

BUDDHISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Perspectives and Responses to Global Challenges and Crises

Organized by
Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India
at
Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda (Bihar)
(Deemed to be University)

Date: March 17-19, 2017

Venue: Rajgir International Convention Centre, Rajgir & Nava Nalanda Mahavihara,
Nalanda, Bihar (India)

An International Conference on the theme of “*Buddhism in the 21st Century - Perspectives and Responses to Global Challenges and Crises*” is being organized by the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India at Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, (Deemed to be University), Nalanda, Bihar from March 17-19, 2017 at Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda in the state of Bihar, India.

The conference to be inaugurated by HH the Dalai Lama is expected to be attended by the supreme Buddhist religious hierarchy of the Holy Sangha of various countries, spiritual masters, scholars and eminent delegates from world over. The deliberations at the conference is aimed to address the unprecedented threats and challenges faced by the contemporary world and develop a unified Buddhist response. The conference will deliberate on Buddhist perspectives towards such issues as: ecological sustainability, social and economic justice, ethics and values, education, inter-religious understanding, and gender equality. A main area of focus will be on modes of disseminating and internalizing Buddhist values. How can Buddhists from different schools and lineages work together to address the challenges of these issues and challenges both within their own communities and on global scale and offer model communities for the future? A key question will be; how can Buddhism’s fundamental values provide inspiration and guidance in contemporary settings?

The Background:

Our world is grappling with unprecedented crises. Climate change, terrorism, religious and ideological intolerance, depletion of resources, economic disparity, and other issues plague human development. Similarly, corruption and dysfunctional governments are impacting countries and societies, while at the individual level people are facing numerous forms of personal stress. These are indicative of a grave systemic disorder that needs to be addressed at a fundamental level. These problems—both individual and social—are connected to a neglect of basic human values. These values, the foundations of a healthy and meaningful life, are the ingredients that shape the personality and positively transform our behavior and attitude towards our fellow beings and the world around us. Buddhism has a great deal to say about these values.

All the religious traditions of the world believe in peace and harmony. The moral principles and values they teach can play a pivotal role in mitigating the suffering of human beings. It is thus ironical that many of the current conflicts around the world are being fought along religious, sectarian and ideological divides. In the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama “We must remember that the different religions, ideologies, and political systems of the world are meant for human beings to achieve happiness. We must not lose sight of this fundamental goal and at no time should we place means above ends; the supremacy of humanity over matter and ideology must always be maintained.” Buddha ascribed greed, hatred, and delusion as the three root causes of unwholesome deeds which often manifest as conflicts and wars. Towards this Buddha outlined a system of mental training to confront and eliminate these negative emotions and states of mind. This system is even more relevant to the challenges that we face in the twenty-first century. Thus, while the world is witnessing untold suffering inflicted by humans on fellow human beings, Buddhists must take a proactive responsibility in proffering and contributing to mitigation of the causes of the conflict, promoting greater understanding and dialogue and finding solutions for way forward. Buddhism also can play a pivotal role in promoting dialogue and understanding among religions and fostering religious harmony and mechanism to resolve differences.

The advent of 21st century also brought about a realization that “Mother Earth” and us are at a crucial crossroads where our survival as the world we know and that of other species is at stake. Climate change, rising sea level, desertification, extinction of species, pollution, newer epidemics are all scientifically proven to be a direct result of our actions, wanton greed, over exploitation of natural resources and recklessness. Buddhist leaders have been speaking about this for decades drawing on Buddha’s realization of dependent co-arising, which interconnects all things in the universe. The Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders, signed by world’s most recognized Buddhist leaders, was submitted and accepted at the COP-21 Summit in Paris in November 2015. While urging the world leaders to act with wisdom and compassion it also highlighted the need for Buddhists to look inwards and take greater participation in effecting change. Lots still needs to be done to turn this vision and words into action. There is a crucial need for a paradigm shift in human mindset, attitude and the basic approach towards nature. Drawing from Buddha’s teaching of welfare of all sentient beings Buddhist spiritual, social and political leaders, institutions can play a significant and effective role in addressing these interconnected crises.

