

THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE FROM THE BUDDHIST POINT OF VIEW

MY firm conviction is that whether in diplomacy or in the management of internal affairs the state ought to be always standing on certain definite principles based upon the truths of philosophy or derived from a religious faith; when a problem concerns the welfare of several nations, the faith guiding the policy of the government must be a strong and deep-seated one. That the spirit comes first not only in an individual life but in that of a nation does not require much arguing: for a state devoid of any spiritual belief in the destiny of human life on this earth has no meaning for its continued existence.

There was a time when the phrase "for the sake of the state" wielded such a power as to suppress all other considerations making the people subservient to the despotic will of the statesmen, and even the spiritual leaders had meekly to submit to their sometimes arrogant and inflexible orders. This was all right if the state was representative of things that were good, just, and humane; but as history tells us, no state has ever proved in the past to be such a symbol. In fact every one of the states that prospered and disappeared or that are now prospering has been anything but symbolic of justice and love and liberty. Hence the history of the world has been the record of constant struggles and untold sufferings. But fortunately, since the termination of the recent War the world seems to be realising the enormity of the loss and the foolishness of the greed for power. We are now growing more conscious than ever of the imperative necessity of emphasising the spiritual side of human life and

the fact that our lives are so closely interrelated that whatever things good or bad that happen to one nation, are sure to affect another. The time is come when we have to abandon the narrow conception of the state which puts one nation's welfare, especially material welfare, above that of the friendly neighbours.

The ideas that prompted the League of Nations were all very fine as far as they went, but what was the outcome of the Conference so loudly proclaimed by the President of the United States of America and so loudly hailed by other nations? Did each nation endeavour to do its best not only for itself but for others too? Did each one of the participants in the Conference boldly uphold the principle of justice and humanity in which the League of Nations is supposed to be based? Of course, we may say, the League of Nations is in its incipient stage, and it will yet be too harsh to judge it by its first attempt; as time goes on, it may produce better results—let us so hope. But if we are allowed to criticise the general tendency of things that is showing itself in international politics, we do not hesitate to pronounce it to be far from the Buddhist ideals, we have to confess that we are not so civilised as to put everything in practise that we are convinced to be good and beneficial to all mankind. What shall one say about the Washington Conference which is about to take place? All that we can say at present is this; if this Conference is going to follow its precedent and has nothing radical in the way of transacting the business on a spiritual basis, it will be foolish to expect much of the Conference; in case it runs along the old rut of materialistic egotism, it may be a repetition of the past, or perhaps it may end in complicating international affairs worse than ever.

We do not know yet what particular questions affecting the Pacific nations are going to be discussed at the Washington Conference, but there is no doubt that the chief interest

of the Conference must center on the question of disarmament. We do not want to be unreasonably pessimistic, but if we can judge the coming of the autumn by one fallen leaf of paulownia we as Buddhists will not put much confidence in the Conference. If every state really and in earnest desires "to be rich and peaceful and to have no use for arms" as described in the *Greater Amitayur Sutra* as an ideal state of things prevailing in a state, disarmament will be the easiest thing in the world to carry out, it will be done no sooner than it is said; for who would be so foolish as to spend millions after millions for maintaining battleships, submarines, and other infernal machines of destruction, when we know that they are of no avail on this earth? The question is more about how far we are spiritually enlightened than about how diplomatically we can arrange for disarmament. Unless the first question is satisfactorily settled, no amount of conferences or negotiations will bring about the desired end.

A state as a consolidation of people with definite interests and a definite purpose of life has the right to exist, and for its existence it may sometimes have to defend itself against threatening enemies. But even a state is unable to maintain itself against the universal law of mutuality which is so strongly taught by Buddhism. Things can only exist as long as they keep up their harmonious relations with the surrounding objects; if one thing grows too domineering over others, the latter rebel against it; if the latter is too weak to resist, the predominant one will die of its own predominance, for an internal disruption is sure to break up within itself. This is the law inviolable. The balance ought under no circumstances to tip one way or another. Egotism that feeds itself too fat is bound to burst from within. All the evils, whether individual, social, or international, grow out of abusing the law of mutuality or interdependence. When the hard shell of the ego, cut away and isolated from others, is crushed and merges

itself in the oneness of things, that is, in the idea of universal brotherhood, the earth will really become a peaceful, comfortable place of abode.

