

BUDDHISM AND CO-CREATION OF THE PATH TO PEACE

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In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the deepening crises in our world are now re-surfacing and revealing themselves in new forms and challenges. The crises of global security and the environment has re-emerged as a global threat which has been accelerated due to the seemingly powerful geo-political forces.

As for the environmental crises, the urgency to address global warming is merely a small part of the larger climate crisis. Tropical rainforests are being degraded and destroyed every day, including record-high usage of pesticides, aggressive irrigation for freshwater altering ecosystems, and the use of synthetic nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizer in agriculture. It is estimated that over 1 million species are now being threatened with extinction. In terms of security, there is an increase in the incidences of conflicts across the globe, and the escalating numbers of dead and displaced people. This global crisis has been escalating and intensifying long before the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Myanmar's ongoing civil war. Spending on arms and military forces is rising; the use of nuclear weapons seems to be less unthinkable than it was previously.

In the *Ādittapariyāya Sutta (The Fire Sermon)* of the Pāli canon, the Buddha describes the entire world as ablaze with the three fires of greed, hatred, and delusion. The Buddha's choice of metaphor and his analysis of suffering as rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion makes *The Fire Sermon* most relevant for our consideration today. Socially-engaged Buddhism which emerged in Asia as social and political activism in the 20th century, is also a highly relevant response to these burning questions we are confronted with in our world today.

In this context, there are new awakenings in the frontiers of knowledge and wisdom, both about the external and the internal worlds. Some important trends include the following:

- The disciplines of both the natural sciences and the social sciences are being challenged and vigorously reconstructed in response to our rapidly growing awareness in planetary changes. At the same time, there is increasing interest and work done in “de-colonising” the sciences, especially our knowledge and research in interpreting and analysing current economic, social and cultural challenges faced by humanity.

- A. radical shift in our knowledge and understanding of the world we live in – from “universe” to “pluriverse”. This worldview is based on local knowledge and practices – old and new, local and global – emerging from indigenous, peasant and pastoral communities, urban neighbourhoods, environmental, feminist and spiritual movements. This “view from below” enables us to view our world as a web of diverse, plural and multi-dimensional interface of living beings interaction with nature and the cosmic world.

Against this background, some of the key insights and inspiration we can draw from Buddhism include the following:

1. Challenging the hypothesis of the ‘Anthropocene’. This Euro-centric view holds the notion that we are living in a new epoch of geological time that is marked by the emergence of humankind as a dominant factor shaping the evolution of our planet. This idea is based on the long-held convictions about humans being proudly detached from other living beings-, or ‘nature’.

Thai Buddhist monk thinker and an intellectual Payutto or Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya, maintains that contemporary society is in the grips of **three mistaken** beliefs, foremost of which is “(a)that mankind is separate from nature, (b) that mankind must control, conquer, or manipulate nature according to his desire, and (c) that viewing natural resources solely as tools for our own ends”.

2. It has become increasingly clear that the practice of viewing state territories as isolating containers is obsolete – especially given the impact of globalization today. Geologists or climate experts look at units for answers that have little to do with current political boundaries and/or state territories. When the environmental threats affect our globe, assertions based on national interests does not foster effective responses, and even at time counter productive as seen in the case of the new arms race. Cooperation beyond national interests is the only way forward.

3. Following this major paradigm shift, historians are now engaged in much more dynamic debates about ‘more-than-human’, ‘multispecies’, ‘environmental’, ‘post-humanist’ and ‘human–non-human’ histories. This has generated new knowledge and wisdom on the triangular relationship between human-nature-cosmos and the inter-relationship and inter-dependency of one with the other.

Failure to appreciate the deep “interconnectedness” of all lives and beings results in deluded action among us. To imagine that our own flourishing as humans can be attained through the exploitation or disregard for others or other beings is short-sighted and is the reflection of wrongly seeing oneself as entirely separable and independent of other living beings.

4. We are becoming more aware of the interaction and communication among different species of living beings. It is not only the case that humans communicate with one another and with non-human animals, or that animals communicate with other species of animals. But that rapid advances in planetary science convincingly proves that plants have biochemical ways of communicating with other plants as well as with animals.

5. A call for the practice of zooming-in and zooming-out, a strategy of switching theoretical lenses and re-positioning to examine our crises i.e (a) there is a clear need for a broader scope of enquiries to our challenges, – which help us understand the earth, plants, animals and human connections across borders, and (b) a benefit in examining all matters in narrower scope – to help us grasp how multispecies histories are anchored in particular landscapes and ecological regions or zones.

6. Yet the forces of greed, hatred and delusion of us as humans have become even more powerful, fueling more conflict, violence and wars. Humanity’s collective failures to fulfill the global SDGs promise for the Earth’s repair are leading us into a global crisis that threatens to destroy Mother Earth and with it, all living beings. In doing so, we are not creating but destroying the world for our future generations.

7. Establishing international multi-lateral mechanisms and platforms are needed even more today than ever before in the face of this global crisis marked by increasing inequalities, unilateral political dominance and economic trade wars and militarization on a global scale. In such a context, the values and practices of Buddhism can be source of inspiration and guidance for all of us to enhance global solidarity and to strengthen co-creation on our pathways towards peace and justice in the world today.