

# Reconciliation and Conflict Analysis of Kosambiya Sutta

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## Abstract

This paper provides an investigation of the Buddhist vision of peace and reconciliation in the light of peace studies. Conflicts seem to be a natural part of human life and its effect to distorting the unity and harmony in the individual, community, society and overall the state. The conflicts exist not only in the world of ordinary people, but also within the spiritual community of Buddhist. Even as men ordain to become monks in pursuit of unity, harmony, peace, and purity, as ordinary human beings, they are still vulnerable to making mistakes because no one perfect and getting involved in conflicts. This paper aims also to observe the quarrels were the monks engaged in disputes, arguments and contention that occurred amongst the Sangha at Kosambi from Kosambi Sutta and will analyze reconciliation methodology that the Buddha used for handling these problems with six factors of communal harmony i.e. polite, create affection and respect, lead to inclusiveness, non-contention, harmony and unity. Some issue seems quite minor and it is a lesson how big problems can arise from small things. It will also deconstruct conflict analysis based on contemporary theories.

**Keywords:** Peace; Conciliation; Conflict; Kosambi

## Introduction to Buddhist Peaceful Means

The fundamental goal of Buddhism is “Peace”, not only peace for oneself and others but peace for all living beings. The *Pāli* word “*Santi*” means “Peace”. If there is peace, there is happiness. Therefore, peace is equivalent to happiness. The most prominent word for peace (*santi*) denotes essentially the absence of conflict in the individual’s mind. The Buddha taught that the first step on the path to peace understands the causality of peace. He had the view that peaceful minds lead to peaceful speech and peaceful action. If a person mind is not at peace, conflicts and violence can potentially happen. In general, most of the conflicts originate from the combination of Lobha, Dosa, Moha-human’s defilement, but with different extent. Understanding this big picture allows us to deal with conflict resolution more effectively.

In Buddhism, the concept of peace is extended to include both outer peace and inner peace. In short, the concept of peace in Buddhism, here has both negative and positive meanings. In its negative sense, peace is an absence not only of war and conflict, but also of structure violence such as social injustice, social inequality, the violation of human rights, the destruction of ecological balance, etc. In its positive sense, peace means encompasses within itself the absence of conflict as well as the presence of harmony.

Inner Peace is a prerequisite for outer peace, which involves interpersonal relations. A person is said to have external peace when he lives harmoniously with his fellow beings. External peace includes

communal, natural and global peace. Buddhism believes that peace is as much concerned with individuals as with groups and institutions.

The internal peace of individuals provides firm foundations upon, which the entire edifice of social peace is to be establishing itself. In fact, society can remain fully peaceful only if its members fully have peace of mind. Buddhism, therefore, is the religion of peace. J.T. Sunderland has pointed out, 'Buddhism has taught peace more strongly among its followers, more effectively, during all its history, than has any other great religious faith to the world'.

Human beings receive every day is not true happiness but false happiness. In fact, true happiness does not arise if our minds do not have peace. Not only can peace build true happiness, but it also brings to other people who associated with us. Moreover, happiness and suffering are states of mind, and so their main causes cannot be found outside the mind. The real source of happiness is inner peace. If our mind is peaceful, we will be happy, regardless of external conditions. But if it is disturbed or troubled in any way, we will never be happy, no matter how good our external conditions may be. External conditions can only make us happy if our mind is peaceful. If everyone thoroughly follows the teachings of the Buddha by cultivating a peace of mind and doing no harm to others, then there would be peaceful coexistence not only among human beings, but also among human beings, animals and natural environment.

Throughout his journey in propagating Buddhism, the Buddha had applied many peaceful means in conflict reconciliation. This paper will explore the case study of the quarrels that occurred amongst the Sangha at Kosambi from Kosambi Sutta and will analyze reconciliation approaches used for handling these problems by the Buddha. It will also deconstruct conflict analysis based on contemporary theories.

## **Reconciliation and Conflict Management Case Study of Kosambiya Sutta**

### **Background Story**

Although men ordain to become monks in pursuit of unity, harmony, peace and purity, as ordinary human beings, they are still vulnerable to making mistakes and sometimes get involved in conflicts, disputes and contentions.

