

Clarifying the Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict

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Abstract

Buddhism embodies a strong tradition of nonviolence. However, while much has been written about Buddhist approaches to conflict, a clear summary of these approaches does not appear to exist. For the benefit of Buddhist teachers and chaplains, this paper distills the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict. The author defines a core practice as one which is rooted in at least one primary source of Buddhism, appears to be reasonably consistent with a broader understanding of Buddhism, and has some recognition in contemporary Buddhism as a skillful approach to conflict. The author researched and prepared a draft set of practices and distributed it to a small sample of recognized and experienced Buddhist teachers. Overall, teacher impressions were positive. The author then prepared a revised set of thirty-eight practices, each with source citations and each rendered so that it is actionable and applicable in a variety of conflicts.

Abbreviations

AN	Anguttara Nikaya	(Numerical Discourses)
It	Itivuttaka	(As It Was Said)
MN	Majjhima Nikaya	(Middle Length Discourses)
SN	Samyutta Nikaya	(Connected Discourses)
Ud	Udana	(Inspired Utterances)

Note. The above texts are classical works containing teachings attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha. These texts are cited in *The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony* (Bodhi, 2016) and *In the Buddha's Words* (Bodhi, 2005), the two collections I rely on as primary sources for the Buddha's teachings.

Introduction

What are the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict? In order to answer this question, it is useful first to clarify what Buddhism and conflict have to do with each other. Conflict exists whenever there is an incompatibility of goals or actions (Deutsch, 1973, p. 10). In contemporary conflict theory, conflict is defined more precisely as “*perceived divergence of interest*, a belief that the parties’ current aspirations are incompatible” (Pruitt & Kim, 2004, pp. 7-8). Buddhism, on the other hand, works to cultivate awareness of our evolving oneness and diversity, and it teaches skills for living in harmony with this oneness and diversity (Glassman, 1998). The Buddhist tradition, in the course of this work, has much to say about perceptions, interests, aspirations, and actions – all the operative ingredients of conflict. Thus, the field of “Buddhism and Conflict” is wide, and it is reasonable to inquire about what it means to work with conflict from a Buddhist perspective.

Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha who lived in India about 2,500 years ago, began by exploring the path to spiritual liberation (Bodhi, 2016), but:

[The Buddha’s teachings] gave rise to a broad ethic that applied not only to individual conduct but to the relations between people living under diverse conditions, whether in monasteries or at home, whether pursuing their livelihoods in the marketplace or workshop or in the service of the state. Under all these circumstances, the chief ethical requirement was the avoidance of harm: harm through aggression, harm by trampling on

the claims of others, harm through conflict and violence. The ideal was to promote good will and harmony in action, speech and thought. (Bodhi, 2016, p. 3)

As the Buddha's teachings have evolved across various cultures, the Buddhist tradition has become well-known for approaching conflict with nonviolence. Examples include the Tibetan Buddhist tradition exemplified by Shantideva (trans. 2006), the Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition exemplified by Dogen (Tanahashi, 1985, 2012), and the Western engaged Buddhist tradition exemplified by the many teachers and practitioners affiliated with the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (Moon, 2004; Eppsteiner, 1988). Similar to other religious traditions, Buddhism has branches that argue for and practice violence (Jerryson & Juergensmeyer, 2010), but these are the exception rather than the rule. Roshi Joan Halifax, reflecting on the Sixteen Precepts taken upon entering the Zen Buddhist tradition, sums up Buddhist practice concisely: "This really is a promise to end violence" (2018).

What are the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict? It's reasonable to expect that leaders in the Buddhist tradition (teachers, monks, priests, and especially chaplains) occasionally would be consulted about this question, and it's reasonable to expect that such representatives of the tradition would be prepared to offer a meaningful response. In my research, however, I have not found a useful distillation of the essential practical tools for working with conflict taught in the Buddhist tradition. Therefore, I attempt in this paper to clarify concisely this roster of fundamental practices. I suggest that Buddhist leaders would benefit by having such a resource.

Before proceeding, two notes will be helpful. First, in regard to talking about what we do with conflict, it is common to use the phrase "resolving conflict." However, in light of Buddhist

perspectives on impermanence, incompleteness, and interdependence (Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 76 [verses 277-279]), the notion of achieving a state of resolution does not square with this worldview. The phrase “transforming conflict” is also common and perhaps is more in tune with Buddhist perspectives regarding how systems function. Since Buddhist practices regarding conflict are largely process-oriented, I generally prefer the phrase “working with conflict” because it does not speculate on outcome.

Second, in regard to scope, I am not attempting to identify all the practices for working with conflict that are *consistent with the Buddhist tradition*. That field is too large, and it encompasses much of what are regarded as current best practices in the secular field of conflict transformation. At the other end of the spectrum, I am not attempting to identify the practices for working with conflict that are *exclusive to the Buddhist tradition*. That field appears so small (especially since many similar practices are found in other religious and ethical traditions (Tauscher, 2003)) that it would not likely yield useful results. My intention is to identify all the practices for working with conflict that are *distinctly rooted in the Buddhist tradition*. This field appears to be reasonably identifiable and, if it can be clarified, Buddhist leaders would be able to say: “Here are the core practices for working with conflict that our tradition raises for consideration.”

Literature Review

In order to clarify the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict, a literature review is essential. However, the field of literature relevant to this project is massive and expanding. In light of my research, I propose three premises: (a) four broad categories define the

range of relevant works: primary sources, theoretical analyses, contemporary secular interpretations, and contemporary Buddhist interpretations; (b) the works identified below are central to, and representative of, each of these four categories; and (c) the works identified below, as a group, offer a reasonable basis for identifying and clarifying the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict.

Primary Sources

I define *primary sources* as works which convey the earliest and most durable traditions. These include the works that record, to the best of our knowledge, what Shakyamuni Buddha taught about working with conflict and what, according to early generations of practitioners, was deemed important enough to pass on to later generations.

My review of primary sources includes selections from three teachers. Naturally, I begin with the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. The most useful sources I found are English anthologies of the Pali Canon edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005, 2016). His most helpful text, *The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony* (2016), presents a well-organized collection of discourses, many of which address working with conflict. Sections of the book address working with anger, exercising patience, practicing careful speech, settling disputes, and similar topics. Bodhi notes that, although the Pali Canon is regarded as the authoritative collection of the Buddha's teachings by followers of the Theravada Buddhist tradition (2005, pp. 5-14), these scriptures serve as "the fountainhead, the primal source, for all the evolving streams of Buddhist doctrine and practice through the centuries" (p. ix). While the passages he cites are exclusively from the Sutta Pitaka (the Discourse Collection), he notes that relevant teachings

from the Vinaya Pitaka (the Collection on Monastic Discipline) have parallels here (Bodhi, 2016, p. 4). Anyone familiar with the Pali Canon is aware that the text can be dense with repetition. While Bodhi's editing eliminates most of this problem, the text is not designed as a quick reference. Nonetheless, his work supplies the earliest teachings that constitute a Buddhist approach to working with conflict.

Other useful English collections of relevant teachings by Shakyamuni Buddha include *The Dhammapada* (trans. 1995), Nhat Hanh's (1991) *Old Path White Clouds*, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu's (2013c) paper "Non-violence: A Study Guide," which provides a collection of the Buddha's teachings related to nonviolence.

The second teacher I turn to is the Indian scholar Shantideva, author of *The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicharyavatara)* (trans. 2006). This work, composed in the 8th century CE, has served as a primary Buddhist text for over one thousand years. It is rooted in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, and its vibrant presence today is due largely to its transmission and practice within Tibetan Buddhism (pp. ix, xv, 25). The term "Bodhisattva" literally translates as an awakened or enlightened being, and Bodhisattvas are understood as "those beings who, turning aside from the futility and sufferings of samsara, nevertheless renounce the peace of an individual salvation and vow to work for the deliverance of all beings and to attain the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood for their sake" (p. 1). Shantideva teaches what it means, in the course of everyday life, to live out the Bodhisattva vow:

As long as space endures,
As long as there are beings to be found,
May I continue likewise to remain
To drive away the sorrows of the world. (10.55)

Shantideva explores many topics relevant to working with conflict, including: acknowledging past behavior and its consequences; working with thought and emotions; working with anger, hostility, and disputes; the need for training and diligence; and how all this work must be framed by the understanding that nothing, including ourselves, has a separate self. *The Way of the Bodhisattva* does not serve well as a concise reference, but its significance to any exploration of Buddhism and conflict is revealed in a comment by the fourteenth Dalai Lama: “If I have any understanding of compassion and the practice of the Bodhisattva path, it is entirely on the basis of this text that I possess it” (Shantideva, trans. 2006, p. 28).

The third teacher I consider is Eihei Dogen (1200-1253 CE), founder of the Soto school of Zen Buddhism and one of the primary and most durable interpreters of the Buddhist tradition. He is best known for establishing Zen Buddhism in Japan and for his extensive writings and insights regarding Buddhist practice (Leighton & Okumura, 1996; Tanahashi, 1985, 2012). Several of his essays are particularly relevant for clarifying core Buddhist practices for working with conflict, including: “Guidelines for Studying the Way” (Gakudo Yojin-shu) (Dogen, trans. 1985c), “Bodhisattva’s Four Methods of Guidance” (Bodaisatta Shisho-ho) (Dogen, trans. 1985a), “Actualizing the Fundamental Point” (Genjo Koan) (Dogen, trans. 2012), “Instructions for the Tenzo” (Tenzokyokun) (Dogen, trans. 1996), and “Instruction on the Precepts” (Kyojukaiimon) (Dogen, trans. 2017). These works are relevant, not because they specify precise tools to address conflict, but because they serve as maps, highlighting skillful practices of Buddhism, useful for guiding us through the conflict-ridden waters of daily life.

The above primary sources cover much ground regarding what Shakyamuni Buddha taught about working with conflict and how these teachings unfolded and persisted in the Theravada, Mahayana, Tibetan, and Zen traditions. There are countless other texts, canonical and

apocryphal, that could be included in this category, but the above sources, in my opinion, reasonably mark the terrain.

Theoretical Analyses

I define *theoretical analyses* as works which attempt to apply some scholarly rigor to the primary sources. These include historical, sociological, and philosophical analyses that serve to clarify some of the confusion that easily arises when using historical texts alone. Many early Buddhist teachings and commentaries about working with conflict would bear little fruit today without the context provided by skilled scholars.

Several scholars are especially helpful. To begin, Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his introductory essays to each part of *The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony* (2016), offers concise analysis with historical and philosophical insights. These essays, as a group, provide excellent context for investigating Buddhist practices regarding conflict.

Johan Galtung explores how the Buddhist tradition contributes to our work with global conflict. Two of his books, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996) and *Buddhism: A Quest for Unity and Peace* (1988), contain analyses of how Buddhist perspectives regarding conflict fit into the broader field of social, economic, and political conflict transformation. His writing can be dense, but he frequently returns to practical points. For example, at the conclusion of one chapter, he remarks:

The closest Western approximation to Buddhist conflict transformation would be a multilateral conference with all issues on the table and all parties seated around the table,

and time to articulate and process the conflicts in the system, preceded by meditation, and without pre-conditions. Holistic and dialectic, *mature*: but very rarely practiced during conflict. (Galtung, 1996, p. 87)

Theresa Der-lan Yeh, in her article “The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective” (2006), surveys Buddhist practices of building peace. She concludes that:

[T]he Buddhist worldview is surprisingly in accordance with the insights of peace studies in its process-oriented paradigm, its insistence on peace by peaceful means, and its holistic framework of peace, which would play a vital role in the efforts of bringing the culture of peace into existence around the world. (Yeh, 2006, p. 91 [Abstract])

Tatsushi Arai has conducted a multi-year exploration of how Buddhist teachings translate into current Buddhist practices for working with conflict, especially structural conflict (Arai, 2012, 2015, 2017). In his article “Toward a Buddhist Theory of Conflict Transformation” (2017), Arai suggests that:

One of the most fundamental challenges faced by scholars and practitioners who seek to develop a useful Buddhist theory of conflict analysis and transformation is the inner-directed, spiritual nature of the Buddha’s teachings. More specifically, Buddhism is a religious tradition that seeks to enable human beings to overcome suffering (*dukkha*) through a deeply spiritual, self-reflective effort. While Buddhism necessarily looks inward to seek an answer to human suffering from within the inner depth of people’s

lives (Ghosananda, 1992; Nhat Hanh, 1987; Nhat Hanh, 2012), conflict transformation requires not only looking inward but also looking outward to improve the *relationships* between conflict parties. (Arai, 2017, pp. 4-5)

Arai comes at this problem from several angles, ultimately offering suggestions for how a Buddhist approach might be augmented to better address social and structural conflicts.

Contemporary Secular Interpretations

I define *contemporary secular interpretations* as works which explain the current best practices of conflict transformation and mediation using Buddhist frameworks and terminology. Since the secular and the Buddhist approaches both have much to share with each other, these works can be useful regardless of one's religious or philosophical outlook. In regard to the parameters of the present project, it is important to note that while many contemporary secular practices for working with conflict may be consistent with Buddhist perspectives, this does not mean that such practices are distinctly rooted in the Buddhist tradition (see e.g.: Bush & Folger, 2005; Coleman, Deutsch, & Marcus, 2014; Fisher & Ury, 2011; Lewicki & Saunders, 2016; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Rosenberg, 2015; Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2010; Ury, 1993).

Cheris Kramarae provides an excellent introduction to this category in her thesis, "Transform Conflict: Mediation Resources for Buddhist Chaplains" (2013). In this paper, Kramarae explores how Buddhist approaches to conflict intersect with contemporary mediation (not to be confused with meditation) theory and practice. After examining the religious and

secular roots of mediation practice in the United States, Kramarae outlines a variety of ways that key Buddhist principles for working with conflict mesh with this practice.

