BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON MINDFUL LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

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ABSTRACT

Buddhist teaching propounds a simple contemplative awareness or mindfulness as the highest source of wisdom, higher than all mundane wisdom that transforms directly into altruistic mind. In fact, wisdom and altruistic mind are often understood as one arising from the other.

The threat to the very foundation of existence stems from the ignorance of this wisdom that all existential things are interdependent and the survival of global peace is through co-existence. To eliminate the ignorance and to illuminate wisdom; the key method is to cultivate mindful awareness towards altruistic motivation. Altruistic motivation is cultivated through generating a thorough understanding of dependent origination of all existence, the core concept of Buddhist teachings. The intrinsic aspiration of understanding the true nature of self and others (inter-dependent origination) increases the sense of mutual responsibility and the altruistic motive; mutual for it is complementary, and responsibility, for it becomes an obligation of wise and the compassionate to lead others to the right path, and to act towards freeing them from suffering. The quintessential understanding of wisdom which sees objective reality develops a desire to guide all others to the state of ultimate peace.

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Hence, a perfect Mindful Leader is someone who acquires both the wisdom and an altruistic mind to feel mutually responsible in making conscious choices towards the right direction for the benefit of bringing ultimate solution to sustain peace and happiness for all sentient beings.

As per the Founder & Executive Director of Institute for Mindful Leadership, (Janice Mariturano 2013) "the aspirational definition of a Mindful Leader is someone who embodies presence by cultivating four fundamentals of excellence: focus, clarity, creativity and compassion. She further elaborates that in such state of cultivation of excellence, one can bring oneself more consistently into the present moment into that space of the present moment, where one get to make more conscious choices."

Comprehending the above statement, it clearly signifies the fundamental Buddhist concept of virtues that are indispensable for the state of awakening; Buddhist Wisdom and Altruistic Mind or more ideally the Noble Eightfold Path[1] (which leads to the cessation of Pain). Many profound doctrines in the mankind's search for ultimate peace emerged from this core teaching of the Buddha, the Noble Eightfold Path.

Thus this Present work is an attempt to justify how Mindfulness becomes synonymous with the fundamental teachings of the Buddha and how, a sense of 'mutual responsibility', is purely a manifestation of associated practices, in the context of Mindful Leadership for sustainable peace. Meditation, indisputably the most effective Buddhist technique, has been reviewed at, in the purview of post-modern global society.

1. SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Individual human nature is a complex subject. It is thus easy to arrive at a conjecture that conflicts and wars are but natural. Yet, despite all the complexities in understanding and predicting behavior of individuals and masses, want of sustained peace, unarguably stands out as one of the most – if not the highest - desirous goals of our civilization. And it turns out that it may not be natural as conflict as an age old idiom puts it - familiarity breeds

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1. Correct view & correct intention are commonly called Wisdom, correct speech, correct action & correct livelihood as Ethics, and correct effort, correct mindfulness & correct meditative absorption as Meditative absorption.

contempt, and as Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) famously declared a ubiquitous manifestation of conflict - 'Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.'

It is not hard to imagine though - billions of humans, looking upon themselves through diverse lenses of self-identities, that each one can be cultivated into resourceful individual, who have learnt to be calm and accepting to diversity others bring, and appreciate the opportunity to witness what they may or may not lack within. This sounds difficult, but not un-natural – paints roughly a picture of most desirous goal of human kind. Note – In the context of this paper, not to be misunderstood with peace, as in tranquility or calmness, which is a state of individual mind. A rather well accepted measure of sustained peace is 'non-violence' – Absence/reduction of violence of all kinds [1] Means to achieve sustained peace is a vastly debated topic. In general peace theories can be broadly categorized into following two mechanisms:

i. Top down – use of Political, Military, Economic & cultural power.[1]

ii. Bottom up – Voluntary peace for example by cultivating tolerance and changing mindsets. [2]

Both means of attaining peace underscore the fact that conflict is natural. An apparent key difference is that a top down approach cannot work unless a power is ever-present to control violence, while bottom up approach aims for a more sustainable state of affairs. Former approach is more conservative and aims for 'negative peace' – merely, an absence of war in which no active military violence is taking place, while the latter approach is more comprehensive way towards 'positive peace', denoting continuing presence of an equitable and just social order , as well as ecological harmony. [3]

The downside however of a bottom-up approach is that it is rather difficult and even un-imaginable to institutionalize it, since use of power is not enough by definition, the transformation should take place at individual level and spread outwards, and lastly, formal strategies to build sustainable and long lasting peace are lacking. What comes in handy though is a rare resource available to mankind - an authoritative peace leadership. A leader can not only transform

informal strategies into guiding principles of togetherness, but also reaches & inspires each individual to effect transformation.