During the time of the Buddha, nine years after his Enlightenment, a major quarrel broke out amongst the monks residing at Kosambi. The Buddha happened to be staying at Kosambi during the time of the quarrel. The cause of the quarrel stemmed from something rather petty but which grew out of control until it turned into a major crisis that divided monks and laypeople into two opposing sides. In this sutta, the Buddha preached the State of Reconciliation or Six Principles of Cordiality (Saraniyadhamma) and the seven perceptions of Ariya for Bhikkhus of Kosambi after their massive dispute in Buddhism history.

Here was how it all began:

The incidence was caused by two prominent monks at Kosambi: the master of Vinaya or Vinaitorn, an expert in *Vinaya* (monastic rules), and the teacher of the Dhamma or Dhammadathuk, an expert in Dhamma teachings. Each of them had five hundred disciple monks and a great number of lay followers. One day, Vinaitorn, after using the restroom, asked Dhammadathuk: "Brother, was it you that left the water?"

"Yes brother.", Dhammadathuk replied.

"But do you not know that it is a sin so to do?"

"Indeed, I do not."

"But, brother, it is a sin", said Vinaitorn.

“Well then, I will make satisfaction for it.”

“Of course, brother, if you did it unintentionally, inadvertently, it is no sin.”

Later, Vinaitorn disclosed the incident to his disciples. He remarked to them that Dhammadhathuk with all his knowledge still committed a basic *āpatti*. The rumor quickly spread throughout the monastery. When Dhammadhathuk heard of the rumors against him, he felt extremely embarrassed and so, furiously, he turned himself and his disciples against Vinaitorn and Vinaitorn's disciples. To make matters worse, Vinaitorn and his disciples initiated Ukkhepaniyakamma-a formal act of suspension, against Dhammadhathuk. This further compromised the situation and caused the conflict to elevate. Monks from both sides were engaged in arguments, contention and deep disputes. They threw verbal assaults at one another.

Some monks brought the matter to the Buddha for response to the face to the quarrel. The Buddha asked them to deliver his message to all the monks without argument rights and wrongs concerned. He advised them to treat each other with physical, mental and verbal acts of loving-kindness and to keep the unity of the Sangha; otherwise this will lead to long-lasting suffering for them.

Unfortunately, none of the quarrelling monks heeded the Buddha's advice nor followed his guidance, and the conflict continued. The Buddha tried various means to help them settle the quarrel peacefully, but to no avail. Finally, seeing that his efforts were futile, he left them without uttering a word. Taking only his bowl and robes, he retired to the Paileyyaka Forest, away from Kosambi.