John McConnell provides a lengthy reflection on how the traditional conflict mediation model and Buddhism intertwine. In his hefty book *Mindful Mediation* (1995), McConnell offers a leisurely exploration of Buddhist perspectives on conflict. He also provides a somewhat dated description of the mediation model, regularly applying an overlay of Buddhist terminology. His reflections move freely between practices that have strong roots in the Buddhist tradition and practices that are distinctly contemporary and secular. While the writing style and length of this book will deter many readers, a Buddhist new to mediation will find that it sheds light on important principles and practices in both traditions. Also, it is important to note that this work focuses more attention on the mediator's role than on the practices that might be employed by the parties in conflict.

Helena Suk Yee Yuen takes a more scholarly approach than McConnell. Her doctoral thesis, "Buddhist Mediation: A Transformative Approach to Conflict Resolution" (2008), provides a rigorous investigation of how Buddhist principles might be applied to the practice of conflict mediation. Also in the scholarly vein, Ray Parchelo provides a brief treatment in his paper "A Mind to Fight: Conflict Resolution and Buddhist Practices" (2008). Parchelo, a social worker, outlines his perspective of the primary Buddhist principles that apply to working with conflict.

Diane Musho Hamilton achieves a fine balance between McConnell and Yuen with her book *Everything is Workable: A Zen Approach to Conflict Resolution* (2013). In this work, Hamilton explores many of the recent best practices of contemporary secular conflict transformation and mediation, viewing them lightly through the lens of Zen Buddhism. Her

presentation of these practices is very accessible, and she does not try to force them into a Buddhist mold. Rather, she simply reflects on connections between the disciplines. Despite the book's subtitle, this volume serves better as a summary of current secular practices than it does a summary of Buddhist approaches to working with conflict. However, Hamilton provides useful exercises at the end of each short chapter that encourage exploration of how a Buddhist perspective might inform our work with conflict.

Ross McLauran Madden's book *The Three Poisons: A Buddhist Guide to Resolving Conflict* (2010) references and overlays many Buddhist teachings and contemporary secular tools for working with conflict, but the presentation is cumbersome. While the book's subtitle is promising, the work does not ably serve as a "guide." I mention this work only because it tends to appear often in online searches for resources on Buddhist approaches to conflict.

John Paul Lederach stands apart in this category in regard to the simplicity, subtlety, and practicality of his work. In his book *The Moral Imagination* (2005), Lederach does not reference an explicit Buddhist framework, but his worldview and approach are informed by and exemplary of contemporary Buddhist understanding. Lederach's theme is that our work with conflict calls for more than just technical skill. It calls for creativity. This includes: imagining how our relationship with our partner in conflict might flourish; being curious about how our relationship might hold complexity and paradox; making space for creative options to be explored and tested; and taking risks (pp. 34-39). In general, Lederach suggests that, while it is important to sharpen our practical skills, we ultimately will work better with conflict if we behave less like a technician and more like an artist (p. ix). Lederach's mix of secular presentation and Buddhist underpinning functions as a delightful bridge into the fourth category of resources.

Contemporary Buddhist Interpretations

I define *contemporary Buddhist interpretations* as works which explain how living Buddhist traditions now understand and apply the teachings of the primary sources. Many Buddhist teachers and authors have produced relevant reflections. In regard to the theme of working with conflict, teachers and practitioners in the contemporary tradition of “engaged Buddhism” are especially useful.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a renowned Zen master who came to prominence for his peace work during the Viet Nam War, has written prolifically on how the practices and principles of Buddhism apply directly to our work with conflict. His explanation of the core teachings of Buddhism, *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching* (1998), contains applicable guidance throughout. *Interbeing* (1987b) sets out the fourteen precepts of the Tiep Hien Order, applying the traditions of Buddhist ethics to how community members engage with a variety of difficult social matters. *Being Peace* (1987a) is his classic teaching on working for peace interpersonally and in the larger world. *Creating True Peace* (2003) expands this teaching with specific guidance on practicing nonviolence in the family and the community. *Good Citizens* (2012) applies the Buddhist teachings on nonviolence to global and social issues. Nhat Hanh’s books explore approaches to conflict from all different angles, including how we can work with anger (2001), how we can communicate better in difficult times (2013), and how we can better address conflict in the workplace (2005). The list goes on, marking Thich Nhat Hanh as a defining figure in shaping contemporary understanding of how Buddhism applies to our work with conflict.

Maha Ghosananda, in his book *Step by Step* (1992), offers another example of recent clarification and application of Buddhist practices for working with conflict. Ghosananda was a

monk and leader in the Cambodian Buddhist tradition, and is well-known for his peace work beginning in the 1970's during the rule of the Khmer Rouge. His book is organized into meditations on wisdom and meditations on compassion. These brief reflections describe, in simple accessible language, the essentials of a Buddhist approach to working with conflict.

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF), founded in 1978, continues to serve as a home to the Western incarnation of engaged Buddhism (<http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org>). Many leading figures in the engaged Buddhist community have written pieces under the auspices of BPF. In *Not Turning Away: The Practice of Engaged Buddhism* (Moon, 2004), Susan Moon provides an anthology from twenty-five years of writing on engaged Buddhism, drawn from the pages of *Turning Wheel*, the former journal of the BPF. The organizing theme of this collection is the practice of “not turning away” from difficulties in our lives (such as conflict), but engaging kindly and directly with such matters. Many articles, by respected Buddhist teachers, offer guidance on what it means today to approach conflict from a Buddhist perspective. The practice of fearlessness is a recurring theme. In *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Eppsteiner, 1988), Fred Eppsteiner provides an earlier anthology on the same theme of engaged Buddhism, including articles by many of the defining figures in this movement over the last several decades.

Alan Senauke is a Zen Buddhist priest, former Director of the BPF, and a contemporary leader in international projects related to engaged Buddhism. In his book *The Bodhisattva's Embrace: Dispatches from Engaged Buddhism's Front Lines* (2010), Senauke offers his experiences with the gritty realities of applying Buddhist traditions of working with conflict to many challenging struggles in today's world. His first chapter, exploring Dogen's “Bodhisattva's

Four Embracing Dharmas,” serves as a concise overview of the core values and practices of engaged Buddhism.

Bernie Glassman, Zen Master and founder of the Zen Peacemaker Order, explores Buddhist insights for working with conflict in his book *Bearing Witness* (1998). The subtitle of his book is “A Zen Master’s Lessons in Making Peace,” but traditional approaches to working with conflict are not offered. Rather, Glassman’s lessons revolve around practice of Buddhism’s Three Pure Precepts. “Not-knowing” is the practice of keeping an open mind and abandoning the certainty that I know what’s best here, or that I know how to fix this, or that I know why this happened. By releasing our grip on being right, all sorts of new possibilities for peacemaking become evident. “Bearing Witness” is the practice of paying close attention to the experience of all involved in a conflict, including those who appear to be fueling the conflict or creating the antagonism. By observing closely, without attachment, judgment, or turning away, we become more attuned to what action might be appropriate. “Compassionate Action” is the practice of engaging in the world in a way that eases suffering. Glassman suggests that we can assess what action might ease suffering in a conflict only by practicing not-knowing and bearing witness.

Glassman summarizes:

In the Peacemaker Order, we don’t ask ourselves what are the right methods of handling conflict. Instead we try to approach the situation with no attachment to ideas or solutions. Only then can we really bear witness. And as we become each situation that arises, as we find in ourselves the place of suffering, illness, or despair, the healing arises. (p. 88)

Joanna Macy is an internationally renowned eco-philosopher, activist, and scholar of Buddhism and systems theory. Her book, with Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* (2014), is an excellent example of how we might apply the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict. Macy has a strong history of exploring how we move from a disconnected self-destructive existence to a connected sustainable society, work that she calls the “Great Turning” (see: Macy, 1983; Seed, Macy, Fleming, & Naess, 1988). In this book, she addresses the broader milieu of societal conflict from a perspective that is rooted in a Buddhist worldview (Macy & Brown, 2014, pp. 48-49). She assesses our fundamental human conflicts through the lens of greed, hate, and delusion, and she prescribes a path to sustainable society based on our experiential understanding of interconnectedness and communal evolution. Macy offers training exercises rooted in the Buddhist principles of impermanence, no separate self, loving-kindness, and compassionate action. The exercises encompass personal reflection, role-playing, communication skills, connecting with other human beings, connecting with the natural world, etc. Since the Buddhist approach to conflict focuses substantially on the character and workings of the heart-mind, Macy’s exercises serve as useful tools for training.

Literature Review Conclusions

In light of the above review and my investigation of many similar works, I draw two conclusions relevant to the structure of this project. First, none of the resources I have explored provide a useful distillation of the essential practical tools for working with conflict taught in the

Buddhist tradition. Second, the above works provide a reasonable degree of breadth and depth to inform my draft summary of the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict.

Method

While much has been written about Buddhist approaches to conflict, a concise summary of the essential practical tools taught in this tradition does not appear to exist. In order to create such a summary, I: (a) reviewed the literature and extracted what I determined are the core practices, (b) drafted a four-page summary of these practices, (c) circulated my summary to thirty respected teachers from several Buddhist traditions for their review, and (d) evaluated teacher responses and prepared a second draft of my summary.

Determining Core Practices

The central problem of this thesis is determining what constitutes a core Buddhist practice. Defining “core” can get messy very fast. Which traditions are important to consider: Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, Zen, secular? Which cultural settings are important to consider: India, China, Japan, Burma, Europe, the United States? What periods are important to consider: practices from Shakyamuni Buddha’s lifetime, practices from early monastic communities, practices that have been passed down over generations, contemporary practices?

A very rigid approach would identify a core Buddhist practice as an explicit practice taught by Shakyamuni Buddha. However, by this standard, there would be no material to consider. The history of Buddhism (see Lopez, 2001) indicates that the stories and teachings of

Shakyamuni Buddha were preserved by the memory of followers for many years before they were set in writing, so it is impossible to know precisely or literally what happened or what was taught. Subsequently, different canons of core texts and commentaries emerged according to the particular interests of different groups, thus leading to disagreement and uncertainty regarding which texts should serve as essential guides. The spread of Buddhism, from one to land to another across the globe, has necessarily involved syncretization with the values, perspectives, and practices of local cultures. And, text translations for use in these new cultures routinely introduced biases and errors to which translations are necessarily susceptible. Such factors lead Buddhist historian Donald Lopez to conclude: “[S]trictly speaking all Buddhist sutras, even those composed in Indian languages, are apocryphal because none can be identified with complete certainty as a record of the teaching of the historical Buddha.” (Lopez, 2001, p. 103)

A more realistic approach is to identify a core practice as an explicit practice described in a primary text of the tradition. However, what constitutes a primary text is subject to wide interpretation. There are countless early texts, subsequent versions, and translations. And for each text, there are degrees of recognition by practitioners, and degrees of recognition by scholars. In light of this context, and as a matter of practicality, I began my determination of core practices with a close reading of the primary sources prioritized above in the Literature Review, including texts from the Pali Canon, Shantideva, and Dogen.

In order to assess the relevance of potential core practices, I considered the insights of scholars and Buddhist teachers including, but not limited to, those mentioned above in the Literature Review. A running question in my assessment was: Just because the Buddha, or one of his early followers, said or did something related to working with conflict, does that make it a core Buddhist practice? If subsequent generations of scholars and teachers appear to embrace,

ignore, or dismiss a practice, I added that weight to my assessment. As the Padmakara Translation Group observes:

The Buddhologist of Western academia aims, through the examination of texts, archaeological evidence, and so on, to arrive at a scientifically objective understanding of a religious culture. This is viewed, from outside, as an essentially anthropological phenomenon, the beliefs and practices of which are described and classified within a discipline that consciously distances itself from religious allegiance and practice. Buddhists, on the other hand, study the sacred texts as part of a spiritual discipline, intending or at least aspiring to implement the teachings they contain. And to that end, they attach an equal importance not only to the origins and authorship of the texts, but also to the living tradition of explanation and practice that has preserved them into the present age. . . . For the Buddhist, the contribution to a tradition made by the lineage of its accomplished practitioners is just as crucial as that of its source. (Shantideva, trans. 2006, pp. xii, xv)

Therefore, for the purpose of this project, I define *a core Buddhist practice for working with conflict* as a practice which is rooted in at least one primary source of Buddhism, appears to be reasonably consistent with a broader understanding of Buddhism, and has some recognition in contemporary Buddhism as a skillful approach to conflict.

First Draft Summary of Practices

My first draft summary was a four-page document outlining thirty-six discrete practices for working with conflict (see Appendix A). I selected these practices on the basis of my close reading of the primary sources described above in the Literature Review. I then evaluated these practices in the context of the theoretical analyses, contemporary secular interpretations, and especially the contemporary Buddhist interpretations also described above in the Literature Review. From my perspective, each of these practices appears to be consistent with the criteria I set forth to define *a core Buddhist practice for working with conflict*.

In rendering these practices, my intention was to describe each practice with enough detail to be concrete, actionable, of practical use, and applicable in a wide variety of conflict situations. My intention was also to write with concise and straightforward language so the summary might serve as a useful resource for Buddhist chaplains, teachers, and other leaders in the Buddhist tradition. I originally considered including source citations for each practice, but I decided to omit them from the summary since they would detract from the simplicity of the document, they would make the document longer, and they could easily be made available to those who were interested.

As I began to organize these practices for the purpose of presentation, five broad groupings naturally emerged. While the groups are not rigid, and certain practices could reasonably be placed in more than one group, I felt that each of the practices easily fell under one of these organizing themes: Cultivate Intention, Cultivate Stability, Cultivate Awareness, Cultivate Challenging Perspectives, and Cultivate Skills for Action.

