

WAR AND PEACE : A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN BUDDHIST AND ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who made this program possible. The most prominent one is H.S. President of Islamic Republic of Iran Mr. Muhammad Gotami who proposed the idea before the General Assembly of UN and also UNESCO to declare the year of 2001 as “the year of exchange of civilization”. In this kingdom of Siam, thanks went to the Embassy of Iran in Bangkok especially H.E. Ambassador and Director of Iranian Center Bangkok and my Boss.

Most Ven. Phra Thepsophon, Rector of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University for their untiring works and various helpful activities.

Now we try to sow the seed of peace at least in our mind, then hopefully it will grow internationally and globally in order to create our country, an unracial society and peaceful world.

General Consideration

Here I would like to present the general consideration about the basic matters in order to pave the way to understand better the topic namely:

1. Asia as the Puja Room

If we compare the globe to a house which consists of five rooms that are equivalent to five continents namely Asia, Europe, America, Africa and Australia, in this case, the quest reception room is compared to Europe, the working room to America and the Puja room in the house to Asia, because all main world religions originated in Asia and spread to another continents. Buddhism, for example originated in India and became one of the world religion, then it spreads throughout Asia and the other parts of the world. Islam in likewise.

2. Why Good People do not Come to Meet

To my understanding, men being associated with religions are categorized in three kinds namely:

1) Paganism of those who have no faith in any religions, this kind of people likes a captain navigating a ship or aircraft without a map and a compass, having to encounter many dangerous things. This kind of men is the dangerous people.

2) Fanaticism or those who have a blind faith in any religions with self centric interest, political bias and sectarianism. Finally, they would use violence and make war against each others. This kind of men is the most dangerous.

3) Religious men or those who have a proper faith in any religions. According to my understanding, this kind of men is good. Why and how they do not come to meet and exchange knowledge and experiences? Do you see business and politicians men around the world quite often come to discuss and exchange ideas among them. Therefore, we should

encourage more meetings and conferences among religious people in order to create more happiness and peace unto this world.

3. Tolerance

Why do not the religious men come to meet? What is the obstacle? I think that among the barriers the intolerance is the most powerful. Because we have it in our mind then we could not come to meet and exchange our ideas. The least we can do, is just in the surface or ceremonial basis. Nothing is deep and really creative, or sometimes we say that they are belonging to "NATO group" (that means No Action, Talk only). According to Most Ven. P.A. Payutto (or Phra Dhammapitaka), an eminent Buddhist monk in Siam, the opposite world to "Intolerance" is "Tolerance". The term is just recently know to the West of which the real meaning is "the bearable state of mind in seeing or hearing to those who profess the different religions"¹

From the intolerance, it leads to the religious persecution, which began in the Early Christianity namely when Christianity was introduced into Roman Empire (64-313 A.D.), they have experienced severe persecution such as they were put into the Colosseum (Colisium) Stadium to fight with lion or tiger and unfortunately became the victims of those wild animals.

Fortunately, when the Christian people seized the whole Roman Empire and forcibly made it Roman Catholic, then they easily forgot the betterly past experience and started cruelly the persecution of thousands of non-believers or non-Christians.

Here we may say that was the West there was no concept of Ahinsa or non-violence, in place of non-violence there is tolerance, therefore sometimes in the past their predecessors based on a blind faith in religion had engaged in various wars such as the Crusades the wars between Catholics and Muslim trying to occupy Jerusalem which lasted for 275 years (1096-1270 A.D.) Intolerance might be based on two root-causes namely:

- 1) Ignorance or lack of knowledge of real nature of essence found in their religion

- 2) The followers of any religions due to strong faith in their religions using no "self-criticisms" looking over negative points of their own religions and the positive points of others.

How we can estimate the real value of all religions using both subjective and objective aspects that lead to a well understanding among people belonging to different faiths.

At present, the politic, economic, army and even scientific technology have failed totally to sustain the peace of the world as we see the conflict and war are still prevailing even at every corner of the world. For instance, the recent war between the allied army lie by United States of America and Iraq.

Therefore, to my understanding, only the power of religion is expected to be brought to save this world at this time. It is hopeful and powerful indeed at the present time, but we have to clear out the obstacle or barriers which divide and rule us, that is our priority task.

In Buddhism there are plenty of beautiful examples of tolerance. May I present some to you namely:

1) A story of Upali Householder, the former devotee of Jaina religion having said he had put some philosophical questions against the Buddha and then he had cleared out all, Mr. Upali declared to convert into the Buddha-Dhamma, and then Lord Buddha advised him to think of it and not to over hurry up, because he was a strong supporter of Jainism. When Upali insisted to uphold Buddhism as the way of life. The Lord Buddha advised him to continue feeding the Jaina monks in his house.²

2) Another example of tolerance is King Ashok, the Great, according to him "One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn religions of the others, but one should honour other's religions for this or that reason. So doing one helps one's own religion to grow and render service to religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions..."³

This kind of conduct has become the pattern of all kings in our kingdom, that means our beloved king even being a devoted Buddhist is supporting all religions by donating land and money to build temples, churches or mosques and at the same time Their Majesties the King and Queen used to consent to preside over all kinds of other religions, ceremonies.

