Fifteen years ago, a notorious Thai Buddhist monk told the Bangkok press that “it is not sinful to kill a communist.” He later modified his statement, saying, “to kill communism or communist ideology is not a sin.” He claimed that he did not encourage people to kill others. Nevertheless, he confessed that his nationalist feelings were more important than his Buddhist practice. He said he would be willing to abandon his yellow robes to take up arms against the communist invaders from Laos, Cambodia, or Vietnam. By doing so, he said, he would be preserving the monarchy, the nation, and the Buddhist religion. Young people in Siam were astounded that a Buddhist monk had tried to justify an act of killing. Although monks in the past have tried to condone “just war,” none has ever been able to find any canonical source to support this claim. That is why our monk had to retreat from his earlier statement.

Christmas Humphreys, the founder of the London Buddhist Society, stated that one of the reasons that he abandoned Christianity was that during the First World War, when his brother was killed in serving his King and country, both English clergymen and German pastors invoked the same God to guide the soldiers in warfare. The emphasis on pacifism seems to be at once a great strength and a great weakness of Buddhism as an organized religion. It strengthens the religion in moral terms, but what happens when nation and religion are threatened by an enemy?

Dean Inge of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London once said, “If Christians had been as pacifist as Buddhists...there is scarcely any doubt that the ‘legacies’ of Greece, Rome, and Palestine would have been finally and totally extinguished.”

Before the end of the Vietnam War, I asked Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh whether he would rather have peace under a communist regime that would mean the end of Buddhism or the victory of democratic Vietnam with the possibility of Buddhist revival, and he said it was better to have peace at any price. He told me that preserving Buddhism does not mean that we should sacrifice people’s lives in order to safeguard the Buddhist hierarchy, monasteries, or rituals. Even if Buddhism as such were extinguished, when human lives are preserved and when human dignity and freedom are cultivated toward peace and loving kindness, Buddhism can be reborn in the hearts of human beings.

In all of Buddhist history, there has never been a holy war. Surely Buddhist kings have waged war against one another, and they may even have claimed to be doing so for the benefit of humankind or the Buddhist religion, but they could not quote any saying of the Buddha to support them. The Buddha was quite clear in his renunciation of violence: “Victory creates hatred. Defeat creates suffering. The wise ones desire neither victory nor defeat...Anger creates anger...He who kills will be killed. He who wins will be defeated...Revenge can only be overcome by abandoning revenge...The wise seek neither victory nor defeat.”

After waging many wars, Emperor Asoka was so moved by sayings such as these that he converted to Buddhism and became the model for later Buddhist kings. Buddhism retreated from India, China, Vietnam, and other countries.
rather than involve its believers in armed struggles to preserve itself. Again, this illustrates the strengths and the weakness of Buddhism.

On many occasions in the history of Sri Lanka and Buddhist Southeast Asia, monks have been asked by kings to initiate peace treaties. On the other hand, Theravada Buddhist monks have never been involved directly in warfare. They could not be, for to kill or to cause a person to be killed is a sinful act of such magnitude that a guilty monk would immediately lose his robes. Personally, a monk may agree or disagree with any war, but he is required to refrain from exposing his opinion in this respect.

In Siamese chronicles we find the story of a great king who personally fought the Crown Prince of Burma while both were on elephants, and the Siamese king won by slaying his opponent. Afterwards, he was angry with his generals for not following him more closely and allowing him to face the enemy single-handedly, and he condemned them to death. The Buddhist Patriarch and other senior monks visited the King and asked him to pardon the generals. The monks said that on the eve of the Buddha's enlightenment, if the Blessed One had been surrounded by all the deities, his victory over the hordes of Mara—the evil ones in various forms of greed, hatred, and delusion—would not have been as supreme as the victory when the Buddha single-handedly overcame the army of sensuous desires. Likewise, if His Majesty had been surrounded by all his generals and won the battle, it would not have been as great a victory as His Majesty's single-handed victory over the Crown Prince of Burma. His victory could be regarded as similar to that of the Great Buddha. Using this metaphor, the monks secured the release of all the generals.