Buddha Dhamma in Ancient India made significant contributions to the development of Indian civilization through serious and rich interaction with other Indic spiritual and philosophical traditions. Its spread to other parts of the world too led to a great churning of knowledge and cultures and flowering of diverse spiritual and philosophical traditions which further enriched the Dhamma across civilizations and are followed today by millions in Asia and the rest of the world. The great monastic universities of Vikramashila, Takshashila, Odantapuri, and Nalanda, the most prominent of them all, also played a crucial role in advancing, on the one hand, the frontiers of various disciplines like philosophy, medicine, science, and the arts, and on the other hand, educating the human heart in spirituality through the cultivation of insight, compassion, and loving kindness, the core message of the Buddha. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama refers to Tibetan Buddhism as the “Nalanda Tradition,” he is emphasizing Tibet’s links to the works of the great masters of the ancient Nalanda University: Nagarjuna, Asanga, Aryadeva, Chandrakirti, Vasubandhu, Dignaga, and Dharmakirti, among others. All the great luminaries of Nalanda University stressed critical investigation, emphasizing the importance of deeply analyzing the Dharma before accepting and practicing it, just as the Buddha himself advised. A session on the session on the preservation of the Nalanda tradition will be held in recognition of the historic Dharmic links between this ancient seat of learning and modern day Buddhism. This session is

also to give due respect to the significance of the conference site, in the auspicious environs of Nava Nalanda Mahavihara Deemed University.

Since ancient times Buddhism, as it reached countries and civilisations across Asia and later other parts of the world, has offered a way to peace at both the individual and social level. Over the centuries, the indigenous cultures, especially of Asian societies, influenced how Buddhism, was embraced, giving each tradition a unique flavour. Yet the foundations of Buddhist study and practice—such as the three baskets (*tripitaka*) and the three trainings (*trishikshas*)—are maintained across these traditions. With Buddhism now evolving as a global religion in the 21st century, there is a critical need to develop greater understanding among diverse Buddhist traditions to create a higher level of commitment to responding to global issues.

Buddhism and the depths of its philosophy, logic and sciences are being embraced by millions besides being pursued as a spiritual path. It has also become a subject of great interest and serious exchanges amongst philosophers and scientists having a deep impact on human consciousness. The conference strives to explore this fascinating aspect of Dhamma that is linked to expanding the horizons of human understanding of the physical and metaphysical world and universe as well as human mind, life and its correlation with nature and other sentient beings.

The contemporary world is in crisis. In the midst of the many challenges facing us today, it becomes imperative that we question the models of human progress and the future of our world we are striving for. No doubt, human civilization has faced many crises in the past, but the magnitude of our current challenges is alarming. There is a greater need than ever to explore how the teachings of the Buddha can contribute to resolving the problems that confront us as individuals and societies.

The Objectives:

- For Buddhist groups and individuals to share their experience in outreach they are currently doing in their communities and the world at large and to explore the opportunities and challenges this work presents.
- Examine how we can begin to act with genuine compassion for all to protect each other and our natural environment and create wellbeing and a viable and sustainable future
- To explore sustainable social, academic, economic and institutional frameworks for resolution of conflicts
- To explore ways to promote and enhance interfaith understanding and tolerance.
- To reinforce and further strength the global network Buddhism practitioners in order to enhance the Buddhist voice in the global dialogue.
- To promote and establish institutions critical to the future development of humankind and its horizon of understanding, knowledge and action, based on compassion and wisdom, universal responsibility and ethical behavior in education, governance, business and society
- To encourage and initiate greater exchange and understanding among diverse Buddhist traditions and their cultural and civilization perspectives and uniqueness
- To develop roadmaps for the preservation of Buddhist heritage.
- To promote even greater exchange, research and cooperation in the realm of Buddhism and science.
- To explore how Buddhist values can influence systems of education for the benefit of future generations.