According to the present Constitution (1997 A.D.) in Article No.9 "The King of Siam is a Buddhist and the supporter of all religions". And in Article No.37 as "Ones have full freedom in belief in religion, sect of religion of religious doctrine; and have freedom to follow religious

rules or ritual as they believe... ". And in Article No.37 as "State must support and protect Buddhism and others, encourage well understanding and harmony among various religions' followers...".

Therefore, Most Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a well known scholar in the south of Siam had proposed the three principles on inter-religious dialogues as follows:

1) To encourage all followers of any religions to attain the essence of their own religions.

2) To encourage right and well understanding among religions.

3) To collect and unite the power of religion's followers to fight with consumerism materialism.

4) As a Buddhist country, Thailand which has about 300,000 Buddhist monks who live in 30,000 monasteries across the country and in these monasteries we use to introduce Buddhist meditation courses to all foreigners irrespectively of race and creed. Buddhist monks friendly welcome you all to join the course or have a look around their residences. Another point, even Buddhist missionary doesn't aim to convert anyone into Buddhism, but aim to share the inner-peaceful experience with others.

For the reasons mentioned above, we are very proud of being the most tolerant country, since the long history, the kingdom of Siam never witnessed any persecution or religious war in the name of Buddhism or the Buddha.

Finally, let me quote the Royal Speech of H.M. our beloved King as stated; "Any religion bearing whatever name must support each other for social security"; therefore, various religions in Thailand live

together harmoniously for a long time in which Thai people live happily and peacefully⁴

Ditthi, Tanhā & Māna: Cause of War

When the U.S. Air Force invaded Afghanistan by the end of the year 2001, the President George W. Bush justified the war by declaring against terrorism i.e. Mr.Osama Bin Laden of AI - Qaida movement and claiming to establish the everlasting peace in the world because this group was accused of the involvement in the 11th September 2001 incident.

And when the allied countries i.e. U.S.A. and England raided Iraq on March 22 this year, even the U.N. Security Council and Millions of people protested it. President Bush Junior justified the war by claiming to free Iraq under the Saddam's regime and to destroy the chemical and nuclear weapons.

The reason to engage war as mentioned above is not sound enough, since it is judged on the one sided reference or just facial of causes or external phenomena. In other words, some say that in two situations namely; love and war there is no reason at all. Anyway, I personally look a little into the three internal causes of war namely:

1. **Ditthi** or wrong view, in the world is that divided into the free democratic countries on one side and on the other social countries which leads to discrimination, condemnation, intolerance, persecution and wars. In this case the superiority and inferiority of men are based on good and bad deed as stated by the Buddha

Not by birth one is bad,
Not by birth one is good.
One is bad by action,
One is good by action.⁵

Similarity in Islam the equality of all men is mentioned as follows

“O men God of yours is only one and your ancestors come from only one man (Adam). Arabs are not superior than non-Arabs and non-Arabs are not better than Arabs, and the white are not better than the black and the black are not better than the white.”⁶

2. *Tanhā* : Here we can see some similarity between two great religions, now let us consider another cause of war and conflict namely “*Tanhā*” or “desire” *Tanhā* is the root cause of consumerist-materialism, being over powered by desire, a man is very much greedy and accumulate wealth beyond his needs. Then he takes advantages and exploits the others and the environments, for instance, a man commits evil actions such as killing, stealing, committing sexual misconducts, telling untruth, drinking intoxicants and so on.

In the circle of religion also, if we are not aware of the danger of *Tanhā* through which one is never satisfied and fulfill one's wish since he unlimitedly desires more and more, some religious organizations or people are hypocritical as Mr. Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya says that “When Christian Missionary came to our country, they possess of Bible and we possess of lands and they taught us how to close eye and pray according to Bible and then we wake up and open eyes, they possess lands but we possess Bible instead”. Here self interest and money leads life of religious men to a luxurious and less spiritual life by which religion loses their power and control of people.

3. *Māna*: Another important item, which causes trouble us internally and externally. That is *Māna*, literally means pride or arrogance, through which one discriminate people and look down and praise each other. Actually overpowered by pride people feel themselves superior and make others inferior.

In the past, the discrimination of people i.e. Caste system comes from *Māna*. At present, we think or believe that the white (American) are superior than the yellow (Asian men) or the black (Negros or Afrikans) that we can not create harmonious and peaceful living with one others, and finally it leads to conflict and war among people.

War and Religion

As a student of religion I do believe that war and religion are directly opposite at each other. We can not keep both together in the same place like day and night. Brightness and darkness, I think that immediately the ill-thought such as hatred, angry, envy and so on arise in your mind, then they will be holy or sacred any more then you harm and violate others and then you commit evil actions which bring about bitter results and leads to hell.

Why do we do not support conflict and war? I think there are at least 3-4 reasons as follows

1) According to the general concept of Buddhism, we all are relatives or brothers and sisters and friends of each other, actually we are the subject of suffering and changing, that is the severe problem of mankind, so why do we increase suffering to the other more.