Hsüan Tsang, the famous monk-traveler, was once asked by the Emperor of China to accompany him on a military campaign. The monk's reply showed his tactfulness and his adherence to Buddhist ethical codes:

Hsüan Tsang knows himself not to be of any assistance to your military campaign. I feel ashamed to be the object of unnecessary expenses and a useless burden. Moreover, the Vinaya discipline forbids monks to see military battle and displays of armies. As Lord Buddha gave such an admonition, I dare not, to please Your Majesty.

Sri Lanka has been invaded by foreign aggressors many times in its history, and Buddhist monks were so committed to pacifism that the lineage of the monkhood was at one point discontinued. To recontinue the lineage, the King of Sri Lanka had to send a mission to Siam for a group of Siamese monks to ordain Sinhalese novices and laymen.

The spirit of nonviolence permeates Buddhism. The first precept, not to kill, is the foundation for all Buddhist action. This idea is expanded in the notion of non-harming (abhimsa): that one should actively practice loving kindness towards all.

The Buddha said, "There is no greater happiness than peace." The ultimate goal for a Buddhist is to reach the peaceful state of nirvana and the means to reach this goal must be peaceful. To be a Buddhist, one is first of all required to observe the Five Precepts, to ensure that one does not take advantage of oneself or others. Being neutral towards all beings, one can embark on the spiritual journey
of meditation and reach tranquility of the mind, so that eventually one might be enlightened and gain the insight or wisdom of seeing things as they really are (pañña or prajña). Buddhists call this the realization of total awakening or enlightenment (bodhi).

One day, a religious leader came to visit the Buddha and asked, "When one follows your Way, what does one do in daily life?" The Buddha replied, "One walks, stands, sits, lies down, eats, and drinks." The man asked, "What is so special about that?" And the Buddha answered, "An ordinary person, though walking, standing, lying down, eating, or drinking, does not know that he is walking, standing, sitting, lying down, eating, or drinking. When a practitioner of the Way walks, he knows that he is walking. When he stands, he knows that he is standing." This is mindfulness practice—to be mindful of every movement of body and mind. Without mindfulness, we get caught up in our thoughts and in the pleasures and pains of our senses.

To practice nonviolence, we must cultivate mindfulness. It is easier to do so in quiet, peaceful surroundings. We should pick a suitable time and find a secluded place where we can devote ourselves to practicing meditation, without interruption. To begin, we should assume a comfortable posture. The usual postures are sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. The ideal position, if it is comfortable, is sitting cross-legged, with the spine erect and head straight, eyes half-closed, and hands resting on the lap. We follow each breath and develop concentration. During meditation, when anger (or some other emotion) arises, we know that anger has arisen. Meditation on the breath of loving kindness is as simple as this. We cultivate patience and joy, and we do not discriminate between what

we desire and what we wish to avoid. We accept each thing as it comes, and then we let it go.

Then we embark on the development of metta, loving kindness, to dissolve all hatred and acquire the virtue of patience as a foundation stone upon which to build spiritual strength. The Buddha offered us many hints concerning how to maintain the proper attitude for meditation:

*In those who harbor such thoughts as, "He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me," hatred never ceases.*

*In those who do not harbor such thoughts, hatred will cease.*

*Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through nonviolence it comes to an end.*

*Some do not think that all of us here one day will die; if they did, their dissension would cease at once.*

*One should give up anger, and renounce pride.*

*Let a man overcome anger by loving kindness; let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome miserliness with generosity; let him overcome lies with truth.*

*One should speak the truth, not succumbing to anger.*
There is none in the world who is blameless.

One should guard oneself against misdeeds caused by speech. Let him practice restraint of speech. Let him practice virtue with his mind.

The wise who control their body, speech, and mind are indeed well-controlled.