Teacher Review

In order to assess the accuracy of both my choice of practices and my rendering of these practices, I planned to gather input on my first draft summary via an informal review by at least ten respected Buddhist teachers. I developed a list of potential reviewers, using the criteria that reviewers should be recognized and experienced Buddhist teachers, with some apparent interest in this topic, and that the group of teachers should represent several traditions. I presumed a low response rate, so I tripled my response goal in order to determine the number of requests I would send. I circulated my first draft summary to thirty respected teachers, distributed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of Requests Sent to Potential Reviewers

Tradition	Female	Male	Total
Zen	7	5	12
Vipassana / Insight	6	2	8
Tibetan	5	1	6
Theravada	0	2	2
Secular	1	1	2
Total	19	11	30

My cover letter accompanying this first draft (see Appendix B) asked potential reviewers to offer any comments, even if only briefly, and, if possible, to consider the following questions:

- Should any practice on this list be reframed or clarified?
- Should any practice be added to this list?
- Should any practice be deleted from this list?
- Does this summary raise any broader concerns or questions for you?

Second Draft Summary of Practices

After my closing date for receiving reviewer replies, I examined the results, noting general impressions, trends, and specific suggestions. In light of the input I received from these recognized and experienced Buddhist teachers, and in light of additional research I had done while the first draft was out for review, I revised my text. This second draft summary is a four-page document outlining thirty-eight practices for working with conflict (see Appendix C). My complete description of these practices, including sources, is presented below.

Results

I circulated my first draft of “Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict” (see Appendix A) to thirty respected Buddhist teachers for review. I received replies from a total of fourteen teachers (see Appendix D). The distribution of requests sent compared with the distribution of replies received is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Distribution of Requests Sent Compared with Replies Received

	Tradition	Female	Male	Total
	Requests Sent			
	Zen	7	5	12
	Vipassana / Insight	6	2	8
	Tibetan	5	1	6
	Theravada	0	2	2
	Secular	1	1	2
	Total Requests Sent	19	11	30
	Replies Received			
	Zen	4	2	6
	Vipassana / Insight	2	2	4
	Tibetan	2	0	2
	Theravada	0	2	2
	Secular	0	0	0
	Total Replies Received	8	6	14

Since my plan was only to conduct an informal review, using a sample size that is not statistically significant, a statistical analysis is not relevant. However, several additional details might be of interest. Among the thirty teachers I contacted: nine never responded, even with a follow-up; six declined outright, due to time constraints or health; two said they would respond, but ultimately did not; thirteen responded with a substantive reply, and one of them recruited a fourteenth respondent who was not on my list.

As stated in the Method section, my purpose in gathering teacher input was to assess the accuracy of both my choice of practices and my rendering of those practices. Generally, reviewers affirmed that both my selection and description of the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict appear to be reasonable.

Six teachers offered only general impressions, four teachers offered a few comments, and four teachers offered more than a few comments. Most comments related to matters of fine-tuning, such as word choice. Several comments prompted me to add clarifications to my text. And several comments were not applicable, due to the fact that reviewers were only sent my summary and not my full descriptions of scope, method, and rationale. Overall, teacher impressions of my first draft were positive. Table 3 provides a summary of general impressions offered by the fourteen teachers who responded.

Table 3

General Impressions Offered by Reviewers

Teacher	General Impression
1	“a great comprehensive job”
2	“quite wonderful . . . these are excellent practices”
3	“well done”
4	“in general looks good to me”
5	“an amazing job . . . well organized, clear and thorough . . . a valuable offering”
6	“it all looks very thorough”
7	“certainly thorough”
8	“a very good list”
9	“would not add anything else or delete anything . . . no concerns . . . good job”
10	“very complete . . . it will be very useful . . . excellent compilation”
11	“a wonderful outline”
12	“a very comprehensive list . . . lots of good practices and consideration”
13	“very good . . . will be beneficial for many people”
14	[No general impressions, only suggestions]

Note. The above teacher comments are all contained in personal communications received between June and September 2018. Since the review process was informal, I did not ask reviewers to prepare comments that would be cited to them by name. For this reason, teacher names have been omitted from this table, and teacher order is random relative to the list of names appearing in Appendix D.

Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict

Below is my selection, distillation, and rendering of the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict. I have attempted to identify practices that are distinctly rooted in the Buddhist tradition, as opposed to practices that are simply consistent with the Buddhist tradition (a very large set) or practices that are exclusive to the Buddhist tradition (a very small set). My intention here is to create a resource that concisely lays out what the Buddhist tradition offers for consideration as we engage with conflict.

For the purpose of this project, I regard *a core Buddhist practice for working with conflict* as a practice which is rooted in at least one primary source of Buddhism, appears to be reasonably consistent with a broader understanding of Buddhism, and has some recognition in contemporary Buddhism as a skillful approach to conflict. As described above, I selected these practices based on my review of representative teachings from the Pali Canon, Shantideva, and Dogen. There are countless other sources that could be referenced, but these three, in my opinion, reasonably mark the terrain.

My intention here is not only to identify core teachings, but to render them faithfully and in a way that makes sense in our time. My rendering of these practices is done in light of my review of many secondary sources and my experience with Buddhist teachings over the past thirty-five years.

It is important to clarify five points regarding what this collection is not. First, this set of practices does not represent the full range of best practices available today for working with conflict. Contemporary secular work in the field of conflict transformation offers many

additional tools and techniques, such as: refining communication skills, designing options that meet multiple interests, working with systems, and addressing our latent biases (see e.g.: Beer & Packard, 2012; Bush & Folger, 2005; Coleman et al., 2014; Fisher & Ury, 2011; Kraybill, 2001; Lederach, 2005; Lewicki & Saunders, 2016; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Rosenberg, 2015; Stone et al., 2010; Ury, 1993).

Second, this set of practices is not limited in application to interpersonal conflict. These practices are generally transferrable to intra-group and inter-group situations. These practices can be undertaken by groups and organizations, and they can serve as levers to shift organizational relationships and systems.

Third, this collection does not focus on practices for mediators, intermediaries, or other third parties to conflict. Rather, it focuses on practices that might be undertaken by individuals or groups who are primary parties, i.e., those directly involved in conflict. The field of modern mediation abounds with extensive resources describing skills, techniques, and best practices (see e.g.: Beer & Packard, 2012; Bush & Folger, 2005; Coleman et al., 2014; Kraybill, 2001; Lewicki & Saunders, 2016; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). In light of my research, and my training and practice as a mediator, my assessment is that this well-developed field offers substantially more skillful guidance for third-party involvement than anything I've found in the primary sources of the Buddhist tradition. While the Buddhist tradition is not silent on third-party involvement in conflict (see e.g.: McConnell, 1995, pp. 311-314; Thanissaro, 2013a, pp. 452-461), the details are of limited usefulness for this project. (For additional consideration of this matter, see my comments below under Practice 38.)

Fourth, while this is a wide-ranging collection of Buddhist practices, it does not constitute a Buddhist panacea for conflict. Alan Senauke observes that, despite the many specific

directives outlined in the Buddha's teachings, there is, in practice, much ambiguity in living out our lives (Bodhi, 2016, p. 197). Contemporary insights regarding complexity, systems, and creativity affect how we choose and exercise the many tools at our disposal. John Paul Lederach emphasizes that the messiness of the personal elements in conflict, and the particulars unique to every situation, raise many considerations for how we might skillfully proceed (Lederach, 2005, pp. vii-xi).

Fifth, and most important, this collection is not intended to serve as a checklist of "things to do" when facing a conflict. Rather, it is a set of skills that Buddhist practitioners might cultivate and experiment with over time. In the spirit of the Buddhist tradition, one might train in these practices until they become habits that naturally arise in one's daily encounters with conflict.

I have organized the following thirty-eight practices under five themes: Cultivate Intention, Cultivate Stability, Cultivate Awareness, Cultivate Challenging Perspectives, and Cultivate Skills for Action. A four-page summary of these practices is available in Appendix C.

Cultivate Intention

(1) Vow to Benefit the Other. *Practice making, and renewing, a commitment to benefit our partner in conflict. Vow to ease their suffering, to avoid causing them harm, and to be of service. Vow to cultivate the heart-mind so that we become naturally intent upon doing these things.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings on the Four Divine Abodes: loving-kindness (wishing for the well-being of others), compassion (wishing to ease the suffering of

others), altruistic joy (rejoicing in the good fortune of others), and equanimity (welcoming all, without grasping, turning away, or indifference) (MN 99, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 42). It similarly appears in the Buddha's discourse on the Five Ways of Removing Resentment (AN 5:161, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 56). This practice takes full shape in Shantideva's exploration of the vow of the Bodhisattva (3.7-10, 3.18-22), the classic Buddhist vow of selfless service to others, summed up in his verse:

As long as space endures,
As long as there are beings to be found,
May I continue likewise to remain
To drive away the sorrows of the world. (10.55)

This practice is also rooted in Dogen's core teachings on ethics (Dogen, trans. 1985a., trans. 2017), and his guidance to maintain a nurturing mind, the mind of mothers and fathers (Dogen, trans. 1996, p. 47-49). The altruistic spirit of this vow is captured in Dogen's verse:

Awake or asleep
in a grass hut,
what I pray for is
to bring others across
before myself. (Tanahashi, 1985, p. 213)

(2) Train Diligently. *Practice, with energy and effort, sharpening the skills necessary to work well with conflict. Since these skills are yoked to habits of the inner life, train regularly and when no conflict is pressing.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings on applying appropriate effort, as part of his Eightfold Path to the end of suffering (SN 45:8, in Bodhi, 2005, p. 239), and in his general principle that whatever one frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of one's mind (MN 19, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 39-40). Two particular teachings illustrate well the practice of diligent training in regard to conflict. The teaching on practicing effacement provides an extensive list of ways to interact with others despite their conflict-provoking actions (MN 8, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 40-42). And the teaching on preparing oneself to respond to physical attacks with loving-kindness suggests that diligent training is necessary in order to face the worst of conflicts (MN 21, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 59-60).

This practice is also supported by Shantideva's chapter on diligence (7:1-76) and his explicit linking of training to the Bodhisttava path:

Just as all the Buddhas of the past
 Have brought forth the awakened mind,
 And in the precepts of the Bodhisattvas
 Step-by-step abode and trained,

Likewise, for the benefit of beings
 I will bring to birth the awakened mind,
 And in those precepts, step-by-step
 I will abide and train myself. (3.23-24)

Dogen, likewise, emphasizes the need for training, with energy and perseverance, in his “Guidelines for Studying the Way” (trans. 1985c, pp. 36-37).

Cultivate Stability

(3) Develop a Fully Embodied Presence. *Practice being attentive to posture, breath, senses, and physical presence, all indicators of how well we are working with conflict. Exercise using the body and the heart-mind as one in determining skillful ways forward.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha’s teachings on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (MN 10, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 281-290), on breathing (SN 54:13, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 290-295), and on the senses (SN 35:26, 28, 85, 147-149, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 345-347). A running theme in these teachings is that skillful engagement with the suffering of life is not just an intellectual endeavor. Rather, it involves bringing our full unfragmented self, our unified mind-heart-body, to bear on the difficulties we encounter. As Dogen suggests in his “Body-and-Mind Study of the Way” (Dogen, trans. 1985b),

To study the way with the body means to study the way with your own body. It is the study of the way using this lump of red flesh. . . . To turn this body around, abandoning the ten unwholesome actions, keeping the eight precepts, taking refuge in the three treasures, and leaving home and entering the homeless life, is the true study of the way.

(p. 91)

(4) Develop a Heart-Mind that is Tranquil and Alert. *Practice meditation, cultivating the ability to be present in difficult situations with grace. Build capacity to pause amidst high emotion, and to act with intention rather than out of impulse or habit.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings on right mindfulness and right concentration, as part of his Eightfold Path to the end of suffering (SN 45:8, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 239-240) and is supplemented by his many teachings on training the mind, such as the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (MN 10, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 281-290). The Buddha states succinctly the relevance of this practice to working with conflict:

I do not perceive even one thing, O monks, that leads to such great harm as an undeveloped mind. An undeveloped mind leads to great harm. I do not perceive even one other thing, O monks, that leads to such great benefit as a developed mind. A developed mind leads to great benefit. (AN 1:iii, in Bodhi, 2005, p. 267)

A mind out of control will do more harm than two angry men engaged in combat. A well-directed mind creates more well-being than the wholesome actions of parents toward their children. (Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 11 [verses 42-43])

Similarly, Shantideva suggests, that “In concentration I will place my mind. For those whose minds are slack and wandering are caught between the fangs of afflictions” (8.1).

(5) Develop Self-Compassion. *Practice applying patience, understanding, and kindness to oneself. By doing this, we not only ease our own suffering, but we strengthen our ability to*

face conflict with less reactivity, and we increase our skill in treating our partners in conflict with similar patience, understanding, and kindness.

While this practice does not appear to be an explicit teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, Amy Roomy provides an excellent argument for the canonical roots of self-compassion in the Buddhist tradition (Roomy, 2017, pp. 20, 23-24, 93-135). Her frank assertion is that “Although early Buddhism does not talk explicitly about self-compassion, there are grounds for feeling it is implied” (p. 24). She then proceeds to make a strong case for including self-compassion as a core Buddhist practice based on her analysis of many classical and traditional teachings (pp. 93-135). Additionally, several of my reviewers suggested that the practice of self-compassion deserves inclusion as a core Buddhist tool for working with conflict (Teachers 5, 7, 11, 12). And the link between self-compassion and conflict work is explicitly made in the writings of prominent contemporary teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh (2003) and Sharon Salzberg (Salzberg & Thurman, 2013).

(6) Develop Equanimity. *Practice welcoming pleasant experiences without grasping, welcoming unpleasant experiences without turning away, and welcoming neutral experiences without indifference. Nurture the ability to enter conflict with openness and spaciousness.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha’s teaching on equanimity in the Four Divine Abodes (MN 99, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 42) and in his teaching on the Five Ways of Removing Resentment, which states bluntly, “One should develop equanimity toward the person one resents; in this way one should remove resentment toward that person” (AN 5:161, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 56). Similarly, Dogen urges maintaining a magnanimous mind, “like the great mountains or like the great ocean; it is not biased or contentious mind” (trans. 1996, p. 49).

