

BUDDHA ON WAR - (Ahimsa) - From the Suttas

One day, Sinha, the general of the army, went to the Buddha and said:

"I am a soldier, O Blessed One. I am appointed by the King to enforce his laws and to wage his wars. The Buddha teaches infinite love, kindness and compassion for all sufferers: Does the Buddha permit the punishment of the criminal? And also, does the Buddha declare that it is wrong to go to war for the protection of our homes, our wives, our children and our property? Does the Buddha teach the doctrine of complete self-surrender? Should I suffer the evil-doer to do what he pleases and yield submissively to him who threatens to take by violence what is my own? Does the Buddha maintain that all strife including warfare waged for a righteous cause should be forbidden?"

The Buddha replied,

"He who deserves punishment must be punished. And he who is worthy of favour must be favoured. Do not do injury to any living being but be just, filled with love and kindness.

"All warfare in which man tries to slay his brothers is lamentable. Struggle must exist, for all life is a struggle of some kind. But make certain that you do not struggle in the interest of self against truth and justice. He who struggles for peace and truth will have great reward; even his defeat will be deemed a victory.

"If a person goes to battle even for a righteous cause, then Sinha, he must be prepared to be slain by his enemies because death is the destiny of warriors. And should his fate overtake him, he has no reason to complain. But if he is victorious his success may be deemed great, but no matter how great it is, the wheel of fortune may turn again and bring his life down into the dust.

"However, if he moderates himself and extinguishes all hatred in his heart, if he lifts his down-trodden adversary up and says to him, "Come now and make peace and let us be brothers," then he will gain a victory that is not a transient success; for the fruits of that victory will remain forever.

"Great is a successful general, Sinha, but he who conquers self is the greater victor.

"This teaching of conquest of self, Sinha, is not taught to destroy the lives of others, but to protect them. The person who has conquered himself is more fit to live, to be successful and to gain victories that is the person who is a slave of self.

"The person whose mind is free from illusion of self, will stand and not fall in the battle of life. He whose intentions are righteousness and justice, will meet with no failures. He will be successful in his enterprise and his success will endure. He who harbours love of truth in his heart will live and not suffer, for he has drunk the water of immortality. So struggle courageously and wisely. Then you can be a soldier of Truth."