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The Role of Buddhism in the Promotion of World Peace Through Inner Peace

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Abstract

In an era marked by geopolitical volatility, systemic violence, and unprecedented technological advancement alongside deep social fragmentation, conventional frameworks for peace building—such as military deterrence, political treaties, and socioeconomic engineering—frequently prove fragile or insufficient. This paper explores the distinct paradigm offered by Buddhist philosophy and psychology: the premise that outer structural harmony is entirely dependent upon inner mental transformation. Drawing from primary texts and modern applications of lifestyle medicine and mindfulness, this study investigates how structural global conflict is merely a macrocosm of the micro-conflicts residing within individual human minds. By systematically dismantling the inner roots of violence—namely greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha)—and actively cultivating mindfulness (sati), compassion (karuna), and universal loving-kindness (metta), individuals generate a psychological equilibrium that naturally radiates outward. This paper establishes that true global peace is not merely the political absence of war, but a dynamic, sustainable reality built from the inside out, bridging ancient meditative practices with modern global ethics and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Buddhist Philosophy, Inner Peace, World Peace, Mindfulness, Meditation, Compassion, Loving-Kindness (Metta), Non-violence, Dependent Origination

Introduction

The search for world peace has historically been treated as a collective, political, and institutional challenge. International bodies, legal frameworks, and diplomatic accords operate on a macro-level, attempting to manage conflicts after they manifest or trying to enforce a state of non-aggression through geopolitical equilibrium. While these external mechanisms are necessary to prevent immediate catastrophes, they treat the symptoms of conflict rather than its underlying etiology.

Buddhism introduces a radical shift in this paradigm. It posits that conflict is not an abstract historical force, nor is it an intrinsic property of nation-states; it is a collective projection of human psychology. War, systemic exploitation, and environmental degradation begin within the boundaries of individual human consciousness before escaping into the physical world. Therefore, attempting to establish world peace solely through treaties and borders while leaving the human heart untamed is akin to treating a systemic infection with a superficial bandage.

The core thesis of Buddhist diplomacy is simple yet profound: outer peace is impossible without inner peace. This framework does not ignore the social, political, or economic dimensions of war; rather, it identifies the foundational soil from which those dimensions emerge. To build an unshakeable structure of global harmony, we must begin by examining and transforming the individual mind.

The Internal Landscape of Conflict: The Three Poisons

To understand how inner peace translates into outer peace, Buddhist psychology first provides a rigorous diagnostic analysis of why human beings wage war.

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In the foundational discourses of the Buddha, all forms of violence—from interpersonal squabbles to global warfare—are traced back to the three unwholesome roots of consciousness, known as the Three Poisons (*Akusala-mula*):

Greed and Attachment (*Lobha*)

At the individual level, *lobha* manifests as an insatiable desire for sensory gratification, material wealth, and status. When magnified to a societal or national scale, this individual craving transforms into aggressive economic expansion, resource exploitation, colonialism, and territorial conquest. The underlying psychological delusion is that acquiring more external resources will finally provide inner security—a fallacy that drives perpetual global competition.

Hatred and Aversion (*Dosa*)

When our desires are thwarted, or when we encounter people, ideas, or cultures that challenge our comfort zones, *lobha* turns into *dosa*. This is the impulse to reject, dominate, or destroy that which we perceive as an obstacle. On a macro-level, hatred fuels xenophobia, racism, religious intolerance, and the military apparatuses built to annihilate the designated "enemy."

Delusion and Ignorance (*Moha*)

The foundational engine driving both greed and hatred is *moha*—the fundamental spiritual blindness to the true nature of reality. Specifically, *moha* is the illusion of a permanent, isolated self (*atta*). Because we view ourselves as fundamentally separate from others, we naturally divide the world into "us" and "them," "my nation" and "your nation." This artificial polarization blinds humanity to its deep, existential interconnectedness.

The opening stanza of the *Dhammapada* explicitly states:

"Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox."

