Introduction

Suppose if striving for peace in Buddhism is considered a mental flow of energy, then it could be understood as being both centrifugal and centripetal in nature; having outward flowing trajectories as well as a strong inward moving tendency. In other words, peace is not just an external factor that comes to affect lives from the outside, but very much an internal happening that governs individual lives, before it impacts communal existence. From the individual practice of learning to cultivate peace within, Buddhists develop the outer contours of peace and harmonious co-existence. The inner and outer spheres of peace are always conterminous.¹

In the Saraniya Sutta, the Buddha outlined six conditions that are conducive to peaceful co-existence and amiability and that are to be put into practice unconditionally, within and without, irrespective of the physical presence or absence of the ‘Other/s.’ These six conditions are: bodily acts of goodwill, verbal acts of goodwill and mental acts of goodwill all to the faces and behind the backs of one’s fellow beings, sharing of righteous gains with one’s fellow beings in a righteous way, cultivating virtues and dealing in virtues in tune with one’s fellow beings, and developing views that are noble and conducive to ending suffering of others.²

While the above six conditions outlined in the Saraniya Sutta point towards the centrifugal trajectories of the peace-building process with others, mindful abiding by the Five Precepts (pañcasīla) points towards the centripetal tendency, i.e., self-development of inner peace and virtuous living, both for the good of oneself as well as that of others. The self-training involved in the Five Precepts are not something imposed from the above but undertaken with one’s own ready willingness, as the formulaic utterance – I undertake the precept to refrain from… (… veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami), of each of the precepts demonstrate. The precepts, that are democratic in garb and not compulsive chains of binding, are considered as basic codes for maintaining peace and harmony within oneself and with others in one’s immediate surroundings. Thus, it is clear that the observance of the precepts is a personal undertaking; however, when the positive effect of the act of observance upon oneself and the resultant well-being upon the society at large is taken into consideration, then it clearly indicates that the precepts actually help foster the issue of human rights,³ an integral factor leading to communal peace and harmony.

¹ This paper is written from a deeply personal engagement and understanding of peace from within and is based on the author’s observance of the precepts, vipassanā meditation practice and pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in India and elsewhere. As I adhere to my practice, the democratic garb of the precepts and the tremendous respect for the ‘Other/s’ (whether the ‘Other’ be a human or a non-human) that Buddhism espouses keep unfolding before my inner eye.

² “Monks, these six are conditions that are conducive to amiability, that engender feelings of endearment, engender feelings of respect, leading to a sense of fellowship, a lack of disputes, harmony, and a state of unity.” An 6.12 (www.accesstoinsight.org), PTS: A iii 289.

³ Also animal rights/non-human rights when it comes to the first precept of abstaining from killing.
The Five Precepts and Human Rights

Just as human rights issues safeguard and protect people’s public and private welfare against any exploitative encroachment or intrusion, each of the precepts fosters due respect or concern for others’ well-being by extending mindful awareness to certain inherent human values like love for life, property, dignity, truth, integrity, etc. Abstinence from killing (panatipata) is respect for life as a whole and other beings’ right to their own lives. Abstinence from stealing (adinnadana) is having respect for other peoples’ right to property and maintenance of it. Abstinence from sexual misconduct (kamesu micchacara) is respect for the sanctity of human life and its generative power and the right to safeguard it equally by everyone. Abstinence from lying (musavada) is respect for human speech and its purity in any interactive discourse. Abstinence from intoxicants (suramerayamja pamadatthana) is respect for consciousness and its integrity, not letting consciousness swing like a monkey on a rope. A society in which most people naturally abide by the precepts is peaceful with fewer cases or instances of theft, murder, rape, corruption, etc. Why is it so? Because each of the precepts triggers the arising of many healthy mental states, which in turn helps dissipate unwholesome mental conditions or thought-processes. Even in the most fundamental act of abiding by the precepts the dependent co-arising of wholesome or dependent non-arising of unwholesome mental states are closely interconnected.