A recurring theme in Buddhist teachings on working with conflict is the practice of engaging with unpleasant experiences without turning away. Contemporary examples are found in Susan Moon's anthology on engaged Buddhism (2004), the title of which, "Not Turning Away," sums up the approach: face difficulties head on and do what is appropriate to improve the relationship. A classical example is found in the Zen story of The General and the Abbot:

When a rebel army took over a Korean town, all fled the Zen temple except the abbot. The rebel general burst into the temple and was incensed to find that the master refused to greet him, let alone receive him as a conqueror. "Don't you know," shouted the general, "that you are looking at one who can run you through without batting an eye?" "And you," said the abbot, "are looking at one who can be run through without batting an eye!" The general's scowl turned into a smile. He bowed and left the temple. (General, trans. 1973)

(7) Develop Contentment. *Practice releasing the grip of envy, lust, and greed. Abandon clinging to sensual and material pleasures. Reduce the field of potential conflict by requiring little.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's extensive teachings on how greed, coveting, stealing, clinging, and desire lead to disharmony and conflict (e.g., AN 2:37, AN 3:124, AN 6:36, AN 9:23, AN 10:176, MN 9, MN 13, MN 104, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 18, 36-38, 132-135, 137). During one teaching, the Buddha states frankly:

With sensual pleasures as the cause, sensual pleasures as the source . . . kings quarrel with kings, noble with nobles . . . householders with householders; mother quarrels with

son, son with mother, father with son, son with father; brother quarrels with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. And here in their quarrels, brawls, and disputes they attack each other with fists, clods, sticks, or knives, whereby they incur death or deadly suffering. . . . Again, with sensual pleasures as the cause men take swords and shields and buckle on bows and quivers, and they charge into battle massed in double array with arrows and spears flying and swords flashing; and there they are wounded by arrows and spears, and their heads are cut off by swords Now this too is a danger in the case of sensual pleasures, a mass of suffering here and now, the cause being simply sensual pleasures. (MN 13, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 132-133)

This practice is reinforced in the Zen precepts of not stealing and not being greedy (Dogen, trans. 2017), and in Shantideva's declaration:

All the joy the world contains
Has come through wishing happiness for others.
All the misery the world contains
Has come through wanting pleasure for oneself. (8.129)

(8) Develop Supportive Relationships. *Practice expanding the web that supports skillful engagement with conflict. Cultivate friendships with those who encourage wholesome perspectives and actions. Avoid the influence of those who encourage unwholesome perspectives and actions.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teaching on how good friendship is the central support to living in a way that eases suffering (SN 45:2, AN 9:3, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 89-90). When the Buddha's disciple Ananda suggests that good friendship is half of the spiritual life, the Buddha replies, "Not so, Ananda! This is the entire spiritual life When a monk has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the noble eightfold path." (SN 45:2, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 89) Similarly, the Buddha suggests, "Do not choose bad friends. Do not choose persons of low habits. Select good friends. Be discriminating. Choose the best." (Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 21 [verse 78]) Shantideva goes one step further to dissuade unwholesome influence on one's effort to follow the Bodhisattva path:

Therefore flee the company of childish people.
Greet them, when you meet, with smiles
That keep on terms of common courtesy,
Without inviting intimate relations. (8.15)

Cultivate Awareness

(9) Observe the Impermanence of Circumstances. *Practice noticing how the circumstances of a conflict are always shifting, including: primary parties, secondary parties, observers, issues and concerns, relationships, perspectives, emotions, resources, external conditions, and criteria for reconciliation. View conflict as a fluid system rather than a static condition.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's core teaching that all circumstances bear the characteristic of impermanence (SN 22:59, SN 22:45, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 341-343; Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 76 [verse 277]). The Buddha also teaches that by meditating on impermanence, we lessen our inclination to hate and retaliate (MN 28, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 60). Similarly, Shantideva encourages paying attention to the qualities of impermanence as integral to the Bodhisattva's work to ease suffering (see generally 9.1-167). And Dogen instructs that one should arouse "the thought of enlightenment . . . the mind which sees into impermanence" (Dogen, trans. 1985c, p.32) as a primary practice of the Buddhist way. These teachings clarify that the circumstances of a conflict are in flux and cannot be regarded as stable conditions.

(10) Observe the Incompleteness of Solutions. *Practice noticing how our solutions to conflicts are unable to satisfy completely and indefinitely. Since we cannot account for all the changing circumstances and unforeseen consequences that arise over time, notice how our solutions naturally become unsatisfactory. Notice how focusing less on specific results and more on relationship quality provides a useful basis for working with this incompleteness.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's core teaching that all circumstances ultimately leave us dissatisfied and feeling that something else is needed (SN 22:59, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 341-342; Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 76 [verse 278]). In the context of working with conflict, this practice runs against our inclination to achieve certain outcomes. I observe that:

[I]n our inner life, we cling to the illusion of satisfaction. In other words, we hold tight to the view that certain conditions will set everything right in a reliable and sustainable way. . . . Of course, our perfect solutions are never perfect. They fall short or unravel for all sorts of reasons. We simply cannot account for all the changing conditions and

unforeseen consequences that arise over time. . . . [A]s our awareness of incompleteness becomes more stable, our desire for quick fixes subsides. This space allows us to be more diligent about crafting adaptable and flexible solutions. . . . [A]s our awareness of incompleteness becomes more stable, it is easier for us to let go of specific solutions and depend more on the skills and relationships that are required when our solutions inevitably need to be revised. (Hanjian, 2017, p. 24)

(11) Observe the Interdependence of Participants. *Practice noticing how all parties connected to a conflict – adversaries, representatives, allies, friends, relatives, communities, businesses, observers, mediators, etc. – are deeply intertwined, lacking separate selves, and functioning as one system. Notice how inaction, acts of harm, and acts of kindness, impact every participant in the system. Notice how the well-being of one is not separate from the well-being of all.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha’s core teaching that all circumstances bear the characteristic of having no separate self (SN 22:45, SN 22:59, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 341-343; Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 76 [verse 279]). Shantideva, likewise, emphasizes the importance of a Bodhisattva maintaining awareness of our expansive interdependence while acting to ease suffering (see generally 9.1-167). Dogen, in his essay on the “Bodhisattva’s Four Methods of Guidance” makes the point poetically:

“Identity-action” means nondifference. It is nondifference from self, nondifference from others. . . . When we know identity-action, others and self are one. Lute, song, and wine are one with human being, deva, and spirit being. . . . “Action” means right form, dignity,

correct manner. This means that you cause yourself to be in identity with others after causing others to be in identity with you. However, the relationship of self and others varies limitlessly with circumstances. . . . With a gentle expression practice identity-action for all people. (Dogen, trans. 1985a, pp. 46-47)

(12) Observe the Consequences of Conduct. *Practice noticing how actions related to conflict unfold. Notice how certain actions (such as killing, stealing, and lying) often lead to burden and discontent, and how certain actions (such as generosity, patience, and kind speech) often lead to ease and freedom.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's core teachings on karma (see generally: AN 8:11, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 19-20; AN 4:232, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 155-156), the notion that "there is fruit and result of good and bad actions" (MN 117, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 17), that "beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions" (MN 135, in Bodhi 2005, p. 162), and that the results of our actions unfold throughout time, including in this very life (AN 6:63, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 19).

John Paul Lederach (2018) and Tatsushi Arai (2017) explore the links between contemporary systems theory, how we work with conflict, and Buddhist insights on causes and conditions. They suggest that systems evolve in all sorts of ways and, hence, as we work with conflict within the systems of our homes, communities, organizations, and nation-states, we should observe, and learn from, both the intended and unintended consequences of our conduct.

Cultivate Challenging Perspectives

(13) Abandon Adherence to One's Current View. *Practice not-knowing. Since our perspective on a conflict is always incomplete (due to our limited vantage point) and thoroughly biased (due to our unique set of life experiences), leave space for a change of mind and a change of heart. Leave space for better options to emerge.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teaching that a primary source of conflict is when "one adheres to his own views, holds to them tenaciously, and relinquishes them with difficulty" (MN 104, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 151; see also AN 6:36, in Bodhi, 2016, p.137). The Buddha emphasizes this point on several occasions (AN 2:37, Ud 6.4, MN 103, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 132-134, 147-150), and he teaches his followers to practice in this way: "Others will adhere to their own views, hold on to them tenaciously, and relinquish them with difficulty; we shall not adhere to our own views or hold on to them tenaciously, but shall relinquish them easily" (MN 8, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 42). Dogen suggests the same practice:

Although there are many features in the dusty world and the world beyond conditions, you see and understand only what your eye of practice can reach. In order to learn the nature of the myriad things, you must know that although they may look round or square, the other features of oceans and mountains are infinite in variety; whole worlds are there. It is so not only around you, but also directly beneath your feet, or in a drop of water.
(Dogen, trans. 2012)

Contemporary Buddhist teachers emphasize this practice as well. For example, angel Kyodo Williams encourages “being willing to come undone” (2018) as we cultivate our understanding of circumstances. Reb Anderson suggests that we cannot engage intimately and meaningfully with anyone, including our partners in conflict, if we decide unilaterally what is going on and if our view is the only one that matters (2001, p.17). Bernie Glassman, founder of the Zen Peacemaker Order, established the first tenet of the Order as “not-knowing,” i.e., letting go of fixed ideas about oneself, others, and the universe (Zen Peacemaker Order, 2018). He suggests:

As soon as we know something, we prevent something else from happening. When we live in a state of knowing, rather than unknowing, we’re living in a fixed state of being where we can’t experience the endless unfolding of life, one thing after another. Things happen anyway – nothing ever remains the same – but our notions of what *should* happen block us from seeing what actually *does* happen. (Glassman, 1998, p. 67)

Glassman teaches that we are so attached to our opinions that we treat them like truths. But if we treat our opinions as opinions, then options for working with conflict arise more readily (2017).

(14) Explore while Suspending Judgment. *Practice examining all aspects of a conflict with genuine interest. Bear witness to the many stories at hand, without clinging to or rejecting any one story. Be curious about difficult people and experiences. When judgment arises, investigate the beliefs, biases, and emotions that motivate our judgment.*

This practice is a corollary of abandoning adherence to one’s current view. It is also rooted in the Buddha’s teaching that a person is “deposited in hell” if they offer praise, blame,

belief, or suspicion, without doing their due diligence of “investigating and scrutinizing” (AN 5:236, in Bodhi 2016, p. 80). Dogen similarly suggests that, rather than putting ourselves forward and imagining that we are in a position to fix or resolve a situation, a more skillful approach is to open ourselves to understanding what is going on before us: “To carry the self forward and illuminate myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and illuminate the self is awakening.” (Dogen, trans. 2012) Likewise, Zen master Glassman established the second tenet of the Zen Peacemaker Order as “bearing witness” to the joy and suffering of the world (Zen Peacemaker Order, 2018). He suggests that even in the most horrific cases, such as when a child is kidnapped, assaulted, and murdered, the role of the peacemaker is to explore and experience the suffering, anger, pain, etc. of all involved: the child, the parents, the murderer, the murderer’s family, the police, etc. “[W]e can’t heal ourselves or other people unless we bear witness. . . . bearing witness to the wholeness of life, to every aspect of the situation that arises.” (Glassman, 1998, p. 76)

(15) View Oneself as Equal to the Other. *Practice seeing how we are equal to our partner in conflict: we both want to be happy, we both want to avoid suffering, and we both must weigh a variety of considerations in discerning the best path forward. Be alert to how our partner wants their needs met as much as we want our needs met.*

This practice is rooted in Shantideva’s core teaching to meditate on the equality of self and other (7.16, 8.89-98, 8.110-117). The Padmakara Translation Group suggests that this teaching, along with the teaching to meditate on the exchange of self and other (described below), constitute “the essence of the Bodhisattva path” (Shantideva, trans. 2006, p. 18). The practice of equalizing self and other is well-established in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition (Dalai

Lama XIV, 1991, pp. 161-174), and its relevance to working with conflict is clarified by Kunzang Pelden:

The way to reflect upon equality is as follows. We can distinguish the various parts of our bodies: hands, feet, head, inner organs, and so on. Nevertheless, in a moment of danger, we protect them all, not wanting any of them to be hurt, considering that they all form a single body. We think, “This is my body,” and we cling to it and protect it as a whole, regarding it as a single entity. In the same way, the whole aggregate of beings in the six realms, who in their different joys and sorrows are all like us in wanting to be happy and not wanting to suffer, should be identified as a single entity, our “I.” We should protect them from suffering in just the same way as we now protect ourselves. (Excerpt from “The Nectar of Manjushri’s Speech,” in Shantideva, trans. 2006, Appendix 2, p. 183)

(16) Immerse Oneself in the Other’s Perspective. *Practice clarifying how our partner in conflict sees the world, sees us, and sees this conflict. Look through their eyes, placing oneself in the context of their lifetime of experience, relationships, and lessons learned. Consider how we might approach this conflict if we were in their position.*

This practice is rooted in Shantideva’s core teaching to meditate on the exchange of self and other (7.16, 8.120, 8.140-154). The Padmakara Translation Group describes the classical practice as:

. . . a meditation that consists in projecting oneself, through a feat of sympathetic imagination, into the position of an opponent. Looking back, as it were, through the

opponent's eyes, meditators must target their own egos, generating the appropriate "negative" emotion of jealousy, competitive rivalry or pride, and getting a firsthand impression of what it is like to be at the receiving end of their own behavior. (Shantideva, trans. 2006, p. 19)

This practice is well-established in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition (Dalai Lama XIV, 1991, pp. 161-174), and The Padmakara Translation Group suggests that the exchange of self and other "is the peak of Bodhisattva practice and takes us to the heart of Buddhist wisdom" (Shantideva, trans. 2006, p. 18). The operative dynamic here is that by developing an intimate understanding of the sufferings and emotions of our partner in conflict, we are in a better position to work with our partner to address the conflict.

