"Non-violence, War and Peace"

➢ Why is there violence?

➢ How should we respond to violence?

➢ Is it right to go to war and what do religions teach about war?

➢ Does religion cause wars and can religion bring about peace?

Violence, conflicts, and wars are as old as the human race. If we wish to find peace, we need to find out the root cause of conflicts. Even in the Buddha's own lifetime there were wars, and his own clan — the Sakyans — were all but wiped out by an enemy king. The root of this conflict was nothing but racial prejudice, and this is one of the main reasons for many wars. The other main reason is competition for land, oil, or other sources of wealth. In brief, conflicts arise due to hatred and greed. Underlying both of these is delusion or ignorance.

The Buddhist response to violence is to cultivate patience and compassion. Non-violence (*ahiṃsa*) is a fundamental principle of Buddhism. A pious Buddhist should not kill even a scorpion, a snake, or a rat, let alone another human being. The first precept for Buddhists is to abstain from killing living beings. It is unconditional. There are no circumstances where killing is acceptable — not for food, nor even in self-defence. For a pious Buddhist, it is better to be killed than to accumulate the unwholesome kamma of killing others. Being killed is the result of the unwholesome kamma of killing living beings. If one kills in this life, one will have to suffer many violent deaths in future lives.

Misunderstanding of religion leads to wars. One should fight the holy war against the mental defilements that lie within our own minds. One should fight to overcome anger and fear. The man who conquers his own anger, wins a battle that cannot be turned into defeat. This idea of holy war can be found in Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism.