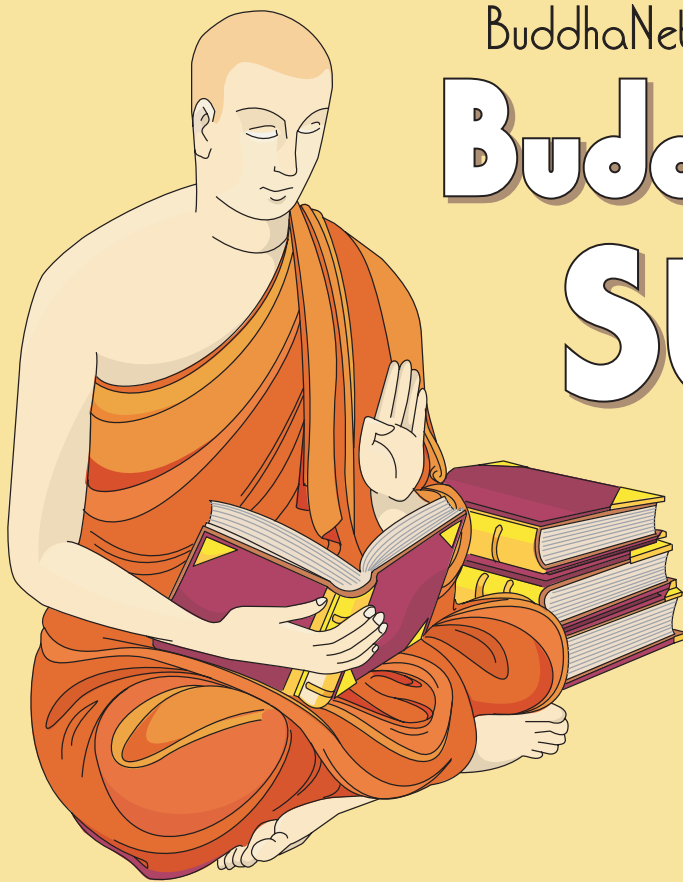


# Buddhism for the Future

by Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda



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## *Dedication Of Merit*

May the merit and virtue  
accrued from this work  
adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,  
repay the four great kindnesses above,  
and relieve the suffering of  
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts  
generate Bodhi-mind,  
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,  
and finally be reborn together in  
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.  
Homage to Amita Buddha!

## *Namo Amitabha*

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## FOREWORD

It is heartening to note that Buddhists in Malaysia are gaining recognition for their significant contribution to the world community while at the same time developing a recognizable identity of their own. While in the past Malaysians were depending on the cultures of the predominantly Buddhist countries like China, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, today Malaysians have begun a trend to merge these various traditions and evolve a distinctive Malaysian Buddhist character.

Also a sizeable number of knowledgeable Buddhists are making contributions to this new culture not only through their Dhamma talks and the organization of Buddhist activities like seminars and conferences, but also in areas such as art, literature and poetry.

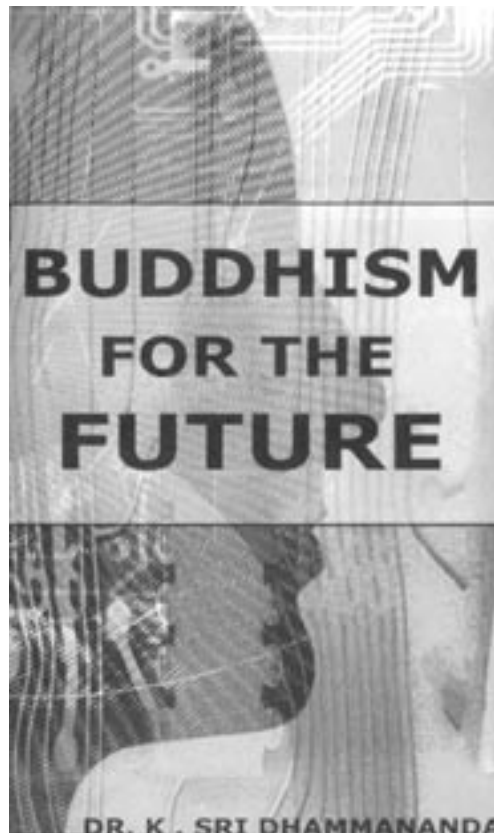
The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, the oldest registered Buddhist society in Malaysia has embarked on a modest programme to publish books for the benefit of all Malaysian Buddhists. We are extremely proud that the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society has been given the honour to publish this book authored by our most Venerable teacher, Dr K Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Maha Thera, the Chief High Priest of Malaysia and Singapore.