(17) View the Other as a Teacher. *Practice respecting the other as an important guide in our work to ease suffering. Identify how our partner in conflict provides us with powerful opportunities to cultivate intention, stability, awareness, challenging perspectives, and skillful action.*

This practice is rooted in Shantideva's teaching that those who cause us difficulties are the very ones who enable us to learn how to skillfully work with conflict (6.107-111).

Like a treasure found at home,
That I have gained without fatigue,
My enemies are helpers in my Bodhisattva work
And therefore they should be a joy to me. . . .

Thanks to those whose minds are full of malice
 I engender patience in myself.
 They therefore are the causes of my patience,
 Fit for veneration, like the Dharma. (6.107, 6.111)

More broadly, this practice reflects the insight of Dogen's Tenth Grave Precept that a practitioner will "experience the intimacy of things" (Loori, 2009, p. 88) and "recognize that all beings, including myself, are expressions of oneness, diversity, and interdependence" (Upaya, 2017, p.15; and generally, Dogen, trans. 2017). This precept suggests that we do not constrain the scope of what deserves respect and inclusion as a source of wisdom about the nature of reality. Even the beings that we find most difficult or harmful are sources of insight. John Daido Loori, in his reflection on this precept states, "We tend to build dreams of separateness that eventually become nightmares of alienation and isolation, and then we struggle to awaken from the nightmare we have created. To practice this precept is to wake up: there are only Buddhas." (Loori, 2009, p.88)

(18) Shift Focus from the Offense to the System that Created It. *Practice shifting attention from the heat of the moment (troublesome events, people, and circumstances) to the underlying web of relationships, structures, institutions, and processes. View offenses, even blatant acts of malice, as the natural result of myriad causes and conditions.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings on lack of a separate self (SN 22:45, SN 22:59, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 341-343; Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 76 [verse 279]) and, specifically, in the dynamic of dependent origination (Dalai Lama XIV, 1999, pp. 35-47) or

interdependent co-arising (Nhat Hanh, 1998, pp. 221-249). Thich Nhat Hanh describes the principle:

The Twelve Links of Interdependent Co-Arising (*pratitya samutpada*, literally “in dependence, things rise up”) is a deep and wonderful teaching, the foundation of all of Buddhist study and practice. . . . According to the teaching of Interdependent Co-Arising, cause and effect co-arise (*samutpada*) and everything is a result of multiple causes and conditions. (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 221)

When Shantideva applies this principle to our activity of working with conflict (6.22-33), he concludes:

All defilements of whatever kind,
the whole variety of evil deeds
Are brought about by circumstances:
None is independent, none autonomous. . . .

Thus, when enemies or friends
Are seen to act improperly,
Remain serene and call to mind
That everything arises from conditions. (6.25, 6.33)

The principle of independent co-arising includes two insights that have bearing on how we work with conflict. First, even under the worst circumstances, the significance of the near causes of an offense must be tempered in light of the long and diverse chain of distant causes. And second, if we were to experience the full range of causes and conditions that led our partner in conflict to offend, there would be good reason to expect that we would offend likewise.

Cultivate Skills for Action

(19) Pause and Reflect. *Practice restraint when provoked. When we feel an urgent need to criticize, defend, or retaliate, make time and space for reflection. Before re-engaging with the other, take stock of our physical body, emotions, thoughts, and options for proceeding.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings to act patiently when provoked (MN 21, MN 28, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 59-60). When facing criticism, he suggests refraining from reactivity: "[W]e shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind similar to the earth, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will" (MN 21, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 59-60). The Buddha also suggests an active practice of moral introspection: when we wish to act, while we are acting, and after we have acted, we should consider if our action leads to suffering, painful results, our own affliction, or the affliction of others (MN 61, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 33-34). Similarly, Shantideva teaches:

When the urge arises in your mind
 To feelings of desire or angry hate,
 Do not act! Be silent, do not speak!
 And like a log of wood be sure to stay. (5.48)

And Ghosananda instructs: “Non-action is the source of all action. There is little we can do for peace in the world without peace in our minds. And so, when we begin to make peace, we begin with silence – mediation and prayer.” (1992, p.51) The underlying theme in these teachings is that it can be beneficial to pause and reflect before addressing a conflict, since immediate responses are unlikely to be well-considered, and reactivity is unlikely to address deeper or systemic problems.

(20) Abstain from Actions that Reliably Enflame Conflict. *Practice not engaging in actions that are known to fuel conflict and increase suffering. Avoid harming and destroying life, taking what is not given, engaging in sexual misconduct, consuming intoxicants, and speaking in false, divisive, or harsh ways.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha’s core teaching to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication, since such actions typically lead to suffering (AN 4:61, AN 4:99, AN 8:39, AN 10:176, AN 10:178, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 34-38, 100-101). These traditional five precepts are central to Buddhist ethics (Lopez, 2001, pp. 48-49, 140-144, 167) and are found in classical texts, such as Dogen’s “Instruction on the Precepts” (Dogen, trans. 2017) and contemporary texts, such as Thich Nhat Hanh’s “Five Mindfulness Trainings” (Nhat Hanh, 2009, pp. 35-38).

(21) Overthrow the Angry Heart-Mind. *Practice breaking the grip of anger. Observe how being lost in anger fuels conflict and damages our relations and communications with others. When we notice anger arising within, apply antidotes to create an inner shift: renew our commitment to benefit others, return to practices that cultivate inner stability, explore challenging perspectives on the situation, offer generosity, etc.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings on dealing with anger (AN 3:27, AN 5:161, AN 5:215, AN 5:216, AN 7:64, AN 9:11, AN 10:80, SN 7:2, SN 11:21, MN 21, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 51-68; Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 63-65 [verses 221-234]). The Buddha warns that the dangers of an angry heart-mind include: "One is displeasing and disagreeable to many people; one has an abundance of enmity; one has an abundance of faults; one dies confused; with the breakup of the body, after death, one is reborn in the plane of misery" (AN 5:125, in Bodhi, 2016, p.53) Likewise, Shantideva regards anger as "our sorrow-bearing enemy" (6.6), and he notes that a single flash of anger undoes all the good works that one has accomplished (6.1). Specifically in regard to conflict, Shantideva suggests:

Harmful beings are everywhere like space itself.
 Impossible it is that all should be suppressed.
 But let this angry mind alone be overthrown,
 And it's as though all foes had been subdued. . . .

And thus the outer course of things
 I myself cannot restrain.
 But let me just restrain my mind,
 And what is left to be restrained? (5.12, 5.14)

While anger can interfere with our efforts to work with conflict, Larry Yang, a prominent contemporary Buddhist teacher, notes that it is helpful to remember that the natural experience of anger can inform and educate, and that we need to distinguish this dynamic from the danger of

being lost in anger, which he differentiates as rage (personal communication, June 20, 2018).

This understanding is reflected in Upaya Zen Center's rendering of Dogen's Ninth Grave Precept: "Transforming suffering into wisdom: this is the practice of Not Being Angry. I will not harbor resentment, rage, or revenge, and I will let anger teach me." (Upaya Zen Center, 2017, p.15)

(22) Energize the Compassionate Heart-Mind. *Practice calling forth our intentions and commitments. As we face our partner in conflict, even in difficult times, recall our vision of serving others, doing no harm, wishing well, and working to ease suffering.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's core teaching to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion (MN 99, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 42) and in his general principle that "Mind is the forerunner of all actions. All deeds are led by mind, created by mind." (Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 1 [verse 1]) In the context of working with conflict, the Buddha teaches, more pointedly, that by maintaining mental acts of loving-kindness toward others, we create affection and respect, and we support the arising of cohesiveness, non-dispute, concord, and unity (AN 6:12, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 116-117). And, if someone offends or attempts to offend, we should practice maintaining a mind that is still and non-defensive, orienting the mind toward compassion, loving-kindness, and equanimity (AN 5:161, MN 21, in Buddha, 2016, p. 56, 59-60). The Buddha suggests that we undertake such interior practices because "In this world enmity is never allayed by enmity. It is allayed by non-hatred: that is the fixed and ageless law." (MN 128, in Bodhi, 2016, p.136)

(23) Focus on Relationship, Not Results. *Practice tending to the quality of the relationship we have with our partner in conflict. Abandon plans and subtle hopes to achieve any*

particular outcome. Instead, repair and nourish the relationship, clearing the way for a helpful plan to emerge.

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's many teachings and examples of how to work with conflict. While focusing on relationship rather than outcome does not appear to be stated explicitly in the primary sources that I reviewed, the teachings referenced throughout this paper demonstrate that this practice is an underlying theme. The general principle is that if we work to repair, nourish, and maintain our relationship with our partner in conflict, the practical details of how we might address the conflict will become clear and will be more durable and beneficial than if we focus on maneuvering toward a pre-determined goal.

The Buddha provides a poignant example of this practice in his encounter with a notorious murderer who attempted to attack him. By means of kind and compassionate engagement, the Buddha developed a relationship with his potential attacker and, ultimately, the attacker became a monk and exemplar of nonviolence (Nhat Hanh, 1991, pp. 351-355, 381-382, 589-590 notes).

Shantideva and Dogen also generally indicate that tending to relationship is the priority. Dogen even suggests that one "should not practice Buddha's teaching with the idea of gain" or even "with the thought that it is to benefit others" (trans. 1985c, p.34) since compassion will naturally emerge if one undertakes the way wholeheartedly (pp. 34-35). More recently, the tradition of engaged Buddhism focuses extensively on the importance of relationship over outcome. Glassman's Three Tenets of the Zen Peacemaker Order epitomize this approach: only by letting go of our fixed ideas about others (not-knowing) and paying deep attention to their experience (bearing witness) can a skillful approach to the suffering at hand (compassionate action) emerge (Zen Peacemaker Order, 2018).

This practice is also supported by the Buddhist tradition of the Three Doors of Liberation, which teaches that one path to freedom is the realization of aimlessness (Nhat Hanh, 1998, pp. 146-155). Realizing aimlessness means abandoning one's agenda or program and expanding awareness of the goodness and restorative possibilities naturally present in a situation (Halifax, 2017).

(24) Examine One's Own Role. *Practice reflecting on our own role in fostering and perpetuating the conflict. Acknowledge this role fully and openly.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teaching that by reflecting thoroughly on one's role in a dispute, one might avoid acrimony and animosity in the settling of a conflict (AN 2:15, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 152-153). This practice is also supported by Shantideva's verses on confession (2.1-65) and Dogen's verse of atonement in his "Instruction on the Precepts" (trans. 2017), both offered as preliminary practices to be undertaken in order to support skillful engagement with others. Examining one's own role is not a matter of self-blame. Rather, it is a prompt for us to uncover and familiarize ourselves with the many direct and indirect ways in which we contribute to the conflict at hand.

(25) Accept Full Responsibility. *Practice accepting full responsibility for addressing the conflict, for improving the quality of the relationship, and for creating opportunities for reconciliation. Rather than blaming others, or trying to control them, or waiting for them to change, acknowledge the myriad causes and conditions that hinder them from acting more skillfully at this time.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teaching that when someone is acting for our harm, we should reflect on the reality that, ultimately, "What can be done about it?" (AN 10:80, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 56) In other words, the Buddha suggests that we acknowledge that we have no

real ability to change others. Consequently, we may as well shift our attention to how we, ourselves, might approach the conflict more skillfully. Likewise, Shantideva teaches:

And thus the outer course of things
I myself cannot restrain.
But let me just restrain my mind,
And what is left to be restrained? (5.14)

Dogen's Seventh Grave Precept teaches that it is unskillful to blame others, since we all contribute to the current circumstances (trans. 2017), and Shantideva goes so far as to turn blame on its head:

When others are at fault, I'll take
And turn the blame upon myself,
And all my sins, however slight,
Declare, and make them known to many. (8.162)

Since blame is of no help, and since we have no meaningful possibility of controlling others, this practice suggests taking full responsibility for our part in how life unfolds. As Kojun Chiba, a Shingon Buddhist lay-ordained teacher and mother teaches: "Take full responsibility for your life in the world as-it-is" (Schneider, 2013, p. 85).

(26) Proceed with an Uplifted Spirit. *Practice setting aside despair during the difficulties of conflict. If appropriate action is possible, we can proceed in the spirit of our vow to benefit others. If nothing can be done, we can offer all good wishes to our partners in conflict.*

This practice finds early expression in a teaching by the Buddha's disciple Sariputta: "When a person's bodily and verbal behavior are impure and he does not gain from time to time an opening of the mind, placidity of mind, on that occasion one should arouse sheer compassion, sympathy, and tender concern for him . . ." (AN 5:162, in Bodhi, 2016, p.58). However, this practice is rooted most clearly in Shantideva's exhortations:

Let us not be downcast by the warring wants
Of childish persons quarreling.
Their thoughts are bred from conflict and emotion.
Let us understand and treat them lovingly. . . .

If there's a remedy when trouble strikes,
What reason is there for dejection?
And if there is no help for it,
What use is there in being glum? . . .

Mounted on the horse of bodhichitta,
Which puts to flight all mournful weariness,
What lucid person could be in despair
Proceeding in this way from joy to joy? (5.56, 6.10, 7.30)

This guidance is also expressed in Dogen's instruction to "maintain a joyful mind" or a "happy heart" while undertaking the daily work of one's practice (trans. 1996, p. 47).

(27) Offer Reciprocal Respect. *Practice being as protective and compassionate with our partners in conflict as we are with ourselves. Avoid acting toward them in ways that we personally find displeasing.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teaching that we should refrain from actions that harm because we, ourselves, do not want to be harmed (SN 55:7, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 21-23). He states simply: "What is displeasing and disagreeable to me is displeasing and disagreeable to the other too. How can I inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me?" (p.22) Similarly, in these famous verses from the Dhammapada, the Buddha teaches:

Everybody fears being struck by a rod.

