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THE BUDDHA'S CONTRIBUTION TO HUMANITY AND WORLD PEACE

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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It is with immense pleasure that I accepted the invitation to this august event. Let me as Vice-President and Representative of the World Fellowship of Buddhists to the UN and UNESCO and the Chairman of the World Buddhist University Council, express my deepest gratitude to the Government of Thailand and its Permanent Delegation to UNESCO, the Director General and the Secretariat of UNESCO, the Pure Land Learning College of Australia and its President Venerable Shi Chin Kung and my compatriot and colleague Dr. Tampalawela Dhammaratana for the joint celebration of the Buddhist Era 2550 with a happy combination of spiritual, intellectual and cultural activities.

I cannot think of any better way of commemorating the Buddha on this occasion than recounting the magnificent contribution he has made to the humanity as a whole.

The inspiring life of Prince Siddhartha Gautama begins with his birth under a tree in the forest-grove of Lumbini, halfway between the two royal capitals of his grandparents. Queen Maya was on her way to have her first child with her parents at Devadaha. Returning to Kapilavastu where his father King Suddhodana ruled over the Shakyas, the Prince was brought up in the lap of luxury – especially designed to keep him away from the predicted destiny of a spiritual leader.

He is already twenty-nine years old and married for thirteen years and about to have the first baby when restrictions on his movements in the kingdom were relaxed and he encountered the realities of life in the form of old age, sickness and death. Shocked by the ineluctable suffering of humanity, he leaves his royal palaces, throws away the regalia and dons the rags of a mendicant to proceed on a quest of on way to end human suffering. He learns whatever the prevailing spiritual traditions could teach him and masters available techniques of meditation and mental development. But still unable to see a way to end suffering, he embarks on his own experimental path resorting to the most stringent penances, which yield no results.

Finally, evolving his unique approach to a middle path, he avoids both extremes of self-indulgence with unlimited luxury and self-mortification, characterized by torturous penances. Two thousand five hundred and ninety-five years ago, on the full moon day of the month of May, he attains enlightenment under the Bodhi tree of Gaya and announces himself the Buddha – the fully Awakened or Enlightened One – a teacher of a Path to End Suffering.

Claimed by Nepal as her brightest and noblest son and by India as its most illustrious and best known spiritual leader, hailed by a Western poet as the Light of Asia, and venerated and followed by the Buddhist world as an incomparable teacher of loving kindness and peace, the Buddha has left a legacy for the humanity as a whole. Over forty-five years, he traveled from village to village and town to town teaching the people the reality of existence, the nature of human suffering and a way to end suffering in a

state of utmost bliss and happiness, peace and tranquility, which he termed Nibbāna - a state of deathlessness.

What the Buddha gave humanity as his primary and most important gift in this Path of Spiritual Perfection. It was not a message he brought from a divine origin or a supernatural power. He did not present himself as a saviour whose grace was needed for humans to attain eternal happiness. As a human, himself, he placed before his fellow humans what each man or woman could achieve by dint of individual effort in self-cultivation.

His Path began with moral or ethical purity which one achieved by avoiding evil and accumulating merit through compassionate service to humanity. One gained his or her spiritual development by simple acts of charity by generously sharing one's time, energy and goods for the benefit of the many and the good of the many. Founded on self-discipline, thus attained, one proceeded to the cultivation of one's mind.

It was the Buddha's fundamental teaching that the mind was the forerunner of every action. One thought and acted accordingly. Thought preceded action. As such a well-controlled and developed mind was one's best friend whereas as a mind left untamed was one's worst enemy. The Buddha's teachings have often been given the sub-title of Mental Culture or Self Cultivation. Meditation for this purpose is the second stage of his process of training. One could start with the simple exercise of mindful or conscious breathing and proceed in stages to develop total mindfulness when one acted with perfect awareness of every moment. With a mind so becalmed, one could progress to systematically graded states of mental training until one reached the highest level of Concentration.

