



# POINTS OF VIEW

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## **How to Promote World Peace: The Buddhist Way<sup>1</sup>**

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This article is adapted from the speech I delivered at a meeting of the World Buddhist Peace Foundation in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1998, when I was the Thai Ambassador there. My good friend, the late Mr. Nemsiri Mutukumara, who was an active member of the World Fellowship of Buddhists and also a senior correspondent and columnist of the local English newspaper “Daily News”, invited me to be the chief guest of that event. The speech was subsequently printed in two issues of the “Daily News” on 3 November 1998 and 1 January 1999. Though many years have passed since this speech was delivered, it is my humble hope that the majority of the points contained therein are still very relevant to the present world situation.

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<sup>1</sup> The article was firstly printed in *The World Fellowship of Buddhists* Vol. 4 No. 2 (May-August 2015), pp. 24-29.

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I would like to share my thoughts on how to promote world peace. My view is largely inspired by the late Sri Lankan Venerable Piyadassi's short article on "Buddhism and World Peace", which appears in his book "The Spectrum of Buddhism". I will try to use the limited knowledge that I have gained through observations made during my years of working as a diplomat, particularly as Deputy Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations in New York for four years during the period 1993-1996, to explain my thoughts. It is my sincere hope that you will find them useful in the furtherance of noble causes.

"Peace", or Santi, is not just the absence of war or hostility, but it is rather Santisuka, which is peace accompanied by tranquility and happiness. Peace in a nation does not only mean that there is no conflict, but it must also mean allowing citizens to develop their own social and economic well-being in order to live a happy life. So peace and happiness must go hand in hand. There cannot be true peace without real happiness.

At the international level, nations are supposed to develop their own social, economic, political and self-reliance for the well-being of their people. At the same time they have to be conscious of what is going on beyond their own borders and to contribute to the maintenance of world peace. Without world peace, it is impossible to achieve the tranquility and harmony needed for nations' development and progress.

All nations must appreciate the work carried out by the United Nations for the maintenance of world peace and security. The main organ of the UN responsible for this important task is the Security Council, which at present comprises 15 members, 5 of them permanent members. Though many squabbles, rivalries, "big-brother" tactics and vetoes arise in carrying out its work, as we learn from the CNN, BBC and other news media, the Security Council on the whole can still be

described as effective. With the exception of a few states, most countries are law-abiding members of the UN and pay full respect to the UN Charter. Most countries do not want the UN Security Council to take action against them. More importantly, most countries pin their hopes on the UN for help and rescue when their security is threatened or violated.

### **How do Buddha's teachings help to promote world peace?**

The Buddha taught us about self-control, self-restraint, and tolerance, which, in the international arena, are also basic and essential ingredients for good relations and peaceful coexistence among nations. At present, when no nation can exist totally alone in this increasingly interdependent world, self-control and self-restraint are essential. In short, nations must behave well in order to have peaceful relations with others.

In my view, an individual behaves well when he or she follows the five precepts of Pancasila. Peace and harmony among people and individuals can be achieved by following the Pancasila. We will feel comfortable and at ease in the presence of individuals who observe and practice the Pancasila. This is because we know that they are not murderers, thieves, immoral persons, liars or drunkards. We have the old sayings “[W]ars begin in the minds of men” and “[I]t is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed”. I sincerely believe that in the minds of men who strictly observe and practice Pancasila, the desire for war or killing will not be allowed to arise. To put it simply, if all members of a family observe and practice the five precepts, there will be peace in that family. If all the citizens of a nation follow Pancasila, there will be peace in that nation. Similarly, if all nations in the world observe and practice Pancasila, whether or not they believe in Buddhism, peace should prevail in the world.

I would like to point out that the word “Pancasila” itself is not a stranger to the vocabulary of international relations, especially in this part of the world. In a different form of words, Pancasila was enshrined at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955, where statesmen and leaders of the developing Asian and African countries met to map out ways and means to achieve peaceful coexistence among nations. That was when the Cold War or the East-West conflict reigned supreme in the world. The main principles of Pancasila included, among others, non-interference in the internal affairs of another state, and respect for one another’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Bandung Meeting can be said to have marked the genesis of today’s Non-Aligned Movement.

What we are considering at this point is the concept of peace as reflected in the specifics of the Buddhist Pancasila: namely, abstinence from killing, theft, misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants. But how can we apply this concept to present day international relations or interactions among states?

**1. Killing:** If leaders of a nation believe in this precept, they will not pursue a policy of aggression against neighbouring countries by sending troops to kill their soldiers. They will not send bombers or warplanes to try to kill the leader of a country whom they consider as an arch-enemy; nor will they send their secret agents to assassinate opposition leaders living in exile in other countries. Examples of this type of misconduct by nations are not difficult to find. They happen all too often.

**2. Theft:** World leaders who observe and practice this sila or precept will not endeavor to take wealth and resources from other countries. For example, states sharing a common river will not accuse each other of “stealing” too much water from the river and leaving an unfair share,

which would create all kinds of problems for their agriculture. Many wars in the past occurred because leaders of one nation simply wanted to acquire wealth or important natural resources. Consequently, they sent their armies to rob other nations in order to acquire what they wanted through force.

**3. Misconduct:** In my understanding, this precept covers much more than sexual misconduct. It also means taking objects that are valued or that have been cherished by others – without their consent. But even in the narrow sense of sexual misconduct, we have known of instances where in past times wars were fought because the ruler of one kingdom merely wanted a princess of another kingdom. In the present world, one government should not allow its citizens to acquire the valuable archaeological artifacts of other countries through mischievous means. Neither should a more powerful nation prevent the citizens of another state from following the practices and beliefs of their own religion. Such phenomena were rampant in the past, particularly during the old colonial days. Had leaders in those times practiced this precept, the history of the world would have been more pleasant.

**4. False speech:** Government leaders who follow this precept will be sincere in their negotiations and enter into cooperative endeavours with other governments. They will honour the agreements or treaties signed by them and other leaders. They will not take advantage of others through lying or deceiving nor will they trick or entrap others. In short, they will enter into agreements in good faith. The agreements should be fair and mutually beneficial to both sides. Unjust agreements will not last long: the disadvantaged party will try any means to abrogate or cancel them.

**5. Intoxicants:** Intoxicants make the mind confused and unable to differentiate between right/rational thoughts and wrong ones, and between right decisions and unreasonable decisions. Leaders who are intoxicated will surely make unsound or irrational decisions detrimental to peace or good neighbourliness. The term “intoxicants” here does not refer literally to alcoholic drinks or drugs only, but should also include ideological and fanatical beliefs or doctrines.

Leaders who are blinded by ideology whether religious, economic or political, may genuinely believe that they are better than others. They may convince themselves that they are morally far superior to others, and that it is their rightful duty to make others follow their beliefs if not voluntarily then by force. The so-called Cold War can be said to have started with ideological intoxicants. Many religious wars, often between different sects within the same religion, are also caused by the false beliefs in one's own superiority to others. Leaders who do not allow themselves to be totally intoxicated in this sense will not devise or follow such harmful policies.

Based on the arguments set out above, Pancasila should be observed by all nations to enable them to coexist peacefully and happily. However, we are not naive enough to believe that this ideal situation can be achieved easily. Man, nation and even the world are not perfect; deranged leaders can be found time and again.

I would like to end by briefly echoing the late Venerable Piyadassi's words of wisdom, (and I quote) “Peace has to be acquired by a sincere and devoted struggle. It cannot be won by merely speaking of it. We should think peace, speak peace and act peace” (unquote). I cannot agree more with him. My sincere commendations go to all of you.