



# HOW BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES CAN HELP THE PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF IHL VALUES DURING WAR WITH RESPECT TO NON-COMBATANTS

Ven Kosgama Muditha, Ven Koralegama Gnanawasa & Ven Kirindiwela Pagnnawansa

**To cite this article:** Ven Kosgama Muditha, Ven Koralegama Gnanawasa & Ven Kirindiwela Pagnnawansa (2021) HOW BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES CAN HELP THE PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF IHL VALUES DURING WAR WITH RESPECT TO NON-COMBATANTS, Contemporary Buddhism, 22:1-2, 355-366, DOI: [10.1080/14639947.2022.2133911](https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2022.2133911)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2022.2133911>



Published online: 04 Dec 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 359



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



ICRC



## HOW BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES CAN HELP THE PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF IHL VALUES DURING WAR WITH RESPECT TO NON-COMBATANTS

Ven Kosgama Muditha, Ven Koralegama Gnanawasa  
and Ven Kirindiwela Pagnanawansa

Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

### ABSTRACT

The arising of war is almost inevitable within human societies, and IHL seeks to regulate its conduct as far as possible. According to Buddhism, mental defilements are the roots of conflict, so from the viewpoint of Dhamma, awareness of them is imperative if suffering is to be effectively reduced. The aim of this study is to examine the utility of Buddhist teachings in ensuring the humane treatment, without adverse distinctions, of those caught up in war, by the development of self-control, self-discipline and responsibility. The *Vepacitti Sutta* describes the ideal mental qualities that are required to do this, and we point out the practical implications of those qualities, as explained in the *Mahācattārisaka Sutta*. Our argument is that cultivating the mind according to the practical path that we introduce is conducive to self-control, discipline and responsibility during a war with respect to international humanitarian law (IHL), and particularly with respect to non-combatants.

**KEYWORDS** Clear vision; perseverance; mindfulness; self-control; patience; path factors; equal treatment; defilements; intention; Sakka; *Vepacitti Sutta*; *Kalahavivāda Sutta*; *Vāsetṭha Sutta*; *Mahācattārisaka Sutta*; *Madhura Sutta*; *Mahā-satipatṭhāna Sutta*

The goal of Buddhist teaching is to attain enlightenment by uprooting all defilements. Buddhism never advocates war. The purpose of Buddhism is non-violence and uprooting the causes of war. There is no space for silence in Buddhism when there is going to be a war. On the other hand, although people may think that they live free from hostility, free from violence, free from rivalry, free from ill will, free from those who are hostile, in practice this is not possible for any except enlightened persons. Most people cannot escape living with problems connected with violence and ill will: they wish to, but fail 'to live without hate, harming, hostility or malignity, and without enmity' (*averā adaṇḍā asapattā abyāpajjā viharemu averino*) (D.II.276). The arising of war is almost inevitable, therefore, within human societies. According to

**CONTACT** Ven Kosgama Muditha ✉ [kosgamamuditha20@gmail.com](mailto:kosgamamuditha20@gmail.com) 📍 Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya

© 2022 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Buddhism, defilements are the cause of conflicts, so awareness of Dhamma and of the nature of defilements is essential during a war to reduce pain.

As stated in Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions:

Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed 'hors de combat' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.<sup>1</sup>

According to Buddhism, making such adverse distinctions arises as a result of defilements. For instance, while the defilement hatred (*dosa*) is a causal factor in war, it also, once war has come about, leads to the absence of humane treatment of non-combatants because it overrides normal ethics, in turn creating violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). Awareness of the defilements can provide an antidote to problematic thinking and behaviour. If someone caught up in a war pays attention to how he or she should deal with defilements, then it is easier to practise IHL on the battlefield and in its aftermath. Paying attention to underlying defilements requires concentration on self-control, discipline and responsibility, with volition being the vital factor because it provides the entire psychological impulse behind a deed. 'Volition (*cetanā*), monks, I call karma [action]; having willed, one acts through body, speech or mind' (A.III.415). Buddhism always aims for volitional purity, namely for ensuring that volitions are not defiled by greed, hatred or ignorance. How one applies the mind to anything has a key effect on the following mental states, then actions and their results:

Mind (*mano*) is the forerunner of all mental states. Mind is their chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a sullied mind, because of that, suffering will follow one, even as the wheel follows the foot of the draught-ox. (Dhp.1)

Hence it is clear not only that there is a similarity between the goals of Buddhism and IHL to reduce suffering, but that Buddhism is alert to the psychological defilements that might lead one to act in contravention of such law. Being thus attuned, it offers ways of developing awareness to counter contraventions. Applying Buddhist teaching in a pragmatic manner, therefore, is one of the most effective methods of minimising breaches of IHL.