From this perspective, a battlefield is merely an impure state of mind writ large across a landscape. The structural violence of our world is an inevitable externalization of these unexamined psychological poisons.

The Anatomy of Inner Peace: Mindfulness and Mental Cultivation

If world peace depends on individual transformation, how does one systematically cultivate this inner peace? Buddhism does not offer a sentimental wish for tranquility; it provides an explicit, replicable

methodology of mental development (*Bhavana*) centered on mindfulness (*Sati*).

The most direct framework for this internal training is found in the practice of *Anapanasati* (mindfulness of breathing) and the broader *Satipatthana Sutta* (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness). Through these practices, an individual learns to observe the rising and falling of physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts with radical objectivity.

The Four Foundations Of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana*)

1. Kaya (Body) - Cultivating physical presence through the breath, anchoring the mind in the now.
2. Vedana (Sensations) - Observing pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral tones without reacting to them.
3. Citta (Mind States) - Recognizing the presence of anger, anxiety, or peace without self-judgment.
4. Dhamma (Mental Phenomena) - Understanding the psychological laws governing freedom and bondage.

When an individual sits in meditation and observes their mind, they develop a psychological buffer between stimulus and response. When anger (*dosa*) arises due to a perceived insult, a trained mind does not automatically lash out. Instead, it notes: *"Anger has arisen; this is an impermanent mental event."*

By observing the anger without identifying with it or acting upon it, the emotion loses its fuel and naturally dissolves. This internal de-escalation is the precise point where peace begins. An individual who has mastered this process becomes incapable of being provoked into violence. Multiply this internal mastery across communities and nations, and the very psychological capacity to wage war evaporates.

Radical Interconnectedness: Interbeing and Global Responsibility

A primary philosophical foundation linking inner peace to world peace is the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Paticcasamuppada*), which contemporary Buddhist thinkers often refer to as the principle of "Interbeing." This doctrine states that no entity, individual, or nation possesses an independent, isolated existence. Everything exists in a vast, web-like matrix of cause and effect.

The Principle of Conditionality: *Imasmin sati idam hoti*

"When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises."

When applied to global relations, this philosophical insight shatters the myth of independent national security or isolated economic prosperity. It reveals that the suffering of one nation eventually compromises the well-being of all nations.

DEPENDENT ORIGATION
(The Matrix of Interbeing)▼
Individual Mind State

- Clear, non-reactive awareness
- Dismantling the rigid "Ego"
- Cultivation of inner peace

▼
Global Manifestation

- Collaborative climate action
- Dismantling aggressive borders
- Shared humanitarian responsibility

When an individual internalizes the reality of interbeing through meditation, the rigid boundary of the ego begins to soften. The illusion of the separate self (*anatta*) is replaced by a profound experiential realization that the "other" is not truly separate from oneself. Under this light, protecting the environment, reducing global poverty, and disarming nuclear stockpiles cease to be mere political options; they become clear acts of self-preservation and universal responsibility.

The Four Brahmaviharas as a Framework for Global Ethics

To translate the quietude of inner meditation into active global peace building, Buddhism deploys the four boundless qualities of the heart, known as the *Brahmaviharas* (Divine Abodes). These four qualities serve as an exceptional matrix for an enlightened global ethic and active conflict resolution.

1. Loving-Kindness (*Metta*)

Metta is the genuine aspiration for all living beings to be happy and safe. It is an active goodwill that carries no conditions. Unlike sentimental love, *metta* is entirely non-discriminatory; it extends equally to friends, strangers, and adversaries alike. In international relations, *metta* shifts the objective from "defeating the enemy" to "wishing for the welfare and correction of all parties."

2. Compassion (*Karuna*)

Karuna is the trembling of the heart in response to the suffering of others, combined with the urgent desire to alleviate that suffering. A nation guided by *karuna* cannot remain indifferent to refugee crises, systemic poverty, or human rights violations occurring outside its borders. It transforms passive foreign policy into proactive humanitarian engagement.