The first precept of refraining from killing helps develop great qualities in the upholder of the precept. As one learns to cultivate respect for all lives, from human to tiny creatures, one automatically develops both loving-kindness and compassion in tandem, as a result of which negative and aggressive emotions like excessive self-love, discrimination, anger, vindictiveness, egotism, megalomania, mercilessness, racial prejudice, jingoistic tendency, love for war or external projection of violence, etc., cannot have room for proliferation, both within one’s own mind first and then in the society one lives in, because a peaceful mind is always supportive of a peaceful society. The second precept of refraining from taking what is not given helps give rise to a very conscientious and balanced way of looking at the desire for material possession of oneself as well as that of others so that no negative feeling of greed, covetousness, jealousy, material competitiveness, ostentatious display of wealth, embezzlement, etc., can arise, or if arises at all, one can immediately recognize and nip it in the bud. Mindful abiding by this precept can curb not only petty thefts and robbery in our society, but also large scale corruption involving those in power, both at the national as well as international trade and economic dealings. Abiding by the third precept means non-destruction of the sanctity of life through any means of indulgence in sensual gratification, even when all the resources of such gratifications might be readily available to one, such as: power, money, a healthy disease free body, a non-

4 In the Abhisanda Sutta: Rewards the Buddha refers to the Five Precepts as great gifts, "Now, there are these five gifts, five great gifts — original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning — that are not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and are unfaulted by knowledgeable contemplatives and brahmins. Which five?" Referring to the act of abiding by each of the precepts it is said, “…In doing so, he gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings. In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression.” AN 8.39, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997, PTS: A iv 245.

5 Buddhism as a religion spread far and wide peacefully both in the ancient world and in modern times because there is no injunction or discourse of proselytizing, of converting the pagan or non-believer through inflicting any force element. This is because any physical force or threat to life for proselytization purpose would mean an outright breach of the first precept. Moreover, Buddhism also doesn’t endorse the idea of retaliation or destroying people of other faiths, even those who might openly demonstrate any anti-Buddhist attitude. The cultivation of peace, both within and without, thus starts with the first precept. At another level, the first precept as well as the four other precepts are jointly responsible for the successful arising and cultivation of the four heavenly qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity, all of which can lead to a firm establishment of peace not only in Buddhist majority states or nations but also in places of multi-cultural and diverse religious presence.
coerced partner, a non-intruding ambience, etc. In the long run, as most people in society get guided and inspired by the precept, it helps reduce social evils related to carnal desires like human trafficking, prostitution, adultery, rape, etc. The fourth precept, refraining from false speech is directly related to the cultivation of a pure mind and pure thinking that is non-exploitative and unselfish, and thus is full of moral uprightness. The fifth precept of abstinence from intoxicants is in a way helps foster the maintenance of all the above four precepts by leading to deliberate avoidance of the path of heedlessness. Failure to keep the fifth precept can easily have a ‘domino-effect’ on triggering the breach of the preceding four others.

A person who mindfully abides by the precepts has already waged the ‘battle within’ against various defilements arising from the three basic unwholesome roots of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). He or she can thus be peaceful within oneself and successfully transfer the state of inner peacefulness in all interactive discourses with others in society. Those who abide by the precepts are also the most trustworthy people in society. From the smallest unit of society, the family, to running a country or a multinational company with its branches or network spread world-wide, the Five Precepts can navigate the life’s ship as accurately as the Pole Star guiding a lone sailor across the vast stretches of water in the ocean. Indeed, the Buddha praised his followers for being willing to throw down their lives for their precepts: “Just as the ocean is stable and does not overstep its tideline, in the same way my disciples do not — even for the sake of their lives — overstep the training rules I have formulated for them.”

The Three-fold Training and World Peace

From this foundational base of morality, one may proceed to the higher stages of mental development of meditation practice and wisdom cultivation that are indispensable for world peace and harmony. Morality (*sīla*), Concentration (*samādhi*) and Wisdom (*paññā*) are all interconnected, but without the first step of morality, the wheel of dhamma cultivation for world peace just cannot get accelerated. If we can compare this to an ordinary simile of a modern-day automobile, then morality is just like the wheels; fuel and the key that starts the car and sets it in motion, is the practice of meditation; and finally, the movement itself is the arising of wisdom. The three-fold training (*tisikkhā*) is beautifully incorporated within the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path that when practiced genuinely culminates in the accomplishment of acquiring wisdom. The Noble Eightfold Path clearly embraces within its median fold the practice of morality (right speech, right livelihood, right action), spearheaded or led by wisdom (right understanding and right thought), and backed or supported by the practice of meditation (right effort, right concentration and right mindfulness).

