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## TWO DIMENSIONS OF BUDDHIST PRACTICE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS ON STATECRAFT

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### ABSTRACT

This article argues that within Buddhism, the ethical principles of those aiming at better rebirths within the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*), and those aiming at nirvana, the transcending of this, should be clearly distinguished. The ethics of the nirvana seeker, mostly monks and nuns, has no place for war and violence, while the more worldly concerns of other Buddhists allow some engagement in defensive wars while seeking to minimise suffering, in line with international humanitarian law. It is argued that the lay Buddhist's emphasis is on avoiding evil (*pāpa*) and doing what is 'meritorious' (*puñña*), i.e. bringing happy results within this and future lives. 'Meritorious' acts are 'good' by worldly standards but are not the same as a nirvana-seeker's 'skilful' (*kusala*) action, which should always be non-violent. This is not to say, however, that a lay Buddhist may not also perform some genuinely skilful actions.

**KEYWORDS** progressive instruction; *upāsaka*; *bhikkhu*; *pāpa*; *puñña*; *akusala*; *kusala*; king Asoka; *dasa rāja-dhammas*; *cakkavatti*; *Jātakas*; *Mahāvamsa*

### Introduction

The thesis of this article is that in Buddhist practice there are two dimensions carrying different implications for statecraft in general, and for war as an aspect of statecraft in particular. This study further suggests that not making a clear distinction between these two dimensions – concerning what is worldly and what is beyond the worldly – has resulted in misunderstanding of the Buddhist position on war. This misunderstanding needs to be exposed as such for it adversely affects the applicability of the Buddha's teaching to a world that is beset with attachment, aversion and delusion (*lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*), three fundamental traits of the human mind that lie at the root of misery and suffering, including all types of conflicts and wars.

The matter that this article seeks to address is the interface between international humanitarian law (IHL) and Buddhism. IHL is the modern 'rules of war' (i.e. *jus in bello*), which aim to regulate its conduct and thereby minimise the suffering involved. As such, IHL is concerned only with what constitutes lawful conduct during war, and it does not comment either on the

legitimacy of war in general as a means for resolving political disputes, or on the legality or otherwise of any decision to go to war – or the aims for doing so (i.e. *jus ad bellum*). As a matter of modern international law, the legality of the reasons for resorting to armed conflict is covered by the United Nations Charter. Thus, IHL assumes and accepts the possibility of war without either condoning or condemning it, or taking any position on the justness or legality of the aims of any particular armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> However, as discussed below, Buddhism's stance on *jus ad bellum* is necessarily relevant because it affects how it views the legitimacy of *jus in bello*/IHL.

In an effort to discover an interface between IHL and Buddhism, it is crucial at the very beginning to be clear about the Buddhist position on war. On this, there is a position held by some, which I would call 'the ideal position', according to which Buddhism is unconditionally pacifist and hence there is absolutely no room for war in Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> If this position is correct then the discussion between IHL and Buddhism becomes one between two groups that share no common ground on the most fundamental issue of the discussion. I think, therefore, that it is important that we have a clear understanding of this issue as a prerequisite for broader deliberations concerning the interface between IHL and Buddhism. In this article I hope to show that there is ground shared by IHL and Buddhism on war, and hence that the proposed discussion is justified.

### The ideal position

What I would call the ideal position may have arisen from not understanding properly the situation mentioned in the discourses such as *Raṭṭhapāla-sutta* (M *sutta* 82). Raṭṭhapāla, a young and wealthy householder, having listened to the Buddha, decides to leave his luxury household life to follow the Dhamma fully. When all the other listeners have left, he approaches the Buddha and says the following to him:

Venerable sir, as I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is not easy while living in a home to lead the holy life, utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Venerable sir, I wish to shave off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and go forth from the home life into homelessness. I would receive the going forth under the Blessed One, I would receive full admission. (M.II.55)

The case of Raṭṭhapāla exemplifies what is applicable to those who leave the household life in order to attain the ultimate liberation from *saṃsāra*.<sup>3</sup> It is reasonable to imagine that this was not the case with all those who listened to the Buddha and opted to follow him. Some, like Raṭṭhapāla, became renunciants (male *bhikkhu*, female *bhikkhunī*, as they are called in the Buddhist tradition), whereas many others opted to follow him as 'lay' followers (*upāsaka*, *upāsikā*). Of these four groups of followers, Raṭṭhapāla's

story suggests that the two former groups were less in number relative to the latter two groups.<sup>4</sup> It provides a good example of as to how this was the case: Ratthapāla approached the Buddha only when all those who were listening to him left at the end of the sermon. This suggests that on this particular day it was only Ratthapāla who opted to become a monastic follower, whereas there may have been others who 'took refuge' in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha and became lay followers.

It appears that, in addition to these four groups, there was presumably another much larger group which did not become even *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* but listened to the Buddha, received some guidance from him and supported the Sangha as ordinary householders. In the broader classification of householders (*gahattṭha*) and renunciants (*pabbajita*), found often in the discourses, this third group constituted householders as a whole among whom was the sub-group of *upāsakas* and *upāsikās*. The householders as a whole are the people who are described in the discourses as laymen enjoying sensual pleasures, living at home in a house full of children, using sandalwood from Kāsi, wearing garlands, scents and unguents, and receiving gold and silver (A. IV.281).

## Two dimensions of Buddhist practice

The difference between the ideal position, meant for the renunciants, and the way of life of the lay followers may be illustrated with reference to several factors such as the Buddha's method of instruction, the gradually deepening character of the Dhamma, and the distinction between what is 'meritorious' (*puñña*) and what is 'skilful' (*kusala*), two broad concepts of good found in Buddhism.

It is said that the Buddha presented his teaching in a gradual manner and that the practice of the teaching itself was gradual. This gradual way of presenting the Dhamma is called 'progressive instruction' (*ānupubbī-kathā*) and, according to Buddhaghosa, the leading commentator on the Theravāda Buddhist canonical texts, is the exposition of giving, virtue, heaven and the path (*dāna, sīla, sagga, magga*) in that order (D-a.I.277). One among many instances of the Buddha's giving instruction in this manner is found in the 'Discourse to Upāli' (M. *sutta* 56):

Then the Blessed One gave the householder Upāli progressive instruction, that is, talk on giving, talk on virtue, talk on the heavens; he explained the danger, degradation, and defilement in sensual pleasures and the blessing of renunciation. When he knew that the householder Upāli's mind was ready, receptive, free from hindrances, elated, and confident, he expounded to him the teaching special to [*sāmukkamsikā*] the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. (M.I.379–380)

According to this statement, the Buddha would start with instruction meant for the ordinary people who are attuned to samsaric concerns, who would do good things in the hope of gaining heavenly pleasures in return. It is understandable that many of the Buddha's listeners would have been at this level of understanding. When the Buddha moved to illustrate the negative side of the pleasures, it is imaginable that a good part of the listeners left the assembly or even if they were there physically, they were not following what the Buddha was saying for it went beyond the worldly state of their mind. The Buddha moved to what is referred to as 'the elevating (*sam + ukkaṃsa + ika*) instruction' (in the above translation, 'special to') only when he knew that his listeners were ready to follow the higher level of instruction. In this particular story, Upāli was ready to go beyond the ordinary level of understanding. In the story of Raṭṭhapāla, he was ready to go even further and to renounce the household life.

The assumption behind this progressive way of teaching is the obvious matter that people have different levels of understanding. According to a well-known classification found in the discourses, there are four types of individuals relative to their intellectual capacity: one who understands quickly (*ugghaṭitaññū*), one who understands through elaboration (*vipacitaññū*), one who needs to be guided (*neyya*), and one for whom the word is the maximum (*padaparama*), i.e. their understanding cannot penetrate beyond the words (A.II.135). An equally important but somewhat less known analysis relevant to the intellectual capacity of persons is the following: one whose discernment (*paṭibhāna*) is incisive but not free-flowing, one whose discernment is free-flowing but not incisive, one whose discernment is both incisive and free-flowing, and one whose discernment is neither incisive nor free-flowing (A.II.135). The last of these four categories is implied to be one who is not intellectually equipped to benefit from the Dhamma in any manner.

