adaptation and Acceptance

Perhaps the most striking feature of the spread of Buddhism is its diffusion through cultural adaptation and voluntary acceptance in South Asia and other places. One of the major contributions of the concept of the Middle Path is the peaceful spread of Buddhism across nations, which consistently finds a way for people, even from alien lands, to accept its tenets, promoting harmony and unity. Unlike other world religions that expanded through conquest or coercion, Buddhism's diffusion was characterized by cultural adaptation and voluntary acceptance. The most well-known example is that of Emperor Aśoka (third century BCE), whose missions resulted in the spread of Buddhism in South Asia. One of the main messages of his edicts, which showcase Buddhist values, explicitly speaks against violent conquest in favour of *dharmavijaya* ("conquest by Dharma"). It was perhaps Aśoka who demonstrated the efficacy of the Middle Path, promoting tolerance, compassion, and respect for all sects, and embodying these values in governance and administration. Modern historians note that this unique model of soft power facilitated Buddhism's acceptance across diverse cultures—from Sri Lanka to Central Asia, China, and Japan—without resorting to violence.⁸

The Imperial Mauryas, with Aśoka as their distinguished representative, rebuilt their empire on four brahma-vihāras rather than one based on force or violence. While challenging the historical example of force securing peace, it has depicted how moderation, ethical speech and action, and intercultural dialogue – which are the signs of the Middle path can sustain harmony on a large scale across cultures. Notwithstanding the criticism, the Middle Path presents a profound model of peace; however, it has certain limitations, as there is a risk of exploitation and oppression inherent in monarchical or monistic structures. We find it has worked whenever experimented. In Rock Edict IV, we find:

For Centuries past, the slaughter of animals, the cruelty to living beings, the discourtesy to relatives, to ascetics, and to the aged have been allowed to increase. But now, on account of the practice of dharma by King Priyadarshin (Aśoka), beloved of the Gods,

there is heard in place of the sound of war drums the sound of the proclamation of dharma.⁹

A modern interpretation of the Middle Path is extended to global issues such as war, ecological imbalance, and human rights, as propounded by the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. B.R. Ambedkar has adopted the Middle Path as a means to address social injustice and hegemonic oppression. By addressing the individual spheres of social life, from physical to psychological, the Middle Path has proven to be a living and dynamic concept aiding the ideal of peace, which is being eroded in both external and internal domains. Thus, philosophically, the Middle Path offers a unique vision of peace, not only through spiritual practice, but also through mindfulness and compassion, addressing the dual dimensions of internal and external human existence and thus providing a practical approach with universal relevance.

Pratītya-samutpāda and Its Implications for Peace

Buddha is believed to have said, “he who knows conditioned co-arising, *paticca-samuppada* (or dependent origination) knows dhamma.¹⁰ It is expressed in the formula: “When this is, that is; with the arising of this, that arises. When this is not, that is not; with the cessation of this, that ceases” (*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imass’ uppādā idaṃ uppajjati; imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati*, SN 12.61). This principle is not merely a metaphysical or epistemological statement but also a profoundly ethical and practical insight implying the ideal that all phenomena are relational, interdependent, and impermanent.

Pratītya-samutpāda (Pāli, *Paṭicca-samuppāda*) is not a speculative doctrine for the Buddha; rather, it is pragmatic and diagnostic. By recognizing the conditioned nature of suffering (*dukkha*), he was able to find a way to escape suffering. The twelvefold chain of dependent origination (*dvādasā-nidāna*) illustrates how each link in the chain arises from the earlier ones, starting from ignorance (*avijjā*), craving (*taṇhā*), and clinging (*upādāna*), thereby making us understand the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). When a person realizes the interlinking, he would be able to come out of it by the cessation of craving and realize the peace by the attainment of *nibbāna*. The *pratītya-samutpāda* can be interpreted at three levels as a philosophical tool that promotes peace. (1) Individual level - inner peace, through the dissolution of ego-clinging and craving; (2) Social level – Peace for the masses by cultivating ethics in interdependence and compassion; and (3) global peace, by offering a framework that

avoids extremes of absolutism and nihilism, thus promoting dialogue, tolerance, and non-violence.

Philosophical Foundations of Pratītya-samutpāda

Philosophically, dependent origination has been conceived as a middle way; a detailed analysis of which is found in the *Mahānidāna-sutta* (DN 15), which illustrates how consciousness, name-and-form, sense-contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, and birth interdependently condition each other, forming a circular and relational pattern without relying on any absolute cause or first cause. *Firstly*, it is opposed to substantialism, which posits that nothing exists independently or permanently, and all phenomena are contingent; secondly, it has no place for determinism, which means that human efforts matter here, and changing the conditions can alter the results. This ideal has implications for peace since it undermines dogmatic rigidity and cultivates openness to relational understanding.

Secondly, at the individual level, it prompts a person to reflect on their being and helps them dissolve their ego, bringing about inner peace. This concept also helps one to overcome their dependence on the belief in the permanent self (Pāli, *attā*; Sk, *ātman*) and the ever-changing self. As the Buddha taught in the *Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta* (SN 22.59), the five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*)—form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are conditioned and impermanent; therefore, they cannot be identified as the self. For an individual, inner peace is eroded because of one's clinging to the ego, which gives rise to craving and aversion, which in turn generate inner turmoil and ultimate suffering. By realizing that the self is not an isolated, fixed entity but a nexus of interdependent conditions, practitioners loosen the grip of attachment and cultivate equanimity (*upekkhā*). This insight leads to inner peace by avoiding conflicts ignited by pride, jealousy, and possessiveness, which lose their traditional locus and basis of operation. This can be corroborated by Modern psychology. Studies of mindfulness-based therapies (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Siegel, 2007) demonstrate that recognizing the impermanent and relational nature of experience can reduce anxiety and promote resilience. Thus, *pratītya-samutpāda* provides not only a philosophical framework but also a therapeutic path toward peace of mind.¹¹

Thirdly, dependent origination also has profound implications for social ethics. If all beings arise interdependently, then the well-being of one cannot be separated from the well-being of others. This relational ontology underscores the Buddhist ethic of compassion

(*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*) that the person develops by understanding and practice. The *Sigālovāda-sutta* (DN 31) illustrates this by outlining reciprocal duties between parents and children, teachers and pupils, rulers and citizens. These duties are not grounded in divine command or contractual obligation but in recognition of mutual dependence. Similarly, the *Mettā-sutta* (Sn. 1.8) universalizes this ethic by urging practitioners to extend love to all beings, transcending social and cultural divisions. In a world where ideological rigidity fuels conflict, the Buddhist middle way offers a platform for dialogue, adaptation, and cultural exchange on a global scale and as already pointed out, by avoiding extremes, cultivating a spirit of openness, which is exemplified by the way it has spread to the different regions of Asia without disturbing their belief systems and integrating with their traditions of thinking and living. The present Dalai Lama frequently emphasizes that “all beings seek happiness and avoid suffering,” and since all are interdependent, global peace requires compassion and mutual responsibility (Dalai Lama, 1999).¹² To live according to *pratītya-samutpāda* is to live in a way that promotes peace—within, among, and beyond ourselves.

The Brahmavihāras: Their Implications for Peace

The term “*Brahmavihāra*” literally means “divine abodes” or “sublime states,” signifying the highest modes of dwelling for the mind. These qualities—*mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity), are highlighted throughout the Buddhist canon as the foundations of liberation, individual and social. The *Dīgha-nikāya* states that the cultivation of these qualities leads to “a mind vast, exalted, measureless, without enmity, without ill will.”¹³ In the *Tevijja-sutta* (DN 13), the Buddha even contrasts the Brahmavihāras with Vedic rituals, suggesting that true union with Brahmā is not through sacrifice but through dwelling in these sublime attitudes.