### Conflict Analysis

Dhammadhathuk used the toilet and had left some of the water in the bowl



Vinaitorn informed that him that this is *āpatti*



Dhammadhathuk admitted his *āpatti*



Vinaitorn revealed this story to his disciples, this news spread widely



Dhammadhathuk 'lost face' among the Sangha

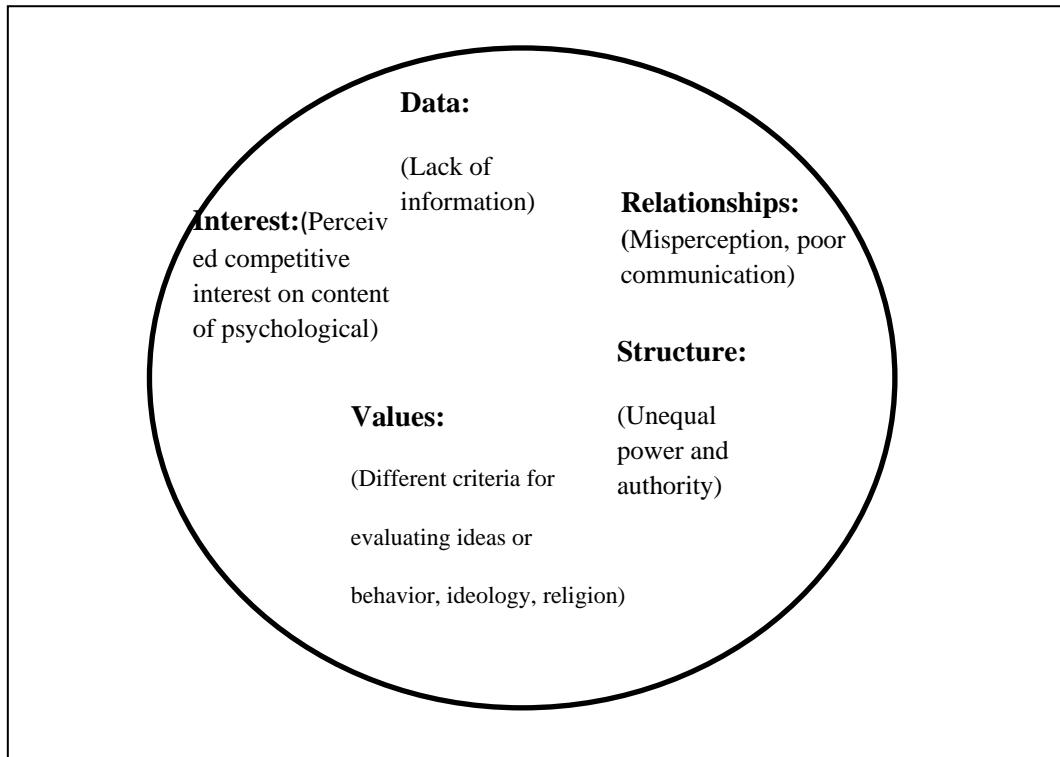


Conflict happened



Both groups of monks turned themselves against each other

Circle of conflict by Christopher Moore:



According to Moore's circle of conflict, in Kosambi's case, the primary cause of conflicts is "Data." Dhammadhathuk had lacked information regarding his minor *āpatti* until he was informed by Vinaitorn. Though he didn't know it was *āpatti*, once acknowledged, he politely accepted. The problem should have ended there; however, Vinaitorn disclosed this story to his disciples and later on it spread all over the sangha community which largely damaged the credibility of Dhammadhathuk who knows all the Dhamma but didn't know such a minor *āpatti*.

This makes him lose his face among the sangha and lead to the severe conflict between Dhammadhathuk's and Vinaitorn's group. Once conflict happened, it is difficult to maintain a peaceful relationship. Thus, the secondary cause of conflict is "Relationship". Both opponents had poor communication with each other, unintentionally spreading rumors without carefully thinking through their actions, further adding fire to the conflict.

To mediate this situation, the Buddha first confronted Vinaitorn and his disciples, pointing out to them the negative outcomes of their behavior, and that the whole problem had originated from them. By spreading the news of Dhammadhathuk's *sāpatti*, and suspending him out of the sangha, they had caused Dhammadhathuk to lose face and suffer embarrassment.

The Buddha then confronted the disciples of Dhammadhathuk's and calmed them down. He explained to them that Dhammadhathuk's *āpatti* was only a minor offense. He knew that they would convey this message to Dhammadhathuk.

To mediate a conflict, it is a good policy to first approach the party that is easier to teach, and then move on to deal with the more difficult party. The Buddha applied the "confrontation, persuasion and blaming" method to resolve the conflict. He used various means to convince both sides to stop fighting. But the quarrel continued and remained unsettled. Both sides assaulted each other in a constant verbal, and sometimes outright physical, attrition. The conflict spread uncontrollably, affecting lay followers on both sides. Dhammadhathuk's disciples asked the Buddha to let them handle the problem by themselves.

The Buddha realized the situation had gotten so out of hand that dealing with it by himself was becoming fruitless. Finally, he decided to use the “avoidance” approach by leaving the town of Kosambi and let the situation resolve itself.

“Under present conditions I am crowded and jostled and live a life of discomfort. Moreover, these monks pay no attention to what I say. Suppose I were to retire from the haunts of men and live a life of solitude.”

During that time, the monks were in the midst of their rains retreat. They were required to stay in one place for three months during the rainy season. The Buddha journeyed to the nearby Paileyyaka forest to spend his rains retreat there.

