

Building up of Peace and Harmony through Buddhism:

Pragmatic Values of the *Ovāda Pātimokkha*

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Introduction

People nowadays are confronted with extreme poverty, disease, conflict, and other serious problems such as gender discrimination, lack of universal education, and environmental deterioration leading to natural disasters. Our precious lives, indeed, are not in safe hands. In order to tackle these problems the UN developed MDGs¹ as a roadmap to serve as a global framework for collective actions. It is my conjecture in this presentation, I propose that the Buddha's *Ovādapātimokkha* could be an essential model to support the accomplishment of these goals.

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1. The Millennium Development Goals, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for:

The Buddha delivered discourses to different assemblies: (*parisās*): monks (*bhikkhū*), nuns (*bhikkhunī*), male lay disciples (*upāsakā*), and female lay disciples (*upāsikī*)², during the forty five years of his missionary career. The *Ovādapātimokkha* are the discourses dealing with the duties of those who have ordained and instructed by the Buddha, to his noble disciples. Moreover, these practices are beneficial and applicable not only to the *Saṅgha* community, but also to the laity.

What is *Ovādapātimokkha*?

The word *Pātimokkha* is familiar to the majority of Buddhists. It is explained by Peter Harvey in his book thus:

“According to one etymology, ‘*pātimokkha*’ means a ‘bond’: something which is ‘against scattering’ of spiritual states and the purity of the *Saṅgha*”.³

There are two categories of *Pātimokkha*. They are *Ānāpātimokkha* and *Ovādapātimokkha*.

Ānāpātimokkha is a Pāli word which is a combination of two words “*Ānā*” and “*Pātimokkha*”. The word “*Ānā*” means “authority” and “*Pātimokkha*” stands for “the rules of the order”.⁴ In fact it is the disciplinary code promulgated by the Buddha during the later part of his dispensation. These rules are not subject to a pre-established disciplinary code; they have only been gradually established, as faults were committed from time to time. There are two sub-divisions constituted under this category. They are the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha*, the basic code of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for monks and the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* 311 for nuns.

2. Ashin Obāsābhivaṃsa, *Research Illustrated Encyclopedia*. (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs Press, 2002), 358.

3. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism, Teachings, History and Practices*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 224.

4. U Hoke Sein, *The Universal Burmese- English-Pali Dictionary*. First Edition (Yangon: Manjūska Literature, 1981), 465, 1030.

The second category set apart from the *Ānāpātimokkha* is the *Ovādapātimokkha*, which can be generally translated as ‘*Pātimokkha* Exhortation’. It is mentioned in the commentary of the *Dīghanakha Sutta* as follows⁵:

“It was exhorted by the Buddha on the full moon day of *Māgha* (third lunar month) while he was staying in the bamboo grove outside of *Rājagaha* to the fully ordained monks 1250 in number. All of them were arahants and ordained by the Buddha himself (through *ehibhikkhu*⁶ ordination). They gathered together on their own or without being summoned.”

Thus, ‘*Ovādapātimokkha*’ is referred to as ‘*Māgha Pūjā* sermon’ since it was given by the Buddha on the full moon day of *Māgha*.

Though these exhortations were delivered by the Buddha, these were, indeed, the teaching of all the *Buddhas*. This is vividly mentioned in the *Dhammapada* with reference to the Buddha’s reply to the question of *Thera Ānanda*. It is said that while the Buddha was residing at the *Jetavana* monastery, he answered a question raised by *Thera Ānanda* regarding whether the fundamental instructions to *bhikkhus* by the preceding *Buddhas* were the same as those of the *Buddha* himself with the following *ovāda gāthās*:

“*Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ
kusalassa upasampadā
sacittapariyodapanāṃ
etaṃ Buddhāna Sāsanaṃ*”⁷

“Not to do evil,

5. Bhaddanta Buddhaghosa-thera, *Papañcasūdanī Majjhimaṇṇāsa Aṭṭhakathā (Paribbājakavagga, Dīghanakha Sutta)*. (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1994), 143.

6. T.W Rhys Davids & William Stede, *Pāli-English Dictionary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1997), 162. "come bhikkhu", the oldest formula of admission to the order

7. *Dhammapada Pāli*, Verse 183, Chatṭha Saṅgayana CD-ROM, Version III. (Igatpura: Vipassana Research Institute, 1999), 26.