(a) Mettā – Loving-Kindness

Mettā is the wish for the well-being and happiness of all beings. It is not limited to affection for family or friends but has universal extension, “without boundaries” (*appamāṇa*). The *Mettā Sutta* (Sn. 1.8) is a classic text in which the Buddha urges: “Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings.” In the *Dhammapada* (v.5) we find; “Hatred is never overcome by hatred; by non-hatred alone is hatred overcome. This is an eternal law (*dhmma*).”

(b) Karuṇā – Compassion

Karuṇā is the empathetic response to suffering. It motivates the alleviation of others' pain. In the *Samyutta-nikāya* (SN 42.8), the Buddha declares that the noble disciple “abides with a mind of compassion toward all beings.”

(c) *Muditā – Sympathetic Joy*

Muditā is rejoicing in the happiness and success of others, an antidote to envy and jealousy. The *Visuddhimagga* (IX.92) explains that *muditā* “opposes ill will” because it fosters delight in others' prosperity rather than resentment.

(d) *Upekkhā – Equanimity*

Upekkhā is balanced impartiality, grounded in wisdom. It does not mean indifference but rather a stable mind free from clinging and aversion. The *Brahmavihāra Sutta* (AN 10.208) describes it as an even-minded love, treating all beings equally without discrimination.

Together, the *Brahmavihāras* counteract the “four perversions” (*vipallāsa*): hatred, cruelty, envy, and partiality. The *Brahmavihāras* transform the inner world by dissolving negative emotions. Thus, a practitioner finds freedom from inner conflict. The Buddha declared in *AN 4.125* that one who develops the *Brahmavihāras* “sleeps easily, wakes easily, dreams no evil dreams... and dies unconfused.” Such inner harmony is the seed of peace in the outer world.

At a social level, the *Brahmavihāras* provide an ethical framework for harmonious relations in society. In the *Sigālovāda-sutta* (DN 31), duties of parents, children, rulers, teachers, and friends reflect the spirit of loving-kindness and compassion. When society is infused with these attitudes, conflict and exploitation are diminished. *Mettā* establishes goodwill among communities. *Karuṇā* promotes social care for the marginalized people. *Muditā* nurtures cooperation instead of rivalry. *Upekkhā* ensures impartial justice, transcending caste, class, or creed.

At a global level, the *Brahmavihāras* provide an alternative paradigm of international relations. Instead of competition, exploitation, and domination, they verily emphasize cooperation, empathy, and equality. The Buddhist emphasis on extending love to “all beings in all directions” (*sabbalokānukampā*) is a call for universalism that transcends nationalism

and ethno-centrism. Aśoka's policy of *dhamma-vijaya* (conquest by Dharma, not by arms; Rock Edict XIII) was a political expression of Brahmavihāra ethics.¹⁴

The Four Brahmavihāras, thus, are not merely meditative exercises but a comprehensive ethical vision. They foster inner peace by purifying the heart, social peace by nurturing justice and harmony, and global peace by transcending divisive boundaries. In Buddha's words, cultivating these states makes one "immeasurable, vast, boundless" (*appamāṇo*). The world today, torn by violence, greed, and hatred, urgently needs this immeasurable love and compassion. If practiced individually and collectively, the Brahmavihāras provide a foundation for a culture of peace that transcends borders and identities.

The Ideal of Peace in Mahayana Literature

The Mahāyāna tradition of Buddhism (c. 1st century BCE onwards) reinterpreted Buddhist teachings with new philosophical depth and broadened universal aspirations. While early Buddhism emphasized the liberation of the individual (the *arahant* ideal), Mahāyāna emphasized the bodhisattva ideal, wherein liberation is sought not only for oneself but also for all beings. Peace (*śānti*) thus became not only personal inner tranquillity but also a universal aspiration tied to compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*). Mahāyāna thinkers, such as Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Śāntideva, and others, enunciated numerous theories on compassion, interdependence, and non-violence, which have enduring implications for both philosophy and Peace Studies.