Once the precepts become a natural part of life, one may wage the other half of the ‘battle within’ until the final triumphant glory is achieved through contemplative understanding of the three characteristics of existence (*tilakkhana*) — impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self/non-substantiality (*anattā*), for which one commits oneself to the cultivation of inner wisdom through right mindfulness (*sammā-panna*) and right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). It is the cultivation of right concentration through the practice of insight meditation or *vipassanā* that finally helps dawn the truth upon us that Buddhism is a religion that works within the matrix of a self-reflexive mode of practice that proceeds from the premise of placing the self that molds this matrix perpetually under erasure/arrest through viewing it as the amalgamation of the five

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7 At the personal level, I feel the precepts are very important that help keep our life luminous as though by a gibbous and internalization of the tilakkhana helps double this luminosity into a perfect full moon.
aggregates (*pañca-khandha*) – corporeality (*rūpa*), feeling or sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) that are constantly changing and are all non-self. From the Buddhist perspective, the five aggregates that we time and again tend to recognize as ourselves have already ‘imprisoned’ us to varying degrees. Realization of this negative truth of self-incarceration is necessary to make our day-to-day living less stressful and constricted, especially in this age of neocapitalism when life has succumbed to the dictates of smart technology and excessive consumption patterns. While at the personal level any Buddhist may imprison himself or herself through individual failure to detach from the ego and by not comprehending the essence of the Buddha’s teachings, but since the teachings are self-revelatory, open to investigation and without any trace of unwholesomeness of instilling blind faith or violence to ‘Other/s’. Buddhists as a whole across the globe have never posed themselves a threat to non-Buddhists nor have ever formed a collective ‘prison’ in which they incarcerate and torture ‘Other/s’ for the sake of religion.

According to Buddhism, the entire realm of existence is permeated by the three aforementioned essential characteristics – *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. The Buddha claimed that these three characteristics would persist irrespective of the fact that whether a Tathāgata (an enlightened being) would come into existence or not. Recognizing the truth of the three characteristics does not give rise to a pessimistic world view, but rather leads to a neutral approach to life and the world around us in its synchronic and diachronic dimensions with a focus on seeing everything as-it-is-in-itself; not wishing to view others, events, occurrences, cultural manifestations, etc., through the lens of subjective predilections. The Buddhists’ realization of the three essential characteristics has a catalytic effect on achieving world peace in unison with all other religions, since the three characteristics help simultaneous building up of an empathetic as well as a non-interfering approach to the ‘Other/s’. Since *dukkha* permeates every life and existence, Buddhists commiserate with adherents from every other religious group (including non-religious

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8 Buddha went on searching from one mode of practice to the other, experimenting all until he discovered his own Middle Path that struck a balance between the two extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence. At the mundane level, Buddha’s deconstruction of the self can be understood vis-à-vis the contemporary religious traditions of his time and how he modified many things that helped give rise to an egalitarian society, dwelling in which one could successfully pursue the search for inner peace through understanding of the three characteristics of existence. Brahmanism overemphasized the dealings of the self with the outer world – rituals, exotic practices, stratification of society, etc. Contrariwise, the Buddha proposed a new way of interpretation, a new way of practice – rendering casteism irrelevant by accepting people from every stratum of society as lay devotees and monastic disciples, preaching and letting his disciples preach in the local tongues/dialects for making dhamma readily available to ordinary people instead of upholding only Sanskrit as the medium of instruction (even today, Pāli, a script-less language survived everywhere codified in the script of every locale within India and every nation in South and Southeast Asia where early Buddhism spread). The Buddha’s teachings also propounded egalitarianism by accepting women as fully ordained monastics.


10 In the Kalama Sutta the Buddha clearly encouraged the path of true spiritual inquiry. He said, “…do not be laid by reports, or tradition, or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances, nor by the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea: ‘this is our teacher’. But, O Kalamas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (akusala), and wrong, and bad, then give them up…And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (kusala) and good, then accept them and follow them.’ Anguttara-nikaya, PTS edition.