This present volume is offered to the reader to commemorate Esala Poya which is a very important date on the Buddhist calendar. It marks the day on which the Buddha delivered his first sermon after his Enlightenment more than 25 centuries ago.

This book by our Venerable teacher will no doubt go a long way in keeping the glorious flame of the Dhamma alight to enlighten future generations and help them attain the final bliss of Nibbana.

Committee of Management  
Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society

July 2000



# *Buddhism for the Future*

## THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

This year we, the members of the Human Race entered into into what has been termed by the largely Western-dominated international media as the Third Millennium or Y2K for short. We have been subjected to an enormous amount of hype by commercial interest groups and some religious enthusiasts who promised us that the world would surely end. The ignorant, the superstitious and the fearful were especially a target for these groups. New cults sprang up threatening the wrath of a frustrated God on humanity that has consistently refused to believe in him or obey his unrealistic commands. The gullible were persuaded to part from their material wealth and even kill themselves to escape the ultimate, final holocaust of the end of the world. Then of course, there were those who made loud and strident calls to warn us of the horrors of the “millennium bug” which would wipe out modern civilization at midnight on the last day of 1999. Computers were supposed to erase information relating to when we had been insured, when we were last inoculated, that our fixed deposits interest rates would have

to be renewed... the prospects were simply horrifying! Then came the great anti-climax — nothing happened! There were many shame-faced religionists who had to run to their holy books and interpret them — once again.

Now, what was the Buddhist attitude to all of this? We did not join the mad crowd and viewed this whole situation calmly and rationally. To begin with, we remembered that we reached our second millennium five hundred years ago and we are already half way into our third millennium. That certainly gave us some greater seniority and maturity with which to view the universe and to advise our fellow beings on how to conduct ourselves in the pursuit of ultimate happiness. Perhaps we could now prevail on our younger brothers and sisters with different world views that their perspectives have motivated them to act in ways dangerous not only to the human race but to all inhabitants on this lovely planet, including plants and animals. Before we become too smug and divide the human race into “us” Buddhists and “them”, the rest, let me hasten to remind ourselves that all of us have been guilty of joining the same rat race and those who call themselves “Buddhists” have just as happily trod the “primrose path” of sensuality, materialism and greed like almost everyone else in the 20th Century. What I will proceed to discuss in the rest of this essay is how

the Sublime Teachings of the Buddha, if rightly understood and correctly followed by everyone can save the human race from ultimate disaster.

We need not think that the beginning of the 21st Century had any particular, or cosmic significance in the supramundane sense. Time is a human invention and a human being is no different today from what his ancestor was two or three thousand years ago. We humans have the same propensity for good or evil as our forebears did during the time of the Buddha. The difference may be that today, given our vast technological advances and education, we are in a better position to develop our good or evil natures. If we have the good sense to slow down and look at the Teachings without bias and practice them sincerely, we can raise the human race to high levels of divinity. If we persist in ignoring the precious teaching we will continue to give in to the beast in us. The choice is ours. The Buddha taught for all mankind. If this message can be brought to all human beings, if we can persuade all human beings and their governments that the Buddha was not bound by narrow sectarian interests, but that he was concerned with all sentient beings, we would have gone a long way towards making this world a better place for all its inhabitants. To effectively promote social harmony and universal peace through Buddhism



we have some serious thinking to do. We should seriously consider what our attitude to the Buddha's message is; we must be united and not waste precious energy and resources arguing about the superiority of any particular school of Buddhism, we must recognize the rights of our fellow inhabitants on earth (including plants and animals); we must recognize the equality of all members of humanity, (including women and children). Once we have set our own house in order, so to speak, we will be in a better position to work for the happiness and welfare of everyone just as the Buddha intended.