Nāgārjuna argued that all phenomena are empty (*śūnya*) of inherent existence (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, MMK-1). Conflict arises when people cling to fixed views of self, nation, or ideology. By realizing emptiness, attachment to rigid positions get dissolved, allowing for peace through non-attachment and tolerance. In *Ratnāvalī*, Nāgārjuna advises kings to rule with compassion, non-violence, and generosity, warning that violence brings endless retaliation. Peace, for Nāgārjuna, is not simply cessation of conflict but recognition of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) as the basis of universal interconnection.¹⁵ Asaṅga, a central figure in the Yogācāra school, emphasized the transformation of consciousness (*cittabhūmi*). In *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, Asaṅga taught that peace arises when the mind is purified of defilements and transformed into wisdom and compassion. He elaborated the *bodhisattva path* where altruism is central: the bodhisattva postpones personal nirvāṇa until all

beings are liberated. This radical altruism is a vision of universal peace rooted in compassion and ideal of universal liberation (sarva-mukti).¹⁶ Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* analyzes the mental factors that lead to conflict—anger, greed, and delusion. In his later Yogācāra works (*Triṃśikā*, *Viṃśikā*), he shows how all experiences are “mind-only” (*cittamātra*). Conflict, therefore, is a projection of deluded consciousness. Peace arises through correcting perception and realizing the interdependence of self and other.¹⁷ Śāntideva (800 CE) thus places peace at the heart of the bodhisattva's vow. Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life) enunciates peace as compassion in action and is perhaps the most profound Mahāyāna treatise on the ideal of peace. He condemns anger as the greatest enemy of peace (Chapter VI). He elevates patience (*kṣānti*) as a supreme virtue, even toward aggressors: “There is no evil greater than hatred, and no austerity greater than patience” (BCA VI.2). He advocates *mettā* and *karuṇā* as universal attitudes, making peace an active practice of bodhisattvas who labour for the welfare of all beings.¹⁸

Conclusion – Buddhism for Universal Liberation and Eternal Peace

The Mahāyāna insights reveal that peace is simultaneously an inner, ethical, and universal reality, attainable through the Bodhisattva's vow to liberate all beings. In a world threatened by violence, nationalism, and ecological crisis, Mahāyāna's emphasis on compassion, interdependence, and altruism provides a timeless framework for universal peace.

The Buddha addressed this throughout his teachings, and the entire practice of Buddhism is directed towards helping individuals who are dependent on others for practicing religion to do so without relying on others. Buddha was perhaps the first analytical philosopher who explained the existential predicaments that humans experience in the world. In doing so, he had to counter a lot of his adversaries who, according to him, were waylaying the people with tons of extra-temporal and so-called metaphysical theories and concepts. More than any other thinkers of his time or the ones preceding him, he formulated a way for the universal welfare. In his very first sermon, contained in *Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana-sutta*, the teaching on the Four Noble Truths is given for exemplifying the fact of life as understood by Buddha as a result of his search for a life, free from suffering, and on the project of life as envisaged by him that leads one to the state of Nirvāṇa.

One of the major contributions of Buddha is to minimize the distance between the spiritual and empirical. He does this in many ways, and we can see this from Nagarjuna's