In addition to intellectual capacity, there is another very important distinction among people: the level of their psychological inclination towards inner development.

Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rest on the water's surface, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rise out of the water and stand clear, unwetted by it; so too, surveying the world with the eye of a Buddha, I saw *beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach, and some who dwelt seeing fear in blame and in the other world.* (M.I.169, emphasis added)

The phenomenon referred to here is of utmost importance in the Buddhist path, the ultimate goal of which is the total cessation of all worldly desires and attachments, and the suffering these bring: even if a person is equipped with intellectual capacity s/he will not be persuaded to follow the path unless s/he has that inclination.

The progressive method of instruction of the Buddha, however, is not a mere matter of logicity of his method of instruction necessitated by the differences in the intellectual capacity and inner inclination of the listener. It has a direct relevance to the gradually deepening character of the path to be practised: 'Just as the great ocean slants, slopes, and inclines gradually, not dropping off abruptly, so too, in this Dhamma and discipline penetration to final knowledge occurs by gradual training, gradual activity, and gradual practice, not abruptly' (A.IV.200–201). This gradually deepening character of the Dhamma, along with intellectual and spiritual differences of people, should show that the ideal position attributed to the Dhamma is too narrow to capture the reality of the intellectual and emotional diversity of its followers.

This may be further illustrated with reference to two key concepts in the Buddhist ethical discourse, namely skilful and unskilful (*kusala* and *akusala*) states of mind and actions, and 'meritorious', or morally good, and evil acts (*puñña* and *pāpa*). The *akusala* ones are characterised by attachment (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*), and the *kusala* ones are those characterised by the opposites of these: non-attachment (*alobha*), non-aversion (*adosa*) and non-delusion (*amoha*). The terms '*kusala*' and '*akusala*' carry deeper psychological import than their usual English renderings 'skilful' and 'unskilful' (or 'wholesome' and 'unwholesome') would convey. According to the Buddhist analysis of mind, the unenlightened person's behaviour is coloured by attachment, aversion and delusion, which are called the roots of unskilfulness. These roots will often be active even when they are engaged in performing what is considered morally good or meritorious acts.

There is a significant difference between the nature of skilful and unskilful and meritorious and evil deeds. Relevant here is the Buddhist distinction between *puthujjanas*, 'worldlings' or 'ordinary folk', and spiritually 'noble' people, who have some degree of enlightenment – Stream-enterers, Once-returns, Non-returns and *Arahants* – who have destroyed some or all (for *Arahants*) of the spiritual fetters that bind a person to *samsāra*. Worldlings always have the roots of unskilfulness in their mind. Hence, whatever they do is motivated by these roots to some extent. When they do meritorious deeds they do so only by temporarily subduing unskilful phenomena. But their mind is not totally free of such phenomena even when they do meritorious acts in the hope of gaining heavenly pleasures. This explains the reason why Rāṭṭhapāla, mentioned above, did not concede to the suggestion made by his parents, who were shocked at his decision to renounce household life, that instead of renouncing the household life he should stay home, enjoy

pleasures and perform meritorious deeds. Meritorious deeds are within the scope of *samsāra*; they make one's samsaric journey pleasurable which, nevertheless, is to keep one within *samsāra* and to prolong it. It should be clear that this is not acceptable to a person who had made up his mind to move beyond the samsaric existence.

Evil deeds (*pāpa*) are socially harmful ways of behaviour also motivated by the roots of unskillfulness. The ordinary person's behaviour, insofar as it is not socially harmful, is not evil even though it is motivated to some degree by the roots of unskillfulness. In other words, all behaviour motivated by unskillful roots is not evil (*pāpa*) even though all evil behaviour is motivated by unskillful roots. The conclusion is that an ordinary person has not yet started to escape the roots of unskillfulness, and hence the samsaric existence is marked by the persistence of these roots. When Buddhist practice is viewed from these two classifications, namely *puñña* and *pāpa* and *kusala* and *akusala*, it becomes clear that Buddhism has two dimensions, samsaric and nirvanic, which, broadly speaking, the lay person and the monastic are respectively supposed to follow – though in practice, from the time of the Buddha, there have been lay people who are noble ones (M.I.490–493) and monastics who are worldlings.

