

# One Vehicle for Peace

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During the life time of the Buddha his teaching was known variously as Buddhavacana[1] ('Word of the Buddha'), Buddha-sasana[2]\_('Message of the Buddha' or 'Teaching of the Buddha'), Satthu-sasana ('Master's Message' or 'Master's Teaching'), Sasana[3]\_('Message' or 'Teaching') or Dhamma[4]\_('Teaching' or 'Truth'). At that time there was nothing called Theravada or Mahayana. According to the ancient chronicles of Sri Lanka - *Dipavamsa (Chronicle of the Island, 4th century A.C.)*, *Mahavamsa (Great Chronicle, 5th century A.C.)* and the *Samantapasadika (Comentary on the Vinaya)* - the terms 'Theravada,' 'Teriya' or 'Therika' were for the first time introduced into the history of Buddhism after the first Council (Synod) held at Rajagaha (Rajagriha) three months after the Buddha's Parinirvana. At this Council, attended by five hundred Arahants who were immediate disciples of the Buddha and presided over by Mahakassapa Thera, all the teachings of the Buddha, both the Dhamma and the Vinaya, were recited during seven months and unanimously accepted as the genuine teaching of the Master. What was approved and agree upon at this Council was designated as 'Theravada' ('Orthodoxy of the Elders') or 'Theriyā' or 'Therika' ('Tradition of the Elders').[5]

Mahayana came into being several centuries later, about beginning of the Christian Era, and most of the early Mahayana Scripture were composed during the following few centuries. But Mahayana was elaborated and formulated as a system of Buddhist philosophy by two great Masters who might be considered as the founders of the two principal Mahayana schools: Nagarjuna (second century A.C.) established the Madhyamika system with his famous *Mulamadhymaka-karika* in which sunyata (voidness) philosophy is discussed and his enormous commentary on the *Prajnaparamita* is found. Asanga (fourth century A.C.) established the Yogacara-vijnanavada system with this monumental work *Yogacarabhūmisastra*, consisting of 17 books.

Here a clarification of the terms Theravada (Orthodoxy of the Elders), Hinayana (Small Vehicle) and Mahayana (Great Vehicle) may be desirable and helpful. Hinayana and Mahayana are not known in the Theravada Pali literature. They are not found in the Pali Canon (*Tipitaka*) nor in the Commentaries on the *Tipitaka*, not even in the Pali Chronicles of Sri Lanka, the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*.

It is universally accepted by scholars that the terms Hinayana and Mahayana are later inventions by Mahayanists. Theravada cannot be included in either of these divisions. Historically speaking Theravada already existed long before these two terms came into

being. This same Theravada, considered to be the original teaching of the Buddha, was introduced to Sri Lanka and firmly established there in the third century B.C. during the time of Emperor Asoka of India. At that time there was nothing called Mahayana. This appeared several centuries later. Without Mahayana there could be no Hinayana. The Buddhism that went to Sri Lanka, with its *Tipitaka* and Commentaries approved and accepted by the Third Council in the third century B.C., remained there intact as Theravada, and did not enter the scene of the Hinayana-Mahayana dispute that developed later in India. It seems therefore illegitimate to include Theravada in either of these two categories. However, after the inauguration of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Sri Lanka in 1950, well-informed people, both in the East and in the West, use the term Theravada, and not the term Hinayana, with reference to the form of Buddhism prevalent in Southeast Asian countries like Burma, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. There are still some outmoded people who use the term Hinayana. In fact, no Hinayana sect as a distinct community is known to be existing today anywhere in the world.

At the First International Congress of the World Buddhist Sangha Council held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in January 1967, at the request of the founder Secretary-General, the late Venerable Pandita Pimbure Sorata Thera, I presented a concise formula for the unification of Theravada and Mahayana, which was unanimously accepted. (This formula is now printed as Appendix IV in my *Heritage of the Bhikkhu*, Grove Press, New York, 1974).

