

## The Seven Conditions of Welfare

The seven conditions of welfare preached by the Buddha to the Vajjians to be followed is important in evaluating the Buddhist approach to statecraft. When once the Buddha was dwelling in Rajagaha, on the hill called 'Vultures Peak' Ajatasattu, the king of Magadha, desirous of attacking the Vajjians, sent his chief minister, Vassakara, to visit the Buddha and tell him that he (the king) was going to attack the Vajjians. Vassakara thereupon went to the Buddha and exchanged greetings and delivered the message just as the king had commanded him. Ananda was standing behind the Buddha and fanning him. When Vassakara was explaining the king's message, the Buddha in the course of the conversation, inquired of Ananda whether the Vajjians were living up to the Seven Conditions of Welfare (Satta aparihaniya dhamma). Ananda answered in the affirmative. They were:

1. They hold full and frequent public assemblies.
2. They meet together in concord, arise in concord and carry out their undertakings in concord.
3. They enact nothing not already established, abrogate nothing that has already being enacted, and act in accordance with the ancient institutions of the Vajjians as established in former days.
4. They honour, revere and support the Vajjian elders and hold it a point of duty to listen to their words.
5. They do not take away by force or abduct women or girls belonging to their clan and detain them.
6. They honour, esteem, revere and support the Vajjian shrines whether in town or country, and do not allow them to fall into disuse.
7. They fully provide rightful protection, defence and support for the arahants among them, so that arahants from far away may enter the realm and therein live in peace.

In accordance with the first, the members share the responsibility to be present when the assembly is convened to discuss the day-to-day events of the confederacy. While annotating the second, whenever there is an issue of an uprising in any part of their territory, whether in a village or in a frontier province, all agree to go there to punish the culprits. In this way all are united and help each other in times of need.

While discussing the third condition, it gives a description of their judicature found in any democracy in the world today. The Vajjian judicial system consists of seven successive stages. Legal procedure is carried out, for example, levying the death penalty, by the following levels of judiciary:

1. Chief minister of justice
2. Voharikas – judges appointed to try cases of a particular nature
3. Sutradharas – well versed in past, present and future legal enactments
4. Atthakulikas – members of families in the legal profession
5. Army commander
6. Viceroy
7. King

In the end the offender is convinced of his own responsibility for the offence committed by him. This legal procedure ensured the growth of the Vajjian kingdom.

With regard to the fourth condition of welfare, it is to be emphasised that even though born as royalty, those who disregard the law, the king and the elders, are doomed to failure and decline. If they do not associate with the elders because of their stubbornness, they would not get an opportunity to learn the traditional wisdom in regard to statecraft and the people's welfare.

The violation of the fifth is also grave. As revealed in many a Jataka story, kings were notorious in wielding their power to take away girls from their parents' custody and also wives by putting their husbands to death under false charges. The abduction and retaining of women and girls by force would naturally lead to chaos and those affected families would eventually flee to frontier villages and would rebel against the state.

With reference to the sixth, the gods do not protect those who neglect the long standing rites and rituals not showing respect for them. Consequently, although they are incapable of making people sick, they are capable of prolonging their ailments. When those deities are honoured and propitiated, they in turn look after those devotees properly and see to their early recovery from their sicknesses. They also assist them to be victorious in war. It is clear that deities are not capable of making people either unhappy or happy, but they do have the ability to be instrumental in lessening both suffering and happiness influencing a man's life. At the same time it is to be borne in mind that, of retributive actions done in their previous lives, some results are sometimes extremely happy and vice versa even if they have resorted to evil.

With regard to the last condition, trees must not be felled in the vicinity of monasteries. Abstention from hunting and using hunting dogs and not allowing fishermen to fish in the ponds and lakes in the monastic surroundings are considered to be rightful protection, defence and support.

These seven conditions of welfare have been enunciated by the Buddha himself in a previous occasion when the Buddha was at Sarandada Cetiya in Vesali, to be followed for the well-being of the republic. The Buddha advised the heads of states to be virtuous and rule their kingdoms righteously by maintaining law and order.