Everybody fears death.

Therefore, knowing this, feeling for others as for yourself,

Do not kill others or cause others to kill.

Everybody fears being struck by a rod,

Life being dear to all.

Therefore, knowing this, feeling for others as for yourself,

Do not kill others or cause others to kill.

(Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 37 [verses 129-130])

The practice of reciprocity is reinforced by Shantideva (8.110-120):

Therefore just as I defend myself
 From even slight disparagement,
 In just the same way with regard to others,
 I should likewise have a mind protective and compassionate. (8.110).

(28) Disregard Offense. *Practice not internalizing a perceived offense. If the offense was not intended, release the perception and pay it no more attention. If the offense was intended, practice setting it aside and not accepting it.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings on the various ways to eliminate our resentment toward those who offend (AN 5:161-162, AN 10:80, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 56-59). In regard to not internalizing the offense, he suggests that one might "disregard the person one resents and pay no attention to him" (AN 5:161, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 56). In the Dhammapada, he teaches:

"He abused me, mistreated me, defeated me, robbed me."

Harboring such thoughts keeps hatred alive.

"He abused me, mistreated me, defeated me, robbed me."

Releasing such thoughts banishes hatred for all time. (trans. 1995, p. 1 [verses 3-4])

In regard to not accepting an offense, the Buddha suggests that one might reflect on the reality that, ultimately, "What can be done about it?" (AN 10:80, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 56) He also

provides a personal example when he refuses to accept the verbal abuse of an angry brahmin. After the brahmin reviled the Buddha, the Buddha told the brahmin that his harsh words were like some food offered but rejected: “I refuse to accept from you the abuse and scolding and tirade you let loose at me. It still belongs to you, brahmin! . . . I do not partake of your meal; I do not enter upon an exchange. It still belongs to you, brahmin!” (SN 7:2, in Bodhi, 2016, p.63)

(29) Be at Ease with Some Adversity. *Practice reframing our attitude toward discomfort in conflict. Not every inconvenience is intolerable or warrants resistance. Not every insult or false accusation needs to be defended. In the spirit of our commitment to benefit others, try to approach discomfort with some equanimity and some openness to what we might learn.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha’s many teachings on dealing with anger and exercising patience (see generally, Bodhi, 2016, pp. 51-68). In regard to disagreements, the Buddha suggests that one “not fall into a dispute over a mere trifle” (MN 103, in Bodhi, 2016, p.148), and even in the worst case scenario, where one’s partner in conflict is given to anger and resentment and is firmly attached to his view, “One should not underrate equanimity toward such a person” (MN 103, in Bodhi, 2016, p.150). In regard to false accusations, Nhat Hanh recounts the story of when the Buddha’s monastic community was accused of killing a young woman and hiding her corpse (Nhat Hanh, 1991, pp. 362-364, 590 note). As the rumors swirled, the Buddha instructed his monks to continue their rounds in the city, saying:

Unjust accusations can occur anywhere at any time. There is no need for you to feel ashamed. The only cause for shame would be if you ceased your efforts to live your pure life of practice. This false accusation will spread and then it will pass away. Tomorrow

when you go begging, if anyone asks you about this affair, simply answer, “Whoever is responsible will reap the fruits.” (p. 363)

Shantideva teaches that a Bodhisattva should expect to work regularly with adversity:

Those whose minds are practiced in this way,
Whose joy it is to soothe another’s ills,
Will venture into hell of Unrelenting Pain
As swans sweep down upon a lotus lake. (8.107)

His chapter on patience is an extended reflection on this topic (6.1-134; see especially 6.14 and 6.21). Shantideva even suggests that, since a Bodhisattva devotes one’s full self to the benefit of others, one should have little concern with physical adversity:

This body I have now resigned
To serve the pleasure of all living beings.
Let them ever kill, despise, and beat it,
Using it according to their wish.

And though they treat it like a toy,
Or make of it the butt of every mockery,
My body has been given up to them.
Why should I make so much of it? (3.13-14)

(30) Abandon the Intention to Harm. *Practice setting aside any intention to harm our partner in conflict. Even when we feel wronged, or when we feel some threat to our reputation or well-being, throw off the inclination to hurt, offend, humiliate, or retaliate. As we become aware of any hostility or ill will lingering within, apply the antidotes of loving-kindness and compassion.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's core teachings to abstain from ill will and a mind of hate (MN 9, MN 21, MN 28, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 18, 59-60; Dhammapada, trans. 1995, pp. 37-38, 52, 81 [verses 129-134, 183, 300]). As a general principle on the path to ease suffering, the Buddha notes:

Animosity does not eradicate animosity.

Only by loving kindness is animosity dissolved.

This law is ancient and eternal. (Dhammapada, trans. 1995, p. 2 [verse 5])

In a startlingly frank passage, the Buddha summarizes his approach:

Monks, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate toward them would not be carrying out my teaching. Herein, monks, you should train thus: "Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading them with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; and starting with them, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted,

immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.” That is how you should train, monks. (MN 21, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 60)

(31) Speak with Care. *Practice speaking gently, truthfully, with kind intent, and only when it seems to be beneficial. Refrain from speaking about the faults and errors of others. Speak plainly and with sensitivity to the temperament of our partner in conflict.*

The practice is rooted in the Buddha’s teachings to abandon false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle chatter (AN 10:176, AN 10:178, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 36-38). The Buddha also offers a variety of teachings on the characteristics of proper speech (e.g., AN 3:67, AN 4:100, AN 5:198, AN 5:236, MN 103, MN 139, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 75-82, 149-150) which he summarizes here:

Monks, when speech possesses five factors, it is well spoken, not badly spoken, and it is blameless and irreproachable among the wise. What five? It is spoken at the proper time; what is said is true; it is spoken gently; what is said is beneficial; it is spoken with a mind of loving-kindness. (AN 5:198, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 75)

Specifically, in regard to working with conflict, the Buddha notes that verbal acts of loving-kindness are “a principle of cordiality that creates affection and respect and conduces to cohesiveness, non-dispute, concord, and unity” (AN 6:12, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 117). This practice is also supported by Dogen in his “Bodhisattva’s Four Methods of Guidance” (trans. 1985a) and his “Instruction on the Precepts” (trans. 2017). And, Thich Nhat Hanh offers a contemporary rendering of this practice in his “Five Mindfulness Trainings” (Nhat Hanh, 2009, p. 37).

(32) Offer Generosity. *Practice offering our resources to our partners in conflict. Share material resources, time, and attention. Give freely, with ease, and without concern for having enough.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's various teachings on abandoning miserliness and offering generosity (e.g., AN 2:141-144, AN 4:57, AN 4:61, AN 5:148, AN 5:254-255, AN 8:33, It 26, in Bodhi, 2016, pp.31-33). It finds full expression in the Buddhist tradition of the Six Perfections, in which generosity serves as the first perfection (Nhat Hanh, 1998, pp. 192-196; Dalai Lama XIV, 1991, pp. 187-188). Dogen explores generosity in the first of his "Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance" (trans. 1985a) and in the eighth of his Ten Grave Precepts (trans. 2017). And Shantideva goes to the point:

"If I give this, what will be left for me?"

Thinking of oneself – the way of evil ghosts.

"If I keep this, what will be left to give?"

Concern for others is the way of heaven. (8.125)

(33) Offer Forgiveness. *Practice offering forgiveness and pardon whenever our partner in conflict makes an apology or acknowledges their transgression.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teaching on forgiveness:

Monks, there are two kinds of fools: one who does not see a transgression as a transgression; and one who, when another is confessing a transgression, does not pardon him. These are the two kinds of fools. There are two kinds of wise people: one who sees a

transgression as a transgression; and one who, when another is confessing a transgression, pardons him. These are the two kinds of wise people. (SN 11:24, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 147; see also AN 9:11, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 65-67)

(34) Rejoice in the Good Fortune of the Other. *Practice being glad, as an expression of loving-kindness and harmony, when things go well for our partner in conflict.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teaching on altruistic joy in the Four Divine Abodes (MN 99, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 42). Correlatively, the Buddha observed that an enemy does not delight in the success or good fortune of an enemy (AN 7:64, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 54-55).

(35) Forgo Rejoicing When the Other is Harmed. *Practice letting go of any inclination to find joy when our partner in conflict suffers misfortune or harm.*

This practice is a corollary of the Buddha's teaching on altruistic joy (MN 99, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 42), but it differs enough that it deserves to be distinguished. Shantideva gives this practice full expression:

If unhappiness befalls your enemies,
 Why should this be cause for your rejoicing?
 The wishes of your mind alone,
 Will not in fact contrive their injury.

And if your hostile wishes *were* to bring them harm,
 Again, what cause of joy is that to you?
 "Why, then I would be satisfied!" – are these your thoughts?
 Is anything more ruinous than that? (6.87-88)

(36) Offer Praise When Praise is Due. *Practice offering praise to our partner in conflict whenever they speak or act well. Extend genuine appreciation for their positive attributes.*

This practice is also a corollary of the Buddha's teaching on altruistic joy (MN 99, in Bodhi, 2016, p. 42; see also AN 4:100, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 80-81) and, again, it differs enough that it deserves to be distinguished. Shantideva gives this practice full expression:

When others take delight

In giving praise to those endowed with talents,

Why, O mind, do you not find

A joy likewise in praising them?

The pleasure that is gained therefrom

Itself gives rise to blameless happiness.

It's urged on us by all the holy ones,

And is the perfect way of winning others. (6.76-77; see also 5.75-76)

(37) Undo the Conventions of Caste. *Practice being alert to how our modern caste system uses circumstances of birth (such as ethnicity, race, gender, and economic position) to bring unearned privilege to some and unearned disadvantage to others. Since this system is a primary fuel for human suffering and conflict, practice identifying its component habits and structures, dismantling what is harmful, and developing worthy alternatives.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings that one's eligibility to train and excel in spiritual and ethical practices and, hence, one's eligibility to enter the monastic community, does not depend on the circumstances into which one was born (AN 8:19, MN 40, SN 3:24, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 121-123; MN 93, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 132-137). While the Buddha's teachings on this matter relate to the caste system that existed during his time, the Buddha's disciples eventually persuaded him that this principle should apply to gender as well, and that the community should welcome women into its membership as nuns (Nhat Hanh, 1991, pp. 291-297, 586-587 notes; Lopez, 2001, pp. 158-159).

Bhikkhu Bodhi notes that the Buddha did not work specifically to abolish the caste system (Bodhi, 2005, pp. 112-113). However, since the Buddha's time, it has become commonly recognized that discrimination based on circumstances of birth is a primary fuel for human conflict. A cursory review of teachers, programs, publications, and websites in the tradition of engaged Buddhism reveals that addressing this source of conflict, especially in regard to dismantling structural and institutional impediments to equity and inclusion, has become an important facet of Buddhist practice (see, e.g., programs of partners in the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (<http://inebnetwork.org/partners>), such as Buddhist Peace Fellowship (<http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org>)).

Two of my reviewers (Teachers 1, 8) suggested that I consider using a term other than "caste" to describe this practice. However, I feel that the use of circumstances of birth to bring unearned privilege to some and unearned disadvantage to others accurately depicts the essence of the caste system and, moreover, this term reasonably links the unfair social structures that the Buddha was addressing with the unfair social structures that contemporary Buddhists address.

(38) Address Community Conflict in a Spirit of Harmony. *Practice coming together in concord to address conflict within the community. Apply the various practices described above to help the community discern a way to proceed with loving-kindness and compassion.*

This practice is rooted in the Buddha's teachings that when community members practice bodily, verbal, and mental acts of loving-kindness, and when they are energized to abandon unwholesome qualities and cultivate wholesome qualities, such principles of cordiality "create affection and respect and conduce to cohesiveness, non-dispute, concord, and unity" (AN 6:12, AN 10:50, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 116-119).

Theresa Der-lan Yeh (2006) and Johan Galtung (1988, 1996) illustrate well how the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict, more or less as I have described in this paper, apply directly to community and political relations. However, Tatsushi Arai (2015, 2017) makes clear that what Buddhism traditionally brings to the table in regard to practices for working with conflict are not sufficient to dismantle structures that maintain violence and conflict. While the core practices described in this paper may provide an excellent foundation for addressing larger-scale conflicts, I suggest that contemporary best practices from peace and conflict studies must be added to the mix in order to meaningfully address structural conflict.

A brief digression is necessary to address the internal practices used by early Buddhist monastics to settle disputes within their community. These internal practices are recounted differently in different texts (see, e.g.: MN 104, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 150-152; Thanissaro, 2013a, chap. 11, pp. 448-461; Thanissaro, 2013b, chaps. 20-21, pp. 331-361; Nhat Hanh, 1991, pp. 311-313, 588 note). The version that I found to be most consistent with the practices outlined in this paper is Nhat Hanh's rendering of the Seven Practices of Reconciliation (Nhat Hanh, 1987a, pp. 74-79; Nhat Hanh, 1991, pp. 311-313, 588 note), in which he describes the conciliatory steps

of face-to-face sitting, remembrance, non-stubbornness, voluntary confession, accepting the verdict, decision by consensus, and covering mud with straw.

On the other end of the spectrum, several parts of the Buddhist monastic code (known as the Vinaya) specify detailed procedures for discipline, censure, punishment, suspension, and banishment of community members (Thanissaro, 2013a, chap. 11, pp. 448-461; Thanissaro, 2013b, chaps. 20-21, pp. 331-361; see also AN 8:10, in Bodhi, 2016, pp. 158-160). These procedures, on their face, do not appear to “address community conflict in a spirit of harmony” and they appear out of synch with the core practices described in this paper.

