



SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

A Field Guide to Socially Engaged Buddhism

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Dedication

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Preface & Acknowledgements

The impetus for this *Field Guide to Socially Engaged Buddhism* emerges from my long standing commitment to explore and examine the concrete ways that Buddhists throughout time and place have engaged in, with, and through this very world to transform suffering. As a cultural critic of Buddhism deeply committed to social justice, I believe that my students should learn to deconstruct the many popularized and exoticized images of Buddhism in the West that have and continue to produce stereotypical images of monks meditating upon lofty mountaintops with little interaction with the social world. Hence, students are encouraged to provide robust critique and analysis of such narrowly held and inaccurate depictions of Buddhism that are perpetuated in contemporary media with the explicit purpose of grounding Buddhism in the here and now.

THRS 491 Engaged Buddhist Movements is a senior synthesis course that requires students to engage in a critical examination of the integral relationship between Buddhism and social justice movements. In this course, students analyze the ethical dimensions of Buddhist philosophy and practice that support and compel deep engagement in and commitment to transformation for the common good. In so doing, this course which culminates in this *Field Guide to Socially Engaged Buddhism* interrogates the relationship between the personal and social manifestations of Buddhist thought and practice and investigates the roles Buddhist thinkers, organizations, and institutions have played in social justice movements.

You will find in this *Field Guide to Socially Engaged Buddhism* that students demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of Socially Engaged Buddhism's origins through research projects, individual and group presentations, and written responses. They demonstrate in depth understanding of the historical, philosophical, social, and ethical implications of Buddhist theories of no-self, interdependence, suffering, and liberation. They have also worked on individual research projects that they then incorporated into a collaborative *Field Guide to Socially Engaged Buddhism* organized and designed by their own efforts. Keep in mind that this *Field Guide to Socially Engaged Buddhism* is the result of only nine weeks of study. Such a final product is a great accomplishment especially since for many of the co-authors, this course was their first introduction to Buddhism. It is amazing to me how much the co-authors accomplished in such a short period of time.

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First and foremost I want to thank all the seniors taking this course. Each of them has brought to this class a unique perspective, intellectual curiosity, and graciousness that have made teaching this course a great joy and something that I looked forward to each Tuesday and Thursday morning. All eleven students took the leap into the unknown by taking this course which is the first of its kind at Seattle University. Because students were expected to design a *Field Guide to Socially Engaged Buddhism* that they would not have to only research, write and organize but also present, it is fair to say that they had their work cut out for them. They have done a marvelous job distilling the key arguments found in Socially Engaged Buddhism and have come to this course with open minds and hearts. I am grateful for the opportunity work with such receptive, generous, and intelligent students who have contributed to the creation of such an enjoyable community. I appreciate the humor and

sense of interbeing developed in this course.

To my students: thank you for being the first cohort to tackle the complex topic of Socially Engaged Buddhism with wit, courage, and alacrity. I am so impressed with the fact that 11 students from 6 different majors with varying degrees of experience with Buddhism (from no experience to much experience in study and practice) were able to take up a new topic that they had little familiarity with and immerse themselves in the process of collaborative learning. You have all made teaching at Seattle University such a gift. Special thanks to Jack Hamrick for writing up the article on the class for the NW Dharma Association and to Jeff Tibbals for taking on the enormous task of putting this *Field Guide to Socially Engaged Buddhism* in such a fine publishing format. You are wonderful bodhisattvas. To Sean, Alemayehu, Wynn, Mary Pauline, Casey, Jack, Kait, Leslie, Marty, Caity, and Jeff—many thanks for putting up with my questions, particular sense of “humor,” suggestions, musings, critiques, and rather heavy work load with graciousness. You were a pleasure to work with and I wish you all the best as you move to the next stages of your lives. You will be missed and thought of often. In gassho,

Sharon A. Suh, Ph.D.
Chair, Theology and Religious Studies
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Part I

Introduction: Buddhist Philosophy

What is Socially Engaged Buddhism?

By Jack Hamrick

The “what is. . .” question heading this essay can be as useful as it is harmful. Do we distort our subject by oversimplifying it, or on the other hand, do we leave its complexity intact without saying much about the overarching commonalities amongst its constituent pieces? These are the two extremes that each author in this field guide has had to negotiate, each on her or his own terms. The individual pieces comprising the whole before you thus represent many unique perspectives on “Socially Engaged Buddhism.” Is it a movement? Is it several, roughly connected movements? Is it an “applied” Buddhism that is a recent development *within* Buddhism proper, or is it perhaps a dimension of traditional Buddhism that has always belonged properly to it?

We do *not*, collectively, have generalized and standardized answers to these questions. However, we also do not have a chaotic and random mix of disconnected topics. Rather than provide an airtight definition of “Socially Engaged Buddhism,” this field guide offers several, each of which varies according to its context and concerns. Accordingly, instead of direct answers that reveal an essence, this field guide is composed of the following: philosophical inquiries into the societal implications of traditional Buddhist teachings, case studies focused on political and social problems to which a single figure or group has responded with a Buddhist spirituality, and gestures toward the future of a Buddhism engaging and transforming the evolving sufferings of our world and worlds to come. In place of the tangled knots of a strictly defined essence (Socially Engaged Buddhism is. . . .), our readers will find that this work is more like Indra’s net, with its infinite expanse and numberless intersections that each, *individually*, reflect the *whole* they constitute.

The title and question of this essay is not a goal, but a guide. Perhaps one way of entering into this guiding question would be to ask, what is “Socially Engaged” or “Engaged” Buddhism in relation to *traditional* Buddhism? Our exploration of Socially Engaged Buddhism will be circling around this tension: is it simply Buddhism, or a more recent phenomenon warranting the qualification of “Socially Engaged”? And what exactly would

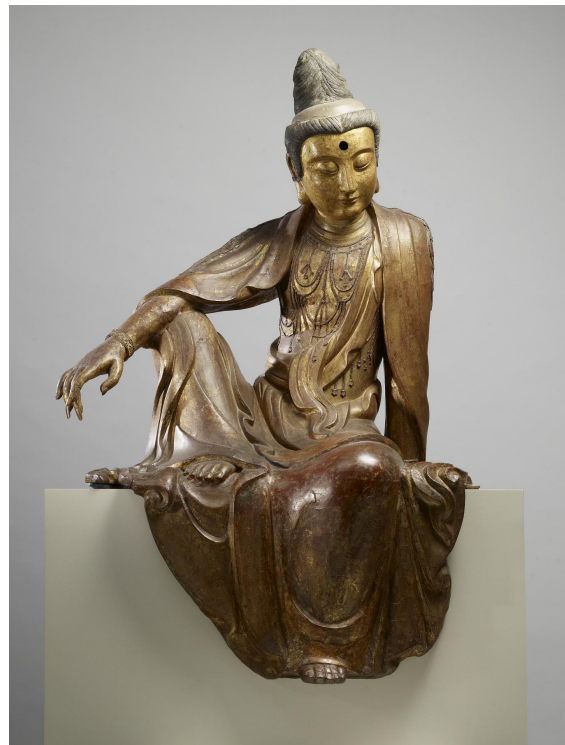


Figure 1: Kuan Yin

a Buddhism of social engagement look like? These are each questions we would ideally be able to answer over the course of our inquiry. Sallie King, who has written much on the subject, gives a clear and eloquent expression of this tension: “is there a form of Buddhism with sufficient unity among its various examples and sufficient difference from other forms of Buddhism to go by the single name, Engaged Buddhism’?” [2, p. 4] Her answer is yes. The difficulty, and the accompanying theoretical caution, follows from the inherently diverse nature of “Engaged Buddhism”: King notes that Engaged Buddhists are not restricted to one geographical location, but exist all over Asia as well as in America and Europe; nor are Engaged Buddhists confined within a single Buddhist sect, but exist in all sectarian varieties of Buddhism. [2, p. 4-5] King therefore defines “Engaged Buddhism” in a way that tries to preserve this diversity while also drawing together their commonalities:

Engaged Buddhism is defined and unified by the intention to apply the values and teachings of Buddhism to the problems of society in a nonviolent way, motivated by concern for the welfare of others, and as an expression of one’s own practice of the Buddhist Way. [2, p. 5]

In short, King maintains that an “Engaged Buddhism exists as an intention and a practice within existing forms of Buddhism.” [2, p. 5] Hence the diversity and commonality of “Engaged Buddhism,” which from King’s perspective possesses the sort of unity a philosophical school might: shared issues and a common set of traditional values, each of which give rise to individual nuances depending on the one working on these shared themes.

What is most appealing about King’s definition is the explicit connection it makes between Socially Engaged Buddhism and traditional Buddhism, a basic assumption that we incorporate into our own: there is indeed a relationship between the two. Granted this relationship, our goal is to reveal a “socially engaged” Buddhism and its Buddhist philosophical underpinnings, tracing its roots within the Buddhist tradition. To accomplish this, we proceed through a couple of questions: do the Buddha’s teachings, with their call to practice toward liberation from suffering, have *societal* implications? Did the Buddha intend for self-transformation to extend beyond individual ego-selves, to radiate outward across the interdependent fabric of our world? There are two basic approaches to match these questions: first, we look to two precedents of social engagement from traditional Buddhist texts; and second, we consider a contemporary Buddhist scholar’s reading of some traditional Buddhist concepts as they apply to our modern society.

Traditional Precedence: the *Vimalakirti Sutra* and the *Metta-sutta*

The Vimalakirti Sutra, an early text of the Mahayana tradition, is a curious one where traditional Buddhist texts are concerned: its main character and “principal propounder of the doctrine” is *not* the Buddha, but a wealthy layman named Vimalakirti.¹ [6, p. 2-3] The sutra features an ill Vimalakirti, who expounds the Dharma to curious inquirers from his sickbed. The Buddha hears of this sick layman, and attempts to dispatch a disciple from his ranks to look into these strange circumstances; however, each of the Buddha’s closest monks refuses to visit Vimalakirti, citing previous embarrassments in which he demonstrated

¹The following summary is largely adapted from translator Burton Watson’s introduction.

a superior knowledge of the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha is finally able to dispatch Manjushri, traditional symbol of the perfection of wisdom, who visits the ill Vimalakirti and engages him in a discussion of the Dharma.

Watson offers a lucid contextual account of the sutra within the larger history of Buddhism, which is worth recounting here. Watson says of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition this sutra belongs to:

It sought to open up the religious life to a wider proportion of the population, to accord a more important role to lay believers, and to give more appealing expression to the teachings and make them more readily accessible.[6, p. 6]

Mahayana is therefore, in part, a response to earlier Buddhist traditions, which is crystal clear in one particular contrast: the *arhat* and the *bodhisattva*. In earlier Buddhist traditions, the arhat is a practitioner “who has gained release from suffering and passed beyond this world,” which contrasts sharply with the Mahayana ideal of the bodhisattva, “one who vows not only to achieve enlightenment for himself but to assist all others to do likewise.”[6, p. 6] This context is crucial for Watson, because the sutra clearly takes the *arhat* as a critical target, criticizing earlier traditions for their tendencies toward “pratyekabuddhas,” i.e. “private Buddhas” or “self-enlightened ones.”²[6, p. 7] The Vimalakirti Sutra warns of the pratyekabuddha and its implication that this world must be abandoned:

The Buddha Law can never grow in a person who has perceived the uncreated nature of reality and entered into correct understanding. It is only when living beings are in the midst of the mire of earthly desires that they turn to the Buddha Law.[6, p.95]

The Dharma cannot bear fruit in a metaphysical beyond transcending of an earthly “here” ; its seeds cannot be planted “in the sky,” as Manjushri says in the sutra, but only in the earthiest, “well-manured soil.”[6, p. 95] The social valences of this criticism are significant: pratyekabuddhas may possess and understand the Dharma *for themselves*, but are faulted with doing nothing for *others* by the text's compilers.

As demonstrated by its vow, the bodhisattva identifies with *all* sentient beings because the Buddha's teachings originate in this world of suffering beings, and not elsewhere. Vimalakirti, the sick laymen, literally embodies the bodhisattva vow: “This illness of mine is born of ignorance and feelings of attachment. Because all living beings are sick, therefore I am sick.”[6, p. 65] From the Mahayana perspective, strict, disciple-like adherence to the Buddha's teachings is not the Dharma's ultimate end. One is awakened and embodies these teachings only when one acts on behalf of others. Vimalakirti once suffered, and is “liable” to birth and death, but penetrates his delusional thinking and attains an awakened state.

²It is important to note that some of this Mahayana language is caught up in intra-traditional politics: Mahayana, a then recent development, sought to firmly establish and maintain its identity by sharply contrasting itself with earlier forms of Buddhism. Some of its criticisms (e.g. the “pratyekabuddhas”) are therefore perhaps unfair in retrospect, for in some cases they have intentionally misrepresented earlier traditions for their own advantage. However, the pratyekabuddhas do offer a nice counter to popular images of Buddhist practice, meditation in particular, as just “sitting around” or escaping from this world. To negotiate this delicate issue, we will balance out this Mahayana-heavy perspective shortly.

And yet, in spite of this self-transformation, others are suffering from delusional thoughts similar to those he experienced. Under these circumstances, why would Vimalakirti deny his capacity to help those who suffer as he once did, or forgo the opportunity to “awaken” living beings to an “understanding free of all obstacles”? [6, p. 99] Mahayana Buddhism is unflagging in its commitment to the bodhisattva ideal, and with Vimalakirti we see one powerful expression of this commitment: he *embodies* the Dharma with his illness, an illness he has taken on and shares with all sentient beings.

The defining characteristic of the bodhisattva is therefore the choice of responsibility and compassion for others, over the choice of a “private” enlightenment one practices to transform one’s *interdependent* self, and not the illusory ego-self. The bodhisattva ideal is thus inseparable from a trademark Mahayana concept, “emptiness”: because all things depend upon all other things, no *one* thing can be said to “have” its own being, or to exist at all as a discrete “one.” Watson presents this concept as deeply rooted in the Buddha’s teachings, which held that

All things in the phenomenal world are conditioned in nature, brought into being and governed by causes and conditions. They are thus in a state of constant flux and are destined to change and pass away. They may therefore be designated as “empty” or “void because they lack any inherent characteristics by which they can be described. . . . At best they can be delineated by what they are not not permanent, not possessed of any fixed form or self-nature. [6, p. 10]

Therefore, in accordance with this “empty” nature of reality, the bodhisattva chooses responsibility for all things, because, strictly speaking, *she is all things*. Emptiness means that all things, depending upon one another for their being, share in the same reality of Buddhahood. In the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, then, an awakened one is not some sort of super being, beyond earthly desires, sicknesses, and struggles, or even beyond birth and death; instead, the bodhisattva *flourishes* under such conditions: “the bodhisattva, though he dies, does not wipe out his good roots, and though he is born, he does not prolong those things that are evil.” [6, p. 132] An enlightened being, though subject to pain, does not *suffer*; and “perceiving the uncreated [empty] nature of reality,” responds in compassion to all things of this inter-dependent, empty world. One of the Buddha’s interlocutors in the sutra asks how one is to purify the Buddha lands, to which the Buddha responds: “the bodhisattva’s acquisition of a pure land is wholly due to his having brought benefit to living beings. [. . .] It is because they wish to help others to achieve success that they take their vow to acquire Buddha lands.” [6, p. 26] As a bodhisattva, you abandon *your* suffering so as to receive *all* suffering. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* and the Mahayana tradition to which it belongs ask, how true is the enlightenment realized for myself, but not for all things? This is an undeniably *social* insight in which we are called upon, by the teachings of the Buddha and the empty nature of reality, to diagnose and cure our own personal suffering *as well* as that of our fellow sentient beings.

