

# Reducing Violence Through Buddhist Practice

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## Abstract

In a world characterized by growing international tension and personal conflict, the more familiar approaches to peacebuilding have increasingly been augmented by psychological and philosophical applications. This paper discusses the effectiveness of Buddhist practices: mindfulness or Sati, loving-kindness or Metta, and non-harming or Ahimsa, as usable methods of reducing violence in today's society. The research argues that Buddhist mental training directly addresses the "three poisons" of greed, hatred, and delusion known to be causative agents of aggressive behavior. This heightened self-awareness allows for a "cognitive gap" between provocation and reaction to open so that, during high-stress moments, a potential for non-violent options can follow. This cultivation of compassion moves the practitioner from the ego-centric world view to one of interconnectedness, dissolving fundamentally the need to "other," which leads often to either physical or systemic violence. In this article, based on the case study and psychological data examine the Buddhist practices in a way to prove that Buddhist practices are not simply religious rituals and are scalable interventions in behavior. When used in a secular setting like schools and community mediation centers and in prison settings, Buddhist practices have been shown to possess great potential in terms of lowering recidivism rates and hostility levels in society and family settings.

**Keywords:** Ahimsa, Cognitive Gap, Akusala-mula, Mindfulness (Sati), Neuroplasticity, Restorative Justice.

## Introduction

Violence, with its various types, ranges from global wars down to personal hostility—threatening the stability of today's world, even after developments in politics and international peace processes WHO (n.d.), it is evident that the cause of violence lies deeper than any external factors; they lie within the psyche and morals of people. In this sense, the philosophical doctrines of Buddhism present a unique perspective on violence as it does not merely view it as a problem of society but also as an inner one.

Ahimsa (Pāli: Avihimsā) – a pivotal ethic in Buddhism, which means the intentional renunciation of violence toward other living beings. The word itself comes from the verb "hiṃs" (meaning to injure) with a negation prefix "a," and thus translates as non-harm or non-violence. Herbert and Kappauf (2021) Ahimsa was a significant concept for the Buddha. He took this principle of immense moral importance and included it into

his ethical system, especially the precept against killing. Moreover, in Buddhism, Ahimsa is not just about avoiding violent actions – it involves the intentionality behind the acts performed. Indeed, as early Buddhism teaches, all moral actions depend on the condition of one's mind, while compassion (karuṇā) is necessary to achieve the principle of non-violence. This idea is also expressed in the *Dhammapada*: "All tremble at violence; all fear death," meaning that no one must ever commit violence towards other living beings. Buddharakkhita (2007)

Understanding the significance of Ahimsa in contemporary society can be difficult as violence stems from hidden psychological factors like greed, hate, and ignorance. The Buddhist understanding of ethics recognizes these three psychological factors as the core reasons for pain and harmful actions and advocates for change within oneself as the only way to find peace. Damien (2021) Unlike traditional theories that rely solely



on outer control measures, Buddhism suggests that any reduction in violence should start from cleansing one's mind through ethics.

Thus, the purpose of this research paper is to explore the contribution of Ahimsa in Buddhism towards minimizing violence in today's society through the development of mental change, ethics, and compassion.

## Literature Review

The connection between violence and Buddhism is extensively studied in ancient times, as well as modern day scholars who have focused on examining this phenomenon from various perspectives. Violence is described in early Buddhism as a state of mind. This point is further elaborated upon by modern-day academic studies.

For example, In the journal article "The Concept of Violence in Buddhism" Winja Kumari and others state that violence arises from humans disagreeing and misunderstanding each other, and that the Buddhist doctrines offer solutions to conflicts, such as speaking with love, listening deeply, and understanding one another. This is supported by the Buddhist tales like the story of Angulimala. Kumari and Pramono (2022)

The scholars have also analyzed the ethical basis of non-violence in Buddhism in relation to the concept of Ahimsa. As mentioned in "Buddhism and Non-Violence", Ahimsa can be regarded as the cornerstone of Buddhism's ethical philosophy, which is associated with developing *karuṇā* and *mettā*. It means that this notion not only involves avoidance of any kind of violence but relates to a person's thoughts and words as well Tiwary and Sharma (2024). Further, Disha Mondal emphasizes the fact that Ahimsa is more about actively creating harmony and minimizing suffering, than simply abstaining from violence. Besides, the author states that compassion serves as an ethical response to aggression. Mondal, Roy, Indrani, and Rai (2025)

In the meantime, historical and critical approaches have provided challenges regarding the notion that Buddhism is totally a religion free from violence. According to, while Buddhist teachings initially encouraged the idea of Ahimsa, subsequent historical evidence shows that violence could be committed justifiably or accept-

ably at times in societies practicing Buddhism. This has shown how Ahimsa was applied inconsistently throughout history. These insights are important because they provide a better understanding of the nature of ethics in Buddhism. Thanissaro (2020)