In working with this discrepancy, I suggest three considerations. First, although there are many strict rules set forth in the monastic code to address disputes and conflicts within the community, the code does not abandon the other teachings of the Buddha regarding conflict. The rigid discipline of the monastic community functions alongside, not instead of, the core practices described in this paper. Second, internal rules used by a closed community with voluntary membership are categorically different than ethical practices and principles suggested for use in open society. In a closed community with voluntary membership (such as a monastic community, a business, a social organization, or a political association), it’s reasonable to expect that the community would be free to define stricter standards for membership and behavior within that community than what we would find in open society. In this exploration of what the Buddhist tradition offers for consideration as we engage with conflict, I suggest that the internal operational practices of a closed monastic community are less relevant than the explicit guiding principles that have been passed down by teachers to lay practitioners over generations. Third, in light of modern insights regarding organizational dynamics, systems theory, community decision-making, and working with conflict, it seems fine to acknowledge that certain internal

procedures used by the early Buddhist monastic community now appear less skillful than they could be. In other words, we can acknowledge that human wisdom in these areas has evolved.

Conclusion

On the basis of my research, I draw three general conclusions. First, the above collection of practices reasonably outlines what the Buddhist tradition suggests for working with conflict. Input from a small sample of respected Buddhist teachers indicates that this distillation provides a fair summary and has the potential to be a useful resource.

Second, the above collection of practices illustrates that the Buddhist tradition calls for full engagement with conflict. Conflict is not regarded as something to avoid, rather, it is an opportunity to address suffering head on. During every phase of a conflict, we have options to consider, and we can choose to exercise these options or not. Buddhist teachings suggest that as we practice the skills described above, we become better able to exercise our options and better able to work with conflict in a way that eases suffering in the world.

Third, the above practices all depend heavily on skills and habits of the inner life. Consequently, in order to apply these practices well, training the heart-mind is essential. In the spirit of the Buddhist tradition, one might train in these practices until they become habits that naturally arise in one's daily encounters with conflict. Without such training, our less skillful habits are likely to guide, especially in the heat of conflict.

Questions to Address in Future Work

Since this paper is an initial attempt to clarify the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict, there are many opportunities for refinement. If this project is developed further, the following questions deserve particular consideration.

(a) What other Buddhist traditions should be incorporated in this project? How can this summary be better representative of a wider scope of Buddhist traditions?

(b) Should the criteria for including a practice be more general or more specific? Are there additional practices that deserve to be included in this project?

(c) How might more substantive review of this project be undertaken by a more representative group of Buddhist teachers?

(d) Do I have biases (as a North American, middle-class, white, male practitioner) that influenced the design and outcome of this project? What aspects of this project need to be revisited in order to correct for bias?

(e) Is this project attempting to create a unified body of practices, when such a body may not in fact exist?

(f) Is a tool like this necessary, or would it be preferable to continue with a very loose, undefined body of practices and principles that evolves, from teacher to teacher, with variations as necessary for local communities and traditions?

How this Tool Might Be Used

I suggest that this summary of core practices might be useful to all Buddhist leaders, and especially chaplains. Buddhist chaplains naturally encounter conflict in a wide variety of settings: hospitals, hospices, military units, prisons, campuses, religious communities, social service organizations, families, and so on. In the course of serving as a chaplain, this resource could be useful in at least three ways.

First, this tool could serve as a convenient personal reference to inform chaplain conversations and interactions with those who hope to address conflict more skillfully. While this tool is not a list of “things to do” to make a conflict go away, it might serve as a prompt for helping others understand what the Buddhist tradition offers for navigating conflict. In essence, this resource could serve as a concrete expression of the Buddha’s central teaching of the Four Noble Truths: suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to the end of suffering (SN 56:11, in Bodhi, 2005, pp. 75-78). In conflict, we experience suffering. As we experiment with the above practices, we shed light on the origins of suffering and the possibility of the cessation of suffering. And as we apply the above practices skillfully over time, we blaze a path to the end of suffering.

Second, this tool could serve as a training resource for workshops, study groups, and retreats. If we hope to work with conflict skillfully, the Buddhist tradition makes clear that we must cultivate intention, stability, awareness, challenging perspectives, and skills for action. This tool could serve as a resource for specific training in each of these areas.

Third, this tool could serve as a guide for personal practice. By personally working with conflict well, Buddhist chaplains create space for suffering to subside in the world. Moreover,

when chaplains work with conflict well, they demonstrate to others that it is possible to approach conflict in a way that is not fraught with anxiety and harm.

On a final note, this tool could serve as an outline of how Buddhism contributes to the broader human project of nonviolent social change. Despite our longstanding habits of addressing conflict with threats, coercion, and harm, respected teachers across cultures and throughout time have taught that a nonviolent approach to conflict is our path to full humanity. The Buddhist tradition, in offering these practices for working with conflict, supports this human journey from burden and discontent to ease and freedom.

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Appendix A

Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict (Draft 1)

Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict

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 Draft 1 – May 31, 2018
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Below is my summary of the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict. I selected and distilled these practices based on my review of primary teachings from the Pali Canon, Shantideva, and Dogen. Many additional contemporary tools for working with conflict are consistent with the Buddhist tradition. My purpose here, however, is to identify the practices that might reasonably be regarded as the foundation of a Buddhist approach to conflict.

My intent is to provide a useful reference for Buddhist teachers, monks, priests, and chaplains. I attempt to describe each practice plainly, yet with enough detail to be actionable, of practical use, and applicable in a wide variety of conflicts.

This summary is the root of my thesis for the Upaya Zen Center Chaplaincy Program. It is a first draft for review purposes only, so I request the courtesy of not sharing this version with others. If you would like to share the final version, or if you are interested in text citations and rationale for these practices, I'm happy to send you my thesis as soon as it is finished. If you would like a copy, please contact me at the address above. Thank you.

Cultivate Intention

- (1) *Vow to Benefit the Other*: Practice making, and renewing, a solemn commitment to benefit our partner in conflict. Vow to ease their suffering, to do no harm, and to be of service. Vow to cultivate the heart-mind so that we become naturally intent upon doing these things.
- (2) *Train Diligently*: Practice, with energy and effort, sharpening the skills necessary to work well with conflict. Since these skills are yoked to habits of the inner life, train regularly and when no conflict is pressing.

Cultivate Stability

- (3) *Develop a Fully Embodied Presence*: Practice being attentive to posture, breath, senses, and physical presence, all indicators of how well we are working with conflict. Exercise using the body and the heart-mind as one in determining skillful ways forward.
- (4) *Develop a Heart-Mind that is Tranquil and Alert*: Practice meditation, cultivating the ability to be present in difficult situations with grace. Build capacity to pause amidst high emotion, and to act with intention rather than out of impulse or habit.
- (5) *Develop Equanimity*: Practice welcoming pleasant experiences without grasping, welcoming unpleasant experiences without turning away, and welcoming neutral experiences without indifference. Nurture the ability to enter conflict with openness and spaciousness.

- (6) *Develop Contentment*: Practice releasing the grip of envy, lust, and greed. Abandon clinging to sensual and material pleasures. Reduce the field of potential conflict by requiring little.
- (7) *Develop Supportive Relationships*: Practice expanding the web that supports skillful engagement with conflict. Cultivate friendships with those who encourage wholesome perspectives and actions. Avoid close relations with those who encourage unwholesome perspectives and actions.

Cultivate Awareness

- (8) *Observe the Impermanence of Circumstances*: Practice noticing how the circumstances of a conflict are always shifting, including: primary parties, secondary parties, observers, issues and concerns, relationships, perspectives, emotions, resources, external conditions, and criteria for reconciliation. View conflict as a fluid system rather than a static condition.
- (9) *Observe the Incompleteness of Solutions*: Practice noticing how our solutions to conflicts are unable to satisfy completely and indefinitely. Since we cannot account for all the changing circumstances and unforeseen consequences that arise over time, notice how our solutions naturally become unsatisfactory. Notice how focusing less on specific results and more on relationship quality provides a basis for working with this incompleteness.
- (10) *Observe the Interdependence of Participants*: Practice noticing how everyone connected to a conflict – adversaries, representatives, allies, friends, relatives, communities, businesses, observers, mediators, etc. – are all deeply intertwined, functioning as one system. Notice how inaction, acts of harm, and acts of kindness, impact every participant in the system. Notice how the well-being of one is not separate from the well-being of all.
- (11) *Observe the Consequences of Conduct*: Practice noticing how actions related to conflict unfold in both expected and unexpected ways. Notice how certain actions (such as killing, stealing, and lying) typically lead to burden and discontent, and how certain actions (such as generosity, patience, and kind speech) typically lead to ease and freedom.

Cultivate Challenging Perspectives

- (12) *Abandon Adherence to One's Current View*: Practice not-knowing. Since our perspective on a conflict is always incomplete (due to our limited vantage point) and thoroughly biased (due to our unique set of life experiences), leave space for a change of mind and a change of heart. Leave space for better options to emerge.
- (13) *Explore without Judging*: Practice examining all aspects of a conflict, gently, deeply, and genuinely. Be curious about difficult people and experiences. Welcome differences. Bear witness to the many stories at hand, without clinging to or rejecting any one story.
- (14) *View Oneself as Equal to the Other*: Practice seeing how we are the same as our partner in conflict: we have the same interests in being happy and avoiding suffering, and we struggle with the same difficulties in discerning the best path forward. Be alert to how our partner wants their needs met as much as we want our needs met.

- (15) *Immerse Oneself in the Other's Perspective*: Practice imagining how our partner in conflict sees the world, sees us, and sees this conflict. Look through their eyes, placing oneself in the context of their lifetime of experience, relationships, and lessons learned. Imagine how we might approach this conflict if we were in their position.
- (16) *View the Other as Teacher*: Practice respecting the other as an essential guide in our work to ease suffering. Identify how our partner in conflict provides us with powerful opportunities to cultivate intention, stability, awareness, challenging perspectives, and skillful action.
- (17) *Shift Focus from the Offense to the System that Created It*: Practice shifting attention from the heat of the moment (troublesome events, people, and circumstances) to the underlying web of relationships, structures, institutions, and processes. View offenses not as malice, but as the natural result of myriad causes and conditions.

Cultivate Skills For Action

- (18) *Pause and Reflect*: Practice restraint when provoked. When we feel an urgent need to criticize, defend, or retaliate, make time and space for reflection. Before re-engaging with the other, take stock of our physical body, emotions, thoughts, and options for proceeding.
- (19) *Abstain from Actions that Reliably Enflame Conflict*: Practice not engaging in actions that are known to fuel conflict and increase suffering. Avoid harming and destroying life, taking what is not given, engaging in sexual misconduct, consuming intoxicants, and speaking in false, divisive, or harsh ways.
- (20) *Overthrow the Angry Heart-Mind*: Practice breaking the grip of anger. Observe how our anger fuels conflict, damaging our relations and communications with others. When we notice anger arising within, refrain from following it. Instead, apply antidotes to create an inner shift: renew our commitment to benefit others, return to practices that cultivate inner stability, explore challenging perspectives on this situation, offer generosity, etc.
- (21) *Energize the Compassionate Heart-Mind*: Practice calling forth our intentions and commitments. As we face our partner in conflict, even in difficult times, recall our vision of serving others, doing no harm, wishing well, and working to ease suffering.
- (22) *Examine One's Own Role*: Practice reflecting on our own role in fostering and perpetuating the conflict. Acknowledge this role fully and openly.
- (23) *Accept Full Responsibility*: Practice accepting full responsibility for the conflict, for improving the quality of the relationship, and for creating opportunities for reconciliation. Rather than blaming others, or trying to control them, or waiting for them to change, acknowledge the myriad causes and conditions that hinder them from taking responsibility at this time.
- (24) *Proceed with an Uplifted Spirit*: Practice setting aside despair during the difficulties of conflict. If appropriate action is possible, we can proceed in the spirit of our vow to benefit others. If nothing can be done, we can offer all good wishes to our partners in conflict.

- (25) *Offer Reciprocal Respect*: Practice being as protective and compassionate with our partners in conflict as we are with ourselves. Avoid acting toward them in ways that we personally find displeasing.
- (26) *Disregard Offense*: Practice not internalizing a perceived offense. If the offense was not intended, release the perception and pay it no more attention. If the offense was intended, practice setting it aside and not accepting it.
- (27) *Be at Ease with Some Adversity*: Practice reframing our attitude toward discomfort in conflict. Not every inconvenience warrants resistance or is intolerable. In the spirit of our commitment to benefit others, try to approach discomfort with some equanimity and some openness to what we might learn.
- (28) *Abandon the Intention to Harm*: Practice setting aside any intention to harm our partner in conflict. Even when we feel wronged, or when we feel some threat to our reputation or well-being, throw off the inclination to hurt, offend, humiliate, or retaliate. As we become aware of any hostility or ill will lingering within, apply the antidotes of loving-kindness and compassion.
- (29) *Speak with Care*: Practice speaking gently, truthfully, with kind intent, and only when it seems to be beneficial. Refrain from speaking about the faults and errors of others. Speak plainly and with sensitivity to the temperament of our partner in conflict.
- (30) *Offer Generosity*: Practice offering our resources to our partners in conflict. Share material resources, time, and attention. Give freely, with ease, and without concern for having enough.
- (31) *Offer Pardon*: Practice offering pardon whenever our partner in conflict makes an apology or acknowledges their transgression.
- (32) *Offer Praise When Praise is Due*: Practice offering praise to our partner in conflict whenever they speak or act well. Extend genuine appreciation for their positive attributes.
- (33) *Rejoice in the Good Fortune of the Other*: Practice being glad, as an expression of loving-kindness and harmony, when things go well for our partner in conflict.
- (34) *Forgo Rejoicing When the Other is Harmed*: Practice letting go of any inclination to find joy when our partner in conflict suffers misfortune or harm.
- (35) *Undo the Conventions of Caste*: Practice being alert to how our caste system permits circumstances of birth (nationality, skin color, gender, economic position, etc.) to bring unearned privilege to some and undue disadvantage to others. Since this system is a primary fuel for human suffering and conflict, practice identifying its component habits and structures, dismantling what is harmful, and developing worthy alternatives.
- (36) *Address Community Conflict in a Spirit of Harmony*: Practice coming together in concord to address conflict within the community. Apply the various practices described above to help the community discern a way to proceed with loving-kindness and compassion.