We do not need to draw exclusively from the Mahayana tradition and its bodhisattva ideal, however; the roots of a compassionate call to action reach deeper still within the

Buddhist tradition. The *Metta-sutta* of the Pali Canon³, which Walpola Sri Rahula translates as “universal love,” seeks to cultivate a fundamental practice of compassion:

Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let one's thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world above, below and across-without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.[5, p. 97]

While it may be true that Mahayana Buddhism and its bodhisattva offer a more passionate and vociferous call for compassion, it is simply not the case that it is the only compassionate Buddhism. Buddhism, to its core, is a tradition of compassion and compassionate action for the benefit of others. Sallie King negotiates these important differences between divergent Buddhist traditions, without either collapsing them into sameness or placing them in radical opposition:

Though Theravadins do speak of compassion, they more frequently speak of metta, loving kindness, than of compassion, as their idiom for expressing beneficence. A little reflection makes clear that, when compassion (concern that others not suffer) and loving kindness (wish for others to be well and happy) are translated into action, they come to the same thing: benevolence, concern for the welfare of others, and action to enhance others' welfare.[2, p. 6]

Whether we call it “benevolence,” “compassion,” or “loving kindness,” at a certain point we must set aside these labels that, for all their utility, inevitably introduce distinctions that cloud our view of reality. At a certain point, we are merely defining and distinguishing different approaches arising from the same impetus: *engagement with one's own suffering and with the suffering of others*. In the final analysis, a meaningful Buddhism of active social engagement is Buddhist by only one criterion: whether or not it draws from the teachings of the Buddha. We will return to this point in our conclusion. For now, let us look to another source to further explore what social engagement looks like from a Buddhist perspective.

Building from Tradition⁴: David Loy on the Contemporary Relevance of traditional Buddhism

In his essay “What’s Buddhist about Socially Engaged Buddhism?” Buddhist scholar David Loy tries to get to the heart of what a Buddhist perspective offers toward the solution of social

³This selection is made in order to balance the Mahayana-heavy account above on two fronts: one, because it precedes the Mahayana tradition, and two, because it represents a Theravada perspective. Scholar and translator John J. Holder says of this canon: “The Pali Canon is recognized as a scriptural source for all Buddhist traditions, although it is more closely associated with the Buddhist tradition called Theravada’ . . .” Holder, *Early Buddhist Discourse* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), vii.

⁴This felicitous phrase is Sallie King’s, which is the title of a very helpful chapter, from the work cited above, surveying several Buddhist concepts and their interpretation/application within the work of a variety of Engaged Buddhists. The chapter is strongly recommended to help appreciate the plurality of Socially Engaged Buddhism(s).

ills.[3] Unlike the perspective we saw earlier through Sallie King, David Loy does not view “socially engaged” Buddhism as a roughly singular phenomenon; his interest lies in what a Buddhist spirituality can offer in light of the ills pervasive in modern, technological society which is to say, Loy is more interested in the potential of a (serious) Buddhist spirituality in “Western” societies. Loy argues that beyond its call to compassion—certainly something common to most faith traditions—Buddhism possesses the powerful tool of identifying a problem’s *source*. For example, Loy considers the issue of homelessness in the United States, and the obvious misfit between this fact and the nation’s incredible amount of wealth:

Sometimes we do need to ask: what is that source? What is the basic social dis-ease that needs to be alleviated and, so far as possible, cured? What does Buddhism say, or imply, about this type of dis-ease?[3]

A Buddhist perspective offers these kinds of questions to such problems. Loy suggests that, for various historical-political reasons, traditional Buddhism was likely not “socially engaged” in the sense in which it has become so in recent years; however, by examining the condition of technology-driven societies, he identifies the abiding truth and relevance of the Buddha’s teachings:

The three roots of evil remain the same: greed, ill will, and delusion (or “ignore-ance”). But our incredibly powerful technologies mean that they now operate and interact on a scale that is vastly larger than during the Buddha’s day. For Buddhists to ignore this reality, while devoting ourselves wholly to our own liberation, is to ignore our responsibility to the world. Enlightenment, after all, includes realizing that we are part of the world, nondual with it, and today our world needs all the help it can get.[3]

Socially Engaged Buddhism, as a dimension of a broader Buddhist tradition, is a recent phenomenon. Sallie King, for example, implies as much with the selection of “Engaged Buddhists” whom she cites: A.T. Ariyaratne, Cheng Yen, Aung San Suu Kyi, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hahn, Maha Ghosanda, P.A. Payutto, Sulak Sivaraksa, and the rest were all active from about the middle of the last century on.⁵ Nevertheless, this recent development is not mutually exclusive with traditional rootedness; that is, Loy maintains that when looking back to the teachings of the Buddha, and also taking into account their evolution across Asia and the globe, we see that Buddhism was always engaged—in *spirit* even if not yet in practice.

David Loy thus reframes his core question with a more specific formulation: how do Buddhist practice and engagement with social issues intersect and mutually influence one another? What can be said, from a Buddhist perspective, about the relationship between spirituality and practical, societal concerns? For Loy the two are truly inseparable, existing in a state of mutual interdependence. To see one’s Buddhist practice and one’s engagement with a social problem as distinct and unrelated is to maintain,

⁵This is not a comprehensive list of “Engaged Buddhists.” Interested readers are referred, in addition to King, to the *Engaged Buddhist Reader* ed. by Arnold Kotler (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1996) for a more varied sampling of such Buddhists.

A delusion of the sort that we are trying to overcome in our spiritual practice, showing we are not yet mature enough in our spiritual understanding. Believing and acting as if they are separate that is, trying to liberate or awaken myself while leaving the rest of the world to take care of itself is another instance of the subject/object, self/other duality. This duality expresses the fundamental ignorance that needs to be overcome.[3]

According to Loy, we malign the spirit of the Buddha's teachings when we cultivate ourselves at the exclusion of others. Just as with the Mahayana Buddhist perspective expressed in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, *it is not enlightenment, strictly speaking, so long as it is not for the benefit of all living beings*. Loy forcefully contends on behalf of the "distinctively Buddhist" dimension of a "socially engaged" Buddhism, which is to say a socially engaged Buddhism rooted deeply within *traditional* Buddhism. Loy supports this view by way of a handful of traditional Buddhist teachings, viewed through his own lens on contemporary society⁶:

What is distinctively Buddhist about socially engaged Buddhism? Emphasis on the social dukkha promoted by wego-selves as well as ego-selves. The three collective poisons of institutionalized greed, institutionalized ill will and institutionalized delusion. The importance of personal spiritual practice, commitment to non-violence, and the realization that ending one's own dukkha requires us to address the dukkha of others as well. The traditional five precepts, understood in more social terms, give us more specific guidelines that point toward the kind of society we are trying to create, as well as provide us with the framework to follow as we search for ways to challenge the present social order.[3]

Interestingly, for Loy, these traditional Buddhist principles do not, in and of themselves, "amount to a distinct social program." He maintains that the resonance between the Buddha's teachings and some sort of "social engagement" is most effectively acted upon when put to work with a broader movement. In Loy's view, the aforementioned Buddhist principles "add a more spiritual dimension to the global peace and justice movement that has sprung up in recent years." What he refers to as the "anti-globalization movement," i.e. the move to address contemporary societal "crises" and counter the "power structures" that have proven to be incapable of solving these problems, stands to gain a great deal from Buddhist spirituality: "The anti-globalization movement has an increasingly important role to play, and a socially-awakened Buddhism can play an important role in making that movement more spiritually aware". This is the unique contribution Buddhism can make to the social crises we face today: "more spiritually aware" means fully addressing society's *dukkha*, that is, not only taking steps to solve the problem (alleviate the symptoms), but to eradicate its underlying *source* (cure the disease).

* * *

⁶The following quote is part of Loy's concluding thoughts, cited wholesale for the sake of brevity. Loy, of course, offers an excellent and detailed analysis of these ideas, which the reader is strongly encouraged to examine.

Socially Engaged Buddhism: is it simply Buddhism, or a distinctively modern phenomenon warranting the qualification “socially engaged”? We have deliberately posed such a dualistic question to emphasize its inadequacy. Our answer to this question is thus *neither-nor, both-and*: that is, there is a sense in which it is simply Buddhism, but also a sense in which it is a phenomenon worth distinguishing from traditional forms of Buddhism, and therefore, there is a third sense in which it is beyond the dualism of the question. As we saw with Sallie King, there is a variety of Buddhists from different Buddhist sects engaging with specific and unique social problems, and working to solve those problems by way of Buddhist principles and practice. As we tried to demonstrate with the *Vimalakirti Sutra* of the Mahayana canon and the *Metta-sutta* of the Pali canon, there are ways of returning to canonical texts and establishing traditional and textual precedence for engagement with societal ills from a Buddhist perspective. These two texts highlight the fact that a “socially engaged” spirituality began with the original Dharma of the Buddha himself. This “socially engaged” Buddhism is one that is perhaps less of a movement than those modern phenomena we would consider part of “Socially Engaged” Buddhism, but nonetheless, a Buddhism that calls for social engagement. This sort of “return to tradition” is what we further explored with David Loy, examining one possibility for a theoretical-philosophical grounding of a “socially engaged” Buddhism in core Buddhist principles. In short, we have uncovered over the course of our inquiry the existence of Socially Engaged Buddhism *and* a socially engaged Buddhism; that is, a variety of socially focused movements within Buddhism in more recent years, but also a deep-seated resonance between traditional Buddhist principles and social engagement of some form.

Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn, often credited with coining the term “Engaged Buddhism,” [2, p. 11] once claimed that “Buddhism is already engaged Buddhism. If it is not, it is not Buddhism” [4, p. 36]. Thich Nhat Hahn’s work highlights the way in which Engaged Buddhists “build from tradition” while supplementing that tradition when necessary: for example, his Order of Interbeing, which “seeks to realize the Dharma spirit within early Buddhism as well as the development of that spirit throughout the Sangha’s history and the teachings in all Buddhist traditions.” [1, p. 9] An Engaged Buddhist may supplement the tradition, not because the original teachings are inadequate, but because our world is not the Buddha’s world, as David Loy demonstrates. Thus, the Order of Interbeing grew from the “crucible” of colonization and the Vietnam War [4, p. 35] because “the teachings of the Buddha were desperately *needed*” amidst the anger and violence. [1, p. vii] Socially Engaged Buddhism, for all of its diversity, consists of undeniable links to traditional Buddhism a tradition that in *itself* is already a plurality of *Buddhisms*. It is entirely possible that “Socially Engaged” Buddhism does not exist, at least not in the singular and unified manner implied by that label; like the tradition itself, “Socially Engaged” Buddhism also exists only in the plural which is to say, only in all its diverse yet resonant splendor. Our readers will see in the work that follows further ramifications of the broad strokes made and outlined here, which speaks not to a lack of coherence but rather to the open-ended and fluid nature of socially engaged Buddhism.

A Buddhism of social engagement is necessarily plural because societal ills are never the same, the ills of one society are not those of another, and the ills of one generation are not necessarily those of the next even if, as David Loy shows, their root causes usually *do* remain the same. If the source of the problem is similar, then surely the means by which

we can address it will retain this wide applicability. It is for the same reason that socially engaged Buddhisms exist only in the plural, that they must also be distinguished from the traditional Buddhism(s) from which they grow: *out of the necessity of their tasks*, which may be unified as a Buddhist response to suffering, but diverge and differentiate themselves along the lines of their unique challenges and solutions. Whatever singular contribution of these Buddhisms of social engagement there may be said to be, it is certainly to draw out a dimension of the Buddha's teachings that was there all along, even if only as potential, and apply this ancient wisdom to our innumerable and ever-evolving contemporary ills.

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The Impetus for Engaged Buddhist Ethics: Knowing and Unknowing

By Caity Orellana

There is, however, one restriction: if the principles or teaching related to a quest for truth and wisdom do not reveal ethics and a method of practice that can be applied in daily life, then such principles cannot be considered Buddhism this is especially true for that which is held to be the original body of teachings of Lord Buddha, which, here, we will call Buddhadhamma.[3, p. 37]
–Phra Prayudh Payutto

If you were to ask me “What is the essence of Buddhism?” I would answer that it's to awaken. And the function of that awakening is learning how to serve.[1, p. 41]
–Bernie Glassman

Sallie B. King's *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism* provides an analysis of Engaged Buddhism by looking at several contemporary movements in Asia and

their ethical underpinnings. Since Buddhist ethical thought, however, does not fit neatly into any Western school of ethical thought nor standard Asian school of ethical thought, King utilizes an inductive method of gathering together the most prominent features of these various movements in order to articulate a more general Engaged Buddhist ethical system. The foundation for such an ethical system, however, falls primarily on two Buddhist philosophers, Phra Prayudh Payutto and Buddhadasa Bikkhu, each who appeal to “natural law” as the grounding for ethical behavior. King describes their work as moving from “is” to “ought”—“that is, from a description of what is, the nature of reality, to a description of what we ought to do, correct behavior. In other words, their account of ethical behavior is based upon their account of the nature of reality.” [2, p. 43] One is to know the nature of reality in order to know how to act in accordance with it.

While Buddhadasa’s philosophy is topical and at times offers more liberal interpretations of the Pali Canon, Payutto is extremely systematic and maintains a strict adherence to the scriptures. As a Theravada Thai Buddhist monk, Phra Prayudh Payutto has been immersed in traditional religious education since adolescence. He is heavily versed in scholastic training that stresses the importance of understanding the Buddhist teachings through recitative knowledge of the Pali Canon and a practice that is in accordance with it. Most of his writings since the 1960’s involve retrieving the recorded words of the Buddha in order to respond to an ever-expanding modern age. He strongly emphasizes the role of reason in founding his system of ethics and offers thorough explanations for why one should act in a particular manner. It is a philosophy based on the value of *knowing*—knowing the nature of reality and knowing how to act in accordance with it.

At the time in which Payutto was writing his magnum opus *Buddhadhamma* in the 1960’s, the American Zen teacher Bernie Glassman was undergoing Dharma training with Taizan Maezumi Roshi in Los Angeles, California. Maezumi Roshi taught Glassman about the value of “unknowing,” a principle he would later institute as the first tenet in the Zen Peacemaker Order. Glassman reflects in his book *Bearing Witness: A Zen Master’s Lessons in Making Peace* that those who join the Zen Peacemaker Order “train in unknowing,” that is, “in unlearning all their previous conditioning and preconceptions about how to make peace.” [1, p. 68] They vow to penetrate the unknown by approaching life without fixed ideas or answers, “bearing witness to every situation no matter how difficult, offensive, or painful it is.” [1, p. xiv] In being open to the unknown, those who bear witness, learn to know again, newly with fresh eyes and ears. Out of this process, “the right action of making peace, of healing, arises.” [1, p. xiv] For Glassman, therefore, right action—which we will call ethical action—begins with unknowing. In other words, knowing what to do can only arise with an openness to the unknown, to the possibilities not yet found for that particular time and place. Sometimes, knowing what to do can only arise after one is at a loss about what to do. One is assuaged, however, from the concern that this is merely a passive nihilism of knowing nothing, doing nothing. Glassman doesn’t ask his members to throw out their professional skills and knowledge. Rather, he encourages them to use their expertise, but to do so, he says, with “the openness to see things as they are, the constant flow and interpenetration of this life, free from expectation, boundary, and limit.” [1, p. 68] In the Zen tradition, practice and study are not separate. One does not renounce cognition and understanding in a blissful state of nothingness, but learns how to bracket it when necessary. Glassman makes clear, “We want to have knowledge, but not be controlled by knowledge.” [1, p. 68]

Thus, how can we understand Glassman and the practice of unknowing when placed in conversation with Payutto and his philosophical foundation in knowing? Though they appear to be foundationally incompatible, is there a way to hear them in dialogue with each other? To what extent do each speak to the drive or impulse for ethical action? In other words, how might the modes of knowing or unknowing compel one to be engaged in Buddhist ethical action?

Payutto: Knowing ‘What Is’ In Order to Know ‘What I Ought’ to Do

As Sallie B. King articulated, Phra Prayudh Payutto’s system of ethics moves from ‘is’ to ‘ought’. He holds that the teachings of the Buddha, that which he calls the *Buddhadhamma* and his directives for practice, were based upon the Buddha’s knowledge of natural law. This law is known as the law of conditionality or causality, or more precisely *paticca-samuppada* (dependent origination). According to King, this law describes how “all things come into being conditionally and interdependently (*paticca-samuppada*), that is, in dependence upon other things.”[2, p. 45] This is a universal natural law, which in other words states all sentient and non-sentient beings are interconnected. Every movement put forth into the world, explicit or discreet, directly affects other movements, and that movement affects other movements, in a constant interplay of dependent origination. All things come into being in dependence upon other things.