This study aims to point out the utility of Buddhist teaching in ensuring the humane treatment, without adverse distinction, of those caught up in war through the development of self-control, self-discipline and responsibility, using a threefold formula of clear vision, perseverance and mindfulness which is drawn from the Noble Eightfold Path. To develop this study, we shall draw on a number of authoritative texts from the Pāli Canon. Our primary canonical sources are the *Kalahavivāda Sutta* and the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* of the *Sutta-nipāta*; the *Vepacitti Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*; the *Mahā-cattārisaka*

*Sutta* and the *Madhura Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*; the *Mahā-satipatṭhāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*; and the *Sotānugata Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. We extract from these texts Buddhist teachings related to the kind of context in which IHL applies, and build on these to introduce a practical Buddhist method to increase respect for IHL.

As depicted in the *Kalahavivāda Sutta*, the impulse of desire for things that are considered desirable (*piya*) is the foundation of all sorts of disputes, and defilements such as greed and anger which are the roots of war (Sn.863). When these defilements appear in the mind, they cause or worsen quarrels and disputes. During such situations, concentration is imperative. While the *Kalahavivāda Sutta* teaches how awareness of one's defilements can lead one to disengage from disputes, the issue here is how one can be conscious of these defilements within a war situation, including on a battlefield.

### Sakka's calm patience in the *Vepacitti Sutta*

We can turn to the *Vepacitti Sutta*, which is one of the oldest sources in Buddhism, to explain the appropriate treatment of prisoners of war. According to the *sutta*, there was a battle between the gods and the demons or antigods, called *asuras*. Vepacitti was the lord of the *asuras*. At the beginning of the war, he ordered his forces, in the event of their victory in battle, to tie up Sakka, the leader of the gods, and bring him to the city of the *asuras*. Similarly, Sakka also ordered his forces to capture and bring back Vepacitti to the divine assembly hall, if they won.

These parallel plans of both leaders might be indicative of their respect for the principle that the ultimate goal of war is to overcome one's adversary to solve one or more problems without disproportionate harm to the retinue of the opposing forces, for neither leader wished to kill the other, or take the troops of the adversary into permanent captivity.

According to the *sutta*, the gods won and the *asuras* lost the war. So, the gods did as they had been ordered and brought Vepacitti to the divine assembly hall. As Sakka was entering and leaving the hall, Vepacitti abused and insulted him with rude, harsh words. Now Vepacitti was no longer an active participant in the war and was mentally confused, behaving in an ill-tempered manner, an example of the mentality of a war victim from the Buddhist perspective. This allows us to study the behaviour of Sakka, lord of the gods, towards Vepacitti as an authoritative Buddhist example of how to treat the captured. Despite the goading, Sakka did not respond to Vepacitti or take any action against him. This shows how self-control, discipline and responsibility are advocated, exactly those virtues required in order to adhere to IHL.

At this juncture in the story, Mātali, the divine charioteer, posed three questions or suggestions to Sakka. First, he asked whether Sakka tolerated the harsh words of Vepacitti because of fear or weakness.

Sakka replied, 'It is neither through fear nor weakness that I am patient with Vepacitti. How can a wise person like me engage in [verbal] combat with a fool (*bāla*)?' (S.I.221). He displayed patience – a vital mental quality and one that must be practised both in battle and in its aftermath. As mentioned above, the aim of battle is to solve the problems that caused the conflict, and patience is one of the most effective means to do so. An angry and vindictive response to the curses of a captive adds nothing of worth.