This formula may be restated as follows:

1. Whatever our sects, denominations or systems, as Buddhists we all accept the Buddha as our Master who gave us the Teaching.
2. We all take refuge in the Triple Jewel: the Buddha, our Teacher; the Dhamma, his teaching; and the Sangha, the Community of holy ones. In other words, we take refuge in the Teacher, the Teaching and the Taught.
3. Whether Theravada or Mahayana, we do not believe that this world is created and ruled by a god at his will.
4. Following the example of the Buddha, our Teacher, who is embodiment of Great Compassion (*maha-karuna*) and Great Wisdom (*maha-prajna*), we consider that the purpose of life is to develop compassion for all living beings without discrimination and to work for their good, happiness and peace; and to develop wisdom leading to the realization of Ultimate Truth.
5. We accept the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha, namely, *Dukkha*, the fact that our existence in this world is in predicament, is impermanent, imperfect, unsatisfactory, full of conflict; *Samudaya*, the fact that this state of affairs is due to our egoistic selfishness based on the false idea of self; *Nirodha*, the fact that there is definitely the possibility of deliverance, liberation, freedom from this predicament by the total eradication of the egoistic selfishness; and *Magga*, the fact that this liberation can be achieved through the Middle Path which is eight-fold, leading to the perfection of ethical conduct (*sila*), mental discipline (*samadhi*) and wisdom (*panna*).

6. We accept the universal law of cause and effect taught in the Paticcasamuppada (Skt. prativityasamutpada; Conditioned Genesis or Dependent Origination), and accordingly we accept that everything is relative, interdependent and interrelated and nothing is absolute, permanent and everlasting in this universe.
7. We understand, according to the teaching of the Buddha, that all conditioned things (samkhara) are impermanent (anicca) and imperfect and unsatisfactory (dukkha), and all conditioned and unconditioned things (dhamma) are without self (anatta).
8. We accept the Thirty-seven Qualities conducive to Enlightenment (bodhipakkhiyadhamma) as different aspects of the Path taught by the Buddha leading to Enlightenment, namely,

- Four Forms of Presence of Mindfulness (Pali: satipatthana; Skt. smrtiyupasthana);
- Four Right Efforts (Pali. sammappadhana; Skt. samyakpradhana);
- Four Bases of Supernatural Powers (Pali. iddhipada; Skt. rddhipada);
- Five Faculties (indriya: Pali. saddha, viriya, sati, samadhi, panna; Skt. sraddha, virya, smrti, samadhi, prajna);
- Five Powers (bala, same five qualities as above);
- Seven Factors of Enlightenment (Pali. bojjhanga; Skt. bobhyanga);
- Eight-fold Noble Path (Pali. ariyamagga; Skt. aryamarga).

9. There are three ways of attaining Bodhi or Enlightenment according to the ability and capacity of each individual: namely, as a Sravaka (disciple), as a Pratyekabuddha (Individual Buddha) and as a Samyaksambuddha (Perfectly and Fully Enlightened Buddha). We accept if as the highest, noblest and most heroic to follow the career of a Boddhisattva and to become a Samyaksambuddha in order to save others. But these three states are on the same Path, not on different paths. In fact, the *Sandhinirmocana-sutra*, a well-known important Mahayana sutra, clearly and emphatically says that those who follow the line of Sravaka-yana (Vehicle of Disciples) or the line of Pratyekabuddha-yana (Vehicle of Individual Buddhas) or the line of Tathagatas (Mahayana) attain the supreme Nirvana by the same Path, and that for all of them there is only one Path of Purification (visuddhi-marga) and only one Purification (visuddhi) and no second one, and that they are not different paths and different purifications, and that Sravakayana and Mahayana constitute One Vehicle One Yana (eka-yana) and not distinct and different vehicles or yanas.[6]

10. We admit that in different countries there are differences with regard to the ways of life of Buddhist monks, popular Buddhist beliefs and practices, rites and rituals, ceremonies, customs and habits. These external forms and expressions should not be confused with the essential teachings of the Buddha.