It was with such a fine-tuned mind that one was persuaded to contemplate on the realities of existence. Impermanence and change, which characterized everyone and everything, could be easily observed and realized. With it would come the awareness of inherent suffering and misery which impermanence and change caused. The incapacity of the human to avoid either impermanence and change or the resulting suffering would convince one that there was nothing permanent and substantial that one could really identify as "This is I; this is mine; and this is my self." Thus was formulated the Buddha's unique concept of the three signs or marks of existence culminating in the doctrine of Selflessness.

The perfect realization of this truism would lead one to the recognition of the futility of a self-view, as characterized by self-importance and arrogance. Once this conviction is further reinforced by the removal of all doubt and skepticism and also the reliance on mere rites and ritual, one was steadfastly set to progress in a process of ethical perfection. The Buddha called such a person as having entered the stream, which would ultimately lead him to enlightenment.

The Buddha described this Path of Deliverance as leading one in eight stages of such perfection when with the final eradication of the defilement of Ignorance, one became a Worthy One (Arahant) – an Enlightened One or a Saint who in this very life has attained Nibbāna. Every sentient being is eligible to attain this final goal and all that one had to do is to seek it for oneself. Every sentient being has within oneself the Buddha Nature, the Buddhists believe and accept as the crux of the Buddha's teachings.

If the Buddha had simply presented this Path of Deliverance to the few who could meet him and come under his direct influence, his legacy would have been as limited and even obscure as that of Upanishadic philosophers of the past or his own contemporaries. But the Buddha did every thing different. He claimed to be only the rediscoverer of Nibbāna and the Noble Eightfold Path leading to it. With remarkable modesty, he compared his role to one who found an ancient lost or forgotten city with the road leading to it covered and obliterated by a jungle overgrowth. He assumed for himself the function of a benevolent servant of humanity who had to share his discovery with not only his immediate neighbors and contemporaries but also the generations yet unborn in a planet, which still remained to be fully explored.

There is no doubt that the greatness of the Buddha as a spiritual leader teaching a Path of Deliverance, Redemption, Liberation, Emancipation, Salvation or Release from human suffering is beyond question. But all of humanity has not been ready, willing, eligible or spiritually prepared to seek the end of suffering. Many – in fact, the majority - remained outside the pale of the life of renunciation and steadfast adherence to strict discipline that was conducive to the progressive attainment of Nibbāna. The Buddha was as much concerned about them as about those who trod his Path leading to End of Suffering.

His teachings for the ordinary men, women and children of all classes and socio-economic circumstances are many and have remained as applicable to humanity of his days as of the world today, tomorrow and the millennia to come. What he taught was meant to ensure the good and the benefit of the many here in this life and hereafter. The Buddha reiterated the prevailing belief system of his times as regards a cycle of birth, death and rebirth wherein each individual experienced happiness or suffering or rather a combination of both according to good or bad action one committed intentionally. His own refinement of this view was that it was intentionality, which determined the moral implications of one's action, and the human as the master of his or her destiny could continually modify the results of such action. To the Buddha, Karma was not a fatalistic concept demanding helpless surrender but a moral law which left one the freedom and capacity for self-improvement and self-perfection.

The Buddha in both precept and practice has underscored his unwavering recognition of the humanity's intellectual capacity and critical acumen. He valiantly called upon us not to believe what was in the book, what came through rumour or hearsay, what was passed down as a family tradition or even what a teacher taught simply because the teacher was likeable. His appeal was for us to think for ourselves and do only what we could critically determine as was conducive to the good of the many and the benefit of the many. When his closest and perhaps the most brilliant disciple, Sariputta, one praised him saying "You are the best of the Buddhas, his reaction was only to rebuke him. He asked Sariputta, "How could you say no without knowing all the former and the future Buddhas?"

Not only did he seek to liberate humanity from its reliance on dogma, blind faith, superstition and rigid conformity to tradition, but he also boldly stood against all forms of discrimination, exploitation and oppression of his days. He declared the validity of treating a person on the basis of his moral standing and not merely on his birth as the Brahmanical caste system decreed.

