

Justice

The first of the Four Noble Truths states that suffering is inescapable: things just do not always go the way we want. Since most of us are not Enlightened, we are bound to let each other down however much we try to be ethical. Apart from this, there are things like tsunamis and earthquakes which are beyond anyone's control. To some extent life is inherently "unfair". We need to cultivate acceptance and forgiveness.

However, this does not justify apathy or complacency. We cannot blame anyone for a tsunami, but we can certainly help those affected by it. If we are committed to the path leading towards Enlightenment (perfect wisdom and compassion), we need to train ourselves accordingly.

The Four Noble Truths

1. There is suffering
2. Suffering is caused by craving
3. It's possible to stop craving
4. by following the Eightfold Path

Much suffering is caused by craving: for things, power, experiences; lack of contentment or acceptance of what is.

The Five Precepts describe the behaviour of a Buddha. All express the over-arching principle of loving kindness and non-harming (*ahimsa*); abstaining from wielding power over others. Thus, deliberate injustice is clearly unethical.

The Five Precepts

Behaviour to avoid

harming living beings
taking the not-given
sexual misconduct/greed
false speech
taking intoxicants that
cloud the mind



body

speech

mind

Behaviour to develop

loving-kindness
generosity
stillness and contentment
truthful speech
mindfulness, or awareness

Ashoka

The Indian emperor Ashoka ruled much of northern India in the 3rd century BCE. Seeing the suffering caused by his warfare, he converted to Buddhism and wrote new guidelines for his people. They cover state morality and the conduct of the individual.

These were intended to lead to a more just society, favourable to spiritual values, dedicated to peaceful co-existence with neighbours rather than empire-building.

A few of Ashoka's guidelines

Governments should negotiate, not fight.

People should

- treat people and animals kindly
- respect the Buddha's teachings
- learn about other religions
- respect differing opinions and ways
- obey their parents
- be loyal to their friends
- be honest and trustworthy
- be generous
- show gratitude

The Place of Peace Manchester Buddhist Centre



clearvision



The Manchester Buddhist Centre (MBC) opened in its present building in Manchester's Northern Quarter in July 1996. The conversion of this ruined Victorian cotton warehouse had taken two years of voluntary work by the MBC sangha (spiritual community).

It was intended as a centre of Buddhist practice and teaching, but also as a place of peace in the heart of the city; a place of beauty and refreshment for the general public.

For Buddhists, the origins of peace and suffering lie in the human heart. We always have the choice to cultivate peace, regardless of circumstances. However, certain conditions support or impede this. The look of the MBC reflects a belief that well cared-for, aesthetic but simple surroundings can inspire faith and enhance our sense of peace and well-being, enabling us to treat ourselves and others more kindly.



Buddhism does not include belief in a creator God. To live peacefully together in a world in which nobody is in charge, the question is, What works? Buddhism says simply that ethics - loving kindness - is the answer.



The Dhammapada

"He insulted me, he hurt me, he defeated me, he robbed me." Those who think such thoughts will not be free from hate. 1:3

"...hate is not conquered by hate: hate is conquered by love. This is an eternal law." 1:5

The Metta Sutta (Discourse on Loving-Kindness)

*This is what should be done
By those skilled in goodness
Who know the place of peace:*

*Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech;
Humble and not conceited;
Contented and easily satisfied;
Unburdened with duties, frugal in their ways;
Peaceful and calm, and wise and skilful,
Not proud or demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
that the wise would later reprove.*

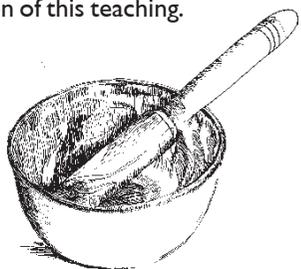
*Wishing, "In gladness and in safety,
may all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be,
And whether they be weak or strong,
omitting none,
The great or mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born -
May all beings be at ease!
Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another."*

*Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart should one
cherish all living beings,
Radiating kindness over the entire world,
Spreading upward to the skies
And downward to the depth,
Outward and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or
lying down
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted, having clarity of vision
Being freed from all sense desires,
is not born again to this world.*

The **Metta Sutta** is from the Pali Canon, the earliest body of Buddhist scripture.

Clearly locating peace of mind in a life of kindness, it describes the attitude cultivated by those who know "the place of peace" - those who know what's really good for them and for others. It advocates the conscious development of a boundless and cherishing heart towards all that lives, including those we do not know.

The **Metta Bhavana** (cultivation of loving kindness) meditation practice is a formal expression of this teaching.



The Place of Peace

is a collaboration between Manchester Cathedral (Church of England) and the Clear Vision Trust/ Manchester Buddhist Centre (MBC) (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order).

Clear Vision runs the MBC's school visits service and provides INSET and award-winning resources for Buddhism in your classroom. For details please see website below or phone 0161 839 9579.

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Peace and war

For Buddhists, peace is a state of mind which comes from living ethically and practising awareness. Starting where we are, we can begin to practise living by the five ethical precepts (back page), deepening awareness, to the best of our current ability.

The possibility of eventually attaining perfect peace is proved by the experience of the Buddha himself: At Enlightenment he is believed to have attained a state of perfect wisdom and compassion.

Peace here is seen as a deep understanding of and harmony with Reality, the Way Things Are; a total victory over the Three Poisons: greed, hatred and ignorance of Reality.

War motivated by greed for power, land or resources is unethical, being based on hatred; on ignorance of interconnectedness. Such behaviour will impede our path to Enlightenment - which is formulated in various ways including the Threefold Way and Noble Eightfold Path.

The Threefold Way

Ethics
Meditation
Wisdom

Without the clear conscience which comes from ethical behaviour, we will only get so far in meditation. Ethics and the deepening awareness that comes from meditation will gradually deepen our wisdom, our understanding of Reality, the Way Things Are.

The Noble Eightfold Path

- 1 Right vision
or understanding
- 2 Right emotion
- 3 Right speech
- 4 Right action
- 5 Right livelihood
- 6 Right effort
- 7 Right mindfulness
- 8 Right meditation
or concentration



Can war ever be justified?

Not all Buddhists are strictly pacifist. Some might take the view that violence might be justified where it would prevent an even greater violence. Here the teaching of

"skilful means" (*upaya*) would be relevant: what determines the ethics of an action is the loving or harmful intention behind it, and consideration of the possible outcomes.

The Dhammapada

"If a man should conquer in battle a thousand and a thousand more, and another man should conquer himself, his would be the greater victory, because the greatest of victories is over oneself." 8:103-105

Discuss: what do you think is meant by "victory over oneself"?