## Buddhism and war

From the nirvanic (*kusala*) point of view, war is out of the question. The only war that is possible is the one with Māra or the Evil One, the personification of evil according to the Buddhist tradition, namely defilements of the mind such as the greed, hatred and delusion (*lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*) referred to above. Talking about war, let alone engaging in it, was prohibited for monks and nuns, and the question of humanising war naturally cannot arise. As mentioned in the *vinaya*,<sup>5</sup> a monk who advised an executioner to do his work swiftly so that the victim's pain would be minimal was found guilty of supporting killing, which resulted in his excommunication from the Sangha (Vin.III.86). According to this *vinaya* judgment a monk or nun concurring with killing-permitting aspects of IHL, even on humanitarian grounds, could face serious *vinaya* consequences. Whether or how this could affect a modern-day Buddhist monk or a nun, who is striving to combine both samsaric and nirvanic dimensions within their own practice, remains to be considered.

Taking the samsaric dimension of Buddhist ethics into consideration, we know that what is said above is not the only Buddhist position. It is well known that the Buddha did not impose *vinaya* rules for the laity. In Buddhism the laity was always under secular rule. When army-deserters wished to join the Sangha (without proper release), the Buddha's ruling was not to accept them (Vin.I.74). This suggests that, although the Buddha did not like war, he respected the state rules, though these are not concerned as such with ethics

and the working of karma. Lay life includes sexual relations, money to be earned, families to be raised, competitive examinations to pass etc., which do or can involve *akusala* actions and states of mind. State law regulates such actions to minimise aspects harmful to others, but do the *akusala* aspects mean that lay people, as scholars like Max Weber held, are not really a part of Buddhism?

Evidence seems to suggest otherwise. If we take seriously the *Vinaya-piṭaka* story of Yasa and his friends who joined the Buddhist monastic Sangha at the very beginning of the Buddha's mission, and whose parents (and possibly other family members) became lay followers of the Buddha at the same time, the laity appeared in Buddhism almost simultaneously with the monastic community (Vin.I.15–18). Subsequently, the male and female lay followers (*upāsaka* and *upāsikā*) came to comprise two constituents of the four-fold Buddhist society, the other two being the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī*.

The path of the laity is different from that of monastics. This difference is not in kind but in degree. In what follows the difference has been described with reference to a peacock, which is colourful but slow, and a swan, which is simple but fast:

Even as the crested (peacock), blue-eyed, (the bird) that soars in the sky never will reach the speed of the swan, even so the householder cannot emulate (to match) the monk, the sage (leading a life) of seclusion contemplating in the forest. (Sn.221)

The two groups follow the same path at different speeds. The lay person's is the samsaric life with *puñña* and *akusala* combined with occasional moments of *kusala*, which is what is feasible for a large majority of lay people.<sup>6</sup>

Within this category of lay people were rulers and soldiers, the former who made the decisions to wage war and the latter who fought them, among both of whom were followers of the Buddha. It is quite clear from the texts that the Buddha did not approve of war. On the other hand, that war was a part of worldly affairs cannot have been unknown to the Buddha, who knew about the workings of *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha* better than anyone else. For his part, the Buddha endeavoured to prevent people from going to war<sup>7</sup> and stop and dissuade those who had already gone to war.<sup>8</sup> But he did not ask kings to disband their armies.<sup>9</sup>

In the *Jātaka* literature,<sup>10</sup> a good source for the samsaric aspect of Buddhist ethics, where the Bodhisatta (Pali, Sanskrit Bodhisattva), the future Buddha, is the main character, there are many stories in which he played an important political role as a ruler or adviser to a ruler. In these stories, the emphasis is to avoid war. But the Bodhisatta kings would usually maintain their armies, accepting in this manner the necessity of power.<sup>11</sup>



In the discourses in which the Buddha comes up with what may be called his political philosophy, the universal ruler (*rājā cakkavatti*) possesses an army and brings all other kings under his righteous reign with the help of this power which, of course, he does not have to use violently (*Cakkavattisihanada Sutta*, D.III.58–79). But if any of the kings, through whose territory the universal ruler marches his army, oppose this exercise, it is hard to imagine what the final result would be. In these discourses, interestingly, we do not find any mention of good behaviour in war, perhaps for the simple reason that the universal ruler did not have to engage in war. However, we have some relevant information in the discourses (e.g. S.I.221–222) referring to the wars Sakka, the king of gods, fought with *Asuras*, his enemies.<sup>12</sup> In the later Buddhist literature of the Indian Mahāyāna we also find some specific instructions on good behaviour in war, discussed by K. N. Jayatilleke (2009, 472).