Recruiting disciples from all castes, he compared their integration within his community to rivers, which flowed into the ocean and thereby lost their individual names. The only way an order of precedence among its members was determined was the seniority of entry. Thus many a disadvantaged person of depressed castes and classes achieved positions of significant recognition and veneration for their erudition, piety and leadership.

Just as the Buddha agitated for the oneness of humanity, so did he attest to a common and shared role for diverse religious systems to lead humanity to ethical responsibility and thereby to happiness here and hereafter. He accepted disciples from other religious paths only on condition that these disciples continued their support to their earlier teachers and institutions and followed what they had taught them as good and evil. Discussing the obligations of a religious teacher to his disciples, the Buddha specified that such a teacher's responsibility was to lead disciples to heaven through moral perfection.

Similarly, in identifying seven ways for a country or community to progress without disruption or degeneration, he asserted that the country or community should open its doors to all saintly persons and facilitate them to live peacefully serving the people. While holding his own Path of Deliverance as one of proven efficacy, the Buddha argued against teachers of fatalism, irreligion, and blind surrender to divine will and dissuaded people from performing sacrificial ritual involving the killing of animals. His fundamental premise was that these teachings and practices did not contribute to a person's moral and spiritual development based on conviction and devotion.

The Buddha was deeply conscious of the importance of wholesome interpersonal relations and worked out a matrix of rights and obligations between parents and children, teacher and student, husband and wife, friend and friend, employer and employee, and religious teacher and disciple. He reminded parents to educate their children, ensure their timely establishment in marriage and passing on the family inheritance while the children still needed support. The children were likewise asked to nourish and maintain parents in old age.

Emphasizing the significance of mutual respect and conjugal fidelity among spouses, the Buddha advised husbands to devolve authority in family affairs to wives and even to buy them jewelry from time to time. The wives, on the other hand, were told to treat relatives of both sides alike and to utilize family income thriftily. While counseling students to be attentive to teachers and to learn diligently, the teachers were made to recognize that spreading the good name of the student was one of the responsibilities. The Buddha was equally concerned with employer-employee relations and spoke on equitable workload, health care, leave and what may be termed bonuses. It is in his comments on religious teachers and disciples that the Buddha expressed his unique understanding of interfaith amity and cooperation.

A spiritual leader, practicing and preaching renunciation and poverty, the Buddha encouraged the laity to engage in economic activity to gain wealth. He showed how wealth gave a person the fourfold happiness of possession, consumption, sharing and avoiding wrongful ways of living. Extending his remarkable approach to moderation as reflected by the Middle Path, he cautioned against excessive greed and resulting corruption. With significant knowledge of financial management, he noted that one should consume only a fourth of his earnings but invest half into his business and keep

the balance fourth in savings for a rainy day. He stressed on how one should safeguard his wealth by adopting a balanced life style in which income exceeded expenditure. Similarly, he counseled the young to avoid addictions and wasteful and dangerous activity, which would render them indigent.

When one goes over his forty-five years of teachings, which fortunately his disciples have diligently preserved in Buddhist scriptures, one is absolutely impressed by the sheer variety of his concerns and sagacious answers to issues that affected every aspect of human life. One such was education. A teacher of exceptional ability and talent, the Buddha was a remarkable innovator of instructional techniques, which continue to exert an influence on public education in Buddhist circles. What made Buddhism last and spread across world and remain a perennial influence on humanity is a series of incredibly effective steps that the Buddha and his immediate disciples took right from the time he delivered his first discourse at Sarnath.

With his very first audience of five ascetics, the Buddha set up the Sangha – the Buddhist monastic order, which grew to sixty within months. These sixty monks, he sent out as missionaries to announce the Path of Immortality he had discovered saying, “Wander, O monks, on mission for the good of the many and the benefit of the many. No two shall go on the same road.” He himself followed suit and the Sangha grew in leaps and bounds.

The Buddhist Sangha was conceived as an evolving organization and rules were made from time to time as circumstances demanded. It was a learning and teaching society with the emphasis that its main purpose was to facilitate self-cultivation leading to the end of suffering. While this aim remained the foremost, the Sangha did realize that its members could serve different roles.

