

2nd International conference on
PEACE AND NON-VIOLENT ACTION BUDDHIST
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Principles for Non-Violence Training

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates and friends:

I feel highly privileged to be given the opportunity to take part in this International conference whose primary theme is Peace and Non-violent Action. It is encouraging that many peace activists, thinkers, writers, religious leaders and others of prominence, both in India and abroad, have gathered here to discuss a very vital and topical subject.

The timing of this conference is most appropriate for we have met under the lengthening shadow of a fierce and highly destructive war that is currently raging in the Persian Gulf. This war is decidedly more destructive than any other recorded war in human history. This war has at its command the most lethal weapons whose precision and speed for devastation has stemmed from the highest attainments in sciences and technology. It is a sad irony of human fate that scientific knowledge and its application whose sole objective should be to discover the truths of nature and to provide comfort to living beings, has been villainously exploited to manufacture a vast range of weaponry for causing appalling havoc. Each day we hear the proud and shameless claims of the fighting powers about the death and damage they have afflicted on each other.

None can say at present, as to when this horrendous war will cease and whether it will lead to any stable peace or sow the seeds of potential discord and conflict. But one thing is certain that human beings must learn, once again, the lesson power of the mind. And here I am reminded of the glorious example left behind by the great humanist and spiritualist, Mahatma Gandhi, who solved the problem of foreign rule over India through the practice of non-violence. He succeeded because he first achieved within himself both peace and non-violence. Having done this, he radiated it and drew others within his orbit.

Ladies and Gentlemen, peace is not a commodity that one can buy or acquire through any material means. It is a quality of the mind and an attitude of our thought processes which can only be achieved through personal endeavor. Over 2500 years ago, the Great prince of peace, Lord Buddha, enunciated the required disciplines and practices that can help forge peace in the human mind. Again, he did not give it any esoteric label or status, indeed his teaching was direct, pragmatic and simple which can be grasped by each one of us. But he placed emphasis on personal endeavor and personal motivation. “We can show you the path, but you have to tread it”, were his forthright words. Therefore, for the inculcation of peace in this world, weather it has international, national, community or group connotations, we have to begin with the individual. It is the conglomeration of individuals vowed to peace that collectively spread and achieve a total state of peace.

In the Buddhist thought, peace and non-violence are two sides of the same coin. It is only the clam and steady mind that will eschew violence. Violence in action flows from a mind that is charged with hatred, anger and malcontent. And hatred and anger are manifestations of an unsatisfied mind or mind that is suffused with greed and avarice. The lord Buddha, therefore, propounded his fundamental principle which urges us to overcome yearning and desire. The drive and power of desire has overwhelming dimensions. It generates an unending cycle. When one desire is satisfied it causes a further spurt of desire. And when the desire is not gratified, it brings in anger, frustration and dejection. The result is restlessness which is the very antithesis of peace.

Again, non-violence will only come to us when we are at peace. In the ensuing Gulf war, what is the basic issue in contest? It is petroleum. The Western powers want to have their monarchy over the Arab peninsula which is the richest reservoir oil. The Arab countries that are divided come in the way of the Western. Instead of finding a route to peace, they have embarked upon the path of violence hoping that the conqueror will achieve his desire. I have quoted this instance not for any political reasons but as a ready situation in front of us today and because it stands out large as life as a vivid example of how the crisscross of unfulfilled desire drive human beings to resort to physical force and violence.

The tragic part of violence is that it does not remain confined to the parties that are involved in it. Its destructive effects engulf others as well because violence has a wide area of fall-out.

If we wish to build a world of peace and non-violence as indeed everyone swears by-then we must embark on a plan to educate people and train people for the cultivation of peace. The precepts for this purpose are well-known. But foremost of all, as I said before, the starting point must be the individual.

I can think of no better place for making a beginning than the family fold. The parents of families are in an ideal position to set a lead. They should first train themselves and then become the lodestar for their children. The schools and centres of education are, to my mind, equally important in propagating the message of peace. Here the teachers can spearhead a movement and disseminate the techniques for achieving peace in mind. Such endeavors in ever-widening circles along the horizontal plan will, no doubt, in time absorb groups, communities and nations that will enjoy the blessings of a restful and peaceful mind. In short, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to underline the practical aspect of peace and Non-violence. The aim should not merely be to academically dwell on it or write tomes of literature on peace-indeed there is ample written material at hand to guide us- we must strive to achieve it in reality. This alone will lead us to human salvation and ultimate bliss. Irrespective of our differences in religious and cultural traditions, there is surely a common vision and aspiration for building a world free from strife and united in the ideal for universal peace. The latter is not beyond our reach. Never before was the message of peace of Lord Buddha and Mahavir more relevant as it is today. We must abide by their teachings to first imbibe peace within ourselves which in turn, will pave the way for human tolerance, brotherhood and amity. This in sum will create happiness and well-being amongst mankind.