2. PEACE LEADERSHIP

In simple words Leadership is a reciprocal, transactional and transformational process in which individuals are permitted to influence and motivate others to promote the attaining of group and individual goals [4]. In most generic way, leadership exists at all levels – from within an individual to group of friends and to small and large communities coming together on the basis of for example common social, political, religious & economic goals. Stogdil (1974) suggested that there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it [5]. It is thus needed to limit the definition, and focus on certain characteristics of leaders in the context of this paper. Again, the list of characteristics might include aspects such as Authenticity and integrity, Self-knowledge and emotional intelligence, intuition, creativity, Courage, understanding of power and influencing, Strong interpersonal skills, Strong verbal and non-verbal communication skills, Self-confidence and optimism, Adaptive capacity and the ability to perform different roles, Engagement etc. [7]

Proposed below are some of the characteristic based on four quadrants as conceptualized by McIntyre Miller and Green (2015) [8], and are translated here into leadership qualities enabling building and sustaining peace:

> i. I quadrant – Love, compassion, kind-heartedness, patience, self-reflection, empathy for self and others, and forgiveness.
>
> ii. IT quadrant - conflict resolution, negotiation techniques, dialogue, reſtorative justice, reconciliation, adaptability and openness
>
> iii. WE quadrant - Motivating and Inspiring, enabling communities to get together and build institutions for knowledge sharing, activities, discussion forums and meditation.
>
> iv. ITS quadrant – Formal & informal authority, allowing

one to turn theory into practice, implement innovative ideas.

These aspect are very much interrelated. For example, implementation of new ideas from the ITS quadrant is supported by quality to negotiate in the IT quadrant, take responsibility of consequences and take right decisions from the I quadrant, and last but not the least, keep the faith of masses & the momentum behind those ideas.

3. ENGAGED BUDDHISM

Over last few years, several scholars have begun to associate abovementioned aspect as contained in social side of Buddhist teachings. In the past, Buddhism had been great source of treatise on attaining freedom from suffering (Dukkha), and attain absolute awareness (Nirvana). However, when Buddhists speak of the universal altruism of 'great love' (mahamantri) and 'great compassion', empathy (mahakaruna), they clearly speak of a social aspect. Historically, ideal of bodhisattva as conveyed in the Mahayana texts, the great emperor Ashoka's transformation from a king to a social crusader from the sutras of pali canon, or the great Mahayana philosopher Nagarjuna's jewel counsel, all teachings and practices suggest social fiber deeply ingrained in Buddhist philosophy [9]. Revisiting texts like from Dhammapada: 1:3-5, below [10]:

"Look how he abused me and beat 'em,
How he threw me down and robbed me."
Live with such thoughts and you live in hate.
Look how he abused me and beat 'em,
How he threw me down and robbed me."
Abandon such thoughts and live in love.
In this world hate never yet dispelled hate.
Only love dispels hate. This is the Law ancient and exhaustible.

Contents of this passage in fact consist the basis of Buddhist views on Peace. Buddhist understanding of peace is closely linked with, and emanates from idea of Wisdom – together with mindfulness &

compassion it forms one of the core Buddhist ideas. It is wisdom to realize that the underlying cause of conflict and war in the society lies within ourselves. And thus peace has to begin from individuals. In this way Buddhists put forth the idea of inculcating inner peace to effect, attain and sustain global peace [11].

