they see luxury cars.

7. Akkodha – freedom from envy, ill-will, and enmity. He should bear no grudge against anybody. Bearing grudges is a human failing but someone exalted to high positions is big enough to avoid that. Have our rulers refrained from this? You answer.

8. Khanti – patience, forbearance, tolerance, understanding. He must be able to bear hardships, difficulties, and insults without losing his temper. In recent times one political leader I have observed has shown such forbearance is the Leader of the UNP when dealing with the volatile ‘reformists’ of his party who jump up to cut his neck whenever a local gov’t poll is lost.

9. Avihimsa – non-violence, which means not only that he should harm nobody, but that he should try to promote peace by avoiding preventing war, and everything which involves violence and destruction of life. Now this principle is central to Buddhism and deserves detailed discussion in the current context. It can take it up with the final principle number.

10. Avirodha (non-opposition; non-confrontation) as they are related though not the same.

As already suggested, our government’s response to the opposition has been essentially confrontational (Avirodha)-liking to have it destroyed somehow. The fact that an Opposition is vital for a functioning democracy is now realized. There is no space for democratic dissent. Either you are with me or against me. If you are not with me you are a traitor. At the Colombo Municipal Election campaign one Minister has stated that only a government backed Council will have funds to develop the Municipality. Why have elections at all?

When it came to dealing with the issue of Tamil secession, our rulers all had no faith in one of the most fundamental tenets of Buddhism, namely ahimsa. Ironically our JHU-led erudite Buddhists were the first to discourage ahimsa in confronting the most dangerous crisis in contemporary times. JR first issued a command to Brigadier Weeratunge to vanquish the LTTE by “ceasing fire” to discourage ahimsa in confronting the most dangerous crisis in contemporary times. JR first issued a command to Brigadier Weeratunge to vanquish the LTTE by “ceasing fire” and gave his assurance that the war was unwinnable. That assumption had been conveyed to the leadership by the respective Army Commanders of the time. The geopolitical circumstances of the time had also contributed to this assumption. Even the present President hasn’t carried the assumption and in fact continued with Ranil’s Peace Accord for a significant. However, he was quick to abandon the peace approach when an Army commander of a different character came up to him and gave his assurance that the war was winnable.

Thus in tackling the LTTE our preference right along had been not to go with Ahimsa. It is not easy to agree with the decision to turn our back to this defining principle of the Buddha Dhamma; that meant an admission that Buddhism is not a practical doctrine. I believe we failed ahimsa firstly because we did not understand its true potential, least of all the influential monks didn’t realize it. Ahimsa assumes an advanced state of consciousness. Secondly, we had no spiritual leaders of the calibre of Gandhi who alone could have led us to that path. Thirdly, the Ahimsa approach to reconciliation must be perceived and felt by the opposition as coming sincerely from the heart. It wasn’t so as there was no space in our hearts and minds for a pluralist society of live and let live with other communities. Sinhala Buddhists had been nurtured by school education upwards in the Mahawansadwa society that the island belongs to the Sinhala race. One cannot blame the monk leaders of the Deepawanswa and Mahawanswa; they were not chauvinist but were simply imbued and prodded by a devotion to the Buddha.

Furthermore, at the time the country had not really become so plural and multi-cultural as in modern times. However, perhaps as a defence reaction to growing pluralisation of society this ideology integrated much later into the political stream to develop a viscous fundamentalist sectarianism that lay at the heart of the crisis that eventually led to the emergence of an even more vicious counter chauvinism in the form of militant Tamilism.

Forbearance (Khanti) disappeared with the resultant tension. Thus ahimsa failed not because of anything false in the doctrine but because the context for its application was not forthcoming.