Once we feel content and peaceful, we can spread our loving kindness toward others:

May all beings be happy and secure;  
May their hearts be wholesome.  
Whatever living beings there be,  
Feeble or strong, tall, fat, or medium,  
Short, small, or large, without exception,  
Seemed or unseen,  
Those dwelling far or near,  
Those who are born or those to be born,  
May all beings be happy.*

When we sit in meditation, our body and mind are relaxed. We are not only peaceful and happy, we are also alert and awake. Meditation is not a means of evasion; it is a serene encounter with reality. When one person in a family practices meditation, the entire family will benefit. Because of the presence of one member who lives in mindfulness, filled with compassion, the entire family will be reminded to live in that spirit. All Buddhist communities need at least one experienced meditator to help create a peaceful atmosphere for everyone, to set a good example and to provide the sweet nectar of mindfulness for everyone to share and be nourished. This is so important for people of our time.

Every day, we find ourselves in conflict situations, ranging from minor inconveniences to serious confrontations. Conflicts can flare up over backyard fences or national borders, over cleaning up the kitchen or cleaning up the environment. They can involve our most intimate relations or the briefest acquaintances. Whenever people cannot tolerate each other's moral, religious, or political differences, conflict is inevitable and often costly.

But conflict can also open avenues of change and provide challenges. Conflict resolution skills do not guarantee a solution every time, but they can turn conflict into an opportunity for learning more about oneself and others. Violence and heated arguments, where people hurl abuse and become overwhelmed by their feelings, are sure signs of crisis. During crises, normal behavior is forgotten. Extreme gestures are contemplated and sometimes carried out. These are obvious clues that something is wrong.

Conflicts can be positive or negative, constructive or destructive, depending on what we make of them. Buddhists know that everything is impermanent, everything is changing; but in many conflict situations, we forget and become attached to our views, refusing to let them go. We tend to blame the other side alone for our problem.

Insight into impermanence can allow us to alter the course of events simply by viewing them differently. We can turn our fights into fun. Transforming conflicts in this way is an art, requiring special skills. The key Buddhist

* Metta Sutta.
term, skillful means (upaya), refers to just this kind of process. We must try to develop skillful means to understand conflict. We must remember that crisis, tension, misunderstanding, and discomfort, including our fights and personal differences, are part of life. It is a mistake to expect to avoid conflict all the time. The best we can do is to make conflicts less painful by learning to anticipate them and to manage them constructively. Conflict resolution depends on awareness, and there are clues that can give us ideas for how to deal with it.

The first step in the art of conflict resolution is to regard conflict as an opportunity and to look for skillful means to apply appropriately. Generally, when people think about conflict, they believe that there are only three possible outcomes: victory, defeat, or compromise. From the Buddhist point of view, the end result is less important than the way we work with it. There are many stories from the life of the Buddha that illustrate how he dealt with conflict situations. I would like to present two of them.

The first incident arose from a difference of opinion between two monks on a minor point of the monastic rules. Because these monks happened to be experts in different fields of study and each had a large following, their conflict escalated, and more people became involved. After a time, the two groups’ minds became polluted, and each felt that the other was wrong. The Buddha went to their monastery and told them both to let go of their position and ask forgiveness from the other, so that they could live harmoniously together. He told them several stories to illustrate how conflicts can grow from small misunderstandings to serious crises. One story was about a king and queen who were attacked by another ruler. As they lay dying, they asked their small son to be patient and forgive the enemy. The son eventually joined the enemy’s service and became his royal page. Once, alone in the jungle with his parents’ killer, the page drew his dagger, but his parents’ words of caution came to his mind, and he could not commit the act. Seeing the drawn dagger in the hand of his page, the enemy king learned the whole story. All was forgiven and the page ended up marrying the king’s daughter and succeeding to the throne.

Stories like this are often told in Buddhist countries to encourage us to solve conflicts in nonviolent ways. But when the Buddha told it to the quarreling monks, it had no impact. The Buddha saw no alternative but to leave them and stay by himself in the forest. Soon after, the lay community found out about the conflict, and they refused to give alms to the monks. After being hungry for many days, the monks came to their senses. They went to pay respect to the Buddha and ask for forgiveness. They let go of their views and opinions and were willing to accept each other.

Another incident from the time of the Buddha deals directly with armed conflict. The King of Kosala wanted to become a relative of the Buddha, so he asked for a Sakya princess to be his Queen. The Sakya clan was very caste-conscious and always refused marriages with outsiders. So instead of the princess, they sent the King of Kosala the daughter of a slave girl to be his queen.

The King and his new Queen had a son, Vidhudhabha. Neither he nor his father knew that the Queen was an outcaste. When the young prince went to visit his relatives among the Sakya, he found that they all looked down upon him because his maternal grandmother had been a slave.
So the young prince vowed to kill all members of the Sakya clan in revenge.

When Vidhudhabha succeeded his father to the throne of Kosala, he marched his army northward. The Buddha heard of the situation and went to sit at the border of the two kingdoms to stop the warlike King. But three times he was unable to convince the King to get rid of his hatred and vengefulness, and finally the King did kill almost all of the Sakyans. On his return home, Vidhudhabha and his troops were drowned in the river.

We can draw many conclusions from this story. Although the Sakya clan produced a wonderful person who eventually became a Buddha, who preached that people should get rid of caste and class barriers, they continued to hold their views of caste in contradiction to his teaching. They deceived the king of Kosala, who was much mightier than they, and they paid for it. As for Vidhudhabha, his negative thoughts drove him to a terrible act, and his life ended tragically.

Those who claim to be Buddhists but want to solve armed conflicts by violent means are no different from Vidhudhabha and the Sakyans who honored the Buddha and listened to his sermons, but thought, spoke, and acted violently. On the other hand, there are many non-Buddhists who are compassionate and filled with forgiveness towards others. They are more Buddhist than the Buddhists. To solve the complex problems of today’s world, we need Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Marxists all to face the situation mindfully in order to understand the structural violence and to avoid blaming anyone. With skillful means and patience, we can solve the world’s conflicts nonviolently.

There is a Buddhist saying that describes this approach:

*In times of war
Give rise in yourself to the mind of compassion,
Helping living beings
Abandon the will to fight.
Wherever there is furious battle,
Use all your might
To keep both sides’ strength equal
And then step in to reconcile this conflict.*

Tibetans provide an excellent example of a Buddhist approach to conflict. However violent and ruthless the Chinese aggressors have been to his country, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has never said a harmful word against them. He always asks the Tibetans to refrain from armed struggle and to meditate on what they did in the past that might have caused them so much suffering.

The Tiananmen massacre in Peking followed shortly after a similarly bloody incident in Lhasa in 1989. This time the Chinese government treated their own people as badly as they had the Tibetans. But none of the Tibetan spiritual leaders in exile ever said that it served the Chinese right. On the contrary, the Tibetan Buddhists are always full of compassion towards the Chinese and hope that one of these days a resolution will be found to the issue of Tibet. One cannot help but admire their attitude. Although they have been in exile for over thirty years, they are still very positive and hopeful, yet realistic. Their teachings of self-awareness, meaningful community development, and envi-

*Vimalakirti Sutra.
ronmental sensitivity have contributed positively to the world at large.

The Tibetans have used Buddhism to understand their situation. I think more of us who find ourselves in conflict situations can use meditation as a means to defuse them. If you are in a conflict, it is good to contemplate the person who is causing you the most suffering. Visualize the features you find most repulsive. Think about what makes the person suffer in daily life. Try to understand how he came to do what you find to be so unjust. Examine his or her motivations and aspirations. See what prejudices, narrow-mindedness, hatred, or anger he or she may be harboring. Contemplate in this way until understanding and compassion well up in your heart, and watch your anger and resentment disappear. You may need to practice this exercise many times on the same person before you can feel calm enough to understand the other person. This is only one of many meditation practices that can be used in situations of conflict or anger. Another is to meditate on yourself in the same way, on your own suffering caused by attachment and the lack of wisdom.

In conflict situations, nonviolence is the desired end as well as the means to achieve it. The Buddhist approach to conflict resolution requires concentration and the practice of mindfulness. When we make nonviolence a part of our daily lives, we water the seeds of a nonviolent society.