This finds coherence in our idea of peace leadership that we try to construct in today's world. Many scholars have realized this over this years, and not only that research in peace leadership seek answers in Buddhist philosophy, but also Buddhist scholars have been able to build upon social aspect, as evident in fundamentals of 'Engaged Buddhism'. King (2009) [12] provides a very accurate description – 'Engaged Buddhism is defined and unified by the intention of Buddhists of whatever sect to apply the values and teachings of Buddhism to the problems of society in a non-violent way, motivated by concern for the welfare of others and as an expression of their own Buddhist practices.'. With modern understanding of Buddhism, all conventional wisdom is seen in fresh light, and there is no fear against an explicit recognition of dangers of status quo. Karunakara (2002) [17] affirms - the Buddha emphasized that, with true understanding of the nature, man may not be the victim of superstition and demagogue in religion and politics. So the knowledge of human nature, of society and thought is important for a man who want freedom from suffering and exploitation. Unless the suffers know how they are being exploited, they cannot get rid of exploitation being done through the ill- natured social system. This shows signs of what can undoubtedly constitute Thich Nhat Hanh's (2017) one of the most important contribution to modern Buddhism, and a live example of peace leadership in today's world – the Fourteen percepts:

> i. Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.

> ii. Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge.

Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.

iii. Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education. However, through compassionate dialogue, help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness.

iv. Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, visits, images, and sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.

v. Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life Fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.

vi. Do not maintain anger or hatred. Learn to penetrate and transform them when they are still seeds in your consciousness. As soon as they arise, turn your attention to your breath in order to see and understand the nature of your hatred.

vii. Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Practice mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. Be in touch with what is wondrous, refreshing, and healing both inside and around you. Plant seeds of joy, peace, and understanding in yourself in order to facilitate the work of transformation in the depths of your consciousness.

viii. Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

ix. Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause division and hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn

things of which you are not sure. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety.

x. Do not use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit, or transform your community into a political party. A religious community, however, should take a clear stand against oppression and injustice and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.

xi. Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to live. Select a vocation that helps realize your ideal of compassion.

xii. Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.

xiii. Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others, but prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

xiv. Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Do not look on your body as only an instrument. Preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of the Way. (For brothers and sisters who are not monks and nuns:) Sexual expression should not take place without love and commitment. In sexual relationships, be aware of future suffering that may be caused. To preserve the happiness of others, respect the rights and commitments of others. Be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world. Meditate on the world into which you are bringing new beings.

4. MINDFULNESS

Wisdom, compassion and mindfulness are regarded as three key teachings of Buddhism, irrespective of multiple sects. Looking closely, one leads to other; they are one interconnected concept which can be approached from three sides. All three aspects are

defined in numerous ways with voluminous commentaries on each subject, yet it is worthwhile to revisit the concept of Mindfulness in the present context. Instead of using a full objective description what is mindfulness, which will nevertheless be extremely complicated and perhaps will not serve the purpose of understanding the core of it, following quote from the Great Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh (2000) describes the core concept of mindfulness, and will suffice to move on with the discussion:

If while washing dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not "washing the dishes to wash the dishes." What's more, we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't wash the dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus we are sucked away into the future -and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life.

At the core of it, mindfulness is awareness of the present. Early discourses divide mindfulness further into four main areas of practice [14], which are:

i. Mindfulness of the body,

ii. Mindfulness of the feelings,

iii. Mindfulness of the mental states (feelings)

iv. Mindfulness of the dharmas (object of mind)

Kavagisvaracharya (2006) [16], elaborates upon what does awareness exactly mean: Mindfulness, or awareness, does not mean that you should think and be conscious 'I am doing this' or 'I am doing that' NO. Just the contrary. The moment you think 'I am doing this', you become self- conscious, and then you do not live in the action, but you live in the idea 'I am', and consequently your work too is spoilt. You should forget yourself completely, and lose yourself in what you do. The moment a speaker becomes self-conscious and thinks 'I am addressing an audience', his speech is disturbed and his trend of thoughts broken. But when he forgets himself in his speech, in his subject, then he is at his best, he speaks

well and explains things clearly. All great work-artistic, poetic, intellectual or spiritual – is produced at those moments when they forgets themselves altogether, and are free from self-consciousness.