Appendix B

Cover Letter Template for Potential Reviewers of Draft 1

Dear [*Teacher Name*],

My name is Clark Hanjian, and I am a second-year student in the Upaya Zen Center Chaplaincy Training Program. I am currently working on my thesis, under the supervision of core faculty Roshi Joan Halifax, Sensei Hozan Alan Senauke, and Sensei Joshin Byrnes.

My thesis focuses on “Clarifying the Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict,” and my intent is to prepare a concise distillation of the essential practical tools taught in this tradition. I feel that your perspective, as a respected teacher in the [*Tradition Name*] tradition, would be very helpful.

Would you be willing to take a few minutes to look over my attached 4-page summary of core practices? I would be grateful for any comments, and a brief reply is certainly fine. I am especially interested in any thoughts you would like to share on these questions:

- Should any practice on this list be reframed or clarified?
- Should any practice be added to this list?
- Should any practice be deleted from this list?
- Does this summary raise any broader concerns or questions for you?

If you could reply by [*Date*], that would be most helpful. (And, if this is not a possibility for you, I'd be grateful if you could let me know.) Thank you so much.

With gratitude,

Clark Hanjian

Note. The actual text sent to each reviewer was a customized version of the above template.

Appendix C

Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict (Draft 2)

Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict

by Clark Hanjian
Draft 2 – November 9, 2018
Email: clark@dmzlab.org

Buddhism embodies a strong tradition of nonviolence. However, while much has been written about Buddhism and conflict, a concise review of essential guidance does not appear to exist. Hence, for the benefit of Buddhist teachers and chaplains, this brochure summarizes the core Buddhist practices for working with conflict.

I define a *core Buddhist practice for working with conflict* as a practice which is rooted in at least one primary source of Buddhism, appears to be reasonably consistent with a broader understanding of Buddhism, and has some recognition in contemporary Buddhism as a skillful approach to conflict.

I selected these practices based on my review of representative teachings from the Pali Canon, Shantideva, and Dogen. There are countless other sources that could be considered, but these three appear to reasonably mark the terrain. My selection was also guided by the insights of modern scholars and Buddhist teachers who have explored this topic.

In distilling these teachings, I attempt to describe each practice faithfully and in a way that makes sense in our time. I also attempt to describe each practice plainly, yet with enough detail to be actionable and applicable in a wide variety of conflicts.

This collection illustrates that the Buddhist tradition calls for full engagement with conflict. Conflict is not regarded as something to avoid, rather, it is an opportunity to address suffering head on. During every phase of a conflict, we have options to consider, and we can choose to exercise these options or not.

It is important to clarify several points regarding what this collection is not. First, this set of practices does not represent the full range of best practices available today for working with conflict. Contemporary secular work in the field of conflict transformation offers many additional tools and techniques.

Second, this set of practices is not limited in application to interpersonal conflict. These practices can be undertaken by groups and organizations, and

they can serve as levers to shift organizational relationships and systems.

Third, this collection does not focus on practices for mediators, intermediaries, or other third parties to conflict. Rather, it focuses on practices that might be undertaken by individuals or groups who are primary parties, i.e., those directly involved in conflict.

Fourth, while this is a wide-ranging collection of Buddhist practices, it does not constitute a Buddhist panacea for conflict. The messiness of the personal elements in conflict, and the particulars unique to every situation, raise many considerations for how we might skillfully proceed.

Fifth, this collection is not intended to serve as a checklist of “things to do” when facing a conflict. Rather, it is a set of skills that Buddhist practitioners might cultivate and experiment with over time. In the spirit of the Buddhist tradition, one might train in these practices until they become habits that naturally arise in one’s daily encounters with conflict.

If you are a Buddhist teacher or chaplain, this tool might serve as convenient personal reference for helping others understand what the Buddhist tradition offers for navigating conflict. This tool also might serve as a training resource for workshops, study groups, and retreats. And, it might serve as a guide for personal practice. When we work with conflict well, not only do we create space for suffering to subside, but we demonstrate that it is possible to approach conflict in a way that is not fraught with anxiety and harm.

(Note: This brochure is based on my thesis for the Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program at Upaya Zen Center. The thesis includes citations and rationale in support of each practice. If you would like a copy of the thesis, or if you have comments regarding future editions of this brochure, please contact me at the address above.)

Cultivate Intention

(1) Vow to Benefit the Other. Practice making, and renewing, a commitment to benefit our partner in conflict. Vow to ease their suffering, to avoid causing them harm, and to be of service. Vow to cultivate the heart-mind so that we become naturally intent upon doing these things.

(2) Train Diligently. Practice, with energy and effort, sharpening the skills necessary to work well with conflict. Since these skills are yoked to habits of the inner life, train regularly and when no conflict is pressing.

Cultivate Stability

(3) Develop a Fully Embodied Presence. Practice being attentive to posture, breath, senses, and physical presence, all indicators of how well we are working with conflict. Exercise using the body and the heart-mind as one in determining skillful ways forward.

(4) Develop a Heart-Mind that is Tranquil and Alert. Practice meditation, cultivating the ability to be present in difficult situations with grace. Build capacity to pause amidst high emotion, and to act with intention rather than out of impulse or habit.

(5) Develop Self-Compassion. Practice applying patience, understanding, and kindness to oneself. By doing this, we not only ease our own suffering, but we strengthen our ability to face conflict with less reactivity, and we increase our skill in treating our partners in conflict with similar patience, understanding, and kindness.

(6) Develop Equanimity. Practice welcoming pleasant experiences without grasping, welcoming unpleasant experiences without turning away, and welcoming neutral experiences without indifference. Nurture the ability to enter conflict with openness and spaciousness.

(7) Develop Contentment. Practice releasing the grip of envy, lust, and greed. Abandon clinging to sensual and material pleasures. Reduce the field of potential conflict by requiring little.

(8) Develop Supportive Relationships. Practice expanding the web that supports skillful engagement with conflict. Cultivate friendships with those who encourage wholesome perspectives and actions. Avoid the influence of those who encourage unwholesome perspectives and actions.

Cultivate Awareness

(9) Observe the Impermanence of Circumstances. Practice noticing how the circumstances of a conflict are always shifting, including: primary parties, secondary parties, observers, issues and concerns, relationships, perspectives, emotions, resources, external conditions, and criteria for reconciliation. View conflict as a fluid system rather than a static condition.

(10) Observe the Incompleteness of Solutions. Practice noticing how our solutions to conflicts are unable to satisfy completely and indefinitely. Since we cannot account for all the changing circumstances and unforeseen consequences that arise over time, notice how our solutions naturally become unsatisfactory. Notice how focusing less on specific results and more on relationship quality provides a useful basis for working with this incompleteness.

(11) Observe the Interdependence of Participants. Practice noticing how all parties connected to a conflict – adversaries, representatives, allies, friends, relatives, communities, businesses, observers, mediators, etc. – are deeply intertwined, lacking separate selves, and functioning as one system. Notice how inaction, acts of harm, and acts of kindness, impact every participant in the system. Notice how the well-being of one is not separate from the well-being of all.

(12) Observe the Consequences of Conduct. Practice noticing how actions related to conflict unfold. Notice how certain actions (such as killing, stealing, and lying) often lead to burden and discontent, and how certain actions (such as generosity, patience, and kind speech) often lead to ease and freedom.

Cultivate Challenging Perspectives

(13) Abandon Adherence to One's Current View. Practice not-knowing. Since our perspective on a conflict is always incomplete (due to our limited vantage point) and thoroughly biased (due to our unique set of life experiences), leave space for a change of mind and a change of heart. Leave space for better options to emerge.

(14) Explore while Suspending Judgment. Practice examining all aspects of a conflict with genuine interest. Bear witness to the many stories at hand, without clinging to or rejecting any one story. Be curious about difficult people and experiences. When judgment arises, investigate the beliefs, biases, and emotions that motivate our judgment.

(15) View Oneself as Equal to the Other. Practice seeing how we are equal to our partner in conflict: we both want to be happy, we both want to avoid suffering, and we both must weigh a variety of considerations in discerning the best path forward. Be alert to how our partner wants their needs met as much as we want our needs met.

(16) Immerse Oneself in the Other's Perspective. Practice clarifying how our partner in conflict sees the world, sees us, and sees this conflict. Look through their eyes, placing oneself in the context of their lifetime of experience, relationships, and lessons learned. Consider how we might approach this conflict if we were in their position.

(17) View the Other as a Teacher. Practice respecting the other as an important guide in our work to ease suffering. Identify how our partner in conflict provides us with powerful opportunities to cultivate intention, stability, awareness, challenging perspectives, and skillful action.

(18) Shift Focus from the Offense to the System that Created It. Practice shifting attention from the heat of the moment (troublesome events, people, and circumstances) to the underlying web of relationships, structures, institutions, and processes. View offenses, even blatant acts of malice, as the natural result of myriad causes and conditions.

Cultivate Skills for Action

(19) Pause and Reflect. Practice restraint when provoked. When we feel an urgent need to criticize, defend, or retaliate, make time and space for reflection. Before re-engaging with the other, take stock of our physical body, emotions, thoughts, and options for proceeding.

(20) Abstain from Actions that Reliably Enflame Conflict. Practice not engaging in actions that are known to fuel conflict and increase suffering. Avoid harming and destroying life, taking what is not given, engaging in sexual misconduct, consuming intoxicants, and speaking in false, divisive, or harsh ways.

(21) Overthrow the Angry Heart-Mind. Practice breaking the grip of anger. Observe how being lost in anger fuels conflict and damages our relations and communications with others. When we notice anger arising within, apply antidotes to create an inner shift: renew our commitment to benefit others, return to practices that cultivate inner stability, explore challenging perspectives on the situation, offer generosity, etc.

(22) Energize the Compassionate Heart-Mind. Practice calling forth our intentions and commitments. As we face our partner in conflict, even in difficult times, recall our vision of serving others, doing no harm, wishing well, and working to ease suffering.

(23) Focus on Relationship, Not Results. Practice tending to the quality of the relationship we have with our partner in conflict. Abandon plans and subtle hopes to achieve any particular outcome. Instead, repair and nourish the relationship, clearing the way for a helpful plan to emerge.

(24) Examine One's Own Role. Practice reflecting on our own role in fostering and perpetuating the conflict. Acknowledge this role fully and openly.

(25) Accept Full Responsibility. Practice accepting full responsibility for addressing the conflict, for improving the quality of the relationship, and for creating opportunities for reconciliation. Rather than blaming others, or trying to control them, or waiting for them to change, acknowledge the myriad causes and conditions that hinder them from acting more skillfully at this time.

(26) Proceed with an Uplifted Spirit. Practice setting aside despair during the difficulties of conflict. If appropriate action is possible, we can proceed in the spirit of our vow to benefit others. If nothing can be done, we can offer all good wishes to our partners in conflict.

(27) Offer Reciprocal Respect. Practice being as protective and compassionate with our partners in conflict as we are with ourselves. Avoid acting toward them in ways that we personally find displeasing.

(28) Disregard Offense. Practice not internalizing a perceived offense. If the offense was not intended, release the perception and pay it no more attention. If the offense was intended, practice setting it aside and not accepting it.

(29) Be at Ease with Some Adversity. Practice reframing our attitude toward discomfort in conflict. Not every inconvenience is intolerable or warrants resistance. Not every insult or false accusation needs to be defended. In the spirit of our commitment to benefit others, try to approach discomfort with some equanimity and some openness to what we might learn.

(30) Abandon the Intention to Harm. Practice setting aside any intention to harm our partner in conflict. Even when we feel wronged, or when we feel some threat to our reputation or well-being, throw off the inclination to hurt, offend, humiliate, or retaliate. As we become aware of any hostility or ill will lingering within, apply the antidotes of loving-kindness and compassion.

(31) Speak with Care. Practice speaking gently, truthfully, with kind intent, and only when it seems to be beneficial. Refrain from speaking about the faults and errors of others. Speak plainly and with sensitivity to the temperament of our partner in conflict.

(32) Offer Generosity. Practice offering our resources to our partners in conflict. Share material resources, time, and attention. Give freely, with ease, and without concern for having enough.

(33) Offer Forgiveness. Practice offering forgiveness and pardon whenever our partner in conflict makes an apology or acknowledges their transgression.

(34) Rejoice in the Good Fortune of the Other. Practice being glad, as an expression of loving-kindness and harmony, when things go well for our partner in conflict.

(35) Forgo Rejoicing When the Other is Harmed. Practice letting go of any inclination to find joy when our partner in conflict suffers misfortune or harm.

(36) Offer Praise When Praise is Due. Practice offering praise to our partner in conflict whenever they speak or act well. Extend genuine appreciation for their positive attributes.

(37) Undo the Conventions of Caste. Practice being alert to how our modern caste system uses circumstances of birth (such as ethnicity, race, gender, and economic position) to bring unearned privilege to some and unearned disadvantage to others. Since this system is a primary fuel for human suffering and conflict, practice identifying its component habits and structures, dismantling what is harmful, and developing worthy alternatives.

(38) Address Community Conflict in a Spirit of Harmony. Practice coming together in concord to address conflict within the community. Apply the various practices described above to help the community discern a way to proceed with loving-kindness and compassion.

* * *

Appendix D

Teachers who Reviewed and Commented on Draft 1

The following teachers generously gave their time and effort to review my “Core Buddhist Practices for Working with Conflict (Draft 1)” as presented in Appendix A. I am grateful for their invaluable suggestions and perspectives.

Martine Batchelor

Jan Chozen Bays

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Tara Brach

Florence Caplow

Thubten Chodron

Nancy Kodo Conover

Gil Fronsdal

David Loy

Tenzin Palmo

Sharon Salzberg

Kazuaki Tanahashi

Larry Yang