Mātali's second suggestion was that if those like Vepacitti are not punished, they will continue to repeat the same offence. Sakka's reply was that the only way to put a stop to such a fool was, while recognising the anger of the other, to remain mindful and calm oneself (*sato upasammati'ti*) (S.I.222). Accordingly, we see here that concentration on patience, mindfulness and calm must be practised. We shall return to the question of how one can practise mindfulness and calm in the midst of hostilities below.

The third of Mātali's suggestions was that if a fool mistakes our patience for fear then he will go after us even harder, like a cow chasing someone who runs away. Sakka replies skilfully in three verses as follows:

Let it be whether or not he thinks, 'He endures me out of fear', of goals that culminate in one's own good none is found better than patience.

When a person endowed with strength patiently endures a weakling, they call that the supreme patience; the weakling must be patient always.

They call that strength no strength at all – the strength that is the strength of folly – but no one can reproach a person who is strong because guarded by Dhamma. (S.I.322)

When this context is compared with IHL, specifically the Third Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war,<sup>2</sup> it can be seen that Sakka's reply depicts how one should treat a defeated enemy without any adverse distinction. When one practises sustained patience during a war, one can more easily keep self-control and discipline and take responsibility for one's actions.

The core idea of this *sutta* is depicted by two further verses as follows:

One who repays an angry man with anger thereby makes things worse for himself. Not repaying an angry man with anger, one wins a battle hard to win.

He practises for the welfare of both, his own and the other's, when, knowing that his foe is angry, he mindfully maintains his peace. (S.I.322–323)

Here, Sakka's opinion reflects broader Buddhist ethical principles that are applicable in a war situation, especially as regards treating prisoners of war humanely:

- (1) The importance of mindfully maintaining one's own peace even when aware of the foe's anger – mindfulness and clarity of consciousness or situational awareness (*sati* and *sati-sampajañña*).
- (2) The realisation that the ultimate patience is showing tolerance towards those who are weak – enduring patience is the highest austerity (*khanti paramam tapo titikkhā*).
- (3) The importance of developing calmness (*upasammati*) – hatred is appeased by non-hatred (Dhp.5).

### The importance of mindfulness and awareness

*Sati-sampajañña*, the pair 'mindfulness' and 'awareness', or 'situational awareness', indicates the mental state that needs to be awoken in a situation. *Khanti*, 'patience', is the pivotal quality that leads to peace. *Upasammati*, 'to free from conflicts' or 'to calm down', implies the ideal way of keeping company with others with calm, compassion and amity.

According to the *Mahā-satipatthāna Sutta*, situational awareness – that is, clear awareness of one's bodily and vocal activities and their context – should be present in all human activities (D.II.83). The *Sati-sampajañña Sutta* in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* gives a wider perspective on the same matter:

Suppose there is a tree deficient in branches and foliage. Then its shoots do not grow to fullness; also its bark, softwood, and heartwood do not grow to fullness. So too, when there is no mindfulness and situational awareness, for one deficient in mindfulness and clear comprehension, the sense of moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*) lack their proximate cause. When there is no sense of moral shame and moral dread, restraint of the sense faculties lacks its proximate cause. When there is no restraint of the sense faculties, for one deficient in restraint of the sense faculties, virtuous behaviour lacks its proximate cause. (A.IV.336)

This context clearly explains that *sati-sampajañña*, mindfulness and situational awareness, is fundamental, underlying many aspects of successful functioning, and that working without them generates problems and failures. Thought with *sati-sampajañña* generates right thoughts, which bring benefits. Thought without *sati-sampajañña* causes wrong ideas, which bring problems and suffering. Speaking without mindfulness may often involve dishonesty. Hence, one should be mindful and have situational awareness in relation to whatever is said or discussed. Moreover, *sati* implies concentration in the mind, and *sampajañña* aids the maintenance of concentration in a fourfold manner as depicted in the commentary to the *Majjhima Nikāya* (Ps.I.252): awareness regarding the purpose (*sāttaka-sampajaññaṃ*), the suitability (*sappāya-sampajaññaṃ*), the domain (*gocara-sampajaññaṃ*) and the undeluded

situational awareness of the activity concerned (*asammoha-sampajaññaṃ*).