In today's world, definition and scope of Mindfulness has evolved in encompassing more general aspects of awareness. This is also natural because a training like of Mindfulness begins from inner dialogue with the mind, and in today's world, where socio-political objects of contemplation have grown more and more in size and influence, it becomes a part of the practice to strive for peace not only within, but peace as it manifests into compassion for all sentient beings. When scholars and activists began to make apparent link between peace and mindfulness, it also emerged that the concept and practice of mindfulness delivers essential ingredients to lead the path to the peace. Especially, when mindfulness also provides a practical way to cultivating Wisdom and compassion.

With western understanding of benefits of mindfulness practices, there has been a flood of interpretation, commentaries, and innovative concepts have emerged over the years. Philosophers, managers, activists, and motivators have equally contributed to teach mindfulness in various ways possible. For instance, Maria Gonzalez (2013) a business veteran, a corporate executive, and a coach for business leaders, professionals proposed the incorporated mindfulness training in her methods of coaching, and suggested that mindful leaders are:

i. Present → greater focus and concentration

ii. Aware → Improved time management

iii. Calm → Improved judgement and decision making

iv. Focused → an enhanced ability to deal with conflict

v. Clear → Increased ability to deal with conflict

vi. Equanimous → Enhanced team effectiveness

vii. Positive → greater innovation and inspiration

viii. Compassionate → greater productivity

ix. Impeccable → Increased ability to deal with stress

While mindfulness has evolved into multiple flavors if trainings and practices for making leaders in the corporate world, which is

indeed quite positive, there remains more to be harnessed from accurate understanding of mindfulness in the context of peace leadership. One of the ways could be to revisit the basic framework and leave the fine details to be left untouched. The rationale behind is that there is a important constituent of leadership which is variable, which has to emerge from within and which can not be inculcated. This is keeping in mind that leadership essentially bridges the gap created by absence of any formal strategies for peace building. There cannot be more than core of mindfulness practices, as put forth in early Buddhist teachings, that a leader should begin with and then begin on a journey to find the best possible way for building a peaceful society. This is indeed somewhere midway on the age old debate of whether leaders are made or born. Great leaders witnessed by mankind in last century or so, may all not have been through a mindfulness training, but they found their way to inculcate qualities of great leadership, while keeping the masses adherent to the principles they advocated. To accelerate towards the goal of sustainable peace, however, aspiring individuals should be set on course by using the fundamental concepts of mindfulness practices.

Adhering to the 4 objects of contemplation within mindfulness, and to the four quadrants of leadership qualities as cited in previous section, evolution of mindfulness in peace leaders can be depicted as pictorially below:
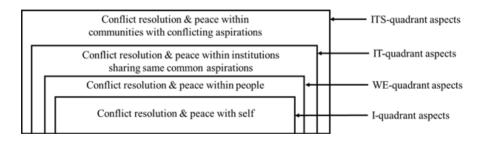

Figure 1. Objects of mindful contemplation aligned with leadership qualities

Note that qualities of leadership, as borrowed from each of the four quadrant are not an input to the mindfulness practice, but merely shown here to demonstrate alignment with each of four. Also, objects

of contemplation are indicated as not independent quadrants but one emerging from the other, as in the teachings of early Buddhism where one should meditate on body, feelings, mental state and dharmas. It is evident that it is a gradual and transitional process and one cannot begin except from self and outwards. Aspects of individual transformation through attaining wisdom and compassion are not explicitly highlighted as there is natural progression of learnings which is variable for individuals and cannot be attached to a method.

5. CONCLUSION

Idea of negative and positive peace are establish means of attaining sustainable peace in the modern society, and to highlight aspects of peace leadership. Buddhist idea of peace is explored in brief to draw parallels in a wider human aspiration and early Buddhist teachings. Social aspects of teaching has been recognized and built upon my modern scholars. Special mention goes to what is generally referred to Engaged Buddhism. Evolution of mindfulness from a core Buddhist concept to modern age mindfulness coaching & training is also highlighted. Leadership for sustained peace however needs to harness understanding of mindfulness at its core. Leadership methods based on mindfulness cannot be prescribed as the course of action has to be natural and enforced, which is true to the concept of mindfulness.

Finally, a parallel has been drawn between qualities of leadership and objects of contemplation as would fall in natural progression of development of mindful leadership for sustainable peace.

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