

An Analytical Study on the Practical Applicability of the Concept of Metta for Universal Harmony and Peace

Ven. Hidakumbure Piyarathana¹

Introduction

With the world today facing more conflicts, social polarization and inter-cultural tension, humanity is in desperate need of sustainable solutions in finding its path to peace and harmony. Metta, translated in English as loving-kindness or universal good will, is one of the Buddhist ethics with the greatest depth and systematically developed that can be translated into English. Metta is described in the Pali canon in the Metta Sutta, and elaborated on in great detail in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga, as the sincere wish for the happiness and well-being of all sentient beings without exception, transcending any boundaries of race, nationality, religion, and social status.

Although the concept of Metta has been integral to the ethical and contemplative aspect of Buddhist path, its possible use as a tool for fostering universal harmony and international peace has not yet been sufficiently explored in modern academic studies. The present study is an analytical exploration of Metta, with an intent to clarify its philosophical bases and to explore its practical utility in solving some of the current social, ethical and political problems of contemporary world. The research is based on the belief that the wisdom that is contained in Buddhist teachings has universal significance and can speak directly to the situation of today's world.

Research Objectives

The study has three main objectives: To explore the doctrinal bases for Metta sutta as presented in the canonization of the Pali texts and in the classical commentarial literature, to assess the philosophical aspects of Metta in the context of the promotion of harmony between persons, between communities, and between nations; and to draw out practical frameworks in which the cultivation of Metta can be systematically applied to the issues of the present world in the context of the resolution of conflict, promoting social cohesion, and developing a culture of peace.

¹ Department of Language Studies, Faculty of Language and Cultural Studies, Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura. hidhakuburepiyarathanathero@gmail.com

Doctrinal Foundations of Metta

The concept of Metta is at the core of the Buddhist ethical system, and is considered the first of the four Brahmaviharas or Divine Abiding states, to be followed by Karuna (compassion), Mudita (sympathetic joy), and Upekkha (equanimity). The Metta sutta of the Sutta nipata makes the point about the universal scope of this boundless goodwill in a very universal way: ‘May all beings be happy, without exception, whether they are weak or strong, long or large, medium, short, small or fat, seen or unseen, those who live near, those who live far, those who are born, those who are to be born.’

The Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa offers a systematic approach to cultivating Metta, the practice of Metta Bhavana, which is a systematic meditation in which good will is gradually extended from oneself to loved ones, to others who are neutral, to others with whom one has conflict. The importance of this graduated practice is one that recognizes the psychological challenge of universal goodwill and gives a practical and trainable route to its actualization.

Critically, Metta in the Buddhist sense is neither sentimentally nor conditionally-affectionate but is a mental state which is purified from personal attachment and partiality. The antithesis of the Pali term is vyapada (ill-will), and the near enemy of the Pali term is pema (selfish affection). The difference here is philosophical—true Metta is not based on personal gain or expectation of return, but on a recognition of the commonality of suffering, and a desire for everyone’s happiness.

Metta as a Foundation for Universal Harmony

One of the strengths of Metta’s philosophical approach is its ability to offer a solid ethical basis for universal harmony, since it is not just a set of actions but a way of cultivating the mind. The laws, politics and diplomacy of peace and harmony in contemporary times focus on resolving symptoms of conflict and do not examine its cause—the human nature of greed, hatred and delusion—the three fundamental causes of suffering and social disorder as explained in the Buddhist worldview.

In contrast, the systematic development of Metta can directly target the psychological causes of conflict. As a result of the people’s minds being filled with true good will, instead of hatred and ill will, the behaviour of hostility, discrimination, and violence naturally decreases. This psychological shift is repeated in communities and cultures, and it produces the internal climate that makes for sustainable and authentic peace, not the fragile peace that is held by external power or self-interest.

In addition, the approach and values of Metta are non-excluding. Metta transcends ideology of peace, which might emphasize certain religious, national, or cultural groups, and embraces all sentient beings. This radical inclusiveness positions it as a unique philosophical foundation for intercultural dialogue and cooperation in the current multi-cultural and multi-connected world. This dimension of Metta is realized in the theme of the conference: Unity in Diversity – a celebration of all beings within the diversity of their form and condition.

Practical Applications of Metta in the Contemporary World

There are three interwoven areas of consideration for the usefulness of Metta: personal, social and international. Individual-level studies indicate that contemporary psychological research on Metta Bhavana demonstrates that it can decrease stress, boost prosocial behaviors, and promote subjective well-being. When these individual level changes are fostered consistently in educational and community contexts, they can contribute to a significant cultural transformation aimed at empathy and non-violence.

In the community setting, applying these principles in conflict resolution provides a very intriguing alternative to adversarial approaches to conflict. Principles similar to Metta and Karuna are found in restorative justice practices, and these have been successful in lowering recidivism and restoring social trust in post conflict communities. The monastic communities and Dhamma organizations of the Buddha have been living examples of communities organized around the practice of goodwill and mutual care in Sri Lanka and in Asia.

The pertinence of Metta is equal in international relations and diplomatic philosophy at the international level. Buddhist leaders and scholars have more and more reached out to other religious communities and other governments to talk about how they can help each other, as a politics of compassion and universal responsibility. Metta and Karuna are central components of the Dalai Lama's notion of "secular ethics", which is one of the major statements about the translation of Buddhist values into universal, secular ethical principles in non-sectarian political and diplomatic arenas.

Conclusion

The present study reveals that the Buddhist theory of Metta has the depth of thought and adaptability to be a useful basis for universal harmony and peace in the present society. Based on the Pali canonical tradition, and developed through the centuries of contemplative practice, Metta is a truly holistic concept of peace that focuses on the transformation of the human heart rather than on external forces. From its intrinsic merits to its significance for communities dealing

with their own unique challenges and issues to its relevance in the international arena for ethical discussions, the Buddhist contribution proves to be relevant and eternal, applicable to all communities and all times. The study concludes by positing more interaction between Buddhist contemplative traditions and the modern peace education, conflict resolution and global ethics contexts.

Keywords - Metta, Loving-kindness, Universal Harmony, Buddhist Ethics, Peace

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