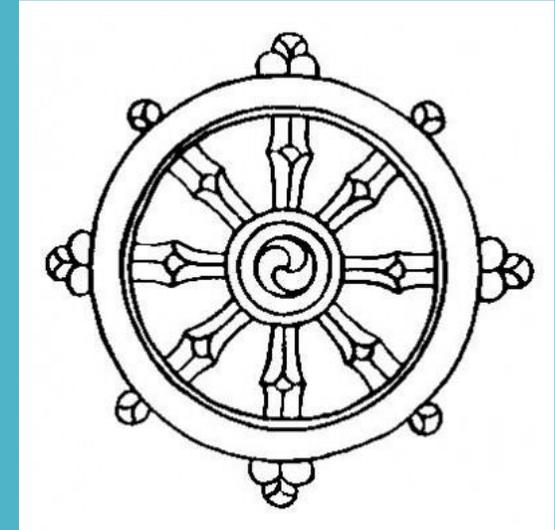


Buddhism and the Military Career

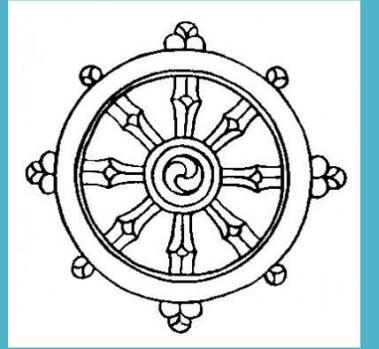


A Talk on the SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP COURSE
H.M. Armed Forces Buddhist Chaplaincy
10th – 12th June 2016

Geoffrey Hunt
Buddhist Chaplain,
Visiting Professor in Buddhist Ethics,
University of Surrey, Guildford
g.hunt@surrey.ac.uk



The First Precept



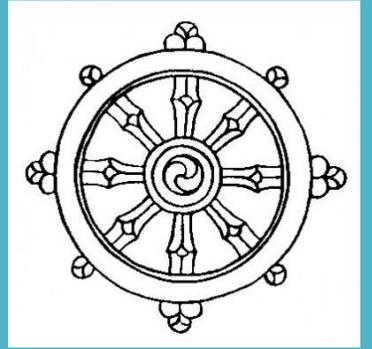
One cannot begin to follow the Dhamma path without a readiness to move towards a non-violent attitude, hence it is the very first precept:

I undertake the training rule to abstain from killing

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

But what does 'non-violent' mean in practice?

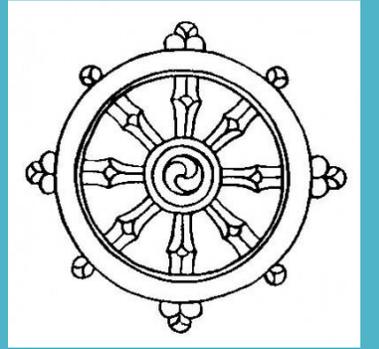
The state of mind behind the action



Yodhajiva asks Buddha if true that a warrior slain in battle while fighting is reborn in the realm of devas. He eventually replies:

“When a warrior strives & exerts himself in battle, his mind is already seized, debased, & misdirected by the thought: ‘May these beings be struck down or slaughtered or annihilated or destroyed. May they not exist.’ If others then strike him down and slay him while he is thus striving and exerting himself in battle, then with the breakup of the body, after death, he is reborn in the hell called the realm of those slain in battle.” ‘To Yodhajiva’, SN 42.3, trans. from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

Nonviolence or pacifism?



Nonviolence is not an absolute, such as ‘no physical violence under any circumstances whatsoever’

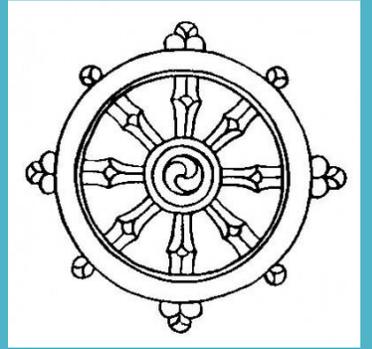
The Buddha had no absolutes, no dogmatic universals, no ‘beliefs’

He said: “It is because you are obsessed with your preconceived notions that you are holding fast” (*Aṭṭhakavagga*, IV:9:7)

Nonviolence is a presupposition in favour of non-harm, a general attitude tempered by discretion (wisdom)

But, pacifism rests on an absolute and is an ideology i.e. a system of beliefs. It is “an attachment to a view”.

The Buddhist rationale for an armed force



The Dhamma gives no rationale for aggressive war, so also none for soldiering insofar as soldiers are instruments of aggressive war.

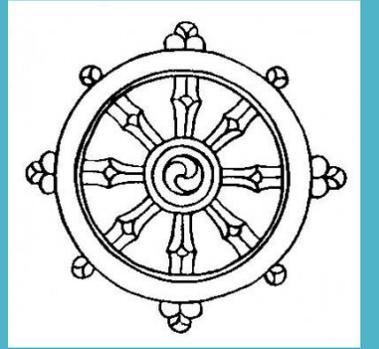
In the Dhamma there is instead a rationale for peace, non-harm and avoidance of conflict.

So when can physical intervention be justified? In the light of ...

1. non-attachment to views (including ideology) and
2. the morality of defence (sometimes more harm by not defending)

Nonviolence requires an understanding of the whole context of war and its motives. One cannot follow nonviolence in itself.