The natural law of dependent origination is essential for realizing our interconnectedness and being able to act in accordance with it. If one knows that everything is in constant flux, coming into existence co-dependently, one also comes to know the principle of no-self. For Payutto, it is “The principle of no-self (*anattata*)” that “has most important value in terms of ethics.”[3, p. 74] The one who understands the principle of no-self maintains a mind of equanimity, that is, a dispassionate state of being in which one is calm and neutral. This condition has the highest importance for ethics



Figure 2: Phra Prayudh Payutto

because it “provides a spiritual happiness that is problem-free, allowing a person to assist others with their difficulties.”[3, p. 71] When one can recognize all of the causes and conditions that brought her to that particular situation, she can uproot personal suffering and avoid attachment due to selfish desires. One can “get involved, consider, and solve problems by not letting the self, selfish wants, and attachments become obstructions.”[3, p. 75]

Payutto’s system of Buddhist ethics is founded on knowing that the state of nature is one of dependent origination, that is, the causes and conditions of every moment are deeply interconnected. Ideally, one is to utilize this knowledge advantageously by not clinging or remaining attached to biases and subjective opinions, but rather by maintaining the wisdom of seeing a situation with all of the causes and conditions in mind, that is, “objectively with pure reason.”[3, p. 75] Nature serves as a model for the way humanity should act. The

nature of ‘what is’ implies the actions one ‘ought’ to perform. Natural law is translated into moral law.

From Systematic Ethics to An Experience of Waking Up

Bernie Glassman writes in *Bearing Witness: A Zen Master’s Lessons in Making Peace* that if someone were to ask him “What is the essence of Buddhism?” he would answer “that it’s to awaken. And the function of that awakening is learning how to serve.” [1, p. 41] In the Zen tradition, awakening is synonymous with serving; there is no separation between enlightenment and practice. There is no ‘before I will study, then I will practice’, nor is there ‘I will awaken, then I will serve’; rather, study and practice occur at the same time, and one awakens when she serves. To what extent, then, is the experience of awakening an experience of ethical action in itself? How is the experience of waking up not merely individualistic enlightenment, nor preliminary knowledge for later action, but ethical action in itself?

As this paper transitions from Payutto’s systematic ethics to Glassman’s experience of waking up, it will be important to make note of two distinctions. The first is that Payutto proposes a complete system of ethics which calls one to act out of duty or responsibility. One ‘ought’ to act in accordance with nature. The second, is that in de-emphasizing knowledge and reason, Glassman taps into the affective dimension of joy and suffering, making the emotional experience central to the question of action.

In regards to the first distinction, rather than founding a system of ethics on knowing, Glassman begins with vowing to penetrate the unknown. He explains that the members of the Zen Peacemaker Order are discouraged from looking for a first cause as an explanation for what is or what one ought to do. Glassman asks his members to try refraining “from asking questions that start with *why*, for those questions indicate a desire to know. They also reflect our fear or hesitation about dealing with something.” [1, p. 68]

For Glassman, the problem is not with asking a question, but the way in which one asks the question. In the West, for example, the question of ethics has always assumed the underriding question that this paper has sought to understand, “Why should I do ethics?” or “What motivates me to do ethics?” It is a particularly linear formula that seeks a logical and sequential explanation for why one should act a certain way. It is as if I am saying “First I am myself, then ethics draws me out.” But for much of Mahayana, and the Zen tradition in particular, it is not a question of *why should I* or *what is it that motivates me*, but *who am I?* For ‘who I am and how I act are not separate.’ In moving away from an ethical system based on knowing, and instead vowing to penetrate the unknown, the affective or emotional dimension of life also becomes more pronounced. Glassman encourages his members to touch their suffering and the suffering of others by bearing witness to every aspect of a situation that arises, that is, becoming every element of the situation. He asks, “And what does it mean to be a murdered young girl, her mother, her killer, the killer’s mother, and a policeman?” Becoming every element of a situation, as painful and terrifying as it may be, allows us to remember and reconnect to those parts of ourselves that we usually ignore. This means that when you suffer, I suffer too. Glassman explains that such action is called *compassion*, for “*com-passion* means *with suffering*. Peacemaker action comes about when we are the suffering of others.” [1, p. 59] What does it mean to be the suffering of others?

And how is that compassionate?

The Unknown at Auschwitz

Glassman writes in the beginning of his book, that as he approached his fifty-fifth birthday, celebrating it in solidarity with the homeless out on the streets of Washington D.C., he felt that something more was needed to confront homelessness, AIDS, and violence in America. Something more was called for, but he wasn't sure what. Many friends and fellow activists had also expressed similar sentiments. They felt isolated and alone in the world with little support in their endeavors. Others, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, had told him "how much they wanted to change their world but that they didn't know where to start. They were discouraged and disempowered, feeling that nothing they could do would make a difference." [1, p. xii] These people were broken and without hope in the face of inexhaustible suffering. In the hopelessness and despair of thinking that nothing you do will ever make a difference, why do anything at all?

Unlike Payutto and much of the Theravada tradition, Zen won't give you an explicit reason. The practices of meditation and mindfulness, rather, open one up to the questions in life that are often too hastily covered up with answers. Glassman considers his narrative "a book of questions"; more precisely, he says it's a book "about living a questioning life, a life of unknowing." [1, p. ix] Why were these people so broken-hearted? Why shouldn't they be? Glassman asks, "What keeps us from feeling separate from each other? What keeps us thinking that we know the right way? . . . What are the peaceforms that will help all beings experience their interdependence?" [1, p. ix] Such questions were the impetus for the formation of the Zen Peacemaker Order and the numerous experiences of bearing witness that the members and non-members would take up as a form of compassion. Of these experiences, one of the most difficult and devastating for people was the retreat Glassman held at Auschwitz.

Born into a Jewish family, Bernie Glassman, had visited Auschwitz on his own in 1994. After that first interaction, he was adamant that two years later he would hold a bearing witness retreat there for people from all countries, backgrounds, ethnic origins, and religions. He was determined to "bring people from different religions and nationalities to the very place where diversity had once been condemned to a terrible grave." [1, p. 5] It was here that they would bear witness to their differences.

People were utterly shocked when they first arrived. Glassman writes, ". . . Seeing Auschwitz for the first time is like a blow to the head. It leaves people's minds blank. Nothing they'd ever heard, seen, or read had prepared them for this." [1, p. 15] They were in a state of complete unknowing. There is a sort of brokenness that one experiences in circumstances like this one; people feel hopeless about what to do or say. It's very much like the desperate reflections of those people who expressed a powerlessness when faced with the inexhaustible suffering of the world. One of the reasons people bear witness—and do so in such extreme ways—is because that deep experience of suffering, of being *with suffering*, is an act of com-*passion*. Being present to the joy and suffering of others, seeing and hearing the differences that move them through life, is the first act of deep compassion.

In 2010, Sensei Beate Stolte from the Upaya Institute and the well-known author Natalie Goldberg, embarked on this retreat together. Beate's father had been a German officer

during the war and Natalie had been born into a Jewish family that fled Europe at the outset of the war. She and her immediate family were able to escape to America, however, several relatives were interned and killed in the Holocaust. The two women, who had initially met at an Upaya retreat and at first disliked each other, decided to go to Auschwitz together, in order for both of them to have an experience of healing together on those very broken grounds. Upon returning, Sensei Beate reflects that one day when watching a young baby in the arms of a visitor she was all of a sudden struck by the realization that babies just like this one were once thrown into crematoriums by Nazis; “without any feelings of remorse, completely disassociated. They threw them in there so they wouldn’t have to hear them scream.” [4] She wondered, “How is this possible?” and realized, “I have no answers for this. All I know is that it’s a human capacity we all have. We have to do something about it. We have to prevent it. What can we do?” [4] Stolte expresses total desperation over this, a complete brokenness when faced with the desire to explain it or know what to do. But from that brokenness arose the joyous experiences of “singing Jewish psalms together. . . dancing, and crying, and laughing together. There was so much love, so much truth, so much connection. That’s also a human capacity. We all share. And to really feel this, and drink it, and to really be penetrated by this. This is more true, this is my truth. I want to live this truth, not the other truth of human capacities.” [4] The two women went on this trip together with the intentions of seeing the dark parts of themselves and of their pasts they had yet to deal with, and from that arose a genuine experience of being together with their differences.

Glassman writes quite beautifully that “there are many ways to express a broken heart: tears, laughter, silence, dance and even German lullabies. You don’t find wholeness till you’re ready to be broken. Evening after evening we found new ways to express our brokenness. Each time we did this, a healing arose.” [1, p. 34]

Two Fingers Pointing to the Same Moon?

Both Phra Prayudh Payutto and Bernie Glassman call us to recognize our deeply intertwined and intricate lives. Payutto envisions this through an understanding of dependent origination and our interconnectedness. As one realizes that she is a part of this interconnectedness, she realizes that she is a non-self, that is, a self without a permanent identity. One is made up of all of the causes and conditions that brought her to that moment, and those causes and conditions interact with causes and conditions of other people, of animals, and trees and tiny motes of dust. Glassman keeps these principles in mind, but envisions this interconnectedness in a more personal manner through the language of “oneness”. He adds an emotional dimension to the nature or reality, focusing on suffering and brokenness as the possibility for healing and



Figure 3: Bearing Witness at Auschwitz

making whole. When interconnectedness takes on the personal language of oneness, we are saying that one becomes the causes and conditions, the elements of every situation regardless of how painful and terrible it is. One is *with suffering*. Glassman explains that sometimes we look at all of the causes and conditions, we appreciate the differences and diversity brought about by these movements, “but unless we’re grounded in unity, I am in you and you are in me, we may have no incentive to act.” [1, p. 59]

While Payutto and Glassman might differ in view for how ethical action arises—one out of knowing one’s duty, the other out of being with universal suffering—the two thinkers have the same goal in mind, that is, ultimately, to alleviate all suffering. Each is clear and pronounced in its differences, but at some point, one must let the distinctions fall away and realize that these are two profound teachings pointing to the same moon.

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Part II

Ideal Societies Utilizing Buddhist Principles

In A Prison With No Bars: Mutual Liberation Through Socially Engaged Buddhism In Prison Ministry

By Mary Pauline Diaz

Introduction

“Basically the difference between people who are inside and people who are not inside, is that they got caught. The rest of us haven’t gotten caught. Unless [volunteers] had a personal experience of a family member or friend who’s been incarcerated, there’s always that first tendency to be a little frightened and to think these are different people than us, that they’re in a different universe than the rest of us. They’re not, really.”[3]

–Rev. Genko Kathy Blackman.

Rev. Genko Kathy Blackman is ordained in the Rinzai Zen tradition and affiliated with Dai Bai Zan Cho Bo Zen Ji Temple in Seattle, Wash. In addition to daily Zazen, regular Dharma talks, and the occasional tea service, Dai Bai Zan Cho Bo Zen Ji has a deep connection with a different kind of practice: prison work. Members of the Temple run Zen meditation groups affiliated with the Prison Dharma Network (PDN) at the King County Jail and Monroe Correctional Complex and started a sangha intentionally welcoming released ex-prisoners, and Blackman has served on the Religious Services Advisory Committee of the Washington State Department of Corrections. While Christian chaplaincy and nonsectarian transformative meeting groups (such as 12-step programs) have had an established presence in prisons, the demand for and openness to Buddhist ministries has been recently increasing. In a space of suffering and limitation, these ministries offer prisoners a sense of liberation. Yet such experiences are not merely interactions where volunteers impart teachings on the prisoners; they become a part of the volunteers’ own practice as well.

In this chapter, I explore Socially Engaged Buddhism through prison ministry, arguing that through a starting point of confronting suffering it emphasizes interdependence and non-dualism, which is mutually liberative for the prisoner suffering as well as the volunteer. I focus on PDN and National Prison Hospice Association (NPHA), both founded by Fleet Maull, as they are influential networks in two different kinds of prison ministries in the United States and focus on the reciprocal relationship between so-called benefactor and beneficiary.

Fleet Maull

If not for his influence, Fleet Maull’s work in prisons is at least worth discussing at least for his fascinating starting point and motivation. Uniquely, Maull’s ministry to prisoners began while he was incarcerated himself. At the time he was serving a 14.5-year sentence at

a federal maximum-security prison for extended participation in a high-level drug trafficking enterprise. Strangely, Maull's involvement in cocaine and his involvement in Buddhism occurred in a parallel that would eventually intertwine in prison. Though Maull was interested in Eastern spirituality in his teens, he began to truly pursue it later on during extended travel in Peru, as he encountered like-minded searchers. Peru also happened to be where he began selling drugs as a means of supporting himself. While living there, Maull had heard about the Buddhist-founded Naropa Institute (now Naropa University) where he would eventually complete his graduate degree and become assistant to the Naropa founder and Tibetan teacher Chgyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Meanwhile, he continued to make international cocaine smuggling trips. "I would spend about half the year participating in intensive meditation and dharma study programs and the other half pursuing the life of a smuggler and drug user," he told *Tricycle*. [1, p. 71]

Although Maull managed to sustain his double-life long enough to hide his drug habit from his Buddhist community, he was indicted in 1985 and moved in to federal prison. In the midst of prison's chaos and coldness, Maull continued to lean on meditation as his touchstone. He also quickly involved himself in teaching ESL and GED preparation to his fellow inmates. Notice that even early in his sentence, Maull prioritized his personal Buddhist practice as well as social engagement yet didn't quite integrate the two. Eventually, he began this integration, first by organizing and teaching



Figure 4: Fleet Maull

meditation groups for other inmates. Later, Maull was struck by the needs of dying inmates and set the groundwork for a hospice care program, insisting on the use of inmate volunteers as hospice workers but reaching out to outside volunteers to help train inmate volunteers. Out of these pursuits within his own prison, Maull's work received attention from other Buddhist organizations and prisons interested in similar work. This demand eventually led to the creation of the PDN and NPHA after his early release. Both organizations serve as networks and information resources for communities participating in similar ministries.

Thus, Maull's work came out of directly bearing witness to the experience of suffering in prisons perhaps as directly as possible. He has sit on both the side of the suffering prisoner, whom we might traditionally expect to be the "beneficiary" of some kind of service or charity, as well as the side of the volunteer, whom we might traditionally expect to be the apparent "benefactor" or liberator for others. He has been both of these roles simultaneously, addressing his own suffering as well as that of others and challenging notions of who is suffering and what suffering looks like. Through this method, Maull shows an active non-dualism in what elsewhere translates to a benefactor-beneficiary relationship. The structures of the two programs studied here facilitate and emphasize this as part of the volunteer experience and approach to confronting suffering. In the following sections, I examine the cases of the PDN and NPHA through the Four Noble Truths, naming some of the faces and causes of suffering in these two cases separately but exploring the end of suffering together.

Nature and Origins of Suffering in Prisons in General

There are, of course, many physical and mental sufferings experienced by a typical prisoner; an expectation of systemic suffering is inherent to the identity of “prisoner” and the prisoner’s experience. Physical suffering is institutionally used as a punitive tool, such as deprivation of light, food, and humanizing living spaces. Socially, the prisoners juxtapose extreme lack of privacy with extreme isolation and severance from their familiar relationships and communities, jostled into hostile new social environments with different power dynamics. These circumstances often lead to despair and depression. Maull asserts that the United States’ current incarceration system is systemically designed to create this emotional suffering by communicating to prisoners that they are “subhuman,” riddling prisoners with “a mountain of guilt and shame,” anger, and bitterness.[4, p. 155]

There is also, indeed, a sense of spiritual thirst, as many long to go beyond self and more deeply, mindfully engage the pain (and other aspects) of the prison situation. Traditionally, chaplains and other resources are made available to prisoners, but for religious minorities including Buddhists, the presence of chaplains and groups is still rare. Even with some resources available, spirituality is not a priority of prison culture, regardless of tradition, often leaving a lack of community, leadership, or growth. Blackman reports that some of the inmates who regularly attend her group at the King County Jail are actually Christians “leaning towards meditation” or simply curious.[3]

The suffering of impermanence, or *anitya*, is also a major part of prisoner identity. Each person incarcerated or reintegrating has had a profound experience of being removed from an entire environment, an entire social network, an entire livelihood, an entire familiar and known day-to-day lifestyle to be put in prison. Those who are reintegrating leave familiar norms of prison to return to an “outside world” that has changed during their time in prison. However destructive those past ways of living may have been, suffering still exists in the experience of their disappearance. We can see how the prisoners’ suffering in light of *anitya* is rooted in a clinging to a lost past and a delusion of what life should be like in this moment.