During a battle, situational awareness, *sampajañña*, can pragmatically be applied: in remembering the purpose of the conflict, namely that it is not to inflict gratuitous harm but to resolve a problem by overcoming the adversary; the measures taken must correspond to this understanding, and should concur with the values of IHL, without being clouded by deluded conceptions. Moreover, being the key mental quality for carrying out activities without inner conflict, *sati-sampajañña* leads those who practise it to concentrate on ultimate patience and calmness, which is required during a war for ensuring the humanitarian treatment of those caught up in it.

### The relevance of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path

Now let us examine how these qualities can be practised to maintain self-control, discipline and responsibility during war. The Noble Eightfold Path is a summary of all the key attributes that lead to success on the Buddhist path. In this case, we find a link between mindfulness and the Noble Eightfold Path (*aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*), the seventh factor of which is right mindfulness, *sammā-sati*. Its position in the Noble Eightfold Path shows that right mindfulness is closely associated with three more of the eight factors, namely right thought (*sammā saṅkappa*), right speech (*sammā vācā*) and right action (*sammā kammanta*), which are needed for both material development and liberation.

While the Noble Eightfold Path leads to emancipation, that it is also important for success in life in general is clear from the *Mahā-cattārisaka Sutta* (M.117), which depicts two ways of practising it:

- (1) That which is affected by taints, partaking of merit, ripening on the side of attachment (*sāsavaṃ puñṇabhāgiyā upadhivepakkā*).
- (2) That which is noble, taintless, supramundane, a factor of the path (*ariyā anāsavaṃ lokuttarā maggaṅgā*) (M.III.71).

The *sutta* goes through the first five factors of the path, showing how the first way improves even the lives of ordinary people, i.e. ‘worldlings’ (*puthujjana*), whereas the second level of the path applies to noble ones or saints. Accordingly, we must pay attention to the way in which mindfulness can be practised for the betterment of this life and how it can be applied to maintaining self-control during war.

As stated in the *Mahā-cattārisaka Sutta*, right view (*sammā ditṭhi*) means identifying and understanding the right and wrong paths, right effort (*sammā vāyāma*) means making an effort to avoid the wrong path and pursue the right path, right mindfulness (*sammā sati*) means abandoning the wrong path and mindfully entering upon and abiding by the

right path. In this way, these three constituents encompass all the other constituents (M.III.72). In other words, this is the common formula connected with the other path-factors in order to reach either the mundane goal or the supramundane goal as depicted by the *sutta*. The *Mahā-cattārisaka Sutta* thus depicts an inseparable interrelationship between right view, right effort and right mindfulness in order to cultivate the other constituents of the path.

Now, we draw attention to how this formula can be applied with the other factors, i.e. right intention (*sammā saṅkappa*), right speech (*sammā vācā*), right bodily action (*sammā kammanta*) and right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*), within the mindset of a combatant so as to follow IHL.

*Saṅkappa* (intention or thought) is a synonym for *vitakka* (thought). *Vitakka* is one of the six particulars or occasionals (*pakiṇṇaka*) that come under the mental factors (*cetasika*) in Abhidhamma and may be karmically wholesome, unwholesome or neutral. Neutral means either that the states of consciousness and mental factors are mere *kamma*-results (*vipāka*) or that they function without karmic effects and so are part of functional consciousness, *kiriya-citta*, for example the consciousness of a Buddha. There are three kinds of karmically unwholesome (*akusala*) thoughts: sensuous thoughts (*kāma vitakka*), hating thoughts (*byāpāda vitakka*) and cruel thoughts (*vihiṃsā vitakka*). Conversely, thoughts of renunciation (*nekkhamma vitakka*), thoughts devoid of hate (*avyāpāda vitakka*) and thoughts of not harming (*avihiṃsā vitakka*) are the karmically wholesome (*kusala*) thoughts (S.II.151–152; M.III.72). The former three constituents deal with ‘wrong intention’ while the latter three constituents deal with ‘right intention’, i.e. *sammā saṅkappa*, the second factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