11 Compare the Buddha’s absolute non-violent stance to the encouragement of violence in other religions like Islam, for instance. Although there are many peaceful and peace-loving Muslims in the world, one cannot deny the fact that the Holy Quran does have many violent-instilling verses. Academics and scholars can understand that the verses are contextual for the moments when Muhammad was facing enemies, but due to the uniquely inherent vindictive tone of expression the verses are still being easily decontextualized and appropriated by Islamic fundamentalists themselves to justify any violent act of terrorism. While Buddhists may be wary of unwholesome teachings in other religions, they cannot actually mimic such teachings even for retaliatory purpose because that would be undoing the timeless teachings of the Buddha. The non-violent and compassion-oriented ethos of Buddhism prevents Buddhists from unmindful acts of crime and vengeance. At this moment, when the world is facing tremendous crisis of faith and ‘being’, Buddhists of every denomination should unite for world peace with a mind full of forgiveness, loving-kindness and right effort. As the Dalai Lama once said, “Compassion, dialogue and peaceful means are the real antidote to terrorism.”
collectives), at the same time, since impermanence and non-substantiality are inherent in life, the question of self-assertion, coerced conversion of others and religious propaganda is impertinent and cannot actually arise within the conceptual framework of Buddhism.

Of all the three characteristics, anicca and dukkha are much easier to comprehend, since certain elements in life and nature clearly manifest both the characteristics. For instance, anicca or impermanence can be understood and explained by drawing our attention to the constant changes that encompass our very own existence – our coming into being from the state of a microscopic embryonic cell to a full grown fetus in our mother’s womb, then to a new-born baby, a toddler, a child, an adolescent, up to adulthood and then gradual progress towards senility after having enjoyed all the vigor and rigor of youth. Similarly, suffering can be observed in day to day life from experiences that are inevitably negative such as disease, sickness, old age, death, worldly vicissitudes, loneliness, fear, mental depression, etc. Anattā, on the other hand, cannot be easily referred to or explained with the help of external factors alone. While anicca and dukkha in a way may assist in the realization of anattā, nevertheless, it requires constant mindful and meta-mental reflection to understand, internalize and finally put into self-realizational practice the truth of anattā. Doubtless, it is the most difficult and the highest truth the Buddha has taught humankind – the failure to realize which only renders us into “half-Buddhists”!

The Significance of Anattā

Before we proceed to understand the universality of anattā it is essential to recognize the fact that no other religion upholds the truth of anattā, hence it is a moral obligation of Buddhists to try to take an active part in the process of understanding it and responsibly share it with others. Almost all theistic religions in the world teach moral values and alongside it the devotion towards an almighty power, variously named as God, Allah, Bhagwan, etc. The concept of God is beautiful and has its utilitarian values in so far as it unites the followers of a particular religion or cult and helps guide them along the moral path. But since God is an absolute authority, it is logically contradictory to the truth of anattā. God, the Supreme Being who is unanimously regarded by his followers as omnipotent, omnipresent, constant (i.e. non changeable) cannot be subsumed under the essential characteristic of non-self or non-substantiality. If the concept of God is changeable or rendered non-self, then His followers will have no refuge to hold on to and will be left utterly confused and spiritually bewildered. Buddhism, as an atheistic religion, however, can view the entire realm of existence very objectively and so the three essential characteristics of existence have formed an integral part of its teachings.

Although the usefulness of anattā is deep and varied, it is not always easy to gauge the unfathomable truth of non-self or the state of egolessness that it implies because the conventional approach to life is selfhood-oriented and the self’s never-ending proliferation as founded upon all the success-stories of culture, science and technology throughout humankind’s history, from the early age to our modern times. Anattā helps to deconstruct the self-oriented nature of all our thinking and makes us commit to one meaningful and silent pause wherefrom we can gauge our civilizational progress and remedy the wrongs that have been repeatedly done in the name of political correctness, supremacist mind-set, economic prosperity, religious conversion and ideological and territorial warfare. The

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13 Buddhists look at this point with compassionate understanding and not with any supremacist attitude. It is a great asset of the Buddhist mind-set that it doesn’t encourage anyone to waste time on being contemptuous of supreme concepts or belief-systems of other religions. If any unwise Buddhist does so, then he or she won’t be any different from the ill-willed Taliban, who took up vandalism with such missionary zeal to the extent of hampering the economic prosperity of their own people in Afghanistan, as Buddhist pilgrims dropped down drastically in the aftermath of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas.
greatest gifts of Buddhism to humankind are not only the divine abidings (brahmaviharas), but also and most importantly anattā and vipassanā. Every religion emphasizes on loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karunā) and empathetic joy (muditā), but almost none have a pure discourse on equanimity (upekkhā). However, Buddhism raises equanimity to a very high level and the confident sustenance of it is dependent or co-related to the realization of anattā through mindfulness practice of vipassanā.