Furthermore, prisoners experience a suffering of deluded self. On the one hand, dissatisfaction (or dis-ease) with their situations and the prison system’s social norms lead prisoners to take on escapism and denial, as opposed to presence and responsibility for their realities.[1, p. 71] Not to mention, the entire social environment of a prison acts as its own society, ruled by an ethic of survival in which each individual is fighting for his own sense of pride and deserving. There are the prisoners’ social groups and the hierarchical relationship with the guards, the resulting “power plays,” a black market economy of smuggled contraband, a system of norms both unofficial and official. [6, p. 74] It is an utterly constructed society of its own, contained within the utterly constructed society that most consider “normal.”

However, there is also a suffering experienced by those who seem to be in power in the prisons: prison guards, administrators, and even legislators. Prison guards and administrators, too, participate in the peculiar prison society. They are causal forces, by carrying out punishment or making legislative decisions (or non-decisions) that maintain the status quo of a punitive and hostile prison environment (rather than, for instance, restorative justice models). Yet even in roles of power, they are not tucked safely away from simply sitting within the devastating environment. Guards are right in the thick of the same space the

prisoners are, expected to maintain control of the prisoners as well as their own emotions in the midst of it, creating a false delusion of self. Prison staffs are often confronted with unusually high rates of alcoholism and suicide. “They’re essentially incarcerated as well,” Blackman said.

One response has been the Prison Dharma Network. The PDN is a network of groups seeking to provide prisoners with contemplative tools “for self-transformation and rehabilitation,” both within and beyond Buddhist practice and tradition. This typically involves volunteers coming in to the prisons and offering time and space for meditation and/or offering teachings, as Blackman does. When Blackman goes to the jail, for instance, the two hours shared with the inmates usually consists of meditation, chanting, a teaching and discussion, closing with more meditation. Other PDN-affiliated groups may lead retreats or other services. Typically, PDN programs are elective and open to prisoners in general, including maximum-security facilities, juvenile detention and a range of other types of settings. Later sections in this paper will further show how the work of the PDN and PDN volunteers such as Blackman respond to the sufferings described above.

Nature and Origins of Suffering of Terminally Ill Prisoners

In addition to the aforementioned sufferings experienced and the obvious physical strain of terminal illness, those dying in prison are dealing with another layer of experiences.

Here, the suffering of *anitya* becomes especially poignant. The impermanence of life itself seems more imminent and obvious, and suffering is experienced through anticipatory remorse for the loss of what could be. “Dying in prison is, in some sense, the ultimate mark of failure in your life. Dying inmates want out,” Maull is quoted saying in *Bearing Witness*.^[4, p. 159] He describes how many inmates fight desperately and obsessively for early release, angry and dissatisfied when they cannot obtain it, if not already angry about their conditions. This suffering is rooted in a displacement from the present moment—either the prisoner is clinging to a past of freedom that is no longer, or he is clinging to a future that is not yet as he stakes his hopes in the prospects and desire of early release. There is a sense of clinging to one’s ego, wanting to preserve oneself from the shame and failure of dying in prison. There is a longing for control where he feels physically, mentally and socially powerless.

Social isolation becomes much more pronounced. Prisoners are severed from the places and people whom they would want to be surrounded by as their lives end, yet visits from friends and family members, even while dying, are extremely limited. Neither can they quite connect to the experience of other prisoners. There is an utter and deep sense of dehumanization, in the shame of dying in prison; in the lack of choice in terms of treatment; as inmates and staff take advantage of the dying person and even loot his possessions; and even in the notoriously poor food, especially for inmates already experiencing low appetites and nutrition because of illness.^[6, p. 144-146]

Seeing this moved Fleet Maull to help develop the first prison hospice in 1987 at the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners (MCFP) in Springfield, MO. This model would later lead to the expansion of prison hospices nationwide and the founding of the NPHA, a “network for the exchange of information between corrections facilities, community hospices, and other concerned agencies” affiliated with hospice care for terminally ill prisoners.^[2] This information includes curricula, trainings and other information or skills. Rather than focusing

on cure, hospice focuses on comforting a terminally ill person's symptoms and improving the quality of the person's last days; one key practice in hospice care is simply offering encouragement and companionship. A paramount component of the NPHA model is the use of inmate volunteers. Inmates commit to staffing the hospice program, and community volunteers from outside the prison teach and train inmates on best practices and methods. The next section will further apply these methods and those of the PDN as a move toward an end to suffering.

An End to Suffering: Prison Dharma Network and National Prison Hospice Association

The third of the Four Noble Truths is the truth of the end to suffering, or nirvana. Specifically, the experience of nirvana is the experience of liberation from the three poisons: greed, ill will, and delusion. Such liberation is reached via the Eightfold Path.

Perhaps one response to a sense of greed and even delusion is the use of inmate volunteers in the hospice program. That inmates choose for themselves to extensively train for such an emotionally exhausting role speaks volumes to the orientation toward liberation from greed. Maull himself describes how hospice work has helped him “discover human dignity,” realize the situations of suffering in others around him, and forced him to confront and deconstruct his own tendency toward anger. In other words, this has a two-way effect that is critical to the liberative ingenuity of the hospice program. The patient receives something. The volunteer receives something. And both patient and volunteer experience a sense of interdependence, gradually dissolving the sense of dualism found in a typical volunteer-beneficiary relationship. For Maull, the work in prison ministry has been an experiment in right intention, shifting away from the blame mentality and a self-centered, if not destructive, lifestyle.

Blackman said she experiences the same phenomenon in the meditation group:

“Sometimes we’ll be in a discussion, and you forgot you’re in prison. It’s like, this is your sangha,” Blackman said. “After a while, you begin to know some of them . . . and you can become very, trusting in a bond that you build with people over time.”

In Blackman's PDN-affiliated Zen meditation group at King County Jail, the work of the volunteer is similarly oriented toward simply realizing human dignity by easing “the tension in an environment where. . . they’ve got to be tough most of the time.” Instead of the hostilities that are more common in a prison environment, the men are able to radically confront the truth of themselves through meditation and through sharing experiences, problems



Figure 5: An inmate hospice volunteer sits at the bedside of his fellow inmate at the Louisiana State Penitentiary

and anxieties with other men. Much of the discussion after meditation and chanting often involves looking at their neighbors' suffering, applying interdependence and compassion on a very practical level. Often Blackman challenges the men to ask themselves and name how their work in that gathering will change how they interact with the first person they see after leaving.

The entire basis of the PDN could quite overtly be summarized in right mindfulness and right concentration; its goal, indeed, is to share practices toward these tools, which go on to encourage other components of the eightfold path. However, it's also worth noting that the PDN itself, being its own community and network of teaching and learning among volunteers, offers a space for prison volunteers to bear witness to each other's joys and suffering and engage in the right action of teaching right concentration. It is, in many ways, part of a vision to transform the prison system at large toward something less greed-oriented, dehumanizing and hierarchical (as opposed to a non-deluded recognition of the truth of interdependence) toward a system that better prepares the inmates for rehabilitation and reintegration.[5]

As prisoners do reintegrate, many of these same sufferings manifest in a new context. Blackman and members of Dai Bai Zan Cho Bo Zen Ji Temple have been involved in working with former inmates reintegrating into typical society who confront the awkwardness, isolation and challenges of returning while attempting to start a right livelihood different from their former ones. Many former inmates, for instance, attempt to become members of lay religious communities such as sanghas and church groups but are rejected on the basis of their criminal records, particularly in cases of sex offenders, and are left still thirsting and seeking a sense of community and fulfillment. In response, members of the temple started a sangha explicitly for former prisoners and other practitioners to commune.[3] Again, the work is simple: practice compassion by creating a welcoming environment. Yet the implications are immense. Such a space enlightens the practitioners to non-dualism, as all sit together in the sangha regardless of what identities (or false selves) might define and exclude them in other environments.

Interestingly, with relationship at the crux of both hospice work and the meditation groups, the volunteer is challenged to engage with detachment as inmates leave. Hospice volunteers confront the patients' impermanence just as they do. PDN volunteers have little guarantee that the inmates who might come to a group will elect to return. In the converse, if inmates are released, there is little guarantee they won't come back to prison or that they will have carried with them any of the work done in meditation groups.

"You have to let it all go after they leave," Blackman said. "You have no idea how they do."

Right action undergirds much of the aforementioned work. The choices of Maull, other participating inmates (be they hospice volunteers or those participating in mindfulness practices), outside volunteers, and even the prison authorities involve action toward reducing harm and suffering. These actions and choices include compassionate companionship and support for prisoners in their suffering, empowering inmates with tools for rehabilitation and tools to choose right livelihood upon their release and reintegration, and in the case of prison authorities, simply choosing to allow and provide resources for these practices to occur. For all prisoners involved, right intention and right action begin with the choice to invite and allow self-transformation toward a life that is less harmful to oneself and others.

Though these ministries involve direct encounter with people in overt suffering, the func-

tion of the PDN and NPHA is to take this grassroots-scale work to larger networks and communities. Ultimately, they are posing an alternative to the philosophy and methods of the larger systems and structures behind United States prisons.

Conclusion

By most expectations, a prison is not an institution for liberation or enlightenment. Through the work of the PDN and NPHA, however, we can see opportunities for each, for those who are commanded into the prisons and for those who choose to be there. Socially Engaged Buddhism, as we see here, looks holistically at the picture of suffering in a situation, allowing social reality to influence Buddhist practice and allowing Buddhist practice to inform response in a way that benefits not only the people we would traditionally expect to be suffering but the people who choose to enter into the challenge of confronting suffering.

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Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism: Idealistic Vision for a Socially Engaged Society

By Marty Tarantino

Society and Suffering

Living within a 21st century context it is easy to assert one's trust in a narrative of progress towards the eventual end of human conflict through technological and scientific advancement. Yet we have just emerged from the most violent century in recorded human history, one facilitated by such developments. During his lifetime (1906-1993), Buddhadasa Bhikku argued that western societal constructs were the culprits of the monstrosities of the modern age.[2] This is due to the promotion of individual strife to obtain that which temporarily satisfies one's desires. In opposition to western social models Buddhadasa conceived his own, which he gave the title of "dhammic socialism." Dhammic socialism exists as a model for an ideal socially engaged Buddhist society in which human suffering is alleviated through the application of key Buddhist principles such as interdependence and loving-kindness.



Figure 6: Buddhadasa Bhikku

Buddhadasa was born Nguam Panitch, receiving his monastic training at 20 years of age in what is contemporarily known as Bangkok, Thailand. There he acquired the title of “Buddhadasa”, meaning “slave of Buddha”. [4] Within his lifetime, Buddhadasa experienced the westernization of Thai culture apparent during the second half of the 20th century. The lingering effects of colonialism within Thailand have contributed to the romanticizing of western culture within the area. Currently most Thai peoples are receiving college educations abroad, ensuing in the erosion of the country’s traditional culture. Within his book titled *Dhammic Socialism*, Donald Swearer suggests that:

The effects of Thailand’s development in the past thirty years have badly eroded the significance and meaning of traditional symbols, institutions, and cultural values. Traditional Thai Buddhism-its beliefs, practices and institutions-has lost centrality in some sectors of Thai life, especially among the educated elite. . . critics of Traditional Thai Buddhism have pointed out that while monks used to be the most respected class of society, that for some people such is no longer the case.[7]

The effects of the scientific age have limited the roles of Buddhist monks to that of keepers of religious ritual. The monks serve as providers of a magically inclined, transcendent Buddhism, whose foundational practice has little effect or prevalence within the lives of lay

peoples. Buddhadasa saw these factors as problematic and as the extension of western culture within his nation.[7]

Buddhaddasa suggests that the issues inherent within Thai society are the result of greed and selfishness.[1] Buddhaddasa regards socio-political institutions as the source of the problem. This is because both Democratic and Communistic political structures promote individual consumerism, and make it possible for leaders to assume and manipulate power positions.[7] He writes:

Because the context of all these problems is social and not just individual, we must turn our attention to the source of the problem: society. Whatever system is laid out for the functioning of a social group, the principles of such a system must be good for the good of society as a whole and not just for individuals or any one person. In a society that puts the interests of any one individual above those of the community, social problems cannot be effectively addressed, because of the context of the problems is the way society operates as a whole.[7]

The poverty of many is a result of moral misconduct by the wealthy, through the stockpiling of resources, whether it's food or money. Buddhaddasa depicts these as "Cataclysmic effects of selfishness".[7] Instead, the monk proposes that society should organize itself in a way which seeks to benefit the whole of its community through the cooperation of each individual member. Within his writings he calls this societal structure "dhammic socialism".[7]

Dhammic Socialism

Buddhaddasa defines dhammic socialism as "A fellowship or community grounded in the dhamma in which all members restrain their own acquisitive self interest to act on behalf of the common good".[5] Here the dhamma implies Buddhist doctrine, the key tool in effectively producing an original state of being (pakati). The term "pakati," is continuously used by Buddhaddasa in his speeches and writings. It is the essence of his teachings on dhammic socialism in that pakati is the state of being which dhammic socialism strives to accomplish. In Pali, pakati means the "original state of things." Nature is pakati, due to its continual state of interdependence, a key component within engaged Buddhism. For the monk morality lies within natural state of our environment not consumed by selfish desires. In his writings on Buddhadasa, Sulak Sivaraksa suggests that,



Figure 7: Suan Mokh Meditation Hall

Buddhadasa defined siladhamma (morality) as 1. the condition of being natural-normal (pakati), 2. The Dhamma which causes naturalness-normality, and 3. the thing which is naturalness-normality (itself).’ Thus siladhamma is a matter of normality, as all pali students are taught.[5]

Here morals could be seen as ethics, as they are the ways in which the dhamma brings about a natural state of being.

There exists three crucial principles at the base of Buddhaddasa’s dhammic socialism. The three principles are; the good of the whole, restraint/generosity, and respect and loving kindness. The first principle is a guideline for economic, social and political constructs, conveying the need for institutions to have the well being of all peoples as the central focus of their motives. The second principle of restraint (niyama), is also taken from the examination of the natural state of things. In order to exist in harmony one must refrain from doing that which is exclusively good for the self. Loving-kindness (metta-karuna), exists as the third principle of dhammic socialism.[5] Like the first two principles, metta-karuna comes from the acknowledgement that one’s well-being is derived from the happiness of the community as a whole. This principle is one of peace and nonviolence. Buddhaddasa writes, “Killing others will only lead to being killed. The only way of living harmoniously together is to act out of loving kindness (metta-karuna). . . We should overcome evil with good, for evil cannot be overcome by evil”.[7] Metta-karuna is universal in that it extends to all things, seeking the harmony of all beings. Such foundational principles can be observed at Buddhaddasa’s Suan Mokkh monastery in Thailand.

An Example of Dhammic Socialism

Wat Suan Mokkh (The Garden of Liberation), exhibits traits the teacher outlined for a dhammic socialist society. Swearer portrays Suan Mokkh as the manifestation of Buddhaddasa’s teachings on dhammic socialism suggesting, “The simplicity of Suan Mokkh represents an ideal balance pakati, not a return to primitiveness but state of Nature (Dhammajati) in which all sentient beings recognize their common humanity [acting] out of mutual respect for the good of the whole”.[7] When depicting dhammic socialism Buddhaddasa continuously uses examples of monastic life as tangible manifestations of the concept. A sort of pakatiness is achieved at Suan Mokkh through a simplistic living style in which one is mostly outside throughout the day. Ajan Tom, a Buddhist monk who has been to Suan Mokkh depicts it simply as being “Very lovely. It is a natural forest. We learn from nature”.[8] Buddhaddasa’s emphasis on pakati permeates the lifestyle within Suan Mokkh, as practitioners are continuously enveloped within their natural surroundings.