War is an instance of using force or violence. It appears that Buddhism accepts using force in certain circumstances. As the *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta* (M. *sutta* 58) points out, the Buddha sometimes had to use unpleasant words, provided that they were true and spiritually useful (M.I.395). The simile mentioned in the discourse, that the king would use force, even at the risk of inflicting pain, to remove a bone stuck in his child's throat, suggests that force used with good intention is permissible, at least when used on the person it benefits. A relevant example from the *vinaya*, which deals with the organisational aspect of the Sangha and has to do with the monastic system of law in contrast to *sīla* (morality) which is personal and soteriological, is the presence of punishments for the violators of rules which are basically psychological – not speaking to an offender, for example. Another instance occurring in the section on punishments (*Kamma-khandhaka*) in the *vinaya* (Vin.II.12), suggestive of use of force, is that the Buddha asked Sāriputta and Moggallāna, his two chief disciples, to impose the punishment of banishment (*pabbājanīya-kamma*) on two ill-behaved monks called Assaji and Punabbasu, and, taking note of the possibility of rough and rowdy behaviour by them, asked his two chief disciples to be accompanied by a large group of monks.

The intriguing *Rajja Sutta* (S.I.116–117), however, seems to leave the question of use of force open. This *sutta* refers to the Buddha who was thinking whether or not it is possible to rule righteously without killing and causing to kill and without conquering and causing to conquer. At that moment Māra appears and tries to persuade the Buddha to rule, saying: 'Venerable sir, if the Blessed One wishes, he need only resolve that the Himalayas, the king of mountains, should become gold, and it would turn to gold'. The Buddha dismisses Māra saying:

If there were a mountain made of gold – made entirely of solid gold,

Not double this would suffice for one – Having known this, fare evenly.

This statement does not answer the initial question but hints at a broader principle of governance, equality. The concept of '*sama*' (equal) along with '*dhamma*' (righteousness) is often referred to in the *Jātaka* stories in describing the rule of good kings. Nevertheless, the good rulers we come across in the *Jātaka* stories who ruled following these broad principles did not exclude the possibility of war altogether, though they often tried to avoid it. Clearly the two concepts are context dependent and require more precise formulation depending on particular situations. Without providing a definitive answer to the questions he himself raised, the fact that the Buddha left the matter open is not without significance.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the *Rajja Sutta* may be taken as indicating both the Buddha's uneasiness about the manner of governance of the rulers of his time, and his awareness of the unavoidability of war given the nature of the ordinary worldly (*puthujjana*) mind of the rulers and their subjects. What the Buddha once said to the king of Kosala who had been defeated by the king of Magadha – namely, 'The victor breeds enmity; the vanquished sleeps unhappy. The peaceful [Arahant<sup>14</sup>], leaving behind both victory and defeat, sleeps happily' (*Dhammapada* 201) – alludes to the ideal transcending both victory and defeat which the Buddha knew to be beyond the reach of the King of Kosala. The *Rajja Sutta* seems to indicate that the Buddha knew that the practicalities of actual rule were not so simple.

If the Buddha knew that war was an aspect of samsaric existence, the question is, why did he not develop a set of rules to make war more humane? One way to answer this question would be to show how the Buddha advised rulers on righteous ways of behaviour such as the well-known 'ten royal virtues'<sup>15</sup> (*dasa rāja-dhamma*, e.g. *Jat.I.260* and *399*) and 'noble duties of a universal monarch' (*ariya cakkavatti vatta*, *Cakkavatti-sihanāda-sutta*, *D. III.61*). If adhered to, these would make war unnecessary, and if war had to be waged, the king would behave in a just and humane manner. The Buddha seems to have been satisfied with outlining the foundational principles of righteous behaviour for the rulers rather than producing a set of rules on how to behave in a war, an act that could have diluted the Buddha's goal of making war unnecessary.

