Inner Peace and Outer Peace: A Buddhist Contemplative Perspective

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Abstract

This paper is about peace, humiliation, and conflict resolution from a contemporary Buddhist perspective. To most Western intellectual tradition, as well as to common people, the word “Buddhism” means no more than a religious institution of withdrawal from social commitment and responsibility. Western people were not, however, the first to accuse the Buddhists of retirement from the social world out of selfish introspection (meditation). The Chinese (Wang Yangming/1472-1529) were the first who charged that Buddhists were: “afraid of the troubles involved in the relationships between father and son, ruler and subjects, and husband and wife; and therefore they [escaped] from these relationship”.

However, the recent works on Buddhism and its interaction with socio-political activism by Christopher S. Queen, Sally B. King, and many others, demonstrate that the reality of contemporary Buddhist practice is somewhat different from the rather negative perception reported above.

Whoever reflects on the Buddha’s biography, he or she would see that Buddha’s life did not end with his journey to enlightenment but in social uplifting. The Pāli original discourses reveal to students of Buddhism that the early Buddhist sermons were powerful forces in ancient Indian society – which they are until now. Such discourses address not only meditative instruction but also social, politico-economic philosophy, criminology, human rights, war and ecology. The early discourses’ association with peace and non-violence is noteworthy in this regard.

In this paper I share my inner experience of contemporary Asian Buddhist views and understanding of peace and non-violent activities. I first raise critical questions first and then look for answers from a “Contemplative Perspective.” My critical questions are: What exactly is meant by inner peace and outer peace by Buddhist traditions? Is there any link between inner and outer peace? If so, how? Can inner peace bring outer peace and then transform this into world peace? Do Buddha’s moral and ethical values have a potential for peace? Other relevant questions – such as how do we apply non-violent theory (ahimsa) to the actual situation – will also be discussed in a substantive way.

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