But to the masses of less instructed and less advanced people, superficial beliefs, external forms, practices and observances are part of their religion. Those beliefs and practices should be appreciated sympathetically according to their relative value. Attachment to external observances and rituals (silabbata-paramasa) is a weakness, a bondage, a fetter (samyojana) from which one frees oneself as one progresses along the Path leading to the

realization of Ultimate Truth, Nirvana. Not only attachment to observances, rites and rituals, but also attachment to ideas, concepts, beliefs, theories (dhamma-tanha) obstructs one's mind from seeing things as they are (yathabhuta). This is a hindrance not only to the realization of Truth, but also to achieving harmony and peace among peoples.

Buddhism is not an ethnocentric religion. It transcends all ethnic, tribal or national boundaries and limits. It does not carry with it any ethnic customs, habits or practices from one country or one nation to another. Buddhism, while exercising a profound influence over those countries throughout Asia where it spread and was established, naturally and graciously adapted itself to the cultures of those countries and nations. Hence the varieties of Buddhist culture - varieties of art and architecture, varieties of the statue of the Buddha, varieties of the garb of the members of the Sangha, varieties observances and ceremonies - from Tibet in the north to Sri Lanka in the south, from India in the west to Japan in the east. Yet the unity of the essential Dharma runs through all these external varieties linking them together like a silk thread running through the beads of different colors of a necklace. The Dharma, Truth, is one and the same. External forms are many and different.

The members of the Buddhist Sangha should not be influenced by aggressive, fanatical tendencies prevailing in some parts of the world today. The Sangha should preserve with dignity and courage the long established glorious tradition of Buddhist understanding and tolerance. In the long history of 2,500 years of Buddhism there has never been any war or persecution to convert people. Buddhist monks propagated the teaching of the Buddha throughout Asia, and now they do it in other parts of the world as well, always peacefully, through the force of their teaching, tolerance, inoffensive benevolent gentle attitude. The members of the Sangha can set an example to the world in this respect.

Today humanity is threatened with the possibility of a nuclear war, that means unimaginable and unprecedented destruction and suffering throughout the world. Two super-powers are threatening each other and are brandishing the latest weapons of annihilation. Those who wield power in the world seem to be devoid of mental health. Only the voice of the well-organized masses of people across the world may bring them back to sanity. There are more than one million members of the Buddhist Sangha in the world today, both Theravada and Mahayana. They have a tremendous influence over the masses. It is the bounden duty of the Buddhist Sangha to spread the message of compassion and wisdom among all peoples in order to achieve world peace. The greatest religious service is to promote understanding, harmony, peace and happiness among people, and not to fix labels of religion on each other's backs.

## Notes:

1. *Vinaya*(PTS) II (*Cullavagga*), p.139.
2. *Dhammapada*, verses 381, 382; *Anguttara-nikaya*(PTS) I, p.294.
3. *Vinaya*(PTS) I, p.12; *Digha-nikaya*(PTS) I, p.110; II, p.206; *Suttanipata*, verse 482.
4. *Majjhima-nikaya*(PTS) I, pp.133, 141, etc.
5. *Therehi katasamgaho theravado'ti vuccati*. "The Collection (of Scriptures) done by the Elders is called the Orthodoxy of the Elders." *Dipavamsa*, Ch.IV, verse 11. *Thereh'eva katatta ca thereya'yam parampara*. "As this was done by the Elders, this is (called) Elders' tradition." *Mahavamsa*, Ch.III, verse 40. *Thereh'eva katatta ca therika'ti pavuccati*. "As this was done by the Elders, this is called (regarded as) belonging to the Elders." *Samantapasadika* (PTS) I, p.30. The *Samantapasadika* is a translation into Pali by Buddhaghosa in the 5th century A.C. from the original Sinhala Commentaries which go back at least to the 3rd century B.C.
6. *Sandhinirmocana-sutra*, edite et traduit par Etienne Lamotte, Louvain et Paris (1935), pp.73, 147, 198, 255.

Source: The Research Institute for Pali Literature, <http://www.ripl.or.kr>