Statesmen have been wont to urge us to sacrifice our personal interest for the state, to abandon our individual claims and even affections for upholding the state as the highest expression of human life. This is all right if the state is also the perfect and most rational symbol of all that we, individuals, can conceive as good and just and lovable. If the state, on the contrary, betrays our thought of justice and freedom and countermands the dictates of love and humanity it has no right to continue its existence. If it does not fall by itself, other states will not suffer its ever-menacing existence. To blindly obey whatever is claimed by the state, good or bad, just or unjust, is to enslave oneself and to lose one's moral and spiritual individuality. A state that is to be a real power and symbolic of all that makes man aspire after things good, just, noble, and lovable, ought never to condescend to disgrace itself in the eyes of its component members.

I am not necessarily talking against the absolutist idea of the state; I believe in the existence of a state, for I think it necessary for the enhancement of real human welfare. But I cannot subscribe to the ideas stoutly upheld by some who, taking the state for an absolute form of human life, believe in its power of doing anything for its own maintenance, regardless of the consequences either to its own members or to the neighbouring states. Inasmuch as no one absolute state can exist by itself and in itself, it requires other states to be its friendly neighbours for, no state can ignore the claims of other states, just as in the case of individuals. If it does this and goes on its own way ignoring its fellow-organisations, it is sure to meet a sad fate and lose its own existence before long. Therefore, it goes without saying that

statism must conform itself to the general conditions governing the whole world, that is, the destiny of whole humanity.

No one expects the Washington Conference to be the last peace conference to be held on earth, but we cannot let it go as meaning nothing in our upward way to the realisation of world-peace not only in its physical but in its spiritual sense.

What shall we then expect of the Japanese representatives to the Conference? I as a Buddhist would wish them to speak out boldly what Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches us, that is, that each individual ego gains its signification only when it loses and finds itself in the greater ego. My sincere belief is that all the Christian peoples are waiting to listen to what we, as a great Buddhist nation, would tell them about their disarmament plans and the realisation of world-peace. They perhaps know what are the Christian views of the Conference, but I am sure that they do not yet know what Buddhism wants to say about the whole proceedings. Let our representatives go to Washington not to listen to the wise sayings of the American or European statesmen, who are most practical and well-trained in the conduct of international affairs, but to announce in a most unequivocal manner that Japan stands for truth, justice, and humanity, as conceived by their great Buddhist ancestors. Let them go across the Pacific to remind the more experienced in things practical of the great truth of non-ego in its positive and most ennobling aspect. We are all liable to commit blunders, and let us frankly acknowledge whatever blunders we have committed if there are any; but at the same time let us frankly and unflinchingly proclaim the truth of Buddhism which will hereafter be made a guiding principle in the management of international affairs. Pointing at Germany as an apt example of egotistic absolute statism that failed, our representatives should emphasise the utmost importance of the truth of the

non-ego doctrine as taught by Mahāyāna Buddhism, through which the world may be saved from self-destruction as well as from mutual destruction. That nations have thought of a league of nations or of a Washington Conference proves that they are gradually beginning to realise this truth, but they are far from really fully awakening to it. There is, however, a great hope for the future of mankind, and our earnest desire is that each "Conference" will be a genuine step forward to the realisation of the Buddhist ideal of a state in which "no arms are ever resorted to."

We do not necessarily expect of our worthy representatives achieving a diplomatic success or anything like it, but we do expect them to be able to infuse into the Conference something spiritual and make the nations grow conscious of something looking far into the real welfare of humanity, or something that goes deep into the root of all human difficulties. When this is even partially attained, I will call the Conference a success.

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