



the Buddha teaches, “Hatred does not eradicate hatred. Only by loving kindness is hatred dissolved. This law is ancient and eternal.” Gandhi summarized it well: “An eye for an eye just makes the whole world blind.” The Buddha also said, “If you act with a corrupt mind, suffering will follow.... If you act with a peaceful mind, peace will follow.” We cannot avoid the results of our karma. We must be mindful of each act of our lives. Violence is not the result of a faulty political economy. Violence springs from human consciousness.

A culture of violence is one that produces, normalizes, and consumes ideas of division and hatred. Modern societies invest massively in war and violence. The U.S. spends nearly half of the world’s total, followed distantly by the UK, France, Japan, and China. Almost every third-world country also

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invests far too much in its own military budget, and many also host U.S. bases on their territory.

Martin Luther King, Jr., observed that, “our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.” Gandhi noted, “We are constantly being astonished at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence.” We live in an age of both pluralism and terror, and it is critical for us to articulate what might constitute a culture of peace. Nonviolence is Buddhism’s master precept.

Peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding are three responses to conflict. Peacekeeping stops people from attacking each other. This minimizes the damage but does not ensure stability. We need to put out the fires, but it would be better to prevent them in the first place by addressing the underlying causes.

Peacekeeping sometimes employs the means of conflict to end conflict. At other times, small numbers of people have been able to penetrate violent situations by practicing nonviolence. When the Nazis tried to exterminate the Jews of Denmark, King Fredrick IX declared that if his Jewish subjects were captured, he, too, would wear the Star of David and be subject to arrest. As a result, the Germans did not touch the Danish Jews. Badshah Khan, a devout Muslim, known as the Gandhi of the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier, was able to persuade his Pashtun brothers to renounce arms and join him in a 100,000-man army of nonviolence.

The 1973 overthrow of the Thai dictatorship, the end of the Marcos government in the Philippines, and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe are all examples of the use of nonviolence to end violence and oppression and bring about lasting social change. The images of a lone protestor standing in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi confronting the Burmese military are reminders of the great moral and physical courage it takes to engage in nonviolence.

The paradigm articulated by [former] President Bush needs to be dismantled. The true power of America is not its wealth or military might, but its ideals of liberty, democracy,



and generosity. We must stop investing in war and violence, and invest instead in peace and nonviolence. Dennis Kucinich has introduced a resolution in the U.S. Congress to create a cabinet-level Department of Peace.

The second response to conflict—peacemaking—involves not just intervening but actually settling conflicts. The most important element of peacemaking is dialogue. What we call dialogue is often just two monologues. Genuine dialogue requires active listening. We need to abandon our idea of a particular outcome and remain quiet within.

When both sides feel heard, creative problem solving can bring unanticipated results. Reconciliation is key. Acknowledging the past alleviates suffering, heals injustice, and fosters transformation. Called restorative justice, victim and perpetrator listen to each other deeply—difficult as that may be—and, as a result, both change. This kind of education, rather than punishment, minimizes recidivism.

Peacebuilding, the third response, is the never-ending effort to create a peaceful society. It begins at the grassroots level and includes a wide range of long-term solutions—education, grassroots democracy, land reform, poverty alleviation. Like the little parrot in the Jataka tale of the Buddha’s former life, a peacebuilder mobilizes his community to bring water drop by drop to quench the raging fire.

Peacebuilding must be based on nonviolence, which, in turn, must be based on wisdom and compassion. These kinds of activities garner few headlines but are the most meaningful responses to conflict. Once a war has started, it is nearly impossible to stop. We need to stop the next war now by creating just and truly democratic societies.

When the Buddha came to understand how suffering arises, he was able to transform the processes that cause and sustain it. He described this insight using the language of four noble truths:

1. Suffering exists.
2. Suffering has causes.
3. We can stop producing the causes of suffering.
4. A path of mindful living can show us the way.

Let us apply these four truths to situations of conflict. We begin by acknowledging both sides' suffering, each adversary states his experience clearly, with witnesses present to acknowledge their statements. This is the first noble truth, the acknowledgment of suffering.

Second, we try to understand the external and psychological roots of the conflict. When we project our emotions onto an object (animate or inanimate), we experience the "other" as having traits which, in fact, dwell first in our own unconscious mind. We fail to see the line between the object and our own feelings. To discover the roots of any conflict, we must also examine its psychological dimensions. With this understanding, we can explore the external conditions more clearly.

The third noble truth is the cessation of the causes of suffering. This does not presuppose that we can reach a state that is conflict-free, but encourages us to grapple with the details—internal and external—every time. Conflict can be an opportunity to go directly to the heart of the matter and learn more about ourselves. The fourth noble truth—peace as a way of life—shows us how to live in ways that reduce suffering and conflict.

The Buddha called this the eightfold path:


1. Right understanding: understanding the four noble truths.
2. Right Thought: freedom from that which cannot bring satisfaction.
3. Right Speech: speaking truthfully and skillfully.
4. Right Action: not killing, stealing, or indulging in irresponsible sexual behavior.
5. Right Livelihood: not engaging in a profession that brings harm to others.
6. Right effort: encouraging wholesome states of mind.
7. Right Mindfulness: awareness of the physical and mental dimensions of our experience.

8. Right Concentration: staying focused.

This eightfold path encourages peacebuilding as a way of life. It points to ways that awareness can be deepened and the parts of our lives brought into harmony. We begin by living mindfully. Then we can use these tools to dismantle oppressive systems and create a culture of peace. ■

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