Within the context of world peace and wisdom, I deem it a moral obligation on the part of all Buddhists, irrespective of race, language, gender, status, nationality and denomination to help give rise to all the four divine qualities as well as spread through mental, verbal and bodily actions the truth of anattā. Why? Because while loving-kindness and compassion create the vast space of goodwill in our hearts to accommodate not only human but every other being, anattā creates the same space in our intellect so that what we feel in our hearts gets actualized and sustained in our mindscape. When the heart and the mind work together in the same direction, each complementing the other, Buddhists’ contribution to global peace becomes absolutely relevant and feasible with full practical applicability, not just a utopian ideal waiting to be actualized in an unknowable distant future. Thus, while the holy abidings help foster mutual trust and respect among the Buddhists themselves and people from other religions, a realization of anattā through experiential knowledge of vipassanā practice helps continually sustain the mutual trust and respect among all people.

With great advancement in the realm of science and technology human life has come to estrange itself from the qualities of the heart as tremendous changes have been ushered in in diverse external spheres – food production, transportation, electronic communication, material enrichment and consumption choices. Human beings have thus come to take an unprecedented pride and confidence in themselves while turning almost a deaf ear to holistic well-being and to the truth of their own interdependence on nature and ecological balance. In today’s capitalist global village, the abiding truth of anattā is to be comprehended in order to:

a) counteract the fetishizing cult of the burgeoning material culture and its irrational proliferation at the cost of devastating the natural environment,

b) to deepen non-attachment to the uniqueness of cultural specificities so as to reduce bickering arising from clinging to religious/cultural signs and symbols,

c) to give rise to a truly democratic and egalitarian society free from all forms of supremacist attitude arising from attachment to race, religion, language, gender, education, technological sophistication, etc.,

d) to have an objective view of life vis-à-vis the acceptance of the truth of human existence as an integral and inseparable part of the ecosystem so as to help reduce global warming and climate change that has effect to varying degrees on everyone’s life, and last but not the least,

e) to develop a wary and critical approach to even positive notions like nation, nationhood, independence, self-defense, combative mechanism, alliance, bilateral policy, collaboration, coalition, etc., so that none of these can be used in mega-narratives of alibi by the politically powerful side to annihilate the ‘Other/s’.

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14 The Buddha urged his followers to cultivate boundless loving-kindness: “With metta for the entire cosmos, cultivate a limitless heart.” Snp 1.8. In Theravada communities the world over, words of goodwill are chanted daily: “May these beings — free from animosity, free from oppression, and free from trouble — look after themselves with ease.” AN 10.176.

15 Phrases in the Karaniya Metta Sutta start out with a simple wish for happiness for all beings: Happy, at rest, may all beings be happy at heart. Whatever beings there may be, weak or strong, without exception, long, large, middling, short, subtle, blatant, seen and unseen, near and far, born and seeking birth: May all beings be happy at heart.
**Vipassanā Meditation and World Peace**

Vipassanā meditation is a powerful mind-training method, the proper use of which leads to a contemplative understanding of oneself and one’s own thoughts and emotions alongside the universal characteristics of existence – impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-substantiality (*anattā*). Without putting into practice this vital method that the Buddha had discovered, continually used and propagated, there can be no true understanding and internalization of the core teachings of Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths, the Four Sublime States of Mind and the Dependent Origination. Vipassanā meditation is non-sectarian in nature and can be used by any interested person irrespective of religious affiliation, gender, and linguistic background. The success stories of Vipassanā meditation masters, namely Ledi Sayadaw, Mahasi Sayadaw, Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Sumedho, Master Sheng Yen, lay Buddhists like U Ba Khin, S.N. Goenka, and countless others, whose dedicated efforts helped disseminate Vipassanā meditation far and wide across the globe among peoples from diverse socio-cultural and religious background, is an indication of the universal appeal of Vipassanā.16

