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BUDDHISM AND LEADERSHIP FOR PEACE*

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August 1985

Dear friends,

The theme of our conference has been "Buddhism and leadership for peace". What does that mean, "leadership"? It means, to be quite explicit, the exercise of power, in other words politics. It means facing the challenges of our times, charting courses of action towards a better future, indicating not only why to proceed in that direction, but also what to do and how to do it, possibly by whom, when and where. Leadership means having a strategy, trying to implement it.

To reduce the analysis of leadership to analysis of power is not correct because it disregards the personalities and the circumstantial factors surrounding the leader. But an analysis of power is an indispensable ingredient in any leadership analysis. There are three types of basic power: normative power or the power of ideas exercised in the realm of culture, exchange power or the power of the carrot exercised in the realm of the economy, and coercive power or the power of the stick exercised in the realm of the military/police. Politics, then, is power over power, the power to decide what kind of power to use.

And at that point buddhists have made a basic choice. The rule of ahimsa, non-violence, serves as a command to reduce the exercise of coercive power down to the bare minimum, if possible to zero - if that is meaningful at all. This means that buddhist leaders in concrete practice, and that is what we are discussing here, will have to rely on the power of ideas and the power of exchange. The power of ideas, that is buddhist spirituality, possibly the best-developed in the world, an incredible richness of psycho-spiritual insight, an epic of the struggle of individuals joined together in a system of mutual support for human betterment. And the power of exchange, that is the study of buddhist efforts by and large to create decent economic structures for social betterment, a setting within which the pursuit of human fulfilment can take place. There are ugly exceptions: there are patterns of feudal exploitation where the northern buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia in some periods in their long history comes to mind; there are other examples.

What this means is that for the exercise of buddhist leadership towards peace a theory of economic relations is indispensable. Not a Catholic Christian, Fritz Schumacher, should have written that famous essay on buddhism and economics; hundreds, thousands, millions of buddhists should have done so. And yet it is difficult in buddhist literature to find thoughts with direct relevance to modern times expressed in such a compelling manner. Buddhism is at its strongest when dealing with nature and human spaces, not with the social space, not with the world space.

And in a sense this is reflected in our conference. In a sense our conference has been a report of how buddhism failed, in Sri Lanka, in Korea, in Thailand, in Japan. It has not been able to stem ethnic violence, not been able to oppose military dictatorships, not been able to overthrow feudal or blatantly exploitative capitalistic relationships, not been able to prevent the Pacific war. To the contrary, buddhists very often seem to have found their place in the power structure although perhaps not so much as buddhists, as citizens carried by a wave of national or class interests. And in a country like the United States, Buddhism is an extremely fragile element in the famous melting pot where - by the way - this melting is now taking place less than ever before because the components want to retain their identity, and the word "pot" has taken on another connotation.

But the impression is not altogether negative. There is the continuation of buddhism as Gandhism, the highly explicit doctrine and practice, based on spirituality and equitable relationships at the micro and macro levels. From India we hear about Gandhism as a factor still alive, opposing the politics of technocracy, of materialistic individualism or consumerism instead of spirituality, an economy geared to growth instead of satisfaction of basic human needs and steered by the trinity of bureaucratic, corporate and intelligentsia forces, and an ever-growing military/police institution aggressing on

external and internal "enemies" of the regime, always in the name of "security". From Indonesia we hear similar signals, although at a more modest level, among other reasons, because Indonesia is not a hindu or buddhist country, but a muslim country except for some particular areas such as Bali.

And then there is another type of success story: buddhism as a transnational organization. From Mongolia we hear about successful efforts to build networks of buddhists for peace, non-governmental networks that can exercise their insolence at the national level, inspired and reinforced by each other.

There were still two more contributions to our conference, one, from Japan, exploring leadership with no mention of buddhism and peace, and another one by a transnational Norwegian, exploring buddhism and peace with no mention of leadership. They both escaped the topic of our conference and the agonising difficulty (1) of bringing the three things together, not only one or two of them.

However, it may very well be that the most important contributions to buddhist leadership for peace have not been explored in the conference papers, and only to some extent in the debates: I am thinking of Soka gakkai under the leadership of its president, Daisaku Ikeda, and the movement in Sri Lanka under the leadership of Ariyaratne. They both reject the very classical buddhist model, withdrawal under the sign of the triple gem into the sangha, at best on the periphery of society, at worst totally marginalised. Perhaps one could say that Ikeda's approach is to penetrate Japanese society at all three points: increased spirituality, better, more meaningful, more human economic relations and in the work for peace through disarmament. Ariyaratne's approach is more ambitious: not to penetrate existing society as much as to build an alternative society on a scale large enough to attract attention and to serve as a realistic model.

If we add to this the third model, transnational organisation as it has been developed in our conference, the total situation

1 The conference also heard reports about buddhism in China and in the Soviet Union, but with no explicit reference either to peace or to leadership only that buddhism was surviving.

is not that bad. And in that connection a rather major name using transnational action as a medium for the exercise of buddhist leadership for peace would be U Thant, the Burmese buddhist secretary-general of the United Nations, although it certainly may be disputed how much he was able to achieve. Just as one might dispute how much Gandhi was able to achieve being assassinated by an orthodox (and not at all fanatic) hindu, Godse, a carrier of spirituality as he saw it, of the highly unequitable economic relations embedded in the caste system, not to mention the cult of violence to achieve political ends, through the military, the police, and ultimately political murder.

But such is life, such is politics. It is an uphill fight. And in this uphill fight, one possible source of a new momentum would be the synergistic workings of buddhism as an interminable source of insight, peace as a goal and leadership as a means.

* Concluding speech, Buddhism and leadership for peace Conference, Tokyo, December 1984.