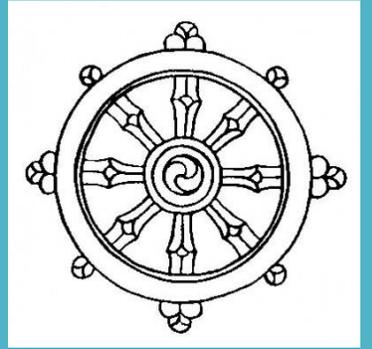
Motives for war



War is an intensified collective expression of everyday conflict and hostility; this rests on greed, hatred and delusion; attachment to property, and territory, wealth and money, pleasure, racial superiority, hatred/fear of otherness; pride and power.

... and in turn these rest on clinging, especially to root delusion of I-me-mine; mindfulness brings non-clinging and release, non-hostility, non-conflict and peace.

Individual and collective

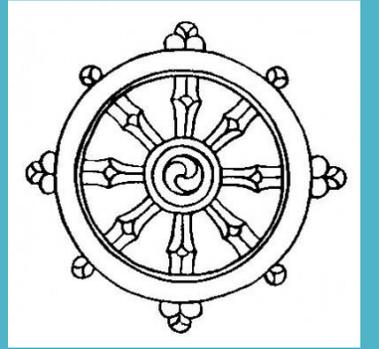


In principle, a country may go to war to defend itself against another one that is pursuing the above. But there are moral limits to defensive action (see below).

And there are uncertainties: distance between policy-makers and army, lack of information, deception, pre-emptive strikes, collateral damage and human shields, digital warfare, drones, etc.

Soldiers may be left with the dilemma of taking orders from those who are (possibly) ill-motivated. Conscientious objection?

The Buddha's encounter with armed forces in his time



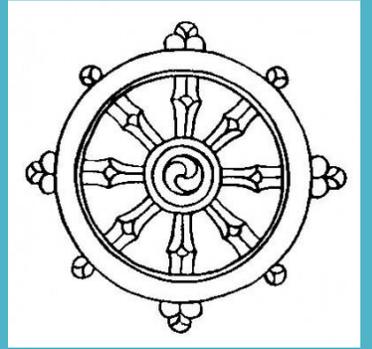
Never advised a king against keeping an AF

Did advise against using armed force for aggression

Example: *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, DN II 72-76; Walshe 231-232; about King Ajattasatu and the Maghda-Vajji war

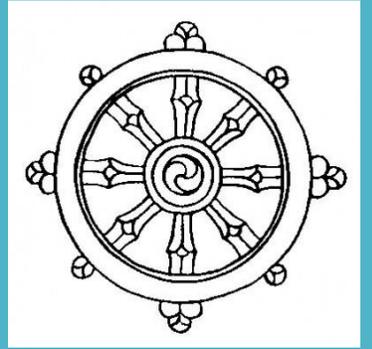
Does not mention soldiering as a case of 'wrong livelihood'. Note: dealing in weapons is so listed

Criteria for Defensive action, including killing



1. When doing nothing is really not an option
2. Not retaliation, vengeance, hatred
3. An effort has been made to understand 'the other' and the causes of their action or threat
4. Last resort: other options exhausted
5. Minimal force is used
6. Intention: Self-examination of state of mind (anger, hatred, superiority, possessiveness?)
7. No triumphalism: Prepared to follow-up 'victory' with medical assistance, reconciliation, rebuilding, other benefits

The least compromised action



Always follow the least compromised path (by following the Dhamma) within the circumstances you find yourself in

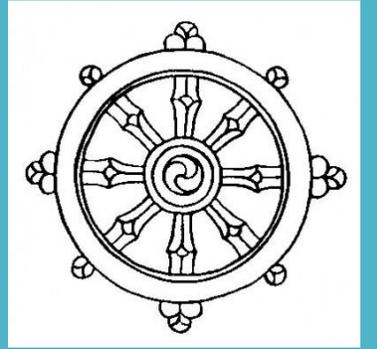
Remember that not everyone's circumstances are the same

Under restrictive circumstances still think through the least compromised path (not the easiest) within those restrictions

This requires wisdom and a nonviolent attitude

Also acknowledge that if circumstances change (due to external factors or your decision) then your least compromised path may change – in either direction, hopefully towards a point further along the path of liberation.

The least compromised action



Example: First precept and vegetarianism

The Buddha would have preferred to be vegetarian, but he depended on others for food (renunciation), so his choice was restricted.

So the least-compromised-choice was to ask householders not to kill for him to eat.

It would have been unskillful for him to reject all meat or to accept all meat regardless of whether an animal had been killed for him.

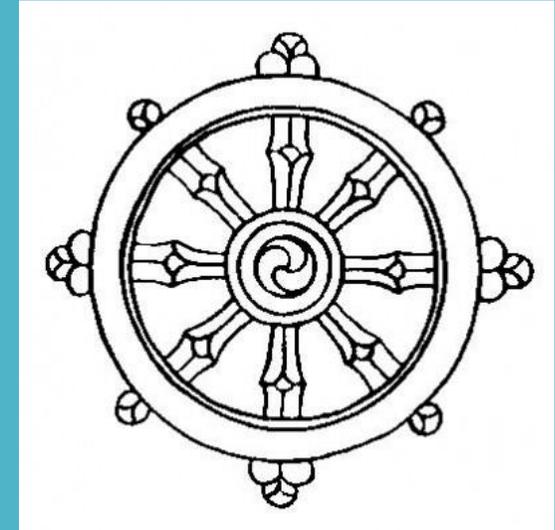
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Mahaparinibbāna Sutta, DN II 72-76; Walshe 231-232; about King Ajattasatu and the Maghda-Vajji war

Attachment to views: *Aṭṭhakavagga*, IV:9:7 (in *Sutta Nipāta*, in *Khuddhaka Nikāya*), trans. Saddhatissa, p99

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