Wat Suan Mokkh is inhabited by an average of 40 monks, expanding to 70 during the summer months. A part of the monastery is sectioned off for nuns and practicing women. Around 1000 foreigners travel to Suan Mokkh each year, participating in 10 day silent retreats. There are simple housing units in which practitioners sleep on straw mats. There also exists, structures for meditating and eating, as-well as a library in which Buddhist texts from multiple countries can be found. Practitioners use 8 precepts as guidelines for right conduct within the monastery. These precepts are:

1. Intend not to take away any breath (abstain from killing). 2. Intend not to take away what is not given (abstain from stealing). 3. Intend to keep one's mind and one's body free from any sexual activity. 4. Intend not to harm others by speech. 5. Intend not to harm one's consciousness with substances that intoxicate and lead to carelessness (no alcohol, no drugs, no smoking etc). 6. Intend not to eat between after noon and before dawn. 7. Intend not to dance, sing, play or listen to music, watch shows, wear garlands, ornaments and beautify oneself with perfumes and cosmetics. 8. Intend not to sleep or sit on luxurious beds and seats.[3]

The 8 precepts observed at Suan Mokkh convey the concept of restraint, an integral aspect of the Buddhadasa's dhammic socialist model. This may be in contrast to what one perceives as ordinary, yet these precepts are seen as promoting a true state of normality, or pakati.

Buddhadasa's Effect on Engaged Buddhism

One of the most important engaged Buddhists in contemporary times is Sulak Sivaraksa. Sivaraksa is a Thai Buddhist influenced by the teachings of Buddhadasa Bhikku. Sulak is responsible for the formation of multiple non-governmental organizations with engaged Buddhist ideals. The most prominent of these being the International Network for Engaged Buddhists. This organization is highlighted by its work in assisting Myanmar's democratic activists within their oppressive dictatorship. Buddhadasa's dhammic socialist principles having an inspirational effect on how they envision the future of Myanmar. The ideology of the International Network for Engaged Buddhists is that the alleviation of global suffering is only achievable through the awareness of the issues and compassionate action in helping alleviate the situations. Like many other engaged Buddhist organizations this movement aims to bring the inner-transformation and insights obtained through Buddhist practice into situations of suffering where such compassion is needed.[2]

During Sulak's upbringing, Buddhadasa existed as a countercultural monk with liberal political and religious views. However, Sulak began to revere Buddhadasa's teachings against materialism and consumerism, and their effects on religious and social life. Within his book titled *Loyalty Demands Dissent*, Sulak writes,

Buddhadasa Bhikku's books, writings, and thinking became a great inspiration for me, in particular his book on dhammic socialism. He found socialism and even communism in Buddhist teachings...The monks do not own anything except one alms bowl, three robes, and one needle and thread. The rest they own jointly, or it belongs to the community. I think if we used this model for lay people it would be something wonderful.[6]

This understanding can be seen in the many organizations founded and co-founded by Sivaraksa. For example, the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) was created in response to an educational system promoting individual success over the betterment of the whole. This movement, and the schools spawned from it, promote a system in which students learn through observation and from the environment as well. This is akin to a novice monastic

life, which Sulak participated in during his youth.[6]

Sivaraksa is responsible for starting the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation as-well. The foundation organizes public forums on Buddhism and social justice, and is responsible for media dealing with similar issues. The Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation exists as a legal body for the five “sister groups” of which the International Network for Engaged Buddhists is a part. Members of these organizations include the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Han. The Foundation was started in 1968, adopting a magazine called *Pajarayasara*, the same year. This publication exists today, providing readers with essays written with an “alternative ecological, environmental, Buddhist, and sometimes even Marxist approach”.[6] *Pajarayasara* provides writers with an outlet for socially engaged Buddhist articles, disseminating ideas of social change throughout the world.

This essay attempts to provide its reader with an accurate portrayal of Buddhadasa Bhikku’s conception of a dhammic socialist society. Dhammic socialism is a reaction to social structures which are flawed due to their lack of incorporation of Buddhist principles. The system attempts to apply a living situation one might find in a monastic setting to places in which great suffering and poverty exist due to flawed socio-political models. Such a monastic environment can be observed at Suan Mokkh in Thailand. Buddhadasa’s vision is quite idealistic and quasi-utopian yet serves as an influential model for future social constructs.

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Building a “Buddhist” Society: The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement and the Creation of Disentangling Cultures

By Casey Jones

The concern of the Buddhist traditions with the state of suffering, the alleviation thereof, and the appropriate way of experiencing and knowing reality structures the way that a Buddhist community will perceive itself, its problems, and the solution to those problems as embodied in its goals. Social engagements of Buddhism are the loci of community involvement in which this framework of perceiving and solving problems is informed by the doctrine of a given tradition. Instances of socially engaged Buddhism are, thus, integral to the functioning of the Buddhist traditions as living religious forms. Epitomizing this perspective on socially engaged Buddhism are efforts to restructure society at its foundations, to create “Buddhist” communities and potentially a “Buddhist” world. The ideal community as envisioned by such movements involves the cultivation of a social structure that acknowledges and utilizes Buddhist concepts to create an atmosphere conducive to alleviating suffering (in a worldly sense) and continually disentangling mental processes (in the sense of nirvana). Such concepts include interdependence, the Four Noble Truths, and the *brahmavihara* (Four Divine Abidings). Recognizing that “Buddhist liberation involves not only individuals, but society,” [4, p. 122] such movements seek to cultivate collective effort toward what must, ultimately, be a connected and universal endeavor to extinguish suffering. This work will focus on the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of contemporary Sri Lanka to demonstrate the activities and ideologies underlying “Buddhist” community creation.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (SSM) is a multifaceted, lay-initiated response to suffering in Sri Lanka. Its activities are focused particularly on rural areas. Founded by the lay Buddhist scholar A. T. Ariyaratne in 1958, the SSM has grown from a small group of urban, middle class volunteers to a nation-wide network of self-sustaining and cooperative villages. Its name, which means “working together for the awakening of all,” embodies the way in which Sarvodaya frames Sri Lanka’s problems and the solutions it proposes. Communities are spiritually and materially “awakened” by programs that cultivate mindful cooperation and the development of resources and services that contribute to collective well-being. In order to facilitate “awakening” on multiple levels of individual and community experience, the SSM is divided into a federation of organizations with specific roles that represent the avenues through which the movement engenders reform.

Organization

The economic initiative of the movement is embodied by Sarvodaya Economic Enterprise Development Services (SEEDS), the main objective of which is “to alleviate poverty by promoting economic empowerment of rural people for a sustainable livelihood.” [9] This arm of the movement is concerned with the formation of village infrastructure and economic negotiation within and amongst villages. Its ultimate aim is to create a society without poverty or affluence, in which wealth and resources are equally shared. The Suwasetha group operates as a more immediate response to the unequal wealth distribution in (rural) Sri

Lanka, comprising “20 homes providing love and care to around 600 persons mostly destitute children, malnourished babies, teenage mothers, street children and older persons.” [12] These organizations are initiated externally, but in the spirit of community building are meant to be continued by communities themselves. Once a village can sustain its own “chapter” of Sarvodaya as a collection of “social security” and cooperative avenues, the external national organization becomes peripheral.

Education plays a large part in any attempt to fundamentally restructure society. The branch known as Fusion focuses on “the empowerment of poor communities all over Sri Lanka, by providing access to ICT (Information and Communications Technology).” [2] It calls this kind of activity “e-empowerment”, and provides opportunities for individual students and the communities to which they will return with new skills.

Cultural education is focused primarily on the youth of rural Sri Lanka, consisting of various schools and exchange programs. The Shanthi Sena branch seeks to “develop youth leadership to help encourage a disciplined society free of violence and suffering . . . [and] to promote cooperation between ethnic and religious communities.” [10] Inter-village exchanges are a potent part of Shanthi Sena’s work; in some cases they have transformed atmospheres of religious violence. The story of the Muslim village of Samanthurei and the Tamil village of Weeramuni is particularly illustrative. After villagers from Samanthurei killed almost 200 in an attack on Weeramuni in 1990, violence proceeded as the only intercourse between the neighboring communities. It was not until a Sarvodaya program facilitated the friendship of young women from each village that any reconciliation efforts began. On their initiative, however, a series of exchange programs and cooperative projects have “seen the people of the two villages exchange visits and the relationship between them dramatically improve.” [10]

The crux of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, however, is the conviction that spiritual development must take place at both the individual and societal levels. Here liberation is quite worldly, entailing freedom from “prevailing competitive, unethical and violent market forces promoted by the broader society.” [1, p. 73] Sarvodaya’s spiritual programs are extensive, but most ongoing projects are centered at the Vishva Niketan Peace Center. It was “established in the firm belief that enduring peace can only be attained when individuals achieve inner peace—cessation of conflict within themselves,” [8] and offers meditative programs for a diverse clientele. Business people attend workshops to cultivate compassionate leadership, expecting parents can explore the spiritual and social dynamics of supporting one another and their child, and prisoners are given the tools with which to process their feelings of guilt, anger, and shame in constructive ways.

Problems and Solutions

As hinted in the specific focuses of the SSM’s organizational branches there are several key issues in (rural) Sri Lankan society that it considers direly problematic. Approaching these problems with a Buddhist lens, the SSM can frame them in terms of individual and societal *dukha* (suffering). *Dukha* is an experience of entangling, destructive responses to and creations of the phenomenal world that cause anxiety, pain, and iniquity. The *dukha* that the SSM attempts to alleviate involves many concerns specific to Sri Lanka’s historical, political, ethnic, and religious condition and general to all societies. Specific to Sri Lanka are violent national and local conflicts between the majority Sinhala ethnicity and the minority Tamils

isolated in the northeast quadrant of the island nation. Until relatively recently the government was actively involved in the suppression of the Tamils, provoking a violent separatist movement among them. Local inter-village tensions have persisted, only exacerbated by the previous political sanction. As mentioned above, villages within miles of each other become embroiled in religious or ethnic aggression and retribution, with seemingly little interference by the urban authority of Colombo.

Poverty and affluence are two further social dysfunctions that Sarvodaya attempts to ameliorate. Especially in rural areas, global and national trends of competitive commercialism have created ruptures within communities as well as extreme inequality in wealth distribution. Starvation plagues the impoverished; lack of access to clean water, modern agricultural techniques, and investment capital perpetuates villages on the brink. Educational opportunities that might alleviate these struggles are, likewise, scarce.

The Sarvodaya model for resolving these issues begins with the organization and cooperative action of a village and culminates in the decentralized networking of various villages for the sake of peace and empowerment. Stage one entails “inquiry from the village and organization of an introductory “shramadana” (voluntary labor for others) camp for the village, during which problems are analysed together and needs identified.” [7] Here economic, ethnic, and religious divisions become peripheral to the needs and thoughts shared, voiced, and considered openly by all. The community is empowered with a lived growth of camaraderie, shared purpose, and shared success. When the ground breaking has been done for building a village of cooperation and mindful peace the foundation can be laid for equity in directing further development.

Stage two involves the “establishment of various groups (children’s, youngsters, mothers’ and farmers’ groups), construction of a child development center, and training of staff.” [7] Equality as an extension of interdependence is safeguarded by quotas for village council representatives from different age, social, and religious groups. If all beings work into the causes and conditions that sustain and create any given being at any given moment, and if all members of the village are recognized as having a stake in any collective decision, it is only natural that all interests and ideas should have their voices heard. Sarvodaya later introduces “family gatherings,” so titled to underscore the familial connection shared by all persons and all beings. With the understanding that equality occasionally necessitates the privileging of certain parts of the community (to counter pre-existing disadvantage), “in a family gathering,’ the first opportunity to observe their religious practices is given to the minority religious groups before the majority performs their recitations or rituals.” [1, p. 75] Buddhist meditation takes place afterward, but even here Ariyaratne’s model employs a tradition of emptying out the title of “Buddhism” such that “recognition of the multicultural nature of Sri Lankan society [has] led Sarvodaya to attempt to translate its Buddhist ideology into a nonsectarian ideology.” [4, p. 136] This is not to say that Sarvodaya divests Buddhism of its religious particularity, simply collapsing certain forms into a secular program. Rather, there is an expansion of Buddhism as a context of social upaya (skillful means) that makes space for plurality even as it is the superstructure in which that plurality has its freedom defined.

Stage three initiates a “program for meeting the basic needs and setting up institutions;” stage four expands upon this foundation of necessity in “measures to produce income and employment [and the] establishment of complete self-reliance and self-financing.” [7] The idea

of giving (*dhana*) becomes crucial here; the wealthy give of their excess that wealth may be balanced, the poor give all that they can to contribute to their community, and all give their work, time, and thought to the development of education, infrastructure, and food and water sources. For the SSM “giving is a practice for developing oneself . . . it gives something that is needed, heightens awareness of interdependence, and builds community.” [3, p. 37] Giving is further explored as a means of living the reality of interdependence positively and creating a larger “Buddhist society in stage five of the plan, defined as support for other village communities.” [7] In stage five “pioneer villages,” which have attained economic and spiritual self-sufficiency (not to be confused with any terminal “perfection”), promote villages that still require outside support. In the early 1990’s “85% of its external aid dried up, [and] the movement was forced to . . . [rely] on so-called pioneer villages to provide support for the surrounding communities still requiring development.” [5] Having established the spiritual and physical foundations of working constructively within the realities of an interdependent world, the communities of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement were able to sustain the further growth of their mission almost on their own.

Informing Doctrine

The lens of the SSM is informed extensively by Theravada concepts such as the Four Noble Truths, interdependence, mindfulness, and the *brahma vihara* (Four Divine Abidings). Each of these will be explored in terms of their influences on the outlook and activities of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement.

According to the First Noble Truth, *dukkha* is a universal experience encountered by all beings. The social and political structures that surround the lives of humans and their communities create the most frequent ways in which *dukkha* is experienced. These structures define and reinforce the ways in which the three poisons of greed, hate, and delusion fit into our very “selves” ranging from the subconscious to the obvious. Some specific manifestations of *dukkha* in Sri Lanka have already been described.



Figure 8: Community metta meditation held in Ampara, the war-torn eastern province of Sri Lanka, in solidarity for peace

As important as recognizing the form of *dukkha* is identifying its sources, both in terms of specific causes and in terms of their more conceptual explanations. In identifying the form of the Second Noble Truth, the arising of suffering, one can mount a Buddhist response that will bring the individual, the community, and society at large into a healthier way of understanding and interacting. Ignorance, taken as the primary cause of suffering by virtue of the space that it creates for craving and alienating dualism, must be cleared away in accordance with that to which it pertains. If society is ignorant of the interdependence of all phenomena, then that concept must be illuminated. *Dukkha* is complicated, however, because it is

multifaceted. The SSM works to disentangle various forms and causes of social suffering that are, themselves, deeply inter-related and entrenched.

In a pamphlet that it distributes to villages that seek the aid and empowerment programs it offers, the SSM observes that “persons and groups lacking peace of mind hang on to nationality, language, religion, politics, ethnic groups . . . and engage themselves in anti-society acts of crime, terrorism, and war.”[11, p. 5] Specifying the causal pathways of ignorance and agitation leading to all manner of suffering, the organization proceeds to the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, the cessation of *dukha* and the practice that entails that cessation. The transformation of society from a *dukha*-centered and *dukha*-generating one into a liberated “Buddhist” nation is seen as the ultimate, ongoing aim.

Just as doctrine informs the framing and investigation of socially structured *dukha*, so too does it form the scaffolding of approaches to deconstructing systems of damaging causation. The Theravada tradition suggests that a correct way of experiencing/knowing the world will allow one to quench the flames of *dukha*; here the Sarvodaya highlights the notion of interdependence as the key attribute of the cosmos that a fragmented society must come to recognize. Meditation techniques and a systematization of the *brahma vihara* provide the practical framework in which interdependence can be navigated for the sake of creating positive co-causation. Directed by the idea that empowered and educated individuals will collectively construct empowered and peaceful societies, “Sarvodaya has [organized] quite a number of visible people’s participatory peace programs,” and realized “the participation of thousands.”[1, p. 75] A community is brought together, its members are equally empowered in deciding the direction of collective action, and each takes part in responsibility for such action. “Instead of competition,” such a process “stresses cooperation . . . promotes interdependence and sharing . . . [and] offers practical wisdom and hope.”[6] Such an experiential understanding of life qua interdependence lays the foundation for further individual and collective disentangling from *dukha*.

While the abstract notion of interdependence is taught by way of tangible community activity, building on this foundation in a tangible, active way returns to more abstract ideology and religious practice. In addition to community work programs, the Sarvodaya holds a variety of mass meditation workshops in villages and in larger urban areas. Whole villages and village networks participate in the spiritual practice of cultivating mindfulness in a progression that Ariyaratne marks with the Four Divine Abidings. While it is argued that “Sarvodaya . . . teaches that the Four Divine Abidings serve primarily as guidelines for social action,”[4, p. 127] it also employs and seeks to develop them at a metaphysical level. The misleading (because dualistic) cycle of co-creating thought and action serves here as a helpful illustrative tool; meditation on, say, loving kindness inspires activity rooted in such, while such activity is conducive to and causative of further attainments in thinking loving kindness. Framed as the non-terminating phases through which meditation and community work initiate the creation of a “Buddhist” society, the Sarvodaya utilizes the Four Divine Abidings as follows:

[It] takes the first principle, metta or loving kindness, to mean respect for all life, cultivating love for all beings. This principle leads to the second, karuna, or compassion, which Sarvodaya understands as compassionate action. Mudita, or sympathetic joy, results from acting on the first two principles because one sees how one's efforts have helped others. . . . The fourth principle, upekkha, or equanimity, becomes important for developing a personality structure unshaken by praise or blame, by gain or loss.”[4, p. 127]

One sees how each step in this process leads to a deeper level of individual understanding and the development of a “personality structure” that recognizes parity between the “self” and the community. If those “lacking peace of mind” cling to divisions that wreak havoc on inter-personal and inter-community relationships, then those with loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity can see interdependence and *live it* as peace. In the creation of a “Buddhist” society, one that embraces all members irrespective of religion, race, species, et cetera, the Divine Abidings cultivate a living context of ongoing liberation. *Dukha* is quelled in a metaphysical, “transcendent” way when this context continues to be conducive to a constant experience of reality, and relationship, as they truly are.

In their intention to recognize, analyze, and quell *dukha* in the experience of all beings, the Buddhist traditions necessarily encounter the manifestations thereof that constitute social problems on individual, community, and structural levels. “Activism” comes into play as a reaction and mobilization of Buddhist doctrine and practice within the social sphere. The Sarvodaya Shramadana makes use of doctrine and practice to develop the spiritual and physical foundations of a peaceful, cooperative, and healthy Sri Lankan society; in so doing it constitutes an effort to establish a social mode that is particularly “Buddhist” in character. Despite the movement’s stated and actual focus on this-worldly elements of liberation from suffering it retains the hue of “transcendence” in its aims. Creating a “Buddhist” society, in fact, accomplishes both worldly and metaphysical progress towards “awakening” to the extinguishing of *dukha*. For the ever-exoticized and mysterious *nirvana* need not mean alienation, escape, and termination from the world; it can just as rightly be seen as the processional way of being without ignorance as to the nature of reality and relationship, and thus without the causes and forms of *dukha* that arise there from.

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Part III

Buddhism and Politics: Engagement, protest, social activism, and peace-making

Becoming Socially Engaged in Burma: The Utilization of Buddhism in the Protection of Human Rights

By Leslie Reilly

For nearly 25 years, the people of Burma have had their human rights violated by their government. Sallie King best describes these violations as the many forms of human oppression including race, politics, economics, and religion. The military junta, or governance, in Burma has taken on the effort to “restore order” throughout the country using fear and violence as the means to achieve a sense of “order.”[7] Speaking ill of the government undoubtedly leads to imprisonment, torture, or even death. Following the government’s brutal killing of over 3,000 demonstrators in 1988, very few civilians have been brave enough to voice their dissatisfaction with the oppressive government. It was not until 2007, when a massive, yet peaceful demonstration by the Theravada Buddhist monks in Rangoon, mobilized the population again.[8] Socially Engaged Buddhism becomes a applicable system for the Buddhist monks to protest the Burmese government, ultimately serving as a platform for social, political, and economic change.

A Country of Revolution: Burma in the 20th Century

The massive human rights violations in Burma are greatly attributed to the political issues that have challenged Burma for decades. After World War II, Burma demanded full independence from Britain, which was achieved in 1948. General Aung San was assassinated, and a weak democratic government took control of the country. Prime Minister U Nu asked the military to step up in 1958 to restore order. They stepped down several months later only to allow General Ne Win to lead a military coup that abolished the constitution that was created after World War II. Through the creation of socialist policies, General Ne Win crippled the country’s economy and businesses. Ne Win carried out disastrous policies per lack of planning and education. He changed the value of the currency to reflect his favorite number, put people in power that he knew he could control, and changed policies and laws to ensure his own personal success rather than benefit the country His party, the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP), was the only party allowed in the country. In the upcoming decades, Ne Win would destroy student demonstrations through violence, and in 1988, his military forces would kill thousands of Burmese protesters. As a result, General Aung San’s daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, stepped up as the opposition leader against the Burmese government.

With the country now in a state of political turmoil because of political opposition against the BSPP, the government called for a new military junta that used violence and fear to crush

any demonstrations within the city. To maintain power, the government refused to let Aung San Suu Kyi lead the country in the wake of her winning the May 1990 elections. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was created, and the law enforcement affiliated with the government took control of Burma through violence and oppression. Conditions in Burma would remain unchallenged for almost twenty years.[7]

Theravada Buddhism in Burma

The vast majority of Burma practices Theravada Buddhism, which is the oldest and more conservative of the two Buddhist traditions.[11] The Theravada tradition closely follows the Four Noble Truths, which includes the Noble Eightfold Path. Within this tradition, the Four Noble Truths are clear guidelines as to how the truth, taught by the Buddha, can be awakened.

In Burma, the government respects Theravada Monks more than lay practitioners of Theravada Buddhism. Historically the Monks have been able to practice their beliefs freely and they have used alms bowls to ask lay practitioners for money and food. The bowl is known for its “humble” uses and its symbolic nature devoted to the teachings of the Buddha.[5] During the Saffron Revolution, the monks made strong, symbolic displays of discontent with the government such as turning over their alms bowls in protest. Such simple acts carried a great deal of weight that resonated within the government. Also, it and brought a sense of discomfort to the government because they lost support from such an influential sector of Burmese society by way of the monks.



Figure 9: Monks turning their alms bowls in protest

Buddhism: Becoming Socially Engaged

If Buddhism is stripped down to its most basic elements, in practice, it is the awakening of the one truth. Although there is more than one means to attain this truth, the Four Noble Truths guide those in practice on a journey to enlightenment. However, it is when these truths are transformed into action that Buddhism becomes socially engaged. Because the term Socially Engaged Buddhism is malleable, for the context of this paper it is best understood as the process of creating peace and understanding on a global level through the relief of suffering by utilizing compassion to create. These ideas led the 2007 demonstrations against the government, which were peaceful, at least on the side of the protesters, which became known as the Saffron Revolution because of the saffron colored robes worn by the monks protested.

Following the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, the father of “engaged Buddhism,” who teaches from his experiences during the war in Vietnam, peaceful resistance has shown to be

a successful product of Socially Engaged Buddhism. Aung San Suu Kyi is a prime example of a Burmese leader, and Buddhist, who protests through peace. She has gained support from the majority of Burma's population through fair elections. Her opposition to the ruling military junta is peaceful, yet they put her under house arrest.[9, 3, p. 2]

Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy of Interbeing is crucial to understanding Socially Engaged Buddhism, especially in Burma. Ultimately, its not possible to be alone, you need other beings, both human and non-human. All beings need society beyond the family, including nature. It's impossible to survive alone, so you have to be inter-be with everyone else because man is made of non-man elements.[4] The things around us help make us, and we need to treat them with compassion, love, and respect. It is through this philosophy that Socially Engaged Buddhism becomes so relevant. In relation to Burma, since we all inter-be and we are all connected through Interbeing, we must engage in making the world peaceful through freedom, peace, and solidarity. In the current state of Burma, the country's citizens are not free, and they do not live in a place where there is peace and solidarity. Since there is interconnectedness between all beings, Buddhism must be used as the peaceful means to bring change to the country so that happiness can be brought to its people. According to the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, social change must occur to affect the way people are treated in Burma, and this can be achieved through Buddhist practice. In regards to Burma, Socially Engaged Buddhism creates a peaceful voice for the people who are oppressed and fearful of their own government.

Human Rights Violations in Burma: The Path to the Saffron Revolution

Over the years, military violence in Burma has been one of the leading actions that disregard the human rights of Burmese citizens, especially political protesters. Even peaceful protest has been criminalized in recent years. Prisoners face inadequate facilities and supplies, brutality from guards, lack of medical care, torture, and in some cases even death. Burma has an estimated 1,200 political prisoners, one of the highest numbers in the world.[2]

Civilians are also faced with crushing poverty and harsh rules that take away basic human rights. According to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all humans are subject to basic human rights including not being tortured or treated inhumanely, the right to a fair and impartial trial, and most importantly, the freedom of opinion and expression.[6] Yet, Burmese civilians live in fear of imprisonment and torture if they were to ever speak out about the harsh living conditions they are forced to endure. It appeared on paper that the government's socialist policies were helping the people, but there was a "reality of decay and neglect for most of the population." Very few children are actually in school, and students are often cut off from the rest of society to prevent an uprising against the government. Less than one percent of Burma's GDP goes into healthcare services which has led to a high infant mortality rate and the one of the shortest life expectancies in Asia.[12, p. 96-97] The military government does not use its resources to provide for the people, but rather to build a oppressive military.

"The Lady": Aung San Suu Kyi

After years of travel, Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma where she was put under house arrest in 1989 for “attempting to destroy military unity.” [12, p. 88] Although she has been in and out of house arrest since then, the government recognizes that it is in their best interest to make sure that no harm comes to her, as they would certainly be held responsible. She became better known as “the Lady” because of the fact that her name alone gave her political legitimacy being the daughter of the national founder Aung San[12, p. 89].



Figure 10: Aung San Suu Kyi meets the protestors at the gate of her home

Over the years, Aung San Suu Kyi has called for discussion and dialogue with the junta, all of which have been denied. In 2010, there was fear that allowing Aung San Suu Kyi freedom in Burma would mean a loss during the election. Aung San Suu Kyi continues to call for a great deal of change in Burma including, “representative government, civilian control of the military, better education (including scholarships), improved access to health, and some form of federal structure for minorities.”[12, p. 89]

Aung San Suu Kyi has declared herself a “believing Buddhist.”[10] She has stated that her Buddhist beliefs have had a great influence on how she goes about her work as an activist for the basic human rights for the Burmese people. Most notably, she said:

I started out in politics, in this movement for democracy, I always started out with the idea that this should be a process that would bring greater happiness, greater harmony and greater peace to our nation. And this cannot be done if you are going to be bound by anger and by desire for revenge. So I've never thought that the way to go forward was through anger and bitterness, but through understanding, trying to understand the other side, and through the ability to negotiate with people who think quite differently from you and to agree to disagree if necessary – if necessary and to somehow bring harmony out of different ways of thinking.[10]

Suu Kyi’s perspective is clearly one that has deep roots within Buddhist tradition. She addresses the importance of remembering the past, but also the mindfulness associated with being in the present. To achieve the truth, there cannot be a clinging, attachment, or ignorance. As a voice for both political and social change in Burma, Suu Kyi has asserted her Buddhist beliefs and turned them into action, essentially participating in Socially Engaged Buddhism.

Burma VJ: Buddhist Monks and the Saffron Revolution

The film, *Burma VJ*, shows the most intimate look of peaceful activism turned violent in Burma. In 2007, doubling fuel prices act as a catalyst, setting off a series of events that put

the brutality of the junta and the tame protesters on global display.[8]

Typically, people never speak out against the government because it is so dangerous. In the film, one man leads a solo protest and is taken out by government officials within minutes. Officials swarm the streets of Rangoon, unidentifiable, and incredibly dangerous. Days later another woman, surrounded by her supporters for safety, leads another protest. Again, government officials crush the protest immediately. Footage of these events gets out of Burma, and makes the injustices in Burma known globally on a mass scale, for the first time.[8]

Buddhist monks soon lead another series of protests. At first, the monks do not want to be taped because they are afraid the cameras are some form of government intelligence. A small group of monks march through the streets of Rangoon, untouched by the government officials. It is disgraceful to be violent towards a monk, and the people of Rangoon begin to march alongside the monks in support. The march is peaceful and includes gestures and chants of discontent with the political structure. It calls for peace and freedom. The country of Burma is 89% Buddhist and it is clear that the people of Burma follow the Buddhist monks for both political and religious reasons.[7] The monks march on a daily basis for just under a week. Each day they rally more and more support. A few days in, however, the government becomes unhappy with the hundreds of thousands of protesters that join the monks in their peaceful march. Violence ensues. A Japanese journalist is shot, point blank, for taping the protest, and one of the video journalists catches it on film.

The next day, the demonstration goes to the home of Aung San Suu Kyi. When they arrive at her heavily guarded gate, she meets them there, crying. All of the demonstrators at the gate are also crying. There is an understanding of a common cause and need for change.[8]

After almost a week of protesting, the government decided to take one last brutal stance against the protesters, and their Buddhist leaders. In the middle of the night, once a curfew has been imposed on the people of Rangoon, the military devastated the monk's living quarters, taking hundreds of monks as prisoners, leaving puddles of blood and broken items everywhere. Days later, one monk is found dead in a creek in Rangoon.[8]

This film's story illuminates the violations of human rights in Burma, and the violent lashing out against peaceful Buddhist monks. In Burma, Socially Engaged Buddhism mobilized tens of thousands of civilians to speak out against the injustices against them. Although the monks were well aware of the dangers of their protest, they did it anyway, knowing that it would be the only way to bring change to Burma. Even though the monks were eventually swallowed by the corrupt system, their protest did something far beyond the realm of their marches. They brought awareness of the issues within Burma to the outside world. Their protests showed the world the brutality of the military ruling junta. Because the vast majority of the population is Buddhist, there is a strong system of support by the lay persons for the monks. Civilians, as part of their Buddhist beliefs, give the monks money and food, and if the government does not support them, the government will face even more scrutiny.

Ongoing Change: The All Burma Monk's Alliance

In the aftermath of the Saffron Revolution, the Burmese Monks from the 2007 demonstrations created the All Burma Monk's Alliance (ABMA) to support and assist refugee monks inside

and outside of Burma in the wake of the revolution. The ABMA currently provides a support system for both the monks from the Saffron Revolution and Burmese civilians who seem to have been forgotten by the rest of the world.[1]

The ABMA has two fundamental objectives. First, it seeks to care for the Monks from the revolution who face torture and punishment from the Burmese government. Second, the ABMA is also still providing strong, peaceful support for the civilian population in Burma. They seek to promote democracy in the country while also defending traditional Theravada Buddhist tradition. The ABMA stresses the importance of education for the monks and the poor in Burma. This is done through what the ABMA declares the “customary” roles of the Burmese monks, which includes “distributing reading material and sponsoring meetings and discussions (dhamma talks) on Buddhist beliefs, practices and education.”[1]

The ABMA strives for political change within Burma, to better both the monks and lay people through Buddhist practice and education. The alliance is a perfect model for the application of Socially Engaged Buddhism. The ABMA aims to relieve the suffering of the Burmese people through Buddhist practice, more specifically, to end the violations of human rights. The organization’s goals are two fold. They call for both an implementation of Buddhist practice and political change. This emphasizes the fact that the two do not act independently, but rather co-dependently. Both politics and Socially Engaged Buddhism are used in order to end the numerous Human rights violations that occur within Burma.