## **SOCIAL CONCERNS**

A great deal has been spoken and written about the Buddha's concern for the well-being of all living beings and humankind in particular. While the greater part of his ministry was devoted to the edification of those who renounced the worldly life, he was most free with his advice to uplift the condition of the householder. Some of the best known Sutras are devoted to the development of social harmony and are addressed to royalty as well as common folk. In the *Agganna Sutra* for example the Buddha speaks in

mythical terms about the origin of society and the causes of inequality; in the *Kasibharadvaja Sutra* he distinguishes between labour for spiritual progress and labour to gain material wealth. In the *Sigalovada Sutra* he explains the duties and responsibilities of the different groups which comprise society — parents, children, husbands, wives, employers, employees, teachers and religious persons. He speaks of the benefits to be derived when every member of a community knows what is expected of him or her and sincerely fulfills his or her obligations. In the *Parabhava Sutra* he enumerates the various forms of antisocial behaviour which cause personal and social loss. In the *Uyagghapajja Sutra* he describes the benefits that can be gained by the householder even without “going forth”. In one section of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutra* the Buddha explains the factors which are necessary for good government and national unity. In the *Mangala Sutra* he enumerates good social behaviour which obstructs misery and woe to the individual and thereby the community.

Beside these sutras, there are of course the numerous stories and legends recorded in the Dhammapada and the Jataka which again emphasize the factors which promote social harmony and universal peace. The question now remains to be asked, how practical are these admoni-

tions in modern times? It has often been suggested that the Buddhist formulae for social well being are rather idealistic. They may have worked when governments exerted far more power over their subjects in ancient India than they do today. Today's citizens are too independent and selfish to be ruled with gloved hands. This need not be so. People can still be treated humanely and we can still follow the principle that if you treat people well, they will behave well. Part of the reason why governments are so harsh today is that they operate from a point of view that the world is finite and that everything is real. We must remember that all the Buddha's advice was given against a world view which is totally different from the world view of a vast majority of humans today. If we want to effectively make use of the Buddha's Teaching to promote social harmony and universal peace we must begin to see the world as the Buddha did. We must "see the world as it really is". We must use all our efforts to give an understanding of the three characteristics of *Anicca* (impermanence), *Dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) and *Anatta* (non-self). Admittedly this is a huge task. We have to overcome two millennia of propaganda which spread the false notion that the world and its creatures were specially created for the selfish pleasure of man. We have to counter the Renaissance notion that "man is the measure of all things."

Surely it is a difficult task, but certainly it is not impossible. More and more people in developed countries are waking up to the obvious fact that the world was NOT made for man's pleasure, and that it was not created in one glorious moment but that everything that exists is an illusion and dependent on everything else, that man's ultimate happiness lies in his working not for himself alone but for the safety and happiness of others. This is exactly the Buddha's view and a large number of people, weary of past excesses and fearful of impending disaster are ready to give heed to the Buddha's advice on peaceful co-existence where duties and responsibilities take precedence over rights.

The time is therefore ripe for Buddhists all over the world to explain the message of the Buddha in modern terms, to help people understand the REAL nature of existence. Once there is Right (or Perfect) Understanding then naturally all other aspects of the teaching will not seem so naive and impractical after all. Already many education systems in the west are paying due attention to the development of a culture where man is taught to put the concerns of others before his own needs. Increasingly the innate goodness of beings is fostered through proper education and understanding. Yes, the Buddha's model for a Perfect Society can work. But we must work intelligently

and ceaselessly to make it work. A Buddhist value system is already recognizable in many organizations such as UNESCO, WHO, FAO and so on. It is of no concern to us whether or not every human being is converted to Buddhism. The Buddha has declared that we can respect any system which contains aspects of the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS which obviously these organisations do. Our concern is only for the happiness of humanity, both material and spiritual. Greater awareness of the Buddha's teachings will make his principles universally accepted.