2) Buddhism is that of universal loving kindness and never agree

with any kind of violence as stated

“Conquer anger by love,
Conquer evil by good.
Conquer the miser by liberality,
Conquer the lie by truth”.⁷

Therefore, in Buddhism there is no just war or holy war or religious war at all. Because all kinds of conflict or war are against moral cordial principle such as the five precepts and loving kindness. And violence must receive violence and leads to endless violence in this world as says

“At any time in this world.
Hatred never ceases by hatred,
But through non-hatred it ceases,
This is an eternal law”.⁸

Now come to Islam a little as the religion of peace. There are many things to ponder upon, for instance, an addressing words as “Assala-mualaikum” means that “may peace be upon you” let us consider holy message in Al-Quran as follows

“O ye children of Adam!
Whenever they come to you
Messengers from amongst you.
Rehearsing my Signs onto you
Those who are righteous
And mend (their lives)
On them shall be no fear
Nor shall they grieve”.⁹

Besides in Islam even it is religion of householder, but we still find teaching on purification of mind such as Nabe Muhammad included that;

“Do good to all if they are Muslim. They are your brothers and sisters. And if they are not, they were created like you all and try to establish peace into this world”¹⁰ and that “Beware of delusion originated from fanaticism and end with sorrow. Be master over hatred and violence in possession of delusion as long as delusion leave you away and wisdom have come back”¹¹ As I said Jihad or the Holy war according to Islam it means to deal with greed, hatred and delusion, that is the inner or inside war not outside war. This kind of war is to fight with oneself not with others. This is really a holy and noble war in the sense of both great religions namely Buddhism and Islam as stated by the Buddha

“Though one should conquer in battle

A thousand times a thousand men.

Yet should one conquer just oneself

One is indeed the greatest victor”.¹²

Peace is Aim of All Religions

The times have come to the age of religion because politics, economics, education, and scientific technology have definitely failed to serve human civilization and world peace. Now all religious leaders to recheck the roles and duties of their religions again. To my comprehension, all religions have only one and the same thing that is peace of the world. This is the goal.

The world peace is so big and beyond our capacity. The Chinese proverb said that if you travel 10,000 miles, then you have to walk first

step, then it gradually covers the course, Buddhists we can start to create peace inside as stated namely

“In other word, I Tathagata have laid down the world, origin of the world.

The cessation of the world and the method leads to cessation of suffering in this physical body with consciousness and perception”¹³

The threefold training in Buddhism namely morality (*silā*), meditation (*samāthi*), and wisdom (*pañña*) through which ones attain the real happiness and peace of mind. We can say that this is the ancient way of world peace according to Buddha-Dhamma. For Islam all kinds of practices namely the faith in God, in Prophet, charity (*sagat*) praying (*namash*) and pilgrimage to mecca are the ways to internal happiness external peace.

Summary Remarks

It is time for the religious leaders of the true followers of all religions to come out from the gates and entrances of monasteries or mosque to join hands and unite. In order to build the concrete co-operations among us and then try to back to the original teachings and apply for the benefits of present day world.

Let the religious followers come to meet more often like the businessmen and politicians. Do not forget now that the world has lost the faith in the political and economic system including science and technology, and the only power of religion remains hopeful aim to mankind. In fact, the essence and the aim of all religions are great happiness of many and peace of the world. If any religion doesn't try in this way that religion is no more righteous and religious leaders are useless.

“Tolerance” must be created in the circle of inter-religious dialogue and we have to accept the principle of “Unity of Diversity”, because there is no other alternative, however, the world still profess the different religions, Instead of fight with people belongs to other religions we should look inside and fight with greed, hatred and delusion in oneself, that is real Jihad or Holy war.

Finally, I repeat again that the power of religions should be collected and united in order to save the civilization of mankind, human society, environment and world urgently.

Lokopatthambhika metta:

“The world is sustained by loving-kindness”.

Note

1. Payutto, P.A. Look at peace through the back ground of Globalization Culture.(In Thai),Buddha-Dhamma Foundation, Bangkok, B.E.2542/ 1999 p.45
2. See Upalivada Sutta Ma.Ma.13/67-68(Pali in Siamese Scrip)
3. PhraSripariyattimole.(Somchai Kusalacitto), The Buddha in the Eyes of Eminent Scholars.(Thai-English) Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Bangkok, B.E.2544-2501,p 112-113
4. Royal Speech of H.M.King of Thailand presented to the representatives of all religions at chilada palace on Dec.4,B.E.2515/1972
5. See Ma, Ma 13/707

6. Record in Musnad amad # 22978 quoted in Zakee Ruangsamuddra (Tran.) To understand Islam and Contemporary Questions and Answers by I.A.Ibrahim, Islambookcenter, Bangkok B.E.2546/2003 p.95
7. Dhanmapada verse no.223
8. Dhammapada verse no.5
9. Al Quran 7.35.
10. Checjaya nul-abidin pimfy (Transl.) Contemporary study of ideology and religious principle (in Thai) pp.74- Islambook center, Bangkok, pp 74-75
11. Rainan Arunrangrsri, (Transl.) Sundarovada of Imam Ali, p.83
12. Dhammapada verse no.103
13. ang