Whereas those seeking salvation and proceeding to the realization of Nibbāna developed meditational practices, others took to the more mundane activities of studying and preserving the Buddha’s teachings, instructing and guiding monastic as well as lay students, and managing the monastic institutions, which grew in number and size as the support for the Buddha’s mission came from kings and the rich. Specialization as meditators and educators was possible within the Sangha and educators again specialized in doctrinal aspects or monastic discipline.

Progressively the Sangha had become a most efficacious human organization, which had perfected a self-renewing, self-regulating and self-perpetuating systems approach to development, preserving a remarkable uniformity despite its spread over the whole of Asia.

The most durable contribution of the Sangha has been the compilation, codification and systemization of the Buddha’s teachings into the vast scriptural literature. Apparently with the Buddha’s own initiative or approval, his discourses were rehearsed and committed to memory right from the beginning of his mission. It is possible that with memorization in mind, he himself had rendered his thoughts into verse with poetic qualities enhanced by alliteration, similes and metaphors. These poetic compositions as well as dialogues, debates and discourses of the Buddha were grouped and arranged according to subject, venue, audience and number of items dealt with into sections, divisions, and volumes. The names given to these volumes as Long

Discourses, Middle Discourses, Numerical and Kindred Discourses, and Minor Texts are indicative of the textual methodology adopted during the life-time of the Buddha.

Sariputta, who had played a leadership role in the codification of the Buddha's teachings, had, in fact, developed an exhaustive index of headwords to retrieve systematically each of the substantial body of doctrines. In addition, exegetical and interpretational studies had commenced simultaneously and a tradition of scholastic analysis was in position.

Thus had been preserved a vast literature in three major divisions, giving the Buddhist scriptures the name Tripitaka or Three Baskets. The three divisions are Vinaya or Discipline (dealing with monastic rules, regulations and procedures), Sutta or Discourses – the sayings of the Buddha and journalistic records of his debates and dialogues, and Abhidhamma or Metaphysics, comprising scholastic interpretations and synthesis of philosophical concepts. This vast body of scriptures, once diffused in many Indian languages, has been preserved in Sri Lanka in Pali, the language in which the Buddha preached, and in China in Chinese as Āgama Sūtras.

This literary heritage of the Buddha to humanity had set in motion a vigorous, intellectual movement. It has resulted in a voluminous commentarial literature, developed primarily in Sri Lanka and further carried on in Myanmar and Thailand. With the development of Mahayana tradition in India, a rich and varied literature evolved in Sanskrit in the form of Mahayana Sutras. With the emergence of such poets, scholars and philosophers as Asvaghosa, Vasubandhu, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga and his brother Vasubandhu, Dinnāga, Matrceta, Dharmakirti and Santideva, Sanskrit Buddhist literature flourished to inspire an equally rich Buddhist literary heritage in Central and Eastern Asia.

The Chinese Tripitaka, representing the efforts of many eminent literati as prominent and prestigious as Kumarajiva, Paramartha, Fa-Xian and Xuan-Zhang, and the voluminous Kanjur and Tanjur in Tibetan are an integral part of the cultural patrimony of humanity. The Buddhist impetus to literary production persists unabated for thousands of creative and scholarly works have appeared and continue to appear in many languages of the world.

Far more conspicuous than this intellectual and literary heritage is the Buddha's contribution to art and architecture. With his princely background, he was no doubt inclined to promote aesthetic creativity.

Inspired by the beauty of a well-laid out rice-field, he orders his monks to cut the rags for their robes into squares, rectangles and strips to form a neat and presentable design. He allows monks the freedom to paint pictures on their cell walls and makes restrictions only when excesses were detected. Not only did he accept luxurious monasteries, which kings and rich merchants offered him, but he also encouraged the donation of beautiful monasteries – aptly described in Pali as "Vihāre ramme".