To cultivate merit,
To purify one's mind
This is the teaching of the Buddhas"⁸

*"Khantī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā
nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti Buddhā
na hi pabbājito parūpaghātī
na samaṇo hoti paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto"*⁹

"The best moral practice is patience and forbearance
Nibbāna is supreme said the Buddhas
A bhikkhu does not harm others
One who harms others is not a bhikkhu"¹⁰

*"Anūpavādo anūpaghāto
Pātimokkhe ca saṃvaro
Mattaññutā ca bhattasmiṃ
Pantañca sayanāsanam
Adicitte ca āyogo
etaṃ Buddhāna Sāsanam"*¹¹
Not to revile, not to do any harm

To practice restraint according to the Fundamental Instructions
for the bhikkhus
To be moderate in taking food
To dwell in a secluded place
To devote oneself to higher concentration
This is the teaching of the Buddhas¹²

It is said that the *Ovādapātimokkha*, is a brief synopsis of the principles of the Buddha's teaching, contains within both injunctions

8. Daw Mya Tin, *The Dhammapada Verses & Stories*. (Yangon: Myanmar Pitaka Association, 1995), 65.

9. Dhammapada Pāḷi, loc.cit. Verse 184,

10. Tin. loc.cit

11. Dhammapada Pāḷi, loc.cit., Verse 185

12. Tin, loc.cit.

and principles for administration of the Order.

When studying this *Ovādapātimokkha* thoroughly, it is found that there are thirteen guiding principles contained within it. They are as follows:

1. Not to do or to refrain from doing any evil
2. To cultivate merit or what is wholesome
3. To purify one's mind
4. Patience is the best moral practice
5. *Nibbana*, the cessation of defilements and transcendence of suffering is supreme
6. A *bhikkhu* does not harm others
7. One who harms others is not a *bhikkhu*
8. Not to revile
9. Not to do any harm
10. To practice restraint according to the fundamental instructions for the *bhikkhu*
11. To be moderate in taking food
12. To dwell in a secluded place
13. To devote oneself to higher concentration

These can be seen as a declaration by the Buddha as a founder of a new faith not only for the welfare of His followers but also for all beings. It is not so much a rulebook for monastic training, as it is a distillation of what's really important in Buddhism. Just as the 613 original Hebrew Bible precepts were given unto Moses as Ten Commandments – and just as Jesus then further distilled these Ten into Two (“Love God” and “Love one another”) – so, too, the Buddha offered His Heart during a *Māgha Pujā* sermon called the *Ovada Patimokkha*.¹³ Moreover, at this time, the Buddha had not yet formulated the monastic discipline for administering the Order because no damage had yet arisen in that regard. So he only laid down the principles for administering the Order in brief. A mundane illustration of this same process occurred not so many years ago [in]

13. Linda Slyke, "Eye on Faith: Heart of Buddhism" 8 March 2012, <eyeonfaith.blogspot.com/.../ovada-patimokkha-heart-of-buddhism.html> (10 December 2013)

Thailand, which then had no state constitution (rath thammanoon), but instead a manifesto (thammanoon) of principles for government. This thammanoon may be compared to the *Ovadapatimokkha*. The constitution (rath thammanoon) for governing the kingdom may be compared to the Vinaya, the rules of discipline, determined by the Buddha in the later time of his administration.¹⁴

Pragmatic Values of the *Ovāda Pātimokkha*

During the life time of the Buddha, he exhorted the essence of the teachings to *bhikkhus* by the *Ovādapātimokkha* verses. These were delivered by the Buddha himself every Sabbath day before the promulgation of the recitation of *sikkhāpada* by *bhikkhus*.¹⁵ Now it has become the heart of Buddhism.

Actually, the *Ovādapātimokkha* deals with the duties of those who have ordained in line with the Buddha's instructions, but these practices can be applicable to lay people as well. Lay people can take these same practices and train themselves to be good people. Pragmatically, this involves using the 13 guiding principles mentioned earlier as the basis and guidelines for living:

Sabbapāpassa Akaraṇaṃ, Not to do or to refrain from doing any evil

It is translated by some as "the non-doing of any evil." It is meant here to avoid all unwholesome deeds.¹⁶ These are either physical, verbal, or mental actions which encroach on someone else or which cause them to suffer. These include... killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, telling lies and taking intoxicants and so on.