## **UNITY IN BUDDHIST SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT**

To create this awareness Buddhists must adopt a two fold strategy. First we must put our own house in order. Two millennia of dissension within ourselves and aggression from outside have weakened our practice. We must look at ourselves clearly and examine what are our inner weaknesses which reduce our ability to truly practise the Buddha's message to help our fellow beings. Ever since the First Council following the passing away of the Buddha we Buddhists have expended enormous amounts of energy to develop different schools or traditions within Buddhism. Of course this development of our divergent views took place with a

degree of brotherly feeling which is unique in the history of religion. We can proudly assert again and again that we have practiced a path of peace which is unique. We can proudly assert again and again that guided by the Master's Teachings in the *Kalama Sutra* (and re-iterated in the edicts of Asoka) we have never shed a drop of blood or raised a single whip to spread our beliefs or to defend them. This record alone gives us a greater credibility over others. We have the blueprint to create universal peace.

However, let's be realistic. While we can go on forever patting ourselves on our backs for our tolerance, the fact remains that we have gone in different directions and that we have tended to consider "our" school superior to that of others. The Buddha taught only one Path to Perfection. Our imperfections gave rise to the different schools. The time has come for us to transcend our narrow sectarian views and look forward to developing an understanding of what has been described as "Transcendental Buddhism". This pooling of our resources, and leaving behind our culture-bound approach to the teachings, has become absolutely necessary, given the fact that the world has shrunk so much and so many people with such diverse languages, beliefs, cultures and attitudes are taking an interest in the Buddha and his teachings. All of us, who have inherited this rich treasure

from various sources, must come together to help all of mankind gain ultimate happiness.

This does not mean of course that we must abandon the indescribable richness and variety of our different traditions. The world would be so much poorer if we lost the invaluable treasures of Sri Lankan, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Tibetan and South East Asian Buddhist way of life. No, what I mean is, while we continue to foster the mundane manifestations of the teachings within our own cultures, we must vigorously make efforts to let the world hear the Buddha's voice. This will reduce the confusion regarding the Teachings especially among people who hear it for the first time. After all, we must never lose sight of the Buddha's first injunction to spread the Dharma for "the happiness and welfare of sentient beings". This clearly altruistic motive for our missionary efforts must never be forgotten. To realize this ideal we must be humble and be prepared to look at the teachings of the other schools without discrimination. Members of the Sangha particularly must highlight the areas of agreement amongst the various schools so that the younger generation is helped to view Buddhism as a perfect, harmonious whole that evolved from a single teaching.

One way of doing this of course is to encourage more dialogue amongst the different traditions. The "First

World Buddhist Propagation Conference” organized by the Nembutsu Sect of Japan, in Kyoto in 1998 is an excellent example of such a successful meeting of Buddhist minds. Such gatherings of prominent Buddhists from different traditions, meeting amicably, serve to remind the world that Buddhists are really united and do share identical views on such issues as enlightenment and service to mankind.

An obvious area where Buddhists can promote cooperation effectively is in the dissemination of the Dharma. Books, periodicals, magazines and more recently the Internet should all try to encourage inter-sectarian dialogue between schools of Buddhism so that readers begin to see the underlying unity of Buddhism in the apparent diversity of its practices.

## **ROLE OF SANGHA**

Aside from making efforts to come together and fostering the acceptance of the concept of Transcendental Buddhism, one more area we must look at seriously to ensure our inner strength in the Buddhist world, is the Role of the Sangha. It is clear that the Buddha recognized the vital importance of the Sangha in keeping alive the purity of his Teaching. This is evidenced by the fact that he included the Sangha as



the third component of the Holy Triple Gem. The Sangha's important role then and now as the transmitter of the Dharma across time and space can never be underestimated. From the Buddha's time until now the history of Buddhism has been illuminated by such glorious names as Sariputta, Moggallana, Ananda, Mahinda, Sanghamitta, Nagarjuna, Vasubhandhu, Bodhidharma, Asvaghosa, Buddhaghosa, Yuan Chuan, Fa Hsien... the list is endless. Philosophers, preachers, commentators, travellers... they all had one thing in common. They were sons and daughters of the Buddha. Even in our own times there are so many names of members of the Sangha who keep the glorious flame of the Dharma alive, bringing the voice of the Buddha to every corner of the globe.