Impact: Socially Engaged Buddhism in Burma

One of the most significant points of Socially Engaged Buddhism is its communal aspect. There is such a sense of community between the monks and the civilians, and even between civilians alone. A sense of camaraderie forms from not only a common cause, but also a common, peaceful approach towards that cause. Since “Buddhism is based on service to others” it is as if the demonstrators are there for a common cause; one another.[9, 3, p. 14] There is a great sense of interconnectedness between all of the people marching in Rangoon in 2007. What started with the monks trickled down to the lay persons.

Socially Engaged Buddhism addresses the human rights violations in Burma in many ways. Through mindfulness practices people can achieve peace, freedom, and solidarity. Violence will not achieve desired peace and freedom.[4] Despite the terrible treatment by the government, the monks and civilians of the Saffron Revolution were only peaceful. Aung San Suu Kyi, who has used her Buddhist beliefs as a platform to fight for fair democracy in Burma, has followed these ideals throughout her decades long fight for fair government and social policy within the country.

Essentially, the human rights violations in Burma have been greatly addressed by the Four Noble Truths, and more specifically the Noble Eightfold Path. The Saffron Revolution was led by speech and action along with the concept of mindfulness, or being present. Although atrocities are still being committed, there has been a great deal of change that has allowed the country to move forward. Because there is such an immense connection between all beings, Socially Engaged Buddhism allows for there to be care for other beings and the social changes that carry permanent improvements in the lives of the millions being subjected to the human rights violations in Burma.

The implementation of Socially Engaged Buddhism in Burma has utilized Buddhist prac-

tice to make political changes. Just as Aung San Suu Kyi has show, Buddhist practice can influence the political changes that must take place in Burma.

In the context of Burma, Engaged Buddhism is applied Buddhism, and it is part of society's transformation. Burma exemplifies how a population can mobilize the teachings of the Buddha in order to make social, economic, and political changes. Burma allows us to see that through attempting to attain the truth, individuals can change society. Although today Burma is still under constant government surveillance, and the living conditions are still appalling, the Saffron Revolution relived the suffering of the people by giving them a soft voice, if only for a moment.[12, p. 169-170] Burma helps us to understand Socially Engaged Buddhism as how traditional Buddhist beliefs can be assembled to call for social and political change.

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Self-Immolation (Chinese-Tibet Relations)

By Sean Abel

Dawa Tsering, a thirty-eight year old Tibetan monk, was part of the Kardze monastery in the Sichuan Province of Tibet. During the monastery’s annual ritual dance (Cham) Tsering doused himself in gasoline and set himself ablaze. As he burned, he shouted for the Dalai Lama’s return from exile in Dharamsala, demanding Tibetan freedom and equality. This all took place on October 25th of 2011 at 9:30 in the morning. Tsering was one of many Tibetans who have self-immolated, demanding equality for their fellow countrymen, and the return of their leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama.[2] The act of self-immolation, within its specific context—in this case committed publicly by Buddhist monks in Asia—is an incredibly complex act to be analyzed in relationship to a) Buddhism’s teachings of peace and non-violence, and b) as a means of protest aimed at affecting social change. A question that must be asked is, do self-immolators through their self-immolation embody the vow of the bodhisattva that is central to Socially Engaged Buddhism? For the purposes of this paper, Socially Engaged Buddhism will be defined as the vow of the bodhisattva—the vow to liberate all sentient beings—in action on an individual, communal, and global scale. Determining whether self-immolation should qualify as a viable tool for socially engaged Buddhists bears dangerous ramifications. The aforementioned question will not be answered here, but should act as a Koan, a way to explore the profundity of the statement of self-immolation.

What must be addressed immediately is the violence and destruction of life inherent in the act of self-immolation. Every Buddhist tradition, “places substantial emphasis on cultivating respect for life, including human life, and discourages actions which result in *dukkha*. . . including harm to oneself or others.”[5, p. 301] Indeed, “[t]he Buddha explicitly warned monks that assisting, inciting or praising suicide would result in expulsion from the *Sangha*.”[5, p. 302] In fact, determining an act of self-immolation as ‘justifiable’ or not is both antithetical to Buddhism and entirely too simplistic a view to take. Qualifying self-immolations as permissible or no would establish guidelines, or a universal rule under which the act would be acceptable or unacceptable. The violence done to a person through self-immolation may be conceived of counter-intuitively. What has been suggested is, “acts of self-immolation. . . might be understood as ‘taking on’ violence, akin to placing one’s body



Figure 11: Tibetan monks who have self-immolated since 2009

between an aggressor and victim, when such an action means the loss of one's life." [10] One could view this purported "taking on" of violence to be an example of the Buddhist teaching of no-self, wherein one might empty him or herself in order to be filled with the beings that one co-dependently arises with. Can it be said though that "taking on" violence through self-sacrifice lessens the violence of suicide?

When the topic of self-immolation arises, it is most often associated with Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation during the Vietnam War as a means of protest. Quang Duc's action bears obvious similarities to that of Dawa Tsering's and other Tibetan self-immolators in that, "Prior to self-immolation, Thich Quang Duc made a plea for religious equality." The accompanying results of the respective self-immolations—Quang Duc's self-immolation and Tsering's self-immolation—should also be noted. For Thich Quang Duc:

Thich Thien-An, a Buddhist monk imprisoned in Vietnam in 1963, was later asked about Buddhist self-immolations during this period and stated that the Buddhist self-immolations had succeeded in increasing international pressure on Vietnam, resulting in the release of some twenty thousand Buddhist monks, nuns, and professors who had been unjustly imprisoned (Thich Thien-An, 1975). [5, p. 302]

Tibetan self-immolation, like that of Dawa Tsering's, has brought about the same international awareness that Thich Quang Duc's immolation did in the 1960's. Tenzin Tsundue in the documentary film "The Sun Behind the Clouds," argues that, "the Tibetan people inside Tibet. . . have set the example that by confronting the injustice you can really awaken your own people, gain support from [the] international community, and expose Chinese brutality." [9] Bringing awareness to suffering and its cause are part of the Four Noble Truths that make up the heart and foundation of Buddhism. One can argue that Tsering self-immolated with the intention of bringing about freedom for Tibetans, and at the very least with the intention of bringing awareness to the situation in Tibet.

When evaluating the Karmic value of an action, Buddhism places emphasis on the intention of the action, not just on its results. Therefore, taking into account Tsering's demands for religious freedom are crucial in conceptualizing his sacrifice. Karma Lekshe Tsomo shows that, "Mahayana texts clearly state that an action taken with *bodhicitta*, the altruistic attitude of wishing to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, is infinitely virtuous." [1] Seeking equality and religious freedom isn't necessarily the achievement of enlightenment for all sentient beings. At the very least it can be said that seeking equality and religious freedom for fellow beings is altruistic, and a step on the path to enlightenment, as someone who cannot practice free of persecution cannot attain enlightenment. The Sutra on Upasaka Precepts shows that the Buddha states that a bodhisattva, "might sacrifice his body and life in order to end the suffering of others, bring peace and happiness to others, eliminate his own attachments to his body, or repay the kindness of his parents." [5]

The Lotus Sutra, the Jataka tales, and the apocryphal Fanwang jing are Buddhist texts that provide commentary and justification for self-sacrifice. [4] The Fanwang jing and Lotus Sutra are widely cited as the grounds upon which Chinese Buddhist monks burn parts of their bodies during ordination. [4, p. 297] Burning during ordination—a practice limited almost exclusively to Chinese Buddhism—was a symbol of penance [4, p. 302], and not intended as a

means of political protest as Dawa Tsering's self-immolation was. One can assume though from the wide distribution of the Lotus Sutra and the apocryphal Fangwang jing text that other Buddhist traditions are familiar with teachings espousing self-immolation although they do not practice them. Does familiarity with texts that encourage sacrifice, at times sacrifice of one's own life, by chance cue one to carry out such an act? As far as Buddhism goes, doing something just because a tradition prescribes it is against the Buddhist ideal because the Buddha taught that one should only believe or follow a teaching if it coincided with one's own experience of life.

The Jataka tales espouse acts of compassion born out of self-sacrifice. In relation to self-immolation, the most widely cited story is a Jataka tale in which "Sakyamuni, in a previous life as Mahasattva, sacrificed his own flesh to prevent a starving tigress from devouring her cubs." [1, p. 144] The Jataka are of vital significance to self-immolation as, "the Buddhist moral ideal. . . is fleshed out in the prototypical examples of the Buddha's actions during his lifetime." [7, p. 60] Seeing as the Buddha's life is an example by which to live, stories of his mortal sacrifices provide justification for self-immolation. "However, it is not certain that such passages [of the Jataka tales] provided textual justification for the acts of self-sacrifice by Buddhists in China and Vietnam." [1, p. 144] As one can see, there is an impasse of whether or not the Jataka tales validate bodily self-sacrifice.

To attain a deeper understanding of self-immolation, one must examine when it has occurred historically, and how Buddhists and non-Buddhists view it. In the case of Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation, it has been posited that, "if there had been any more eloquent way of projecting his message adequately, Thich Quang Duc would surely have chosen it instead of self-immolation." [10, p. 312] If self-immolating was Thich Quang Duc's only option, or the most skillful option, for delivering his message, then he was demonstrating both Right Speech and Right Act. Is the same assertion—that self-immolation was the only means to deliver a message—applicable to Tibetan monks and nuns who have self-immolated?

What is of vital importance to keep in mind when considering self-immolation is " 'the moral value of a given act is to be judged in relation both to time, place, and circumstance and to the interests of the totality of all others in the future as well as now.' " [7, p. 60] In terms of Buddhism, "an individual who sacrifices his life out of compassion rather than despair may still be seen as admirable." [5, p. 306] Historically, self-immolation as a compassionate act was seen as the self-immolating monk alleviating suffering, yet simultaneously transgressing a monastic vow. [5, p. 308] On the other hand, "[t]he spirit of a person who commits suicide out of despair or depression is believed to be intensely dissatisfied and therefore likely to wander as a hungry ghost." [1, p. 142] Was Tsering's immolation the last act of a desperate man, or a sacrifice committed out of compassion for the suffering of his fellow beings? Furthermore, are the states of compassion and despair mutually exclusive, and how is the conceptualization of this act different based on Tsering's state of mind?

At this point, a strictly Buddhist framework for analysis has reached its limit and one must examine the nature of suicide as protest itself. Self-immolation blurs the line between violence and non-violence as well as that between communal and individual action. Sallie B. King argues that, "[i]t is one of the central and most striking facts of these cases that [self-immolators] were acting out of unusually profound faithfulness and obedience to the deepest spiritual principles of their respective faiths. This is precisely what makes this matter so troubling for each faith community." [6] A suicide as protest then seems to be both egoistic

and altruistic. For the purposes of examining self-immolation in the case of Tibet, Tsering's immolation can be qualified as "performatic suicide," because, "performatic suicide is performed *both within and against society*. Therefore, while it shares common characteristics with both egoism and altruism, performatic suicide differs in both intention and effect." [10, p. 66] Because Tsering's immolation was performed within his moral community, the Tibetan community is inextricable from his act, and must be considered. King demonstrates that, "in at least the case of Thich Quang Duc. . . the famous photograph by Malcolm Browne shows . . . the circle of monks and nuns is a barrier against intervention [of the self-immolation]. This was a group action." [6, p. 134] One must ask, "is it possible to commit an altruistic suicide without the implicit agreement, consent and/or encouragement of your community?" [10, p. 65]

Dawa Tsering self-immolated demanding religious freedom and egalitarian human rights for his fellow Tibetans. His intentions are venerable and his action has drawn the eye of the international community to the violations occurring. The immediate results of his self-immolation are, however, disheartening, and they raise the question, is awareness enough? According to an article in *The Economist*, titled "The Buddha and the Tigress," "[i]n China, protest has provoked not liberalization but renewed repression, and not only in Tibetan areas of Sichuan province, where the self-immolations began." [3] Assuming such a report is accurate, it's clear that Tsering's self-immolation, and that of other monastics, is not alleviating suffering, but quite possibly exacerbating it. Furthermore, "[i]t is not only the self-immolator herself or himself to whom violence is done. . . Injury and damage to the family of the immolator is also acute." [6, p. 139] If the act of self-immolation causes more problems than it solves how does it change in terms of both Buddhism and political protest?

The conflict in Tibet is born of ideological differences between the secular Communist Chinese government and the intrinsic role Buddhist practice plays within Tibetan culture. When China came to occupy Tibet,

Local leaders, wealthy landowners, and religious figures were rounded up and subjected to public thamzing ("struggle sessions"), in which they were berated for their "crimes against the people" and forced to confess. Confession was generally preceded by beating and often followed by execution. These struggle sessions were accompanied by carefully orchestrated attempts to undermine the people's attachment to their culture and diminish their respect for religious leaders and institutions. Chinese soldiers commonly tortured monks and nuns in front of crowds of horrified Tibetans. Monks and nuns were forced to copulate in public. If they refused to do so, others would be tortured until they complied. [8, p. 199-200]

Buddhism's central role in Tibetan thought and life may be exemplified by the fact that the Dalai Lama is both its acting head of government and its religious leader whom is believed to be, "the human manifestation of Tibet's patron deity, the Buddha of Compassion." [9, min. 3:45] The Dalai Lama, being a devout Buddhist, commits himself and therefore his government to strictly non-violent means of resolution. For this reason, Tibetan's are committed to non-violent means of protest against Chinese occupation. Yet, if this is the case, where does the violent and tragic act of self-immolation fall into this tableau? The Dalai Lama

“has discouraged but not explicitly prohibited [self-immolation].” [3, p. 57] The Dalai Lama is currently devoted to what is termed the “Middle Way Approach,” which seeks meaningful autonomy for Tibet yet accepts Chinese rule. Such an approach emphasizes his Buddhism, as he acknowledges that all peoples are interconnected and that Tibet could potentially benefit from Chinese cooperation. [9, min. 34:00] Yet, many Tibetans arguably Tsering himself—want complete autonomy for Tibet. Tenzin Tsundue, a writer and Tibetan activist says as much when he states, “the only desire expressed by the Tibetans inside Tibet, when they were risking their lives, when they voted with their own lives, was for independence of Tibet.” [9, min. 41:00]

The schism between the Dalai Lama’s “Middle Way,” and Tibetan desire is becoming increasingly problematic, further complicating the act of self-immolation. Shingza Rinpoche, a reincarnated Lama stands with Tibetans seeking a completely free Tibet. He is vocal in his views, stating, “[i]f you have the courage to die for your people you don’t need to find excuses in [the Dalai Lama’s] advice. We have resolved not to raise our fists.” [9, min. 43:15] Technically one could say that fists haven’t been raised. Yet that doesn’t detract from the violence to self that is inherent in self-immolation. Rinpoche acknowledges as much:

Many lives will be lost in this struggle. . . even for democracy; people have paid with their lives. So, I feel we have to lose lives. Yet, as a follower of the Buddha and particularly as a monk to say, we have to lose lives!’ poses a dilemma for me in terms of our traditional culture. [9, min. 1:11:33]

Jamyang Norbu, a writer and activist, argues that, “the Dalai Lama looks at it. . . completely wrong. He’s looking at it from a very spiritual rational way. . . But of course in reality. . . that is not taking into account dictators.” [9, min. 36:00] It is a strong statement to make, as the Dalai Lama has sought time and time again to dialogue with the Chinese government. Sad to say, such attempts have been met with outright refusal to cooperate on the part of the Chinese government. Ultimately:

The Dalai Lama may see himself as a conciliatory person, someone who is reaching out to the Chinese saying, I am going to give up independence. I want to live within the borders of the [People’s Republic of China]. All I want you to do is give me autonomy.’ But his people don’t see him that way. The moment he is there, he symbolizes Tibetan freedom and Tibetan independence, and that contradiction causes the great kind of confusion that you have in the whole debate over Middle Path and independence. [9, min. 1:08:56]

Certainly, one could argue that Chinese crackdowns and strict control over Tibet show that they understand how Tibetans view the Dalai Lama, and are thus unwilling to cooperate with him. In the mind of the Chinese government, allowing the Dalai Lama to return could bring Tibet too close to total autonomy.