presentation of the Buddha. According to him, Buddha tells us that there is no difference between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.¹⁹ It is usually said that Buddhism is pessimistic, but that is not so! Buddha was highly optimistic that suffering could be arrested by following dhamma, and nibbana could be achieved by following the margas, and with such practices, the world would hope to be a better place to live. We need to move beyond the sectarian views that have destroyed the unity and togetherness. In this sense, as many historians have pointed out, Buddhism is not a religion without a book, a god, and a soul. In the history of world religions, it was the Buddhists who spoke about *sarvamukti* or universal liberation, and conceptualized Bodhisattvas as the harbinger of wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) to facilitate this. Being enlightened of this truth, there was a need to disseminate this and enable it to take root in the minds of those who had suffered and continue to do so. This became a compelling need for Buddha to teach since the truth discovered cannot be for a chosen few; it should be for all, for the society at large. This idea of universality was fully articulated in the Mahayana school, where the aspirant sought to become a Bodhisattva rather than a Pratyekabuddha. Service, not satisfaction, was the goal of the seeker, and numerous Buddhist authors, such as Śāntideva, eloquently address this selfless service of the enlightened, making them more social beings than individuals focused on personal liberation. To conclude with Radhakrishnan's observation: "*Gautama the Buddha is the voice of Asia and conscience of the world.*"

Notes

1. *Dīgha-nikāya* 22, PTS edition, *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.
2. *bahujanahitāya, bahujanasukhāya*, Vinaya Piṭaka, I.21.
3. *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, PTS edition, AN I.158
4. Harvey, 2000, pp. 18–22, 47–49,
5. Galtung, 1996, pp. 9–10.
6. na hi verena verāni sammantīdha kudācana averena ca sammanti esa dhammo sanantano. *Dhammapada*, v.5
7. "Yathāpi māyā puttam āyusaṃ, Evampi sabbabhūtānaṃ mettāya bhāvaye." Mettā-sutta, Sn 1.8 Sutta Nipāta, Sn 1.8. (PTS edition, Khuddaka-nikāya, pp. 13–14).
8. Gombrich, R. F. (1988). *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Early Times to the Present*. Routledge. p. 10., Romila Thapar's *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1961).
9. Quoted by Satchidananda Murty, *Studies in the Problems of Peace*, Asia Publishing House, London, 1960, p.29.
10. yo paticca-samuppādaṃ ñāṇaṃ āpajjati, so dhammaṃ āpajjati. *Samyutta Nikāya*, SN 12.1–12.2, in the Mahānidāna-sutta (*The Great Discourse on Causation*).PTS Edition: *Samyutta Nikāya*, Vol. I, pp. 129–135

11. In his seminal work *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, Kabat-Zinn (1990) introduces the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. He emphasizes the importance of mindfulness in recognizing the impermanent and interconnected nature of experiences, which can lead to reduced anxiety and increased resilience.

In *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being*, Siegel (2007) explores how mindfulness practices can lead to neural integration, enhancing emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships. He discusses the relational and impermanent aspects of experience, aligning with the principles of *pratītya-samutpāda*.
12. In a time of escalating conflict, ecological crisis, and cultural polarization, the Buddhist vision of dependent origination offers a vital corrective: peace is not secured by domination or isolation but by recognizing the deep interconnection of all life.
13. *mettāsaḥagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā...* DN, PTS edition, 13.
14. In contemporary peace studies, this corresponds to Johan Galtung's concept of positive peace—peace not merely as the absence of conflict, but as the presence of justice and equity.
15. *Ratnāvalī* v. 211–213: "By killing one's enemies, one does not attain peace. By conquering anger, one finds true victory."
16. *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* XV.7: "The bodhisattva is the refuge of the world, bringing joy and fearlessness through compassion."
17. Vasubandhu, *Viṃśikā* v. 10–12 – violence arises when one mistakes illusory appearances for reality.
18. *Bodhicaryāvatāra* VIII.129–130: "For as long as space endures, and for as long as beings remain, until then may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world."
19. Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) 25.19–20 The verse is:

*na saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt kiñcid asti viśeṣaṇam
na nirvāṇasya saṃsārāt kiñcid asti viśeṣaṇam.*

*nirvāṇam saṃsṛtiś caiva na vyeti paramārthataḥ.
ayam dvayor viśeṣo hi prapañcopaśamaḥ śivah.*

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