We shall now explore the application of these different types of intentions during war. Sensuous thought involves thinking about, and the enjoyment of, sensual pleasures such as physical beauty, sweet sounds, etc. It is associated with greed. Conversely, thoughts of renunciation or thoughts free from lust (*nekkhamma vitakka*) are linked with the eradication of greed. Accordingly, we cannot expect eradication of greed from one who is at war, because war itself is based on greed and anger. Buddhism does not countenance the unethical enjoyment of sense pleasures, because its effect could be theft, sexual violence or other malpractices. When this is transferred to the context of war, if non-combatants are to be protected against any form of indecent assault and inhuman treatment such as sexual abuse, combatants must be able to deal ethically and mindfully with sensuous thoughts. Right intention, moreover, is applicable in thinking of delivering war victims from suffering and could therefore be directed to the protection of the values of IHL.



*Byāpāda* means the ill will that can lead to injuring or killing others. *Vihimsā* means the ill will that can lead to persecuting or torturing others. These two thoughts are motivated by hatred. When one thinks or plans to kill or cause harm by any means, it is called *vihimsā vitakka*. On the other hand, *avihimsā* means the desire to avoid harming, i.e. compassion or pity, which is the opposite of ill will. The thought that leads us to non-violent action is *avihimsā vitakka*. During a battle, when the defeat of others with weapons is the aim, it is impossible to uproot hateful or cruel thoughts and replace them with non-hatred, loving-kindness and compassion. However, combatants can concentrate on the thoughts that minimise violence, *avihimsā vitakka*, as far as practicable, especially towards non-combatants. *Avihimsā vitakka*, in this manner, can be applied with the aforementioned formula to abstention from the unnecessary violence and inhuman treatment that characterise IHL violations. To do this, the mindset of a combatant must concentrate on IHL principles – that is, his/her right vision (*sammā diṭṭhi*) – and he/she then would strive (*sammā vāyāma*) with mindful (*sammā sati*) intention as discussed. With frequent practice he/she would then be better able to adhere to IHL.

Moving on to right speech, we draw attention to the role of verbal discipline in engaging with others from several Buddhist perspectives. As his final disciplinary act, the Buddha decreed the ostracism (*brahma-daṇḍa*) of the monk Channa, formerly the charioteer of prince Siddhārtha, whereby all monks were forbidden to keep him company in order to chastise him (D. II.151). Channa fainted three times when he was informed of this punishment, as depicted in the commentary, and eventually became an Arahant (Dhp-a. II.112). This incident shows the effect of speech – or meaningful silence – to modify someone's behaviour. A well-spoken statement, according to the *Vācā Sutta*, is endowed with five characteristics; it is spoken at the right time, in truth, affectionately, beneficially and with good-will (A.III.243–244; cf. M.I.395).

Right speech, as the third path factor, simply means abstaining from lying (*musāvādā*), malicious speech (*pisunāvācā*), harsh language (*pharusāvācā*) and foolish babble (*sampappalāpā*). Right intention, moreover, is the base of right verbal expressions, because this leads to right thoughts (*vitakka*) such as ungreediness, non-hatred or non-delusion.

In the case of treating non-combatants humanely, combatants should be aware of and sympathetic to their mental situation, since they are likely to be suffering from fear, grief, anger, frustration or other negative emotions (*dukkham seti parājito* – Dhp.201 = S.I.189), and might also behave like Vepacitti, for example. In practising right speech, those dealing with captured combatants should have a clear view (*sammā diṭṭhi*) regarding speech, should make an effort (*sammā vāyāma*) to speak with calm words and should mindfully (with *sammā sati*) express their words. That is how one can apply the common formula together with right speech in the aftermath of a battle, for example.

The fourth path factor, right bodily action (*sammā kammanta*), stands for three ethical behaviours: abstaining from killing, from stealing, and from adultery or unlawful sexual intercourse. Abstaining from killing is difficult or impossible during war. Nevertheless, abusing non-combatants, i.e. killing them, stealing their property, or perpetrating rape and other forms of sexual violence, is unacceptable. Concerning right bodily action, again combatants can apply the three-fold formula: clear vision (*sammā diṭṭhi*), perseverance (*sammā vāyāma*) and mindfulness (*sammā sati*).

