

Building a Fraternal World

A Won Buddhist Perspective

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We are living in a new world in which the potential of fraternity can be realized. In less than one generation the world has become dramatically interconnected; through the advancements of science and technology we now truly live in the *global village*. This Buddhist and Catholic Dialogue on Suffering, Liberation and Fraternity is an important step in creating an informed and compassionate foundation that addresses the difficulties faced by persons, families, communities, societies, nations, and the world.

Humanistic Buddhism started with Gautama Buddha. The Buddha was born a human being, cultivated the path of awakening, became enlightened, and strived to enlighten other human beings in this world. Great Master So-Tae-San, the founder of

Won Buddhism, elaborated on the many ways in which the Buddha's teachings are relevant to contemporary society. Although he was born in the early twentieth century in a simple Korean village, he foresaw the effects technology would have on the world and its special challenge to spirituality. So-Tae-San promoted Buddhist ethics and meditation practice for practical and useful purposes for everyone, in any station of society.

Pope Francis said, "Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are all relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace."¹ In the hope of building a fraternal world, Won Buddhism offers the following four teachings.

Non-Dualism and One World Community

Non-dualism refers to the idea that the universe and all its multiplicity are ultimately appearances of one essential reality. All beings in the universe are manifestations of Dharmakāya Buddha. All things in the universe are non-dual despite their different names.² In 1916, So-Tae-San proclaimed One World Community based on the Buddhist truth of total interconnectedness and interdependency. He taught that all beings in the universe are of one essential nature. He recognized that our universal and even cosmic interdependence would eventually bring people of all continents, races, and religions together to face a common future. One World Community reflecting One Essential Reality is the fundamental

1. Pope Francis's Message for the World Day of Peace 2014 entitled "Fraternity: The Foundation and Pathway to Peace," no.1.

2. *The Scripture of Won Buddhism*, (Iksan, Korea: Won Buddhism Publishing, 2011), 7.

moral principle for our peaceful coexistence; and our peaceful coexistence is the only way to ensure our continued existence.

In 1961, Master Chung-San, So-Tae-San's successor, proclaimed the Triple Universal Ethics for the new global society: Ethics of the World's Religions, Ethics of Humanity, and Ethics of Co-workers. The world's religions are based on one Common Source and Universal Principles. Therefore, all religions must understand their common source. This understanding can bring about a greater harmony among different religious traditions. All human beings are interconnected as an extended family. And all social and political enterprises aim to construct a prosperous and peaceful world. Although ethnicity and nationality vary, humanity remains One Family on Earth, joined by the One Universal Energy.

To actualize the One World Community and the Triple Universal Ethics, Won Buddhism has served on many important UN Committees to impart an ethical, and spiritual dimension to important global decisions. When Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the UN was elected, our Head Dharma Master and I met with him to discuss how to build a strong partnership with world's religions and the United Nations. Following the tragedy of September 11, the UN often turned to religion as a sphere of influential to help build peace and security in the world. Faith-based organizations and religious NGOs are rooted in families and local communities, and thus they are an indispensable resource that responds with immediate, practical aid to crises throughout the world. As part of One World Community, Won Buddhism unequivocally accepts all other religions and actively encourages interreligious dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

Cultivate a Spiritual Civilization

One of the guiding principles distinguishing Won Buddhism is that "as material civilization develops, cultivate spiritual civilization accordingly."³ We recognize that a political, economic, and scientific revolution requires a parallel spiritual evolution. Materialism is a fact we cannot avoid. However, as we become increasingly materialistic, technologically advanced, and globally integrated, we must also develop our spirituality in equal measure.

The materially fortunate among us enjoy countless new items of convenience, comfort, and entertainment. Although we benefit and make use of these new material things, in fact, this growing material wealth has weakened our spirituality. As material goods and services proliferate into all realms of our lives, they increasingly dominate us and leave us little room for spirituality.

The ebbing tide of spirituality places humanity at risk. Technology has connected the whole world as never before, but only ethical and spiritual values can instill in us the wisdom to choose the best way to use technology. Can we choose the universal good over selfish purposes if that choice diminishes our material comfort? We must cultivate spiritual civilization by bringing spiritual values back into our everyday lives.