Discussing the Buddhist contribution to international law, Jayatilleke (2009, 472–475) refers to the *Śānti Parvan* ('Book of Peace') in Hindu literature, in the great epic on war, the *Mahābhārata*, which contains a developed set of rules to regularising behaviour in war. Jayatilleke shows how these aspects of Hindu statecraft had been shaped under the influence of Buddhist thought which laid emphasis on such virtues for rulers as humaneness, non-violence and righteousness.

## Historical practice

The historical experience of Buddhism in the lands where it spread shows that Buddhist rulers (in general) have often adhered to the basic non-aggressive stand on relations with other countries or other political entities. The outstanding example is the mid-third century BCE Indian emperor Asoka, whom subsequent Buddhist rulers throughout history have regarded as the ideal king. Asoka gave up war after waging a successful but bloody campaign in Kāliṅga, modern Orissa (Kāliṅga Rock Edict, Nikam and McKeon 1959, 27–30). But in Asoka we do not have evidence of good practices in war for the simple reason that he did not wage war after he became a follower of Buddha's teachings.

In Sri Lanka we have the much-discussed war that Duṭṭhagāmaṇi (101–77 BCE) felt obliged to wage against a South Indian Tamil occupier of Sri Lanka in order to protect the country and its culture, religion and economy.<sup>16</sup> There are two clear instances in which Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's Buddhist influence comes to light. One is his decision to fight Eḷāra, the king of the opposing side, one-on-one so that the damage to life could be minimised. The other is that after winning the war Duṭṭhagāmaṇi became regretful rather than elated (*Mahāvamsa* XXV, v.103), which means that Duṭṭhagāmaṇi knew that what he had done was violent and unpleasant. He had nevertheless chosen to go to war because there were so many things at stake. It is obvious that he was faced with a moral dilemma, and he chose war with a hardened conscience. The fact that Duṭṭhagāmaṇi did not have anything against Eḷāra as a person but was only concerned about the damage caused to the country and religion by his rule (*Mahāvamsa* XXIII, vv.9–10) is shown by his post-mortem treatment of the enemy as worthy of respect.

The *Mahāvamsa* account says that a group of Arahants consoled the regret-stricken ruler by saying that he had killed only one and half human beings (*Mahāvamsa* XXV, vv.103–112) – an idea that has come under universal and unconditional censure from scholars who have discussed this matter.<sup>17</sup> In this case, the claimed Arahants seem to have had two choices: one was to tell the king point-blank that he will be born in the hell due to this violent act (whether in his next life, or later), thus causing great frustration in him; the other was to console the mind of a ruler who had done for the sake of others what he himself actually considered morally questionable. The 'Arahants' are portrayed as choosing to do the second. The reasoning given, no doubt, is outrageous. Nevertheless, the statement, unprecedented in the whole history of the country, needs to be understood in its proper context within this semi-historical chronicle. We must not forget that even the Buddha waited until the questioner asked the question three times to respond that a soldier who is killed in

the war will be born in a woeful existence (*Yodhājīva Sutta*, S.IV.308–09).<sup>18</sup> Both the Buddha and the claimed Arahants in Dutthagāmaṇi's case may be understood as practising *Upāya-kauśalya*<sup>19</sup> ('skill-in-means') to determine the proper response to these specific difficult situations.<sup>20</sup>

After Dutthagāmaṇi, subsequent rulers of Sri Lanka are also recorded as having gone to war with invaders. In this they are regarded not as aggressors but as defenders of that which, as rulers, they were obliged to defend. During the medieval period there were a few instances of Sinhala rulers invading parts of Southern India (Sena II 853–887; Mahā Parākramabāhu 1153–1186; Nissanka-Malla 1187–1196; and Parākramabāhu VI 1412–1467). All these events, according to the *Mahāvamsa*, could be seen as responses of these kings to acts of foreign aggression or wrongdoing. This, however, does not mean that the kings of Sri Lanka did not have their own share of in-fighting and struggles for power among themselves.