3. Sympathetic Joy (*Mudita*)

Mudita is the ability to celebrate the happiness, prosperity, and success of others without a trace of jealousy or competitiveness. On a global scale, *mudita* directly counteracts the zero-sum geopolitical mentality where one nation's growth is automatically viewed as a threat to another's security.

4. Equanimity (*Upekkha*)

Upekkha is an unshakeable stability of mind, anchored in deep insight into the laws of cause and effect (*karma*). It allows peace builders to remain completely steady in the face of conflict, crisis, and praise, ensuring that decisions are driven by long-term wisdom rather than short-term emotional reactions or political survival.

Inner Peace as Lifestyle Medicine: The Preventive Approach to Social Violence

Modern public health frameworks increasingly recognize that violence functions very much like a contagious disease. It spreads through social networks, driven by unmitigated trauma, chronic stress, and systemic alienation. Here, the practice of Buddhist mindfulness converges directly with the emerging discipline of lifestyle medicine.

Lifestyle medicine emphasizes that non-communicable physical and mental health issues are largely driven by daily behavioral habits, environmental exposures, and cognitive patterns. When applied to social ecosystems, inner mindfulness practices serve as a potent preventive medicine against structural violence:

- **Stress Reduction and Neural Plasticity:** Chronic psychological stress elevates cortisol and hyper-activates the amygdala, pushing individuals into a permanent "fight-or-flight" survival mode. Meditation down-regulates this response, thickens the prefrontal cortex, and enhances executive function, self-regulation, and empathy.
- **Healing Traumatic Loops:** Systemic social violence is frequently fueled by historical, intergenerational trauma. By teaching individuals how to sit with, process, and safely dissolve traumatic memories and reactive impulses within the container of mindfulness, the cycle of transmission is broken.
- **Simplicity and Sustainability:** Inner peace brings a sense of deep mental contentment (*Santutthi*). A content mind does not need to consume excessively to fill an internal void. This psychological shift lowers consumerist demand, directly reducing the corporate resource exploitation and environmental devastation that underpins many global conflicts.

An individual possessing high inner clarity operates as a stabilizing force within their family, workplace, and community. This health-promoting behavior creates a ripple effect, building highly resilient social networks that are naturally resistant to the rhetoric of hatred and division.

Historical and Contemporary Case Studies of Applied Buddhist Peace Building

The assertion that inner peace can drive systemic world peace is not a utopian fantasy; it is validated by

remarkable historical precedents and contemporary movements.

The Edicts of Emperor Ashoka (3rd Century BCE)

Perhaps the most extraordinary historical example of applied Buddhist political philosophy is Emperor Ashoka of India. After witnessing the horrific carnage of his conquest of Kalinga—which left over one hundred

thousand dead—Ashoka experienced a profound spiritual crisis. Turning to the teachings of the Buddha, he underwent a radical inner transformation.

Ashoka completely renounced aggressive military conquest (*Dig-Vijaya*) and replaced it with the conquest of righteousness (*Dharma-Vijaya*). He codified this new vision into pillars and rocks across his vast empire:

THE RADICAL REFORMS OF ASHOKA

Demilitarization

- Disbanded expansionist armies
- Renounced offensive warfare
- Replaced violence with Dharma

Ashoka proved to the historical record that an empire could maintain peace, stability, and immense prosperity without relying on aggressive military force, purely by anchoring state policy in compassion and ethical responsibility.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sri Lanka)

In modern times, Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne founded the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, applying Buddhist principles of mindfulness and interconnectedness to grassroots economic development and conflict resolution. Meaning "the awakening of all through the sharing of labor," Sarvodaya has transformed thousands of villages by integrating collective meditation with community-led infrastructure projects.

During the brutal Sri Lankan civil war, the movement organized massive, multi-faith meditation walks and peace camps, demonstrating that internal spiritual

State Social Welfare

- Built free hospitals (humans & animals)
- Planted extensive shade trees & dug wells
- Enforced total religious tolerance

cultivation could create a shared, safe space for dialog between bitterly divided ethnic and religious groups.