The narrative of this great success story is a pointer to the receptivity and the exigent need for filling more spaces of such receptivity that await to counteract the cult of restlessness and disquiet that has become the hallmark of the modern-day world. While the present world of globalization and economic competitiveness with its post-postmodern ethos of ever-growing sensibilities and new paradigmatic mode of thinking and ‘defining’, hinges on dynamic growth in every sphere of human life and existence, and proliferation of forever increasing avenues for mental and physical indulgences, Vipassanā meditation becomes the most fruitful investigative method to reflect upon the futility of this growth and the individualistic ego-oriented and too self-centered a mentality that is triggering such growth at an unprecedented degree. It is only through the practice of Vipassanā meditation that today’s crises-stricken world of simulation and simulacra – at the mental and tangible level, can be brought back to a natural and healthy state.

**Buddhist Leadership in the Context of Global Peace**

The very issue of world peace demands the existence of some form of leadership among the Buddhist congregation. So, what does Buddhist leadership imply? Buddhist leadership does not involve the role of ‘leading’ others through convincing and persuasive speech, canonical expertise, ideological standpoint, innovative meditation tool, political backing, accumulation of wealth, magical power of amulets, media attention, mask donning, etc., but first and foremost in freeing oneself from the winding shackles of ignorance (*avijjā*) and defilements (*kilesa*).17 If this subjective and very personal element in Buddhist leadership gets severed, then the concept of leadership ceases to hold any true meaning; that is why, Buddhist leadership is different from all other forms of leadership. The foundation of Buddhist leadership is tied to mastering oneself first and then others;

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16 The highly successful results of Vipassanā meditation practice by inmates in different countries like India, UK, USA, even at such high security prisons like the Alabama Prison where the most vicious and murderous inmates, usually sentenced to very long-term (some even life imprisonment) displayed clear signs of repentance, forgiveness, fellow-feeling, dutifulness, patience, obeisance, love (towards family members), compassion and reduction of recidivist tendency, and the new discoveries in neuroscience of long-time meditation practitioners’ brain configuration as different from untrained minds, are all verifiable proofs of the vital use of Vipassanā for mental cultivation.

17 The US based Moral Re-Armament (MRA) Group which was active in the 1950s and 60s in developing interfaith dialogues among religious leaders and general public upheld four guiding principles – absolute honesty, purity, selflessness and love. Somdet Aj, a Thai scholar-monk and meditation master known for his leadership skill and fight against racial discrimination and political prejudices and who was asked to take participatory role in interfaith dialogue with the MRA, compared the four principles to the four virtues of – truthfulness (sacca), self-control (dama), forbearance (khanti) and generosity (cāga).
leading oneself first, one leads others and not the vice versa. And so no matter who we are, where we are, how well-known or least known we are, the onus of Buddhist leadership rests on each of us at the individual level prior to establishing this role in a wider context. The pinnacle of this leadership is the realization of the state of egolessness with the constant aid of self-reflection alongside the practice of the three-fold training laid down in the Noble Eightfold Path, within the matrix of which the practice of Vipassanā meditation is so clearly embedded.

Vipassanā meditation is the main tool of the Buddhist leader in the absence of which Buddhism as a way of life, practice and thinking is hard to achieve. The Buddha bequeathed this tool to his followers so that each individual had the means to testify for himself or herself the truths he had taught. The Buddha did not base his teachings on hypothetical assumptions but rather on a pragmatic, goal-oriented and experiential understanding. Let me here digress slightly by referring to an influential philosopher from the West. Derrida in his text The Gift of Death states that: “I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another, without sacrificing the other other, the other others”. That is why, for Derrida it seems that the Buddhist desire to have attachment to nobody and equal compassion for everybody is an unattainable ideal. Derrida’s skepticism about the conjugality of non-attachment and universal love and compassion in Buddhism arises because he looks at the matter from a purely theoretical perspective without the use of the practical method of Vipassanā. He thus missed the point and failed to realize the simple truth that because there is non-clinging to the dictates of the ego, the state of non-attachment arises and when there is non-attachment, universal love can arise spontaneously in the human heart.