From the time of the Buddha right up to our own times, the members of the Sangha have been the force which sustained and interpreted the Buddha-word so that it is kept ever alive and fresh in the hearts and minds of men and women. So much for their importance. Let us now look at their function in today's society and the challenges that they face.

Although there have been great monks who went far beyond the monasteries in which they first donned the mendicants' garb, the vast majority of monks never strayed

beyond their monastery walls. They were content to live quiet secluded lives of contemplation avoiding as much as possible the turmoil of the outside world. But as we reach the end of the twentieth century we cannot ignore the fact that the world is indeed very different from what it was for centuries, particularly in Asia. The world is creeping very much into the monastery. The monk is increasingly called upon to serve the society which supports his material needs. It is no longer enough to conduct the occasional devotional practices for the lay person or teach the rudiments of reading and writing and calculation to his children. The world has shrunk. Events which occur in the US or Europe deeply affect the lives of everyone on the planet. The Buddhist monk is part of that global life. Social harmony and Universal Peace are the responsibility of everyone on this planet: the Buddhist monk must carry out his part of that responsibility. The obvious exception to this is of course, the bhikkhu of the Forest tradition, who completely renounces all contact with society and seeks salvation for himself. The monastery monk does not fall into this category.

Not only in Asia, but in Europe, the Americas, Australia, and increasingly, even in Africa, Buddhism is playing a vital role in contributing to social harmony and universal peace. The Buddhist monks or nuns are the vital

links between the Buddha's message of peace and harmony and the people of the world who so desperately need it.

Is the Sangha ready for the challenge?

My immediate and honest answer to that is "No. At least not yet".

To begin with, traditional life in rural Asia has changed very little over the centuries. But at the same time, technological and urban developments and westernization have moved ahead at dizzying speeds. The result: the average Buddhist in a traditional Buddhist country (possibly with the exception of Japan) has become increasingly disoriented and there exists a vast gap within him, between his traditional values and his modern concept of the world with its banking systems, sensational entertainment, materialism, nuclear families and so on. He is torn between what he is "told" he should be as a model Buddhist parent, son, employee or citizen, and the demands made on him in the real world: the world of materialism, greed and selfishness. Too often, the Sangha is ill-equipped to help their lay supporters to bridge the gap between the modern and the traditional. The average modern monk in a Buddhist country is found to be woefully out of touch with the modern world. It is more likely he has not even seen a computer, let alone being proficient to operate one! He has very little contact with the

outside world, so how can he help his fellow beings to cope with it?

What is interesting to note here is that this has not always been so. Who can deny that a Buddhist monk has always been an agent of change for the better throughout history? Who can deny that it was the Buddhist monk who brought Art, Architecture, Technology, Music and Medicine to every country in Asia? It has even been suggested that the ancient Egyptian THERAPEUTAE who practised monasticism and specialized in healing (“therapeutic”) were originally Buddhist monks, therapeutic being a corruption of THERAVADA! Be that as it may, the Sangha civilized the ancient world. But they can hardly be held up as role models for change today! What happened? Of course we can point a finger at colonization, but blaming others for our shortcomings is a luxury we can ill afford. The only thing we can do is to ask ourselves how we can change the situation and once again make the Buddhist monk the leader of men and women in his society.

I believe the key is in Education. Governments as well as social reformers in Buddhist countries must recognize the tremendous potential that members of the Sangha have to help their fellow beings. They are generally highly intelligent as can be seen by their ability to memorize, un-

derstand, interpret and teach the Sublime Dhamma. While continuing to uphold these traditional forms of learning, we must give them additional skills — computer-literacy, farming techniques, counseling, engineering, nursing, teaching for example. They must not only be proficient in the Dharma, they must be practical in serving society's material needs. Over the centuries the Saffron robe has earned its wearer a high degree of respect. Today the Buddhist monk can make use of this psychological tool to help laymen become better people. It must never be forgotten that the Buddha never condemned material prosperity. There are enough Sutras in our scriptures to show that the Buddha even went to the extent of declaring that wealth, honestly earned, gave a person self esteem, human dignity and the power to do good. The Buddhist monk who helps his lay devotee to attain material success WITH RIGHT UNDERSTANDING is indeed following his Master's injunction to work for the benefit and welfare of humanity.