The fifth path factor, right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*), means abstaining from unrighteous occupations such as trading in arms, drugs or poisons, human trafficking, slaughtering or fishing, or those involving deceit, treachery, sooth-saying, usury and so on. While abstaining from trading in weapons cannot perhaps be expected in a war situation, it resonates with the prohibition on the use and stockpiling of weapons that cause unnecessary suffering or superfluous injury, in line with the IHL conventions prohibiting the use of chemical and biological weapons, landmines and blinding lasers, for example.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, volition/intention (*cetanā*) in the form of right intention (*sammā saṅkappa*) plays a pivotal role, being the coordinator of all the path factors, as it is the base of any form of action (*kamma*) as depicted above.

### Treating people equally

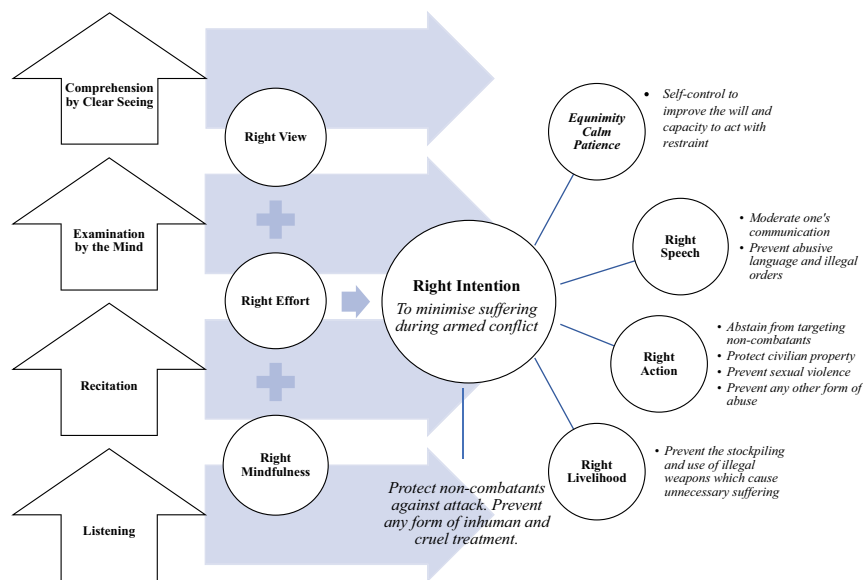
It is appropriate now to draw attention to Buddhist reflections on eliminating any form of adverse distinction based on racism, apartheid or separation of ethnic groups, and so on. Within Buddhism, there is no room for any sort of differentiation based on caste or race, as depicted in the *Pahāraḍa Sutta*, which illustrates this through the metaphor of rivers pouring into the sea. The great rivers that arrive at the great ocean are simply called the great ocean without their former names and designations; similarly, the social backgrounds of people are irrelevant when they ordain in the monastic community (A.IV.201). The same notion is raised in the *Madhura Sutta*, which records the Buddha saying, ‘the facts being what they are, the people of all four castes are absolutely equal (*samasamā*) and I do not see any difference between them at all in these respects’ (M.II.87). To honour this, practising equanimity, calm and patience is the possible solution in suppressing adverse distinctions. The *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* (Sn.594–656) discusses equanimity in two ways, using a biological (Jayatilleke 2006, 72) and a stratification argument. Although there are different species among plants and animals, man constitutes one species (Sn.607), despite minor observable differences in such features as hair, skin colour, the shape of the head, etc. Differences among humans are

a matter of convention, depending on occupation and not caste (Sn.612–620).

When it comes to IHL, combatants should realise that there is no basis for dealing with non-combatants in a divisive way, based on ethnic or social hierarchies. Rather, they should be treated in accord with ethical principles such as equanimity, calm and patience, which, in this context, can be connected with right intention in the Noble Eightfold Path. Furthermore, striving (*sammā vāyāma*) to retain mindfulness (*sammā sati*) and concentration with a clear mental vision (*sammā diṭṭhi*) is the pragmatic way of applying the common formula we have suggested, brought out from the *Mahā-cattārisaka Sutta*.