When we cultivate our minds through meditation and mindfulness we not only prevent our own suffering, but we also alleviate suffering at large. Meditation restores our Buddha-nature, the intrinsic goodness and inner beauty each one of us possesses. Universal compassion can blossom only from the seed of individual spiritual cultivation. Mind-cultivation, sitting in silence and peace

3. Ibid, 88.

can bring spiritual meaning to daily life. It is an essential step towards creating a bright future for all humanity. When people discover their inherent spiritual natures, they will naturally acquire more tolerance and respect for their fellow human beings. Thus, cultivating spirituality will foster the spirit of cooperation and friendship that is so needed in our world.

In building a fraternal world, we should address spiritual needs as well as material needs, spiritual poverty as well as material poverty. Spiritual and moral empowerment must accompany economic, political and legal advancement. Only if scientific civilization can be integrated with inner spiritual civilization can harmony and an ideal society be established in the world.

Buddha-nature and Egalitarian Relationships

Buddha promoted egalitarian relationships based on his fundamental teachings such as no self, emptiness, and impermanence. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, we believe that everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender, is born with the same and equal Buddha-nature, which is the seed of enlightenment. The concept of our universal Buddha-nature is an egalitarian principle that protects us from causing harm from discrimination.

Gender equality is a founding tenet of Won Buddhism, and remarkably this has been the case since 1916. Religion has too often failed to recognize equal rights and opportunities for women even as gender equality advances at all other levels of society. Putting principle into practice, today the Supreme Council of Won Buddhism, its highest decision making body, consists of an equal number of male and female leaders.

Dependent Arising and Gratitude

One of the core teachings of the Buddha is “dependent arising or dependent origination,” which means that everything exists in relation with one another. Popular terms we hear today that have a similar meaning are “interdependency” and “interconnectedness.” Phenomena arise together in a mutually interdependent web of cause and effect. Think about the causes behind the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the house you live in. Do you know how many people worked directly and indirectly in interaction with nature and universe to make that food, clothing, or home? A respected Vietnamese Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, said that we could not just be by ourselves alone. We have to “inter-be” with every other thing. He calls dependent arising “inter-being.”

Master So-Tae-San expressed the importance of interconnectedness when he proposed: “If there is a relationship that we cannot live without, then where would there be a grace greater than that?” In So-Tae-San’s eyes, interconnectedness is grace permitting and supporting our existence, for which we should be grateful. We cannot live without air, without water, sun, moon, rain, cloud, without parents, without other human beings and all forms of life, without spiritual and religious dharma, without law and justice. We are sustained by myriad sentient beings, people and things. How grateful we are to have such support! This was his teaching of dependent arising and gratitude. Gratitude is the spiritual recognition of dependent arising, an appreciation of being part of the universe. Appreciation is expressed through kind regard and respect. Once we see our interconnectedness, a sense of appreciation naturally arises.

In conclusion, the essential foundations for building a fraternal world are understanding non-dualism for One World Community, the Cultivation of Spiritual Civilization, seeing Buddha-nature in everyone and in everything in order to build egalitarian relationship, and practicing gratitude through awakening to Dependent Arising. An individual sitting in silent meditation might not be the first image that comes to mind when we call for a reinvigorated approach to universal spirituality and global solidarity. However, this simple practice can help to cultivate spirituality that begins with individuals connected to communities that unite for peace on earth as a way of building a fraternal world.

Now is the time to translate our words, visions, and ideas into actions—to embody spirituality and practice mindfulness at all times. We have to work together to incorporate into our daily lives the spiritual practices of meditation, wisdom, loving-kindness, and compassion to build a fraternal world.

Ven. Chung Ohun Lee is a member of the Supreme Council of Won Buddhism, a representative to the United Nations since 1992, and the guiding spiritual teacher of the Won Buddhism of Manhattan. She is active in interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Her most recent book is Living Dharma: A Guide to Daily Practice of Won Buddhism (2012).