All of this however could possibly lead to a further problem. And that is, we could have monks who are trained without understanding. They could go to the other extreme and cut off all links with the past. (It has happened!) No, monks have an all important role to uphold tradition. Tradition links us to the past. It gives us our roots, it helps us to

remain steady against the onslaught of alien cultures, alien religious practices and alien values. The monk must be so steeped in and proud of his significant traditions that he imbues his devotees with that same love and pride in his own culture. Can it be done? Of course! Just look at Japan.

This is one area where the Sangha can perform a useful function as a factor in promoting harmony by contributing to the success of that society economically.

## THE BHIKKHUNI ORDER

Another area which is worth looking into is the Bhikkhuni Order. I am certainly aware that this is still a thorny issue among some quarters, but I am convinced that there are fewer people around who cannot see the importance of the Bhikkhuni Sangha. It is again a matter of great pride to us, that the Buddha was the first religious teacher to constitute the component of female monasticism. While it cannot be denied that he had some well-founded initial reservations, he did give in to Ananda. What is generally (conveniently?) overlooked is that the organization spread like wildfire, almost literally, as soon as it was instituted, showing the tremendous spiritual need women had for uplifting. It is also a matter of record (to the eternal credit of the Buddha)

that once accepted, women had no difficulty whatsoever in achieving the highest pinnacles of spiritual achievements human beings are capable of — Patacara, Khema, Kisagotami, Dhammadinna, Uppalavanna, Visakha... need one continue?

Today, women have proven that they are capable of becoming Presidents, Prime Ministers and Scientists as well as teachers and nurses, women are equal partners in every field of human endeavour. It is time, therefore that Buddhists recognize the tremendous contributions women can make to the promotion of Social Harmony and Universal Peace. In fact women have made contributions to both these areas and they can do so today. It is of course a credit to the Buddha's Teaching on this matter that the first woman prime minister of the world was a Buddhist woman from Sri Lanka. A belief that as nuns, Buddhist women have an undeniable role to play especially in harnessing the female workforce and playing an efficient and intelligent part in human development. Their contribution can be invaluable as teachers, nurses, counselors, in fact, as anything, to effect social change. The voice of the women can no longer be ignored as a voice to seek and promote International Peace. As mothers they are better qualified than anybody else to speak against the sacrifice of sons and husbands on the altars of war.

The Sangha male and female, if properly trained and conversant in many languages and skilled in many disciplines, can be a powerful force in the development of peace. Thanks to world leaders like HH the Dalai Lama, the Buddhist monk has always been a symbol of peace even among non-Buddhists. What is necessary now is for Buddhist monks and nuns the world over to equip themselves with the skills needed to spread the Buddha's message of peace to all mankind. Given our past history of non-violence, we are better qualified than anyone else to encourage everyone to practice the "love thy neighbour" policy.

## **THE LAY PERSON**

In a wider sense the Sangha comprises not only Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis but Upasakas and Upasikas (male and female lay devotees) as well. Given the admirable spirit of democracy proclaimed and practised by the Buddha, the members of the Sangha as well as lay people have duties and responsibilities towards the development of Social Harmony and Universal Peace. There are today upasakas and upasikas who are performing an invaluable service in spreading the Buddha's message in the world. This is especially true in non-traditional Buddhist countries like Malaysia and Singapore



where lay devotees are leading their friends to practice the noble Teachings by leading fellow Buddhists along the Path. They even build and run Viharas, Orphanages, Old Folks Homes, Clinics to serve the community. In the Western, developed countries also lay Buddhists will play an increasingly important role to promote.

International Peace in the world, although perhaps they may not be needed as much in areas of social development. This does not mean however that the Sangha will be replaced by lay workers in the cause of Buddhism either in the near or distant future. The Sangha will and must continue to play an important role not only as guardians of the Dharma but also as a role models and teachers of the lay people in matters pertaining to Buddhism. This of course further emphasizes the point that the Sangha must be capable of taking on this added responsibility of training lay people for Dhammaduta work.