The Buddha advised to avoid these unwholesome deeds completely,

14. Ven.Phramaha Nopadol Punnasuvaddhako, *The Ovada-Patmokkha Discourse*. 24 March 2006, <www.dhammadownload.com> (10 December 2013)

15. Chan Myae Sayadaw, *Virtuous Person with Pure Mind*. (Yangon: Chanmyae Veyavacca Group, 2013), 2.

16. Bhaddanta Buddhaghosa-thera, *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*. Chaṭṭha Saṅgayana CD-ROM, Version III. (Igatpura: Vipassana Research Institute, 1999), 3. 235. "*Sabbapāpassaāti sabbassa akusalakammaṃ*"

as they surely provide bad consequences.

Kusalassa Upasampadā, To cultivate merit or that which is wholesome

The cultivation of merit that causes no one to suffer, violate and be faultless. Good consequences accrue to one who performs these deeds, so these should be done as much as possible.¹⁷ Thus, this issue applies not only to the lives of *bhikkhus* but also to living our lay lives in ways that support generosity and morality, and the development of mindfulness, kindness, compassion and other positive qualities.

When every individual avoids the unwholesome deeds mentioned above, and practices generosity, morality and so on, the hunger, poverty, and suffering in some parts of our world can be reduced. Disease, environmental damages, and gender tensions will thus become less severe. In this way, we can look forward to the emergence of the peaceful and harmonious society which all beings long to live in.

Sacittapariyodapanam, To purify one's mind

The purification of one's own mind can be understood from the following explanation of the *Dhammapada* commentary¹⁸: one's own mind becomes purified when there are the five kinds of *nīvaranas*¹⁹ are no longer present (these hinder the attainment of (*Jhāna*) Ecstatic Absorption, (*Magga*) Path and (*Phala*) Fruition). Moreover, purification implies mindfulness and meditation techniques, used to cultivate mind states that pave the way for enlightenment.²⁰

These three simple guidelines proceed in this verse through a graded sequence of steps progressing from outward and preparatory

17. Chanmyae Sayadaw. op.cit. 4.

18. Buddhaghosa-thera, loc.cit. " *Sacittapariyodapananti pañcahi nīvaranti attano cittassa vodāpanam*"

19. pañca nīvaraṇāni(5 set of hindrances), kāmaccanda (sensuality), vyāpāda (ill-will), thina-middha (sloth and torpor, uddhaccakukkuca (restlessness, worry and wavering), and vicikicchā(skeptical doubt)

20. G, "Magha Puja (Sangha Day)" 18 Feb 2011 <buddhaspace.blogspot.com/p/weblinks.html> (10 Dec 2013)

to the inward and essential. Each step leads naturally into the one that follows it, and the culmination of the three in the purification of mind makes it plain that the heart of Buddhist practice is to be found here.²¹

Purification of mind as understood in the Buddha's teaching is the sustained endeavor to cleanse the mind of defilements, those dark unwholesome mental forces which run beneath the surface stream of consciousness vitiating our thinking, values, attitudes, and actions. The chief among the defilements are the three that the Buddha has termed the "roots of evil" — greed, hatred, and delusion — from which emerge their numerous offshoots and variants: anger and cruelty, avarice and envy, conceit and arrogance, hypocrisy and vanity, the multitude of erroneous views.²²

Khantī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā, Patience is the best moral practice

Patience is reckoned as the highest, foremost and noblest austerity in this dispensation.²³ Moreover, the Pāḷi word "*Khantī*" covers the meaning of "endurance, forgiveness and forbearance". It is included in the ten perfections (*Pāramī*) which all *Buddhas* have to accomplish. It is highly virtuous, and conducive to the realization of enlightenment. Patience, moreover, is an inward essential quality for the meditators to possess, for the fruits of meditation are not always immediate, and it may take years for its benefits to emerge. Thus, our learned people have long said that "be patient and attain *Nibbāna*," for getting impatient is a common obstacle confronted by meditators.

Furthermore, there will be non-occurrence of quarrels and fighting when individuals develop the advantages of this quality. *Khantī* denotes patience, endurance, forgiveness and forbearance. Instead of looking down on another's weakness, there is the forgiving of each other's foibles. This will make society to run much more smoothly.

21. Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Purification of Mind", *Access to Insight*, 5 June 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_04.html > [27 October 20130

22. Ibid

23. Buddhaghosa-thera, loc.cit. "*khantīti yā esā titikkhāsankhātā khantīti nāma, idaṃ imasmiṃ sāsane paramaṃ uttamaṃ tapo*"

Since the individual is a fundamental unit of society, people endowed with this positive quality will not be quarrelsome and it is sure that the concerned society will become peaceful and harmonious.

Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti Buddhā, Nibbana, the cessation of defilements and transcendence of suffering is supreme

All the Buddhas have said that *Nibbana* is “the excellent”.²⁴ *Nibbāna* is the greatest bliss. *Nibbāna*, indeed, is the summum bonum of the Buddhist path. Thus, it is the ultimate goal that all the Buddhas urged their disciples to work towards with diligence and all times. The word “*Nibbana* (Saṃskṛt *Nirvāṇa*)” can be analyzed thus; the negative particle “*nir*” implying “no” and “*vāna*” “craving”: no more craving, no more attachment and no more selfishness.²⁵ Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that when there is craving, attachment and selfishness, *Nibbāna* cannot be experienced. In reverse, we can experience the bliss of *Nibbāna* when there is extinction of these defilements. It is said that *Nibbāna* is not beyond our reach, and there is no need to wait till after death to realize it. The wise tell us that the contact with *Nibbana* is right here in the mind, the mind of each one of us. *Nibbana* must be personally experienced in order to be comprehended.²⁶ So the real job for all of us is to try to lessen our craving, attachment and selfishness and free ourselves from worries and disturbances. As a consequence, a society or a country made up of those who have less or little craving, attachment and selfishness becomes peaceful, and all inhabitants gain the bliss of peace.

Na hi pabbajito parūpaghātī , A *bhikkhu* does not harm others

A *bhikkhu* does not harm others; he who injures others is no monk.²⁷ Its implied meaning is that those who believe in Buddhism

24. Ibid " *Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhāti buddhā ca paccekabuddhā ca anubuddhā cāti ime tayo buddhā nibbānaṃ uttamanti vadanti*"

25. Nārada Thera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma (Abhidhammattha-Saṅgaha)*. Vol. II, 2nd Edition. (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1996), 35.

26. G, loc.cit

27. Buddhaghosa-thera, loc.cit. " *Na hi pabbjitoti pāṇi-ādīhi paraṃ apahanto*

should avoid harming others and cultivate harmlessness (*ahimsa*) towards all beings, including animals. Moreover, cultivation of loving-kindness as in the spirit of the *Metta Sutta*,

“May all beings be free from danger, mental suffering, physical suffering and be able to maintain themselves happily”²⁸

Following this instruction, we human beings can live happily without fear of dangers. It is possible to build up the peaceful and harmonious world which we are longing to live in.

Na samaṇo hoti paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto One who harms others is not a *bhikkhu*

He who does harass others is not a recluse. One who insults or mistreats others verbally is not a recluse.²⁹It includes all verbal misconducts such as slandering, using harsh words, and using words that cause disunity between people and organization.

Though the original audiences of the Buddha’s guidance were 1250 *Arahants bhikkhus*, it is still applicable to the whole humanity as a mean of living in unity and harmony.

Anūpavādo, Not to revile

Not disparage or revile others means not to go about finding faults with one another, not saying evil things about one another, not misrepresenting one another, not saying anything that will cause people to fall apart from one another, not starting false reports about one another, (and not encouraging them), not cursing or yelling at

viheṭṭento parūghātī pabbajito nāma hoti”

28. The Advisors of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, *The Teachings of the Buddha* (Higher Level), Vol. II. (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2001), 96. “*Sabbe sattā averā hontu, abyāpajjā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhiattānaṃ pariharantu*”

29. Buddhaghosa-thera, loc.cit. “ *Na samaṇoti vuttanayeneva paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto samaṇopi na hotiyeva*”

one another.³⁰ It seems rather similar to the previous guidance but actually it reinforces its importance, by encouraging and establishing mutual respect. So this principle can be applicable also for lay people as well when we want to be a part of a peaceful and harmonious society.

Anūpaghāto, Not to do any harm

According to Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo, this principle is understood thus: Don't allow yourself to hate one another. It's only normal that when people live together, their behavior isn't going to be on an equal level. Some people have good manners; some people have coarse manners physically or verbally. This is called inequality. When this is the case, there are bound to be conflicts and clashes, at least to some extent. We should forgive one another and wash away that stain from our hearts because otherwise it turns into animosity and enmity.³¹ If this hate seated in one's heart and bursts out, then one becomes dangerous not only to oneself but also to others. On the other hand when people live in line with this guideline of non-harming it is sure to establish peace and harmony.