At this point, it may seem that the Buddha had failed to resolve the problem, but this was not the case. At the end of the rains retreat, instead of returning to Kosambi, the Buddha went on to the town of Sawati and stayed there. This made a major psychological impact on the minds of the people of Kosambi, who had expected the Buddha to come back to their city. They were unhappy with the monks at Kosambi and began to boycott them and stopped supporting them with food and other necessities as mentioned in the scripture.

“These monks, after receiving admission at the hands of the Teacher, were unwilling to patch up their differences when the Teacher asked them to do so. It’s all their fault that we were unable to see the Teacher. To these monks, assuredly, we will neither give seats nor offer respectful salutations or other civilities.”

Without the support of the lay people, a monk can hardly survive. The monks at Kosambihad been facing difficulties living without enough food and necessities, so they had no choice but to seek help from the Buddha. Finally, they decided to travel to Sawati, to see the Buddha and ask for his forgiveness. The Buddha’s supporters at Sawati including the King of Kosala first refused to give all the monks a warm welcome until the Buddha himself personally guaranteed to goodness of their visit. They threw themselves at the feet of the Buddha and asked him to pardon them. To remind their wrong doing, the Buddha said “Monks, grievous was the sin you committed when, after receiving admission as monks at the hands of a Buddha like me, in spite of my effort to **reconcile** you, you refused to obey my words.”

Eventually, monks from both sides started to speak to one another in a friendly manner. The conflict finally ended, and harmony resumed. The event of this peaceful resolve is known as the “Sangha’s Dialogue”.

### **Summary of the quarrel**

One bhikkhu revealed minor mistake of another “Senior” bhikkhu causing him to lose face which resulted by insulting, no talking, and judging other without regarding past conducts.

### **Cause of conflict**

Judging other’s offense, spreading someone’s mistake cause him to lose face, strongly adhering own view without considering negative effect on the Sangha’s community.