As Buddhism consolidated itself as a recognized religion, its institutions were built in stone to last longer and generous donors found a way to immortalize themselves. It was thus that the Buddhist monuments have turned out to be the oldest religious buildings to be constructed in India. The Buddhist shrines all over Asia are noted for their artistic treasures in sculpture, painting and statuary.

The simple burial mound over a grave gave rise to the unique Buddhist shrine the Caitya or Stūpa. In India, itself, the Stūpas at Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda were surrounded by railings and archways, displaying exquisite sculptures of incredible beauty and novelty. Almost simultaneously the Stūpas in Sri Lanka distinguished themselves for their humongous size and three of the largest Stūpas of Anuradhapura have remained the biggest brick-buildings ever to be constructed in the world. Of them Jetavanarama of the third century CE was second in height to only the Great Pyramid of Gizeh in Egypt. Nepal adopted a similar design but painted eyes on the cubical structure on top of the dome.

Stūpa evolved in shape until some of the most innovative and attractive structures are to be associated with those at Buddha Gaya in India, Shwe Dagon in Myanmar, Paharpur in Bangladesh, Borobudur in Indonesia and Nakorn Pathom in Thailand. Further variations are to be found in those at Chiangmai and Ayuthia in Thailand, in Chortens of Tibet and the many-tiered tower-like pagodas of China, Korea and Japan.

The use of visual aids to illustrate a doctrinal point dates back to the days of the Buddha. He is said to have not only appreciated such instructional technology but had a pictorial representation of the wheel of existence drawn on the outer wall of a monastery. Thus have Buddhists used sculpture and painting most creatively and effectively for both ornamentation and public education.

Even when a reluctance or prohibition to represent the Buddha in human form existed during the first five hundred years, the Buddhist artist was able to narrate the life of the Buddha, stories about his past lives and also the history of Buddhism, using significant symbols to represent him. Footprints, a royal parasol, an empty seat, the wheel of Dhamma, a bodhi-tree, a Stūpa, a column of fire and the like stood in beautifully executed panels or medallions in sculptures of Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati. In Sri Lanka, an ingenious design incorporating the footprints, the parasol, the wheel of Dhamma and lotus buds was utilized to represent the Triple Gem, namely the Buddha, his Teachings and the Sangha.

The emergence of the Buddha statue as a result of the Kushan Empire's cultural relations with the Greco-Roman world around the beginning of the Christian Era added a new dimension to Buddhist art. Modeled on Apollo, the Greek sun-god, the Buddha statue has evolved as Buddhism traveled from country to country. The Buddha has the rare distinction of a human commemorated with the largest number of images over the longest period in a most extensive area.

The Buddha image whether in sculpture, painting or statuary seeks to portray the spiritual characteristics of peace and serenity, which the Buddhist teachings emphasize. The size of the image has become an indication of the esteem and veneration and exceedingly large and impressive Buddha statues have come into existence like the two giant Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afganistan (since destroyed by the Taliban government), the seated Budhas of Lesham and Dunhuang in China, Daibutsu in Nara and the Kamakura Buddha of Japan and the numerous giant statues in existence in Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka. As works of exquisite beauty may be mentioned the Sarnath Buddha of India, Samādhi statues of Anuradhapura and Toluwila of Sri Lanka, the walking Buddha of Thailand and the Buddha at Sakkuragam in Korea.

With the Buddha image, the use of sculpture and painting as visual aids expanded impressively. Both from the point of view of architectural innovation and as treasure-troves of exceptional works of painting and sculpture, the Buddhist care-temples are an invaluable part of the cultural heritage of humanity. Those in Western India, represented by Ajanta, Bhaja, Karli and Ellora set the model for the equally entrancing artistic treasures to be found in Begram of Afghanistan, Dunhuang and Loyang of China, Sigiriya and Dambulla of Sri Lanka. These may be described as veritable crown jewels of Buddhist instructional art.