Non-clinging to one’s ego/self → non-attachment → universal love and compassion
Realization of tilakkhaṇa → the true implementation and bringing into fruition of brahma vihāra

Now how this process works is to be realized and practiced by oneself through the cultivation of moment-to-moment mindfulness in order to fight with one’s defilements and the ego’s endless craving that gives rise to all the three evils – greed, hatred and delusion. Mindfulness is sustained through Vipassanā meditation that gives rise to experiential understanding of the three characteristics of existence – impermanence, suffering and non-self. This understanding is indispensable to free oneself from all defilements that arise from craving and attachment and when the mind is clean of selfish desire and clinging the four divine qualities – loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity spontaneously blossom in the heart. Did the Buddha give up Vipassanā meditation after his enlightenment? Was he ever fully satiated with the practice of Vipassanā once his disciples became arahants and began to propagate the dhamma? So, true Buddhist leadership implies taking this core method as a sustained practice in life for both inner peace as well as harmony in the world.

The Holy Buddhist Sites as Symbolic of World Peace and Harmony
Just as one realizes while walking along the ghats of Varanasi (especially, the Manikarnika ghat, where the fire and flame of the funeral pyre has never ever been doused) that life and death are nothing but two sides of the same organic phenomenon that we call

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18 Fortunately, Buddhists today have many inspiring role models like the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Master Cheng Yen (known for her charitable works) who have successfully bridged the gaps among different religions and cultures, both in the East and the West, through their messages of loving-kindness, compassion and mindfulness cultivation.

human existence, at Bodhgaya, the place of Buddha’s Enlightenment, one sees and experiences the two phases of human endeavor – the urge for renunciation and the desire to remain rooted in worldly life.\textsuperscript{20} Buddha, however, through his own personal example elegantly demonstrated the depth of the former, which gave his spiritual search a universal garb, challenging people from diverse socio-cultural background across the globe to experience and delve into the renunciant path for the attainment of the highest spiritual benefit for oneself and others.

In almost all the holy Buddhist pilgrimage sites of India, diverse chanting from many different groups of monastics and lay devotees can be perpetually heard. Seeing both colorful as well as immaculately white-clad groups of pilgrims from many different Asian countries like Vietnam, China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, as well as devotees from the West, who come in throngs to pay homage to the Buddha, one may realize the solidarity of Buddhist fraternity and sorority and the message of universalism underlying the Buddhist \textit{weltanschauung} of loving-kindness, equanimity and non-attachment that has played a vital role in unifying people from such diverse socio-cultural background.

One may wonder how and why this harmonious experience is possible. Why the different forms of chanting never rise up to a cacophonous crescendo severing the much hard-to-achieve meditative state of mindfulness, but rather merge endless rows of assembled devotees with the sublime stillness of the spiritual quest? Why has time and again every historically holy Buddhist site embraced people from diverse socio-cultural background and nationalities into the eternal fold of a serene quietude? The answer to these questions can be found nowhere else but the timeless teachings of the Buddha that lay great emphasis on the reflective understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the cultivation of the four sublime states of mind alongside the realization through the practice of insight meditation that all conditioned things and states in this universe, including our lives and egos, lie within the parameters of the three characteristics of existence. The Buddha’s teachings on equanimity, non-substantiality, and cultivation of right mindfulness are unique in the history of religions and have helped Buddhism spread to different parts of the world without ever having had to shed a single drop of human blood. It is this very message of inner peacefulness, the hallmark of the timeless teachings of the Buddha, which when given rise in the hearts of all Buddhists be mindfully shared with people from other religions, in order to wipe off the current trends of religious fanaticism, hatred and killing.

\textsuperscript{20} At Bodhgaya, the holiest place where the Buddha attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the realization may dawn upon any devout Buddhist that renunciation and worldly life are two sides of the same coin, what matters most is the inner urge to decide which path to follow distinctly or just strike a balance between the two by treading the Middle Path. The interior space and the immediate exterior surrounding of the Mahabodhi temple is forever engulfed by this dual nature of human life and predicament – inside, the environment is infused by the sublimity of devotionalism with monastics and lay devotees deeply engaged in chanting, praying, worshiping, reciting suttas and practicing mindfulness and different forms of meditation, whereas, immediately outside the precincts of the temple stand in stark contrast, the harshness of the struggle for minting and saving an extra coin for mere survival, with sellers and buyers of innumerable exotic and votive merchandise endlessly engaged in the act of bargaining and trading.