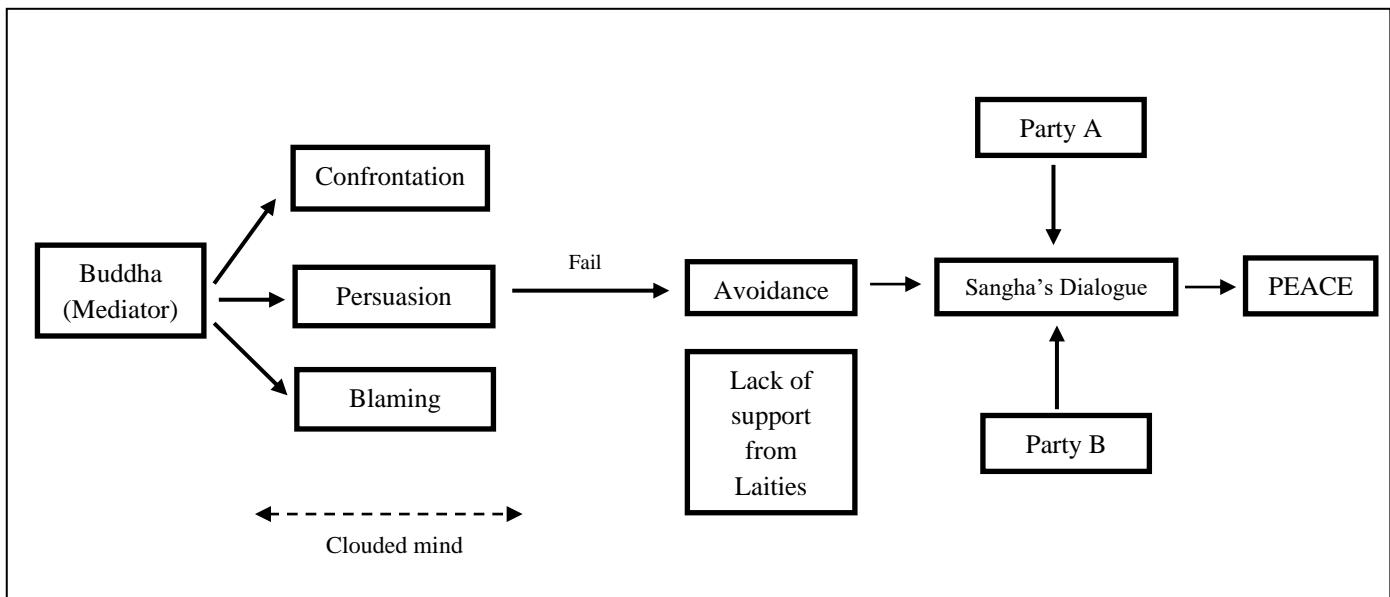
### **Means of conflict settlement**

- Raising awareness of negative effect on the community but not succeeds
- Disengaging from those Bhikkhus
- Lack of support from lay people
- Sangha’s dialogue

### **Key Dhamma principle**

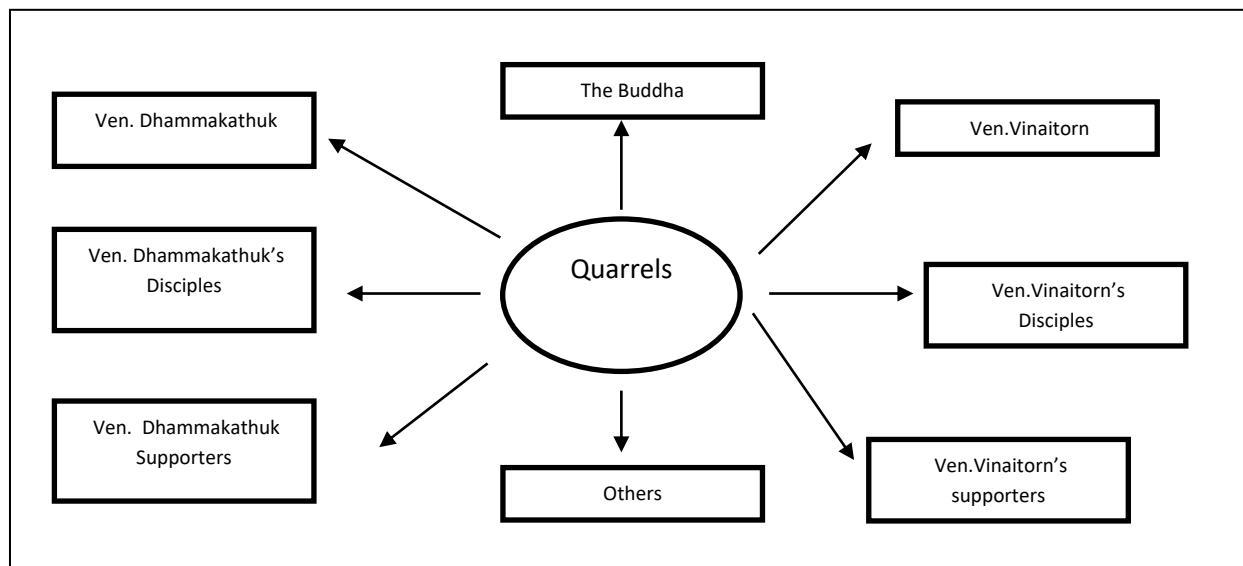
The Six states of conciliation or  
Six Principles of Cordiality (Saraniyadhamma)

## **The Buddha's approach for conflict**



## The Affected Parties

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In this sutta, the Buddha does not put emphasis on the rights and the wrongs of the argument, but with the more vital ethical issue of how we relate to one another when problems do arise. He constantly asked the monks if they were treating one another with loving kindness through bodily, verbal and mental actions; pressing them to be mindful even though he knows they have not been. The Buddha approached this issue wisely by removing the parties from the sphere of politics and into a sphere of peaceful resolution. This approach is known as the “Six Principles of Cordiality”.

### Six Principles of Cordiality (Saraniyadhamma)

The Six Principles below are the teachings of the Buddha in a literal translation from Pali language to English.

*“Ananda, there are these six principles of cordiality that create love and respect, and conduce to cohesion, non-dispute, concord, and unity. What are the six?*

*“Here a monk maintains bodily acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private toward his companions in the holy life. This is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect, and conduces to cohesion, non-dispute, concord, and unity.*

*“Again, a monk maintains verbal acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private toward his companions in the holy life. This is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect, and conduces to unity.*

*“Again, a monk maintains mental acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private toward his companions in the holy life. This is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect, and conduces to unity.*

*“Again, a monk enjoys things in common with his virtuous companions in the holy life; without making reservations, he shares with them any righteous gain that has been obtained in a righteous way, including even the mere content of his alms bowl. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect, and conduces to unity.*

*“Again, a monk dwells both in public and in private possession in common with his companions in the holy life those virtues that are unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, freeing, praised by the wise, ungreased, leading to concentration. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect and conduces to unity.*

*“Again, a monk dwells both in public and in private possessing in common with his companions in the holy life that is noble and emancipating, and leads the one who practices in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect, and conduces to cohesion, to non-dispute, to concord, and to unity.*

*“These are the six principles of cordiality that create love and respect, and conduce to cohesion, to non-dispute, to concord, and to unity.”*

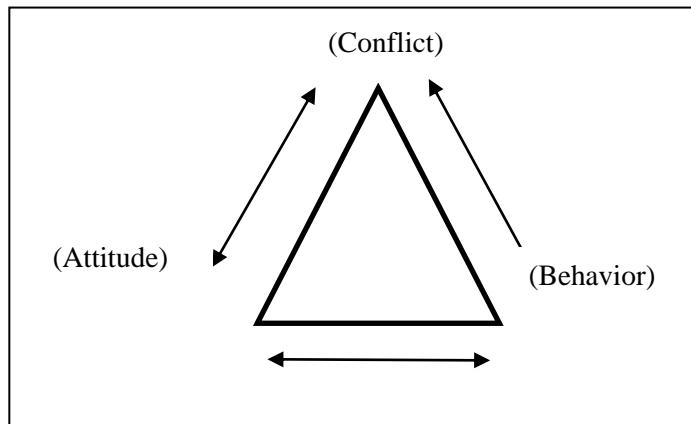
Basically, the Buddha taught us to practice loving-kindness towards each other, to share necessities, to obey and follow the rules and to maintain the right view accepted by society.

Attacking problems with an angry mind is unhelpful and destructive. What is done is done, and we should get over it. What is more important is how to deal with the problems at hand in a constructive way. Problems and complications can happen to anyone at any time -- to the individual, the family, or even the entire society. The Buddha's method of peace and harmony can be applied to all spheres of life. The ones who practice the Dhamma, who seek peaceful means in resolving differences, will find peace and harmony in their lives.

### Conflict Triangle

Below is the conflict analysis model proposed by Johan Galtung in 1969. In Galtung's opinion, a conflict can be viewed as a triangle whose sides are represented by A (attitude), B (behaviors), and C (conflicts or contradictions), where C is the tip of the triangle.

*Conflict Triangle by Johan Galtung:*



The triangle serves the dual purpose of keeping the three apart, and of relating them with the arrows of a two-way relationship. The task here is to de-escalate all three, A, B and C. This theory can be applied to the quarrel at Kosambi.

Both parties have a relatively similar or equal position, and they enter into a conflict due to diverging interests; it is considered to be a symmetrical conflict where both parties possess equal power. Whenever people share a negative attitude towards one another, undesirable behaviors tend to take shape and lead to conflict.

In the case of the Kosambi monks, the Buddha clearly sees that both factions harbor a negative attitude toward each other. In dealing with that scenario, he poses certain questions to the monks to make the situation clear to them of this negativity:

*"Is it true, as is said, that you monks, are disputatious, quarrelsome, contentious, and are wounding one another with the weapons of the tongue? That you neither convince one another nor are convinced yourselves, that you neither win one another over nor are won over yourselves?"*

Next, he reminds them of the appropriate actions to take:

*"This too is the thing to be remembered: making for affection, making for respect; it conduces to concord, to lack of contention, to harmony and unity."*

Lastly, he gave them guidance for a solution:

*"As, monks, in a house with a peaked roof, this is the topmost, the roof-palate, the dome, that is to say the peak, even so, monks, of these six things to be remembered, this is the topmost...to the complete destruction of anguish."*

According to Galtung's Triangle of Conflict, in his attempt to de-escalate the conflict, The Buddha advised the quarrelling monks to become mindful of their actions and to have more compassion towards one another through the practice of the Six Principles of Cordiality. However, his attempt failed. Both parties neither obeyed nor followed his advice. As is evident in this story, whenever one's negative emotions rule over one's mind, even a wise man can become a fool. At the end the Buddha decided to leave the quarrelling monks alone and let them deal with their problems by themselves. After the boycott by their lay supporters the monks finally returned to their senses. With calm and clear minds, the monks awoke to the realization that they indeed should have listened to the Buddha.

