



Sri Lanka's President in his address to the World Body made a significant suggestion particularly for the attention of big powers. 'Do follow the advice of the religious leader who preached compassion and humility as the basis for solving all problems.'

Although it is nothing new, what happens is that practically every one forgets this vital lesson when in a hurry and tries to get on top of his or others' problems. Compassion or love, humility, respect, and also dignity are not always considered necessary in handling issues or dealing with people. Apparently these sterling human qualities are thrown overboard in situations which call for serious consideration and big solutions. Big solutions here means not just simple or magical cures, but ones that are going to have a lasting impact on world events and people. What generally happens is those taking the responsibility of handling these issues consider themselves to be the sole authorities capable and delivering the goods. This coupled with 'the holier than thou' attitude they invariably adopt in the process prevents them from seeing others as worthy human beings, worthy of their respect and treatment as equal partners in the game. Leaving aside the teaching of the Buddha, these experts seem to ignore the familiar advice of Jesus Christ most of them believe in, and forget to love their neighbor.

There can be no human being that can be dismissed as useless or unimportant according to Buddha's teaching. There can be no one less equal than others. This basic truth ought to compel a person to accept the worth of any one whatever position that individual is placed in society. This is a very tall order for people used to dictating terms to subordinates and the rest of the world. One simple but relevant question that can be posed to such high and mighty is how far can you respect your enemy? That individual too is one of



A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO WORLD PEACE?

the human family deserving your respect. The Buddhist perspective on this issue was amply demonstrated by Dalia Lama when he described Mao Stung as his best teacher.

How could that be, may be the immediate response from many. Dalai Lama considered the Chinese Ruler to be the best person to teach him tolerance, patience and forgiveness. One who offers so much ben-

efit and immense opportunities for one's growth or development truly plays a big role in educating him on proper lines.

The lesson one can learn from the Tibetan leader is that one cannot solve problems if one starts the process hating the other party or even devaluing them. First and foremost those individuals or groups must be treated with respect, for whatever action is to be taken.

Let me come back to my original question. Can the powerful persons or groups adopt the attitude and behavior of Dalai Lama? Are they prepared to treat their enemies with respect?

IN point of fact, if we treat all human beings with respect we may not have enemies as such, but only persons we cannot agree with or have a dispute with. That again is going a long way in changing our behavior. I am reminded of the scene where the Iranian President Mahmoud Abmadijenad appeared on the rostrum in the UN Assembly recently, and a host of high and mighty representatives staging a mass walk out in protest. That was the blunt way of telling the Iranian leader and the rest of the world that they do not consider the man standing in front of them worthy of giving a hearing. Not only that, they gave a more poignant message that this is a man we cannot stand the sight of.

The very blunt question one must put to these powerful men and women is, if you cannot stand the sight of an individual how on earth are you going to solve problems that affect the whole humanity? That exactly is what they arrogate to themselves, i.e. ridding the world of evil and making it a better place for humans.

What an absurd ambition, for men and women who cannot treat a human being with respect?

Do they really accept the need to adopt a compassionate attitude towards all humans if at all they want to correct and guide them? It appears that going by the standards commonly used by them there are at least two categories of individuals and groups in the world, namely good and bad or desirable and undesirable. Starting on this premise they seem to go ahead with their cleansing campaign in order to free the world of all the

undesirable elements. What type of world do they hope to usher in? Don't they realize that no religious teacher has yet being able to accomplish this leveling process they envisage? What did Jesus Christ say just before succumbing to the injuries on the cross? Didn't he exhort his disciples to show mercy to the culprit? Remember the way Buddha treated Angulimala the man who had already killed nine hundred and ninety nine and was aiming to get him? He showed the same compassion that he showed his most devoted follower. That approach paved the way for one of the famous disciples to enter the Order of Bhikkhus under him.

One would not expect the current world leaders to become Christ or Buddha, but at least those professing these faiths ought to think twice before rejecting people they do not like. They should at least grant them the privilege to go about their business as usual and stand on their own feet before the world. Can the current crop of peace-makers take a fresh look at themselves and open their eye to the existing reality around them?

It is their inability or reluctance to do this simple exercise that renders them ineffective in their declared mission. In keeping with the current standard, there arises a particular categorization of all issues including the much-talked of human rights. That is the human rights of the favorites and non-favorites or the unwanted. That too becomes a very selective operation. Consider the recent hue and cry about human rights in Lybia and Palestine. Whereas Lybia caused a lot of concern for the big powers the plight of Palestinians did not bother them as much. What about Saudi Arabia? It is a case of expressing satisfaction or gratitude for the little offered to its women folk. But Iranian situation has to be taken



more seriously. All of them were in a mighty hurry to correct the situation in Gaddafi's land, but not so urgent when it comes to Syria or even Yemen.

It was to this basic reality that President Mahinda Rajapakse referred in his address to the UN. It becomes obvious and utterly important to listen to others' views in order to deal with them, leaving aside the question of correcting them. How can an individual not prepared to look another in the eye listen to that person and understand what he thinks and wants? Listening involves another second step, i.e. being able to tolerate others' views. That again means the ability to stand criticism. It was strong criticism that the Iranian President was ready to offer the Western leaders, and the latter avoided the situation by getting their representatives to walk out in advance. What marvelous achievement on the part of people in charge of world affairs? To put it bluntly, forget about world peace if you are not at peace with yourself when someone criticizes you.

Mahinda Rajapakse did not say all that. He was much more diplomatic. He went for the best teacher known to him his people, the Buddha who was quoted at a similar world conference by another Sri Lankan leader, by the name of J.R. Jayewardene, President to be, at the St. Francisco Conference held some sixty odd years ago just on the eve of the current world body coming into existence. He too gave a similar message to the war-weary world. He quoted the Buddha's words advising people to refrain themselves from getting into the cycle of hatred which had caused all the destruction that the world had endured during the Second World War. 'Nahi vewrena verani, smmanti kudacanam' was what the Buddha said, which means that

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