Conference Themes: The format of the three-day conference, that aims to deliberate and evolve a Buddhist response to some of the most important problems of contemporary world, will be thematic. For the convenience of the eminent masters, scholars and practitioners being invited to the conference and to allow meaningful and extensive discussion, the theme of the conference has been divided into the following sub-themes:

1. **Conflict Avoidance and Peace Building:** The Buddhist Response
2. **Environment, Nature Conservation & Animal Welfare:** Perspective & Response
(*Sub Theme/Groups: Response to Climate Change, Building Sustainable Communities, Wildlife Conservation and Wildlife Trade, Blue Planet: Oceans, Glaciers, Rivers and Water bodies, Communication to Effect Change*)
3. **Buddhism & Sciences:** Expanding Newer Grounds with Ancient Wisdom (*Sub Theme/ Groups Mindfulness, Quantum Science, Neuroscience and Psychology, Astro Science*)
4. **Women in Buddhism** Contemplation on Past, Present and Future
5. **Secular Ethics in Education, Governance, Business, Economy, Media, Society**
6. **Promoting Interfaith Harmony**
7. **Buddhism & Social Engagement:** Compassion in Action (*Sub Theme/ Groups: Buddhism and Social Engagement, Buddhism in a Multi-Cultural World*)
8. **Buddhist Holy Sites & Heritage:** Preservation & Development (*Sub Theme/ Groups: Conservation of Holy Sites, Archaeology and Endangered sites, Intangible Heritage*)
9. **Buddhist Traditions:** Learning from Each Other
10. **Promotion of Buddhist studies and Preservation of the Nalanda Tradition**

Plenaries and Sessions: The format of the three-day conference will be thematic with sessions on themes of the day (5 themes per day) held parallel and simultaneously. Besides Inauguration and Valedictory there will be Plenaries, Technical Sessions (5 themes a day), Summit of Heads of Sangha and Prayer for Global Peace.

DAY -1, Friday, March 17

Inauguration

Plenary 1: Five Key note speakers (5 themes of the day- One speaker per theme). Session will have a Chair, Co- Chair and a Moderator.

Technical Sessions: Five parallel Themed sessions (5 themes of the day) divided into three sittings (pre-Lunch, post Lunch and post Tea Sessions) Each of these parallel sessions will open with 5 speakers presenting their papers/ presentation followed by floor to be thrown open for discussion by the Chair. The sessions will also have a Co- Chair and the Moderator. In

addition, there will a Session Coordinator to plan, communicate and coordinate the session well in advance

Working Group Meetings: Each of these themed sessions will form **Working Groups** to go through the deliberations and draft respective Statements of Purpose and Action Plans to carry forward the intent and consensus resolve.

Cultural Program and Inaugural Dinner

DAY -2, Saturday, March 18

Prayers : Chanting Prayers in Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese and English

Summit of the Heads of the Sangha: Supreme Heads of various Sangha and other senior most religious hierarchy of various traditions, countries, senior nuns etc to meet and deliberate on various topics of Buddhist and global concern

Plenary 2: Five Key note speakers (5 themes of the day-One speaker per theme). Session will have a Chair, Co- Chair and a Moderator

Technical Sessions: Same format as on Day 1

Technical Sessions: Same format as on Day 1

Working Group Meetings: Same format as on Day 1

Cultural Program and Dinner

DAY -3, Sunday, March 19

Visit to Xuanzang Memorial and exposition of Holy Relics of the 12th century Master Xuanzang

Plenary 3: Presentation of the Statements and Action Plans, deliberation by full house for adoption

Valedictory Session

Papers are invited from scholars and practitioners on any aspect of the theme and subthemes of the conference which will be circulated with background papers well in time for the participants to understand the issues.