## **BUDDHISM AS A FORCE AGAINST WAR**

Still on the theme of International Peace, religious leaders have an increasingly important role to play in teaching their followers to walk in the path of peace. Sadly how-

ever, the history of mankind is replete with examples of so called religious people who waged war in the name of religion. Buddhism never has and never can ever condone war even if it is disguised as a “just” or “holy” war. The Buddha condemned violence of any kind for whatever reason. He repeatedly declared that the only victory is the conquest of self and the only miracle is the conversion from evil to good. Buddhists therefore, Sangha and lay people alike, are bound by precedent and precept never to wage war but to persuade all people to walk the path of Peace. It is certainly not an accident therefore that the UNESCO Charter begins with the preamble: “Since it is in the minds of men that wars are created, it is in the minds of men that the fortresses against war must be erected”. This is almost exactly like the very first verse of the Dhammapada which states:

“Mind precedes all wholesome and unwholesome states and is their chief; they are all mind wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, misery follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox”.

If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one’s shadow that never leaves. The teaching of the Buddha, if inculcated in the young mind from the beginning, will no doubt be a powerful civilizing factor that will turn humanity from violence

to compassion. One of our tasks therefore is to make available the teachings of The Buddha in more languages and through various media, including the Internet.

Although the human race has made such tremendous progress in almost every field of endeavour, warfare is one area in which we have behaved no better than animals. In fact one might even say that we have even descended lower than animals because given our higher intelligence we should know better than to succumb to our lower instincts of lust, anger, hatred and delusion. It has been said that man's worst characteristic is his ability to inflict pain — mental and physical — on his fellow beings. The worst manifestation of this irrational behaviour is man's tendency to wage war on the flimsiest of excuses. Ever since man learnt to hold a weapon he has waged war against his fellow beings, and any student of history will readily agree that there never has been such a thing as a "just war". And wars go from bad to worse. At least in the past, wars were only waged between men silly enough to get involved on the battlefields. But today whole hordes of innocent men, women, children and even animals suffer indescribable privations as a result of war. Mothers are separated from children, husbands are separated from wives, brothers are separated from sisters — there is no end.

Some people argue that conflict and war cannot be avoided because they are expressions of human nature. I am realistic enough to realize that it would be foolhardy to sit down and do nothing when aggressors are brutally destroying innocent lives on the basis of unrealistic and unfounded claims, but we must always bear in mind that war is at best a last resort to maintain peace. However, if we believe that war is inevitable, then we will wage war. But if, like the great emperor Asoka, we have the spiritual development and the wisdom to see the folly of war we can certainly avoid it. Buddhists can be very proud of the fact that in our own times the greatest advocate of peace is His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet. For nearly half a century this great Buddhist leader has worked tirelessly to regain his homeland, without once uttering a malicious word against those who occupy his land. He has never condemned them but treated them as fellow-beings. On the other hand, he has not been a coward either. He has fearlessly spoken against the ill-treatment of his subjects and the lies spread against him. But he has not chosen to take arms against his people's aggressors. This is because he lives by the advice of the Buddha given in the Dhammapada,

“Hatred does not end by hatred  
By love alone it is quelled”.

A struggle which is ended by force is no victory. Real victory can only be attained by a true change of heart founded on understanding on the part of the aggressor. His Holiness the Dalai Lama truly believes in inculcating peace through non-violence.

We are all familiar with the story of how during the time of the Buddha a prince called Vidudabha annihilated the entire Sakya clan simply because he harboured a grudge against them for a slight insult. We have to learn from that example and seek rather to follow in the footsteps of the great king whose name was changed from Chanda (cruel) Asoka to Dhamma (righteous) Asoka because he had the wisdom to walk the path shown by the Buddha. Let us also recall the Buddha's declaration that the people of a certain kingdom could not be overcome by force because they followed the seven conditions for the progress of a nation. These examples show that war is avoidable if we truly wish it. There is a principle of Modern Management today which declares that if we expect Zero Defects in our operations we will achieve them. Similarly if we envisage a society without war, we will achieve peace. Unfortunately we have been so indoctrinated to believe that war is the only way to get what we want, that we will continue to wage war. The most horrible irony of it is that people even

wage wars in the name of religions which teach the brotherhood of man.