Engaged Buddhism and Thich Nhat Hanh

The venerable Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term "Engaged Buddhism" during the Vietnam War. Refusing to take sides in the geopolitical proxy conflict, he focused entirely on practicing mindfulness while actively rescuing refugees, rebuilding bombed villages, and advocating for disarmament. His life work demonstrated that true inner peace does not make an individual passive; rather, it provides the immense courage and stamina required to step directly into active war zones to perform non-violent mediation.

Comparative Analysis: Institutional vs. Buddhist Frameworks for Peace

To appreciate the distinct value of the Buddhist approach, it is useful to compare standard institutional approaches to peace building with the internal paradigm of Buddhism:

Dimension	Institutional / Geopolitical Frameworks	Buddhist / Psychological Frameworks
Primary Focus	External structures, borders, legal treaties, balance of power.	Internal consciousness, mental cultivation, psychological roots.
Mechanism	Legislative enforcement, military deterrence, economic sanctions.	Systemic mindfulness, ethical self-regulation, compassionate action.
Definition of Peace	Negative Peace: The temporary absence of active warfare.	Positive Peace: An unshakeable mental state free from ill-will and greed.
Directionality	Top-Down: Enforced by governments and global organizations.	Bottom-Up: Cultivated by individuals, rippling out into communities.
Sustainability	Fragile: Vulnerable to political shifts and resource competition.	Highly Resilient: Grounded in permanent internal character transformation.

This analysis shows that these two paradigms do not need to be mutually exclusive. Instead, they are deeply complementary. Institutional frameworks provide the external scaffolding necessary to manage crises, while the Buddhist framework provides the essential internal transformation that makes those structures sustainable over generations.

Challenges and Strategic Roadmap for Global Implementation

While the conceptual path from inner clarity to global peace is clear, scaling this approach across modern, secular, and highly fractured societies presents distinct challenges.

Challenges

- **The Scepticism of Urgency:** Policymakers dealing with immediate military crises often dismiss internal mental training as a slow, secondary luxury.
- **Secular Integration:** Presenting these insights globally requires separating the core psychological mechanics from sectarian religious practices.
- **The Scale Misalignment:** Bridging the gap between an individual meditating on a cushion and a multinational corporation or state military apparatus executing policy.

A Strategic Roadmap

To overcome these barriers and systematically integrate the psychology of inner peace into the architecture of world peace, we can utilize a three-tiered deployment strategy:

1. **Global Policy & Diplomacy:** Introduce secular mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and non-violent communication protocols directly into the training curricula of diplomats, military leaders, and international policymakers.
2. **Institutional Lifestyle Medicine:** Embed basic secular mindfulness and lifestyle medicine practices into public education systems, healthcare facilities, and correctional institutions worldwide. Teaching children how to regulate their nervous systems and dismantle anger early prevents the formation of a violent adult psychology.
3. **Grassroots Cultivation:** Support community-led initiatives that combine local social service (e.g., environmental care, food security) with shared contemplative practices, anchoring social action in inner peace.

Conclusion: The Realizable Imperative

World peace is not a distant, utopian ideal to be achieved through an impossible harmonization of competing national self-interests. It is a completely realizable imperative that rests on the immediate retraining of human consciousness.

As long as our minds remain battlegrounds of unexamined greed, unmitigated aversion, and the blind delusion of separation, our outer world will inevitably mirror that chaos. Buddhism offers humanity an exceptionally practical mirror, a detailed map of the mind, and a time-tested toolkit to disarm our internal conflicts.

By treating the cultivation of inner peace as a crucial form of planetary lifestyle medicine, we systematically cut off the fuel supply to global violence. When an individual achieves an unshakeable inner equilibrium through mindfulness and compassion, they naturally cease to be a source of conflict. Instead, they become an active anchor of harmony.

True global peace is constructed choice by choice, breath by breath, inside the heart of every single

human being. It is an internal journey that has the profound power to transform the face of our shared world.

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