During the last few decades, mindfulness (*sati*), which is based on the principles of Buddhist meditation, has gained popularity and extensive research within psychology and neuroscience fields. In general, scientists have found that mindfulness helps to control emotions and decreases reactions, thus reducing the possibility of aggressive behavior. Neuro-cognitive experiments show how different neural patterns emerge during meditative practices, focusing on such factors as attention, awareness, and emotional regulation Fox (2016). Such observations indicate that with long-term practices, brain patterns may change, affecting people's reactions to stressful situations and conflicts. Another study of mindfulness practices proves changes in physiology and relaxation, thus justifying the statement that mental processes affect our behavior. Chan (2023)

In addition, recent research has focused more on the implementation of the principles of Buddhism into the actual practice. Research related to non-violence and conflict resolution shows that the ideas of compassion, interdependence, and ethics may find their application in solving contemporary world problems such as social conflicts and peace building. Tiwary and Sharma (2024) The notion of personal transformation and moral responsibility provides an alternative approach to the existing methods of dealing with problems that are based mostly on controlling the situation from outside.

**Research Gap:** However, despite all these efforts, a critical gap still exists. Most of the studies conducted up till now have been focused on analyzing specific aspects of Buddhism and the role played by mindfulness as a psychological phenomenon or Ahimsa as a virtue. Very few attempts have been made to synthesize different principles from Buddhism including mindfulness (*sati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*) to come up with a framework through which violence can be understood and ultimately reduced.

## Methodology

The study approaches qualitative method in order to study the application of Buddhist philosophy in alleviating violence via the concept of Ahimsa (non-violence). This particular form of research is ideal for the current study since it allows researchers to delve into philosophical theories and interpretations as well as ethical issues. This research is mainly focused on textual and conceptual analysis. Primary sources will consist of early Buddhist literature, including the Dhammapada, and doctrinal sources on such philosophical concepts as the Four Noble Truths, Paṭiccasamuppāda (the Law of Conditionality), and Pañca-sīla (the Five Precepts). Secondary sources that focus on Buddhist ethics will be considered as well. The research is purely based on secondary sources, as no field work or empirical observation will take place. The purpose of this investigation is to offer a theoretical and conceptual discussion on non-violence, which entails the integration of classical and contemporary views on the topic. The methodology of the investigation involves a process of analysis and interpretation that involves the application of various theories on non-violence from Buddhism into the problem at hand. Furthermore, it involves the study of major principles and doctrines within Buddhism that can help eliminate the psychological origins of violence, including selfishness, anger, and delusion through self-restraint and proper mind development.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base of this study is based on important doctrinal beliefs of Buddhism, the source of suffering, and how to bring an end to it. In this context, violence is not only seen as an action taken by someone from the outside but also as a reflection of inner psychological factors like greed, ignorance, and hatred. As such, Buddhism views Ahimsa or Avihimsā as a consequence of discipline of ethics and mind training. This is done through three key doctrinal principles: Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, and Pañca-sīla.

## Four Noble Truths and the Essence of Violence

The Four Noble Truths are the fundamental principles of Buddhism and provide a diagnosis of human misery (dukkha). While focused on existential misery, the Four Noble Truths can be applied to describe violence as a kind of misery that emerges from undesirable mental states.

According to the early Buddhist scriptures, the root cause of suffering is greed or craving and ignorance, which also motivate the commission of evil deeds. As pointed out in the Dhammapada, our actions stem from thoughts, which implies that violence is the result of mental processes before being expressed outwardly. (Access to Insight, 2012)

## Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda)

Dependent Origination is a doctrine that attempts to offer a causal explanation of the origins of suffering and bad deeds within a chain of events. This doctrine states that all events occur due to previously occurring causes in a continuous cycle (Bhattacharya, 1982). Thus, violence does not stand alone as a single occurrence but as part of a wider chain of events.

In this system of cause and effect, violence results from ignorance and craving, perpetuating the cycles of suffering. Through gaining wisdom (paññā), one can break the cycle and prevent harmful actions from taking place.

## The Five Precepts and Ethical Non-Violence

Within the framework of Buddhism, non-violence finds its implementation in the context of the Five Precepts (Pañca-sīla). The Five Precepts are considered the key elements of ethics in Buddhism, as they set restrictions on an individual's actions at the physical, verbal, and psychological level (Damien, 2021, ch 4).

While the first precept, which is specifically against killing, constitutes the most obvious application of Ahimsa in Buddhism, the rest of the precepts contribute to an ordered lifestyle that avoids causing pain and brings about peace within society.