## Conclusion

From the nirvanic point of view, the eradication or total removal of suffering is the goal of Buddhism. When the Buddha explained to his son Rāhula that one should not do any act if it causes pain to oneself, another or both, he did not specify the degrees of pain (*Ambalatthika-Rāhulovāda-sutta*, M. *sutta* 61, M. I.414–20). In contrast, the IHL goal of minimising suffering is rooted in the assumption that causing some suffering is justifiable and acceptable under certain conditions. As far as Buddhism is concerned, this can be accepted only from the perspective of samsaric Buddhism, which allows the use of force and inflicting pain within limits and provides space for its followers to lead pleasurable but ethical lives. In nirvanic Buddhism minimising suffering may be accepted, though without justifying the use of physical injury, only as a general principle deriving from its goal of total eradication of suffering.

Returning to the subject of the interface between IHL and Buddhism, IHL consists of a set of rules agreed to by states, relevant to the conduct of war. We know that Buddhism has not developed a similar set of rules, only the rudiments of them. The issue is, in the absence of such a well-developed system of Buddhist rules, whether or not Buddhists should accept those of IHL. The position developed in this article is that, within the samsaric dimension of Buddhism, there is no difficulty in concurring with IHL rules in principle.

At this point, it is possible to raise an objection against accepting as good something on which the Buddha has not said anything directly or something that is not found in the Buddhist tradition. There are some guidelines in the teaching of the Buddha itself to be followed in similar situations. Key among such guidelines is the criterion called the 'great indicator' (*mahā apadesa*) according to which any statement that does not contradict the doctrine

(*Dhamma*) and discipline (*vinaya*) may be accepted as the teaching of the Buddha.<sup>21</sup> It is clear that the principle behind this criterion is coherence: what coheres with what the Buddha taught may also be taken as his teaching. Another such guideline is: 'whatever is well spoken is all the word of the Blessed One' (*sabbam subhāsitaṃ tassa bhagavato vacanam*, A.IV.164). The concept of well-spokenness could be understood as that which pertains to the eradication of suffering. These criteria allow a broad scope for accommodating what is good and acceptable, regardless of its source.

On the basis of these criteria, IHL may be accepted because it is conducive to the minimisation of human and other forms of suffering. Furthermore, perhaps inspired by this same openness of thought, the Buddhist tradition, which has a history of accepting good things from other traditions, has not had any problem in accepting what is good in modernity in general, and in modern science and technology in particular. Unlike some other religious traditions, Buddhism does not have a history of waging war against science and (appropriate) technology. This means that Buddhism does not have a difficulty in concurring with what is good whether it is ancient or modern.

In sum, accepting or rejecting IHL depends on the Buddhist attitude to war, or, in other words, on whether or not Buddhism accepts the possibility of war. The Buddhist attitude to war is an extension of the Buddhist attitude to using force as a means of solving problems. From our discussion above we saw that there is a distinction between nirvanic and samsaric forms of Buddhism, and that according to the latter, both war and the use of force were accommodated within Buddhism subject to restrictions. Once this is accepted, it goes without saying that when war is waged as the last resort the parties involved should be guided by some basic principles and procedures leading to minimisation of suffering.

## Notes

1. For more on the difference between *jus in bello* (IHL) and *jus ad bellum* see: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/what-are-jus-ad-bellum-and-jus-bello-0>. Also: <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law/ihl-other-legal-regimes/jus-in-bello-jus-ad-bellum>.
2. See Rahula (1978, 84) for a similar position.
3. The wheel of existence in which beings are subject to repeated birth and death.
4. Indeed, the *Mahāvaccagotta Sutta*, at M.I.490–493, refers to fewer monks and nuns (far more than 1000) who had attained full enlightenment than male and female lay disciples who had attained a lesser level of enlightenment (far more than 2000). S.V.406 also says that there are more monastics that have attained a lower level of enlightenment than those who have attained a higher level.
5. *Vinaya* refers to the system of law applied to monks and nuns and administered internally by the Sangha, the monastic community, itself. It is contained in the collection called *Vinaya-pitaka* (Basket of Discipline) forming one of the three 'baskets' of the Theravāda canon.