The two millennia of Buddhist art and architecture, like Buddhist literature, is a continuously renewing and ever-expanding heritage. In the traditionally Buddhist countries, the emphasis on aesthetic creativity remains astonishing. Monuments of exquisite beauty and Buddha statues of immense proportions are being continuously added. One has only to observe the activity around Buddha Gaya in India, Lumbini in Nepal and Lesham and Lentau (Hong Kong) in China to see the driving force of Buddhist enthusiasm. Buddhist monuments are being constructed all over the world as Buddhist communities enhance their spiritual and cultural contribution to their host countries. Buddhist objects of art of exceptional aesthetic value adorn museums and galleries throughout the world.

Even though the Buddha's monastic discipline laid down restrictions on singing, dancing and drama, performing arts, nevertheless, thrived in Buddhist circles and even today temple festivals have ensured significant cultural traditions of music and dance in traditionally Buddhist countries.

Of course, the Buddhist texts record an instance when the Buddha appreciated a music recital and commented with expertise on the harmonization of the singer's voice and the instrumental music. Asvaghosa of the first century CE popularized the philosophical teachings of the Buddha through the medium of ornate court poetry in Sanskrit and has gone on record as the producer of the earliest known Indian drama, the *Sariputraprakarana*, based on the conversion of this great disciple. Sculpture and painting in Buddhist shrines provide ample evidence on the association of performing arts in religious processions. As the Buddhist temple evolved as the foremost spiritual, educational and cultural centre of each community, its contribution to the development of aesthetic activities of every form has been of the highest impact.

Far more important and spectacular than all these visible and tangible contributions, which the Buddha has made to humanity through his personality and teachings and the institutions he created, is what he has given humanity through the intangible spiritual and moral values he has inculcated. If Buddhism remained for the first two centuries or so as a monastic religious system with a limited regional impact, it was not to be so after Asoka, the third Emperor of the Maurya Dynasty, discovered it in his fervent search for the inner essence of religion. His conversion was the most significant watershed in Buddhist history in that he paved the way to make Buddhism the world religion it now is.

Though Asoka was already a Buddhist by the fourth regnal year, he was obliged to go to war to annex or tame the region of Kalinga. His Buddhist leanings are reflected in his thirteenth Rock Edict in which he expresses his heartfelt remorse over the havoc his military expedition caused. A hundred thousand people died in war and a hundred

and fifty thousand were rendered refugees. As many died of famine and pestilence. "One hundredth or one thousandth of that human suffering would generate repentance and remorse in me," he said putting an end to war for the rest of his reign, which lasted a total of thirty-seven years. "Do not engage in wars of weapons and let your conquests be conquests of righteousness," he advised his sons and grandsons. He further added, "If you are drawn into a war of weapons, be forgiving and administer only light punishment."

Nonviolence, which Asoka exercised under the influence of the Buddha's teachings, extended to all living beings and the environment. His proclamations of sanctuary listing many species to be protected are the earliest known legislation on animal rights. He prohibited the burning of forests without a purpose and the killing of animals in sacrificial ritual. He restricted hunting and fishing on holy days. He advocated vegetarianism, setting the example by reducing drastically and ultimately abolishing the slaughter of animals in the royal kitchen.

Asoka upheld the importance of interfaith amity. He condemned the wanton and vituperative criticisms of another's religion with the vain belief that one thus glorified one's own religion. He also enjoined all to learn one another's religious beliefs. As the root cause of inter-religious disunity, he identified the tactless use of language, stating that guarded speech was the foundation of interfaith understanding.

He balanced legislation with action and believed that conviction gained by promoting informed reflection was more effective than rules and regulations. His vast range of public services included medical facilities for humans and animals, amenities to travelers and the distribution of rare medicinal herbs and fruit plants. He achieved his humanitarian program through intensive education utilizing all available personnel and means of communication from inscriptions on rocks and pillars to visual aids and the spoken word.

Asoka, the ideal Buddhist Emperor, stands out in history as an exemplary implementer of the Buddha's teachings relating to peace and security, social welfare and humanitarian service. Declaring that all beings feared violence and life was precious to each and everyone, he admonished people to consider their own love for life and avoid killing either directly or indirectly.