Therefore the greatest challenge facing us in the next millennium is to grow up, to stop fighting like small boys and heed the word of the Enlightened One

All fear death,  
All fear the rod,  
Knowing this we should never strike  
Nor cause to strike.

## **PROSELYTIZATION**

The world today is divided by many factors. Sad to say one of the most important of the organizations responsible for these many divisions is religion. Today, perhaps like at no other time in history, are the vast resources of certain religious organizations being exploited shamelessly in a mad scramble to win converts at any cost. These include the spreading of malicious lies against other religions like Buddhism. Young, innocent impressionable people are being lured away from their traditional religion through blatant false propaganda

and even through bribes. There are instances of whole villages in certain countries being converted en masse through the promise of material gain. Conversion in itself may not be a bad thing, but when methods employed and the motives for converting are suspect then we must not stand idly by and do nothing about it.

In many countries conversions which are not accompanied by a full understanding of what is being accepted can lead to serious problems, often causing the breakup of marriages and families and other social problems. Therefore it is not conversion but buying people.

There is therefore an urgent need for Buddhists to seek the dialogue with other religious groups to voice our dissatisfaction with their activities. There are genuine members of these faiths who are themselves embarrassed by the antics of their fellow religionists. They must speak against their own kind and Buddhists must make every effort to urge them to do so. In the past, traditional religions were the victims of colonial missionaries. Today, the problem is much more insidious — citizens of the same country are working to undermine the traditional cultures and practices of their forefathers and introducing alien ways to their people, separating parents and children, the old and the young.

## **ECUMENISM**

On a more positive note, however, Buddhists have always been encouraged, in the KALAMA SUTRA for example, to seek dialogue with others to show respect for other genuine seekers after the truth. We need to talk with other religionists formally and informally to know how they think, to show them how we think and to find common ground on which we can cooperate to work for the betterment of the human race. In some cases we must even be humble enough to admit that we can adopt their methods particularly in social and charity work and help the poor and the weak and helpless in every corner of the world.

## **BUDDHIST VALUES**

Having examined some of the challenges facing Buddhists today and how we can help to promote peace and social harmony let us examine how we can identify some Buddhist values which we will need to achieve our goals.

It cannot be said that there are “Buddhist Values” which are unique to Buddhism and not to be found in other religious systems. The Buddha recognized this when he de-



clared that we must accept and recognize the worth of any religion in so far as that religion contains the Four Noble Truths. What is unique about Buddhism is our UNDERSTANDING of the nature of these values and why we practice them. When the Bodhisatta practised the Ten Paramis, he was motivated in an entirely different way than any other follower of a spiritual path either in part or as a whole.

The ten paramis — dana (generosity), sila (precept), nekkhamma (renunciation), panna (wisdom), viriya (energy), khanti (patience) sacca (truthfulness), adhitthana (determination), metta (loving kindness) and upekkha (equanimity) — can form a solid value system on which a Buddhist builds his or her personal spiritual life. This individual effort is then extended to members of the family, the community, the nation and finally the world as a whole. All Buddhists all over the world must consciously make the effort to understand the importance of practising these values, endeavour to practice them earnestly, and then explain them to others. Our education system and our media network must spread these values through every means possible so that our daily thinking is affected by them. We all know the famous Jataka tale in which the Bodhisatta advises his acrobat master. To ensure perfect safety each performer must be fully concerned about his own welfare and security first.

In that way both parties will be safe. Therefore the implementing of a Buddhist value-system involves making each individual understand his responsibility towards the rest, to understand the interrelatedness of all beings, to guard him or herself and thereby guard others.

The year 2000 holds many promises and challenges for all members of the human race. Buddhists are in a particularly strong position to help all human beings realize their full potential and live in peace and harmony not only with themselves but with others as well. It is our duty to help spread the Buddha's message by spreading it through the written and spoken word, but, far more importantly through the example of living noble lives in accordance with the sacred Teachings.

May you all be well and happy.