These doctrinal frameworks together prove that Buddhism considers violence to emanate from the mind's impurities and that it can be cur-

Table 1: The Four Noble Truths

Noble Truth	Meaning	Relation to Violence
Dukkha	Life involves suffering	Violence generates and perpetuates suffering
Samudaya	Cause of suffering is craving (taṇhā)	Desire, attachment, and aversion lead to aggression
Nirodha	Cessation of suffering is possible	Eliminating craving reduces violence
Magga	Path leading to cessation (Eightfold Path)	Ethical and mental discipline prevent violence

Table 2: Dependent Origination (Model et al., 2022)

Stage	Explanation	Relation to Violence
Ignorance (Avijjā)	Lack of understanding of reality	Leads to misperception and conflict
Craving (Taṇhā)	Desire and attachment	Generates competition and aggression
Clinging (Upādāna)	Strong attachment	Produces possessiveness and hostility
Becoming (Bhava)	Formation of identity	Creates division between self and others
Suffering (Dukkha)	Outcome of the cycle	Sustains patterns of violence

tailed through the process of self-discipline and mind training. The combination of these teachings serves as a complete source of understanding non-violence or Ahimsa as an idea and as a practice.

## Discussion

The analysis of Buddhist philosophical teachings demonstrates that violence originates from psychological aspects of humans as opposed to external situations. In early Buddhist scriptures, for example, it is noted that “all deeds have one’s mind as their forerunner; people are their own masters.” (Buddharakkhita, 2007, vv. 1-2) This implies that all actions that may cause harm result from internal elements like ignorance, craving, and aversion, which are referred to as “the three poisons.” As a result, according to Buddhism, eliminating violence necessitates dealing with its psychological causes.

A central contribution of Buddhist philosophy is the role it plays in bringing about mental change. According to Paṭiccasamuppāda, all actions are generated by cause-and-effect relations, not independently. As pointed out by Bhattacharya (1982), suffering comes into being through a sequence of causation which starts with igno-

rance leading to desire or craving and attachment. (Bhattacharya, 1982) This implies that the phenomenon of violence is not simply a random occurrence but a cycle that exists due to mental conditioning.

In this context, sati or mindfulness assumes critical importance for the prevention of violence through its role in allowing people to watch their minds and their emotions before they do anything. Current psychology studies confirm this point since mindfulness has been found to regulate emotion and prevent impulsive action. It can therefore be said that Buddhist meditation techniques provide both spiritual and psychological benefits.

Also, Buddhism teaches that the practice of compassion and non-hatred is important to achieve non-violence. This can be seen from one of the verses of the Dhammapada (verse 5) which states:

“Na hi verena verāni sammantīdha kudācanaṃ; averena ca sammanti” (“Hatred is never appeased by hatred; it is appeased only by non-hatred.”) (Buddharakkhita, 2007, v. 5)

This verse highlights that violence can only be stopped by love, patience, and wisdom. Modern Buddhist scholars like the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have also emphasized com-

Table 3: The Five Precepts

Precept	Meaning	Role in Preventing Violence
Abstain from killing	Respect for all living beings	Directly prohibits physical violence
Abstain from stealing	Respect for others' property	Reduces conflict and exploitation
Abstain from misconduct	Ethical relationships	Prevents interpersonal harm
Abstain from false speech	Truthfulness	Limits verbal aggression
Abstain from intoxicants	Mental clarity	Reduces impulsive and harmful actions

passion, mindfulness, and non-violence in solving contemporary conflicts.

The practical relevance can be seen in the way they are utilized in various fields today. In therapy, education, and stress management, mindfulness-based interventions have proven useful in improving emotional stability and lowering levels of aggression. It shows that the teachings of Buddhism are not confined to religious purposes only, but can also be used in the face of current social issues.

But we must take into account the fact that although Buddhism offers a powerful model in transforming an individual's mind, its implementation within the framework of society and politics might face some problems. Still, this philosophy of inner transformation is vital in supplementing efforts from the outside for solving conflict situations.

Overall, Buddhist philosophy can be considered a comprehensive approach towards eliminating violence through a combination of psychology, ethics, and compassion.

## Conclusion

The study emphasizes that the problem of modern-day violence is more of a psychological problem rather than a mere failure. With the use of the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, and the Five Precepts, Buddhism presents a highly advanced analysis, which sees greed, hatred, and ignorance as the "three poisons" leading to aggression. The traditional approach toward conflict resolution through structure-based management is contrasted to the Buddhist perspective that emphasizes the practice of non-violence through Ahimsa.

From the evidence gathered, the combination of *sati* and *karuṇā* appears to be an effective psychological strategy for breaking the cycle of causation of suffering through controlling emotional responses and encouraging empathy. Despite the obstacles encountered when applying the teachings in past situations, the underlying ethical value does not change: "Hatred cannot be overcome by hatred". In essence, Buddhism offers a comprehensive approach that links the old tradition with modern-day conflict management, showing that lasting global harmony is dependent on cultivating one's inner world. This means dealing with violence requires looking inward first rather than at the negotiating table.

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