### Points to Consider

Conflict seems to occur everywhere where human being exists; mostly, it is neither simple nor straightforward. It can be defined as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatibility and the possibility of interference from others as a result of this incompatibility. The most important feature of conflict is that it is a type of human interaction. As we learn from this story, a big problem can evolve from something small. On hindsight, Vinaitorn could have regarded Dhammadhathukas a well-respected senior monk with many loyal followers; and although Dhammadhathuk was highly knowledgeable in Dhamma teachings, he was but an ordinary human being subject to mistakes. Realizing this fact, Vinaitorn should not have acted imprudently by revealing Dhammadhathuk's minor fault to others and causing him to lose face. Revealing someone's fault that causes embarrassment to the person is highly inappropriate. Not only did the listening monks gain no benefit from the story, but it may have caused them to look down upon a well-respected monk. As a thoughtful consideration, pointing out someone's fault or wrongdoing should be done in private, while praising someone's goodness or glory is better to be done in public.

Verbal aggressiveness is a negative feature that lead to a variety of effects in interpersonal communication, including conflict escalation, long-lasting damage to self-concepts, and corrosion of relationships. When in a conflict with a verbally aggressive person or group, it is important to remain calm and mindful. Though it is difficult to do in the heat of emotional moment, it is critical not to buy into the verbal assaulting. It is also advantageous to keep in mind that, in some cases, a frustrated aggressive person or group of people may resort to physical violence or other means of retaliation as we noticed in Kosambiya sutta; we need to protect ourselves from this possibility.

The story also shows the perils of factionalism. When people become loyal to a particular teacher, leader, or group, they tend to have single-minded admiration or blindfaith towards that person or group, despite the fact that the person or group may possess wrong views. Faith void of wisdom is detrimental. Also, by recklessly spreading the rumor, Vinaitorn's disciples hurt the feelings of Dhammadhathuk's followers and led to dissention between the two factions. Even monks of good standing can fall victim to negative emotions which lead to misbehaviors.

Holding wrong views can become the cause of many conflicts. Although the Kosambi monks seemed well educated, they were blinded by false pride and the faith in their leaders. Causing an embarrassment to others is an unwholesome deed that should be avoided. This is even more so when dealing with high ranking people in society with many followers or supporters. Considering the fact that Dhammadhathuk's inadvertent mistake was quite minor, Vinaitorn's monks should have treated him with the respect he deserved. Furthermore, it should be the duty of all monks to protect the credibility and unity of the Sangha.

### Conclusion

The Buddha took a peaceful reconciliation approach in dealing with the quarrel, he had guided them step by step to settle the conflict in a manner which was simple to follow reminding them to be kind and respect each other and provide a resource of kindness; however, since both parties' minds were clouded by negative emotions, the Buddha's message did not get through to them. Because the Buddha had a good perception of the situation he did not force the issue. Instead, he gave the quarrelling monks time to settle their own differences. That was why he stopped intervening and temporarily removed himself from the scene of the dispute.

Since all the conflicts and disputes originated from the different degree of defilements in human mind namely: greed, hatred and delusion, we must be careful and mindful when dealing with any kinds of conflicts as the Buddha had shown us from this Kosambiya sutta. Living peacefully in the turbulent and fast-moving world, it is crucial for one to practice meditation and mindfulness to empower one's mind to be strong and resilience and we need to be cooperative, harmonious and shareable for keeping peace in the world. If a person's mind is at peace and calm, he or she tends to cope with any situation in a cautious manner and non-violently which help deescalate the heat of conflicts.

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