The highest quality to be developed by every human, according to the Buddha, is loving kindness – *metta* in Pali and *maitri* in Sanskrit. He defined loving kindness as the equivalent of a mother's undying love for her only son. No sentient being of whatever size, seen or unseen, nearby or far away, already born or in the process of coming to existence was excluded as outside the range of creatures to be treated with loving kindness. A moment of reflection on loving kindness was declared by the Buddha to be more meritorious than offering meals to a hundred Buddhas.

The taxonomy of love according to the Buddha was as extensive as it was exhaustive. The mental exercise of loving kindness had to be complemented with acts of compassion as *Karuna* was defined. It was a human's fervent obligation to help, nurture and serve all beings in distress or suffering. He himself risked his own life to go in search of the murderous bandit Angulimala to put an end to his violent career. He sat between battle-ready armies to avert a war and interceded twice an invading army bent on a massacre. From saving a snake tormented by kids to preaching against violence, the Buddha promoted peace and security for all sentient beings.

Recognizing envy and jealousy as hindrances to harmony, the third aspect of love in the Buddha's teachings was *mudita* or sympathetic joy, displayed by congratulating and felicitating others on their happiness, appreciating and admiring other's advantages and achievements and promoting goodwill.

The fourth quality to be developed in this process was *upekkha* -- equanimity or equality wherein everyone and every situation was treated alike. These four aspects of the Buddha's concept of love, called appropriately the Four Sublime States and further emphasized in Northern Buddhism as limitless Imponderables, form the foundation of Buddhism in practice. It is against this backdrop that the Buddhist approach to peace and security stems from inculcating in everyone the commitment, "Let there be peace in the world and let it begin with me."

When the Buddha was recognized in Hinduism as the ninth incarnation of its God of Sustenance, namely Vishnu, a Hindu poet designated the Buddha as "*Mahakaruna*" – the Great Compassionate. Buddhism spread and took root in various parts of Asia, its message of peace and nonviolence tamed tribes and nations with serene thoughts of loving kindness reinforced by compassionate action for social well-being.

Buddhism became a mighty civilizing force with a unique record for a system of thought which influenced millions of people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds for over two millennia. Not a drop of blood has been shed in the process and neither persecution nor oppression was ever resorted to. On the contrary, Buddhism accommodated within its fold the prevailing beliefs and practices of each culture and demonstrated an unusually strong capacity to assimilate and absorb diverse socio-cultural traits.

The unique ability of Buddhism for harmonious co-existence is a key to world peace. As a Chinese proverb asserts,
When one is at peace with oneself,
There is harmony in the community
When there is harmony in the community
There is order in the nation
When there is order in the nation
There is peace in the world.

The Buddhist history records significant instances where violence was thoughtfully averted. A king of Sri Lanka and another from Thailand challenged their rivals to single combat so as to prevent military casualties in long-drawn battle. King Sri Sanghobodi of Sri Lanka had his head severed and sent to the usurper to his throne so as to stop the killing of look-alike innocents. A minister who was ready to wage war against a king of Sri Lanka found that the delicacy that was served to him at dinner on the eve of the battle was a favourite of the king, and crossed the enemy lines to share the meal with him. In a nightlong discussion they settled their differences and a war was averted. Histories of other countries have similar anecdotes to illustrate the impact of the Buddha's teachings and example. One even sees the reflection of Buddhist thought in the motto of UNESCO: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed."

That Buddhism has a role to play in ushering and maintaining world peace has been conclusively demonstrated in recent history as in the San Francisco Peace Treaty Conference of 1953. The invocation of the Buddha's diction that "Hatred is never appeased by hatred and only love appeases hatred" enabled new Japan to evolve as a free nation without the burden of war damages. If a similar policy was adopted after the First World War to avoid humiliation and impoverishment of the defeated party, the causes and conditions leading to the Second World War could have been totally eliminated.

The Buddha's ideal of loving kindness, which expresses itself with a deep commitment to peace, unity and harmony, tolerance and accommodation, nonviolence and selfless service, remains the fundamental basis for all human relations – person to person in family and community and nation to nation in the world. This is his contribution to sustainable world peace.

May all beings be happy and well.

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