6. This, however, does not mean that the higher states in the path leading to nirvana are totally beyond the reach of lay people. Discourses do refer to some lay men and women who attained such states. For one instance refer to the *Mahāvaccagotta-sutta*, M. *sutta* 73 (M.I.490–493).
7. E.g. when Sunīdha and Vassakāra, Ajatasattu's ministers, informed the Buddha that the latter was getting ready to wage war against Vajjis, the Buddha tried to convince them that it was not a wise decision (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*).
8. The source of this criterion is the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, D. *sutta* 16, D.II.72–76.
9. E.g. the imminent war between Sakyas and Koliyas on the waters of Rohini River (Jat.V.412–414).
10. A part of the Buddhist canonical literature containing the stories related to the past births of the Buddha.
11. See Premasiri in this volume.
12. See Premasiri in this volume.
13. See Premasiri in this volume.
14. That is, one who has realised the highest state of purity in Buddhist soteriology.
15. See Premasiri in this volume.
16. See Premasiri in this volume.
17. E.g. Harvey (2000, 257).
18. See Harvey in this volume.
19. The Buddhist ethical principle that takes into consideration context and practicality in making moral judgements.
20. For a different perspective on this story, see Harvey in this volume.
21. The source of this criterion is the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, D. *sutta* 16, D.II.124–125.

## Abbreviations

**A.** *Āṅuttara-nikaya* vol.I (1961, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), vol. II (1888, repr. 1976), edited by R. Morris. Vols. III–V (1897, 1899, 1900, repr. 1958), edited by E. Hardy. London: Pali Text Society, as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012.

**D.** *Dīgha-nikaya* vols. I–III, (1890, 1893, 1911, repr. 1976), edited by J. E. Carpenter. London: Pali Text Society, as translated by M. Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1995.

**D-a.** *Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*, vols. I–III, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1968, 1971), Pali Text Society: commentary on the *Dīgha Nikāya*, untranslated, edited by T. W. R. Davids and J. E. Carpenter (I and II) and W. Stede (III).

**Jat.** *The Jātaka, Together with Its Commentary*, Ed. by V. Fausboll, 6 vols. London, Luzac and Co. (vol.1), & Tibner and Co. (vols 2–6), 1877–1896. The Pali, and English translations all of them are available at: <https://jatakastories.div.ed.ac.uk>. The translations are those done by various hands under E. B. Cowell, *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, 6 vols., London: Pali Text Society, 1895–1907. Newer translations are the following. N. Appleton and S. Shaw, *The Ten Great Birth Stories of the Buddha: The Mahānipāta of the Jātakavaṇṇanā*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2 volumes, 2015; this translates the final 10 and longest *Jātakas*: nos. 538–547. S. Shaw, *The Jātakas: Birth Stories of the Bodhisatta*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2006, translates 26 of the *Jātakas*: nos. 1, 9, 20, 37, 48, 55, 75, 94, 95, 99, 106, 108, 121, 128, 248, 273, 313, 316, 385, 402, 407, 476, 506, 538, 539, and 540.

**M.** *Majjhima-nikaya* I–III (1888, 1898, 1899, repr. 1979), edited by V. Trenckener. London: Pali Text Society, as translated by Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Bodhi. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001.

**S.** *Samyutta-nikaya* vols. I–V (1884–1898, repr. 1973–1976), edited by M. L. Feer. London: Pali Text Society, as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.

**Sn.** *Suttanipāṭa*, translated by N. A. Jayawickrama, *Suttanipāṭa: Text and Translation*. Colombo: Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, 2001.

**Vin.** *Vinaya-pitakam* vols. I–V, edited by H. Oldenberg. London: Pali Text Society, 1879–1883, repr. 1969. Translated by I. B. Horner as *The Book of the Discipline*, 5 vols., London: Pali Text Society, 1938–1966.

References to Sn. are by verse number; those to the other texts above are by the volume and page number of the Pali text, the page numbers being shown in their translations within square brackets. In the case of Vin., vols. I and II of the Pali are vols. IV and V in the translations.

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