## Conclusion

We have now come to the end of our discussion of our proposed Buddhist approach to the humane treatment of non-combatants based on the Noble Eightfold Path. In this regard, insufficient knowledge or understanding may be the major cause of IHL violations. Unless frequent training takes place, practical implementation is impossible. If the teaching process and the practice are perfected, war crimes will cease and this Buddhist approach holds out the possibility of reinforcing IHL training. To this end, the threefold formula of clear vision, perseverance and mindfulness that we set out at the beginning of this article to



**Figure 1.** Practical implementation of Buddhist and international humanitarian law (IHL) values during a war.

embed IHL into the mindset of belligerents in a war situation can be enhanced by the fourfold way of practising the Dhamma, i.e. by listening, recitation, examination by the mind, and comprehension by clear seeing (*tassa te dhammā sotānugatā honti, vacasā paricitā, manasānupekkhitā, diṭṭhiyā suppaṭividdhā*) depicted in the *Sotānugata Sutta* (A.II.185). In this respect, it is particularly important for a combatant to comply with the fourfold path factors – right intention, right speech, right bodily action and right livelihood – and their IHL particularities as discussed above. For ease of implementation, recapping all of the above, [Figure 1](#) illustrates this Buddhist approach towards the practical implementation of IHL values during a war.

To conclude, we initially discussed the problematic defilements that can both lead to war and exacerbate violations of IHL during war, drawing on both *sutta* texts and the analysis of defilements and their opposites in *Abhidhamma*. We also examined the mental qualities required to minimise suffering during war, before moving to the application of the Noble Eightfold Path to increase adherence to IHL in practice. Bearing these factors in mind, we suggest the application of a threefold formula – clear vision, perseverance and mindfulness – to improve self-control, discipline and responsibility during war with respect to IHL, and particularly the protection of non-combatants. All things considered, Buddhist teachings lead to the cultivation of humanitarian qualities. The cultivation of the mind (*citta*) is key, because the state of our minds determines the state of affairs in the world, not least during war (S.I.39).

## Abbreviations

**A.** *Aṅguttara-nikāya*; as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Bristol: Pali Text Society, 2012.

**D.** *Dīgha-nikāya*; as translated by Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Massachusetts: Wisdom, 1995.

**Dhp.** *Dhammapada*; our translations are based on that by Valerie J. Roebuck, *The Dhammapada*, London: Penguin, 2010.

**Dhp-a.** *Dhammapadatthakathā* commentary on Dhp., as translated by E. W. Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, 3 vols., Harvard Oriental Series, Harvard University Press, 1921; repr. London, PTS, 1995.

**M.** *Majjhima-nikāya*; as translated by Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom, 1995.

**Ps.** *Papañcasūdanī*; commentary on M. (untranslated).

**S.** *Samyutta-nikāya*; as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*, Boston: Wisdom, 2000.

**Sn.** *Suttanipāta*, translated by K. R. Norman, *The Group of Discourses (Sutta Nipāta)*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2001.

Reference to A., D., M. and S. are to volume and page number of the Pali Text Society editions of the Pali text, as indicated in the translations. For Dhp. and Sn., reference is to verse number.

## Notes

1. International Committee of the Red Cross, *Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, 12 August 1949. Conflicts Not of an International Character. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/375-590006>
2. International Committee of the Red Cross, *Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, Geneva, 12 August 1949. Conflicts Not of an International Character. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/375-590006>
3. For more details see: <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law/weapons/conventional-weapons>

## Disclosure statement

This article has been supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

## Notes on contributors

**Ven Kosgama Muditha** earned his BA degree in Pali studies from the University of Peradeniya (2018), was a temporary lecturer (2020–2021) in the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies at the University of Peradeniya and is currently reading for his master's degree at the Centre of Buddhist Studies, the University of Hong Kong.

**Ven Koralegama Gnanawasa** earned his BA degree in Buddhist studies from the University of Peradeniya (2018) and is currently reading for his master's of philosophy in the Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Peradeniya.

**Ven Kirindiwela Pagnnawansa** earned his BA degree in Buddhist studies from the University of Peradeniya (2018) and is currently reading for his master's of philosophy in the Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Peradeniya.

## Reference

Jayatilke, N. 2006. *Dhamma Man and Law*. Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Center.