Pātimokkhe ca saṁvaro, To practice according to the fundamental instructions for the *bhikkhu*

In other words, to act in accordance with this fundamental code of conduct. For novices and monks, ten or 227 *sikkhāpadas* should be observed. For lay people, the code of conduct is the five precepts. When all people keep at least these precepts of not killing, not stealing, etc., global peace and harmony are not beyond our reach.

Mattaññutā ca bhattasamīh, Moderation in taking food

It can be translated as knowing the measure, and extent in taking

30. Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo (Phra Suddhidhammaransi Gambhiramedhacariya),"Dhamma for Everyone: October 5, 1960", translated from the Thai by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight*, 27 September 2013, <http://www.access-toinsight.org/lib/thai/lee/everyone.html> . (1 November 2013)

31. Ibid

food.³²It is further elaborated as having a sense of moderation in taking food. That means not to eat greedily. It means that though the stomach is full, the mind isn't full, and yet the mind still wants to eat more. This is called eating greedily. Don't let this greed take charge of the heart. Moreover, it means to eat contentedly (consume only what one has, not wishing for other's belongings) and modestly (not eating until one had given some of it as a gift to someone else).³³

This instruction of keeping moderation does not confine to taking food, it also extends to the use of clothing, shelter and so on. When we are not greedy for other's possessions, and are content with what we have, sharing what we possess, there will be love and affection, peace and prosperity. By following this teaching of the Buddha, it is sure we are able to establish peace and harmony.

Pantañca sayanāsanam, To dwell in a secluded place

The Buddha taught to dwell in seclusion. Specifically, this means not to be busy with unnecessary things so that we are neither involved nor entangled with others unless it is really needed. Wherever and whenever one lives, try to be quiet and at peace. It is important to look for quiet, solitary places to live and to meditate in. When living alone, one should be a real secluded person, avoiding thinking this and that, and not getting involved in a lot of activities.

Even living in a community, be a secluded person and try to be quiet in actions, quiet in speech, quiet in mind and without involved in quarrels. When there is quarreling there will be no peace. It, indeed, is essential to make sure that the community is at peace, that there is no conflict, no quarreling, no hurting one another's feelings or doing one another harm. The community should be a cooperative for training peacefully in virtue and the Dhamma. That's when it's a good community, orderly and civilized, fostering progress for all its members.³⁴

32. Buddhaghosa-thera. loc.cit. "*Mattanññutāti mattaññutabhāvo pamāñajānanam*"

33. Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo, loc.cit.

34. Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo, loc.cit.

Therefore, in order to build up peace and harmony it is important to follow this principle taught by the Buddha in the *Ovādapātimokkha*, *Pantañca sayanāsanam*: creating a quiet place to live, at ease in both body and mind.

Adicitte ca āyogo, To devote oneself to higher concentration

This can be understood as not to be complacent but be diligent in practicing concentration to the level of heightened mind, *Adhicitta*³⁵. This refers to when the mind is free from its hindrances and enters into the higher concentration. When one keeps working to attain the higher concentration, it is beneficial for everyone, as one is busy with training the mind.

Conclusion

The essence of Buddhism is summed up by the Buddha himself in verses and known as *Ovādapātimokkha* or *Magha Puja* sermon. Though this heart of Buddhism deals with injunctions and principles for the *Saṅgha* Order, it can be applicable to lay people as well. When we take these and put them into practice in all honesty and integrity, at the very least we will meet peace and prosperity even if we cannot liberate totally from suffering and the cessation of defilements.

In this paper, I have discussed and explored the applicability of this ancient teaching, the *Ovādapātimokkha* even in this modern world. The thirteen principles constituted in it lend a hand for achieving the eight UN MDGs in general and building up of peace and harmony in particular.

Buddhism does not believe in the building up of the golden age of a perfect society, yet it strongly believes that the general societal deterioration can be reduced by this Buddha's teaching, which causes the mind to be freed from greed, hatred and ignorance. When every individual practices according to this approach, finally it will bring about the emergence of a worldwide peace and harmony.

35. Buddhaghosa-thera, loc.cit. "*Adhicitteti aṭṭhasamāpattisaṅkhāte adhicitte*"

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