The monk Dawa Tsering’s self-immolation aimed as a protest against the Chinese government’s treatment of Tibetans rejects any single framework of analysis. A Buddhist framework falls short of accounting for the political nature of self-suicide, and leaves the question of violence or non-violence in a gray area. A political and cultural analysis is too narrow, and

glosses over the choice of the individual self-immolator. A poly-methodological approach would be best in conceptualizing the infinite nuances of self-immolation as political protest. What must be done is a deeper analysis of the historical, cultural, and political factors in Tibet and China that have given rise to the 'need' for monks to self-immolate. The act of self-immolation is as expansive as the ocean, and all its creatures. Therefore, when exploring it, one must take time to account for each and every single factor involved.

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Part IV

Two Truths

Introduction

This section of the field guide offers two pieces which may seem to be unrelated at first glance. But in the spirit of the Buddhist challenge to dualism, we offer them side by side, with some points to consider for their interpretation. The two truths doctrine states that there are two levels of truth: relative or commonsense truth, and ultimate or absolute truth. Relative or commonsense truth describes our daily experiences of a concrete world, whereas ultimate truth describes the ultimate reality as *sunyata* (emptiness), empty of concrete and inherent characteristics.[8] The suffering we experience as sentient beings conceives from our misunderstanding of the ultimate truth as a relative truth. Our task, then, is to exist within the relative truth of our intersecting identities as individuals, while remaining mindful of the ultimate truth that the self is an illusion all life is interconnected. The first paper in this section, “Understanding the Nature of Reality,” utilizes theories of molecular physics and quantum mechanics to demonstrate the Buddhist principles of no-self, emptiness, and interdependence. It is with this framework in mind that the second paper in this section, “Race and Class in Insight Meditation in the United States,” explores the roles racism and classism have played in shaping vipassana meditation practice in the United States, and the intersections of social justice with spiritual practice. Juxtaposed, these two papers acknowledge our fundamental interconnectedness, alongside the lived experience of constructed separateness that is enforced and experienced along such lines as race and class.

Understanding the Nature of Reality: Moving away from Avidya *By Jeff Tibbals*

Reality can be understood in terms of the Buddhist doctrine of the two truths. The two truths doctrine states that there are two levels of truth: *relative* or commonsense truth, and *ultimate* or absolute truth. *Relative* or commonsense truth describes our daily experiences of a concrete world whereas ultimate truth describes the ultimate reality as *sunyata* (emptiness), empty of concrete and inherent characteristics.[8] As stated in the Introduction to this section, the suffering we experience as sentient beings conceives from our misunderstanding of the *ultimate* truth as a *relative* truth. In this way, by working towards a worldview in which we recognize *ultimate* truths and alleviate *relative* truths we work to alleviate suffering. This paper explores how the study of science and Buddhism can be used as a solution for deconstructing the origins of racism. Understanding science and Buddhism on the level of *ultimate* vs. *relative* truths is crucial to socially engaged Buddhism, or Buddhists practising compassion in action, for the cessation of suffering.

A few of the central themes put forth by active socially engaged Buddhists in the world today are interdependence, interconnectedness, the universality of suffering, interbeing, etc. This paper explores the meanings of these themes, and relates them to some of the discoveries of modern physics that took place within the past century. By relating doctrinal teachings of emptiness to theories of science, an explanation is offered of how the teachings of socially

engaged Buddhists (not universally known/accepted) share deep resonances to the teachings and implications of modern science (more universally known/accepted) in the attempt to create a foundation for the usurping of racism, sexism, and other civil rights injustices. From the basis of theory this paper will develop, the study of science alongside of socially engaged Buddhism, and those who practice compassion in action, new understanding and insights are gained to increase the motivation for the abolishment of civil rights injustices.

Buddhist theory of emptiness says that any belief in an objective reality grounded in the assumption of intrinsic, independent existence is untenable. For instance, the Srimala Sutra, one of the main early Mahayana Buddhist texts, insists that the ultimately correct understanding of emptiness is that it means you are empty of all knowledge which does not lead to Enlightenment.[10] The Mahaparinirvana Sutra describes emptiness in slightly different terms, considering it to be a substanceless vacuity (“Affirmation of Eternal Self in the Mahyna Mahaparinirvana Sutra”). In other words, all things and events, whether material, mental, or even abstract concepts like time, are devoid of objective, independent existence. To possess such independent, intrinsic existence would imply that things and events are somehow complete unto themselves and are therefore entirely self-contained. This would mean that nothing has the capacity to interact with and exert influence on other phenomena, and would violate the principle of interconnectedness.

If humans were to suddenly vanish from the earth, the mountains and forests and rivers would still exist, there would simply be no humans to attach labels to them. Human attachment of labels and distinguishing characteristics is not something truly intrinsic to an object. Kathleen McDonald, a Western Buddhist nun, sums it up quite nicely: “Our mistaken idea is deeply ingrained and habitual; it colors all our relationships and dealings with the world. We probably rarely question whether the way we see things is the way they actually exist, but once we do it will be obvious that our picture of reality is exaggerated and one-sided; that the “good” and “bad” qualities we see in things are actually created and projected by our own mind.” [9]

For some, accepting the emptiness of the world is a formidable task, because they confuse emptiness as if there were saying that there is nothing in the world, and nothing inside of themselves. But to be empty is to be no-thing, much like the metaphor of Indra’s Net, discussed in the introduction of the Field Guide. For the Huayan school, a tradition of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, Indra’s net symbolizes a universe where infinitely repeated mutual relations exist between all members of the universe.[2] This idea is communicated in the image of the interconnectedness of the universe as seen in the net of the Vedic god Indra, whose net hangs over his palace on Mount Meru, the axis mundi of Vedic cosmology and Vedic mythology. Indra’s net has a multifaceted jewel at each vertex, and each jewel is reflected in all of the other jewels.[6]

Further, consider a spider web still wet from early morning dew. Each bead of dew



Figure 12: Indra’s Net: A Spider’s Web

resides at the intersection of two strands of the spiders web. And every dew drop contains the reflection of all the other dew drops in the web. In each reflected dew drop lies the reflections of all the other dew drops in that reflection, and so ad infinitum. Now think of that same dewy spider web expanding infinitely in *every* dimension and you have the Buddhist conception of the Universe in an image.

Thich Nhat Hanh has a talent for putting complex ideas into simple, comprehensible words. When discussing the idea of emptiness he said “If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud there will be no water; without water, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, you cannot make paper. So the cloud is in here.” [7] So what exactly are we empty of? We are empty of *separate self*, we are all connected.

To summarize, the principle of emptiness says that the belief in an objective reality is grounded in the assumption of an intrinsic, independent existence which at its heart is untenable. All things and events, whether material, mental, or even abstract concepts like time and space, are devoid of objective, independent existence. To possess such independent, intrinsic existence would imply that things and events are somehow complete unto themselves and are therefore entirely self-contained. This would mean that nothing has the capacity to interact with and exert influence on other phenomena.

The discoveries of quantum physics[1] and special relativity[3] in the beginning of the 20th century paralleled the theory of emptiness by shedding insight on the ultimate nature of reality. The scientific community was shocked by the way these concepts challenged our basic understanding of the way we view the world, and its implications on the past, present, and future. Prior to the development of quantum physics and relativity, from a scientific standpoint the universe was completely deterministic. In other words, if one knew the position and velocity of every particle in the universe, one could calculate the course of future events without any discrepancy.[1]

When the Dalai Lama spoke on emptiness, “at its heart is the deep recognition that there is a fundamental disparity between the way we perceive the world, including our own existence in it, and the way things actually are.”[12] Quantum mechanics and other postulates of quantum physics, such as the Uncertainty Principle, suggest that the notion of a pre-given, observer-independent reality is untenable. In other words, with quantum physics, matter cannot be objectively perceived or described apart from the observer: mind and matter are co-dependent. In this view of reality, while the external world is not denied, it is understood to be *relative*. It is contingent upon our language, social conventions, and shared concepts.

Quantum mechanics proved a difficult lesson for many scientists to come to terms with, because it challenged a deeply ingrained belief that the way we perceive the world was the same as the way things actually were. In fact, it wasn't until 1964 that the majority of opposition to quantum physics was silenced by a famous experiment by the Irish physicist John Stewart Bell. Bell started from the assumptions of (i) *reality* (that microscopic objects have real properties determining the outcomes of quantum mechanical measurements), and (ii) *locality* (that reality in one location is not influenced by measurements performed simultaneously at a distant location). From these assumption Bell was able to derive an inequality known as Bell's inequality, which implied that at least one of the two assumptions must be false.[4] This means that, according to Bells result, quantum physics says exactly

what emptiness says, namely that everything is interconnected.

In Quantum mechanics, predictions about a physical system are formulated in terms of probabilities about the characteristics to be measured in the physical system. In his experiment, Bell was able to measure the spin (an intrinsic characteristic) of an electron, and show that its paired electron's spin was therefore determined by the act of measurement on the first electron. Spin, like many other properties, is conserved, meaning that the total spin of a pair of electrons must add to zero total spin. If one of a pair electrons has spin *up*, the other must have spin *down* ($up + down = zero\ spin$). By Bell's measurement of the spin of one electron, the spin of the pair electron was determined. In other words, Bell proved that the act of measurement influences the outcome of an experiment[4]; to observe and be a part of this world is to be interconnected with every aspect of it. This is exactly what the Buddhist idea of emptiness is really all about. Things do not have intrinsic values that are completely separate from the rest of the world—everything is connected.

To paraphrase, quantum mechanics gives a direct scientific explanation of how reality, from atomic and subatomic scales and by translation, galactic sizes, is all interconnected. Theories of emptiness put forth exactly the same in that reality is truly subjective and codependent. But there is more meaning to the subjectivity of reality. In a fuller sense, the subjectivity means there is no separate self *and* that we are all the same. Several examples illustrating the point that there is truly no 'separate self' that any one person owns which is completely separate than any other person have been presented. Yet the idea of emptiness means so much more. Whatever I am made of is exactly the same as you and every other sentient being on this earth.

Consider the following discoveries made by Chemistry and Astrophysics in the beginning of the 20th century. In the beginning of the 20th century, Chemists did not know the origin of the chemical elements (the atoms). It took astrophysics another 50 years to discover that the origin of the chemical elements came from nuclear reactions that take place at the center of stars.[5]

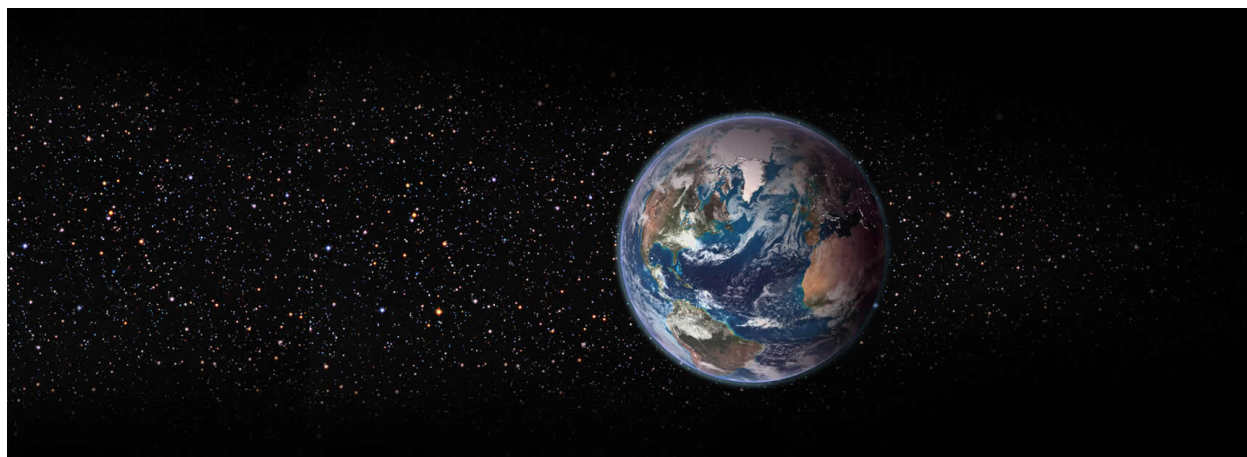


Figure 13: The Earth and Stars

When those stars explode they lay bare their contents, contaminating/enriching gas clouds with those elements. In turn the gas clouds form a new generation of stars populated by planets. What modern astrophysics discovered was that the chemical elements—the basic

elements we are made of—derive from the actions of stars. If you rank the ingredients of the universe, the most abundant element is Hydrogen. From there it is followed by Helium, Oxygen, Carbon, and Nitrogen. Compare this to every human being on the planet and rank the atoms from most abundant to least, we are made up of Hydrogen, Oxygen, Carbon, and Nitrogen. With the exception of Helium, a chemically inert atom (meaning it has no place in chemical and biological reactions), our chemical make up identical to the makeup of the universe. In the last century we have learned that not only are we made up of the universe, it is the universe that is made up of us. When we look up at the night sky, we see that we are made up of the universe and the universe is made up of us. When we see other humans in the world, we see the same constituents as we ourselves are made up of.[5]

So how does the knowledge of interconnection pertain to Socially Engaged Buddhism? “From the perspective of human well-being, science and spirituality are not unrelated. We need both, since the alleviation of suffering must take place at both the physical and the psychological levels.”[12] The Buddha taught that there are 84,000 Dharma doors, or teachings of ways in which to reach enlightenment.[11] In the early days of Buddhism, large numbers such as 84,000 were used as metaphors as an uncountable amount. In other words, there are an uncountable number of ways to alleviate suffering. The convergence of scientific teachings with Buddhism and Socially Engaged Buddhism opens the door to the encompassing of suffering peoples such as minorities who would otherwise not engaged with Buddhist philosophy.

“The Awakened One, the best of teachers, spoke of two truths, conventional and higher; no third is ascertained; a conventional statement is true because of convention and a higher statement is true as disclosing the true characteristics of events.”[8] This paper has explored how the convergence of Buddhist and scientific thought have disclosed a truer nature of reality in that the universe is empty and interconnected. Using this framework we can see how unjust false prejudices such as racism can be usurped by deeper understanding of the nature of reality. Scientific thought, Buddhism, and Socially Engaged Buddhism must be understood in relation to each other to the end of relinquishing false perceptions such as race and move towards unity between all peoples and the end of suffering.

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Engaging Conventional Truth: Race and Class in Insight Meditation in the United States

By Wynn Barnard

When we speak of Buddhism in the United States, we are speaking of a cultural movement that has brought to this continent ancient Indian, East and Southeast Asian, and Tibetan spiritual teachings and practices. For the first time in history, these teachings have arrived in a land that is racially heterogeneous. At the same time, they are taking root in a society that was founded, by a white majority, on the unwholesome seeds of colonialism, genocide and slavery. In this meeting, the values of community, interdependence, and collaboration come face-to-face with the values of the pursuit of individualism, self-interest and competition. Deep bow meets handshake.[2]

Tuere Sala is a dharma teacher at Seattle Insight Meditation Society (SIMS) and co-founder of their People of Color and Allies Beginners Course. In a telephone interview she explained that “you can’t be a Buddhist without being socially engaged. If you’re deep into the practice, it’s too profound, it tugs on the heart too much.” However, she went on to explain that “not all meditators are Buddhists. If you try to make a *meditator* socially engaged, you’ll have a problem.” Sala’s distinction between Buddhists and meditators points to the complex history of Buddhism in the United States, one in which Theravada Buddhism has been appropriated by populations with race and class privilege, stripped of its cultural and doctrinal context, and narrowed to a meditation practice known as *vipassana*, or insight meditation. But why are meditators reluctant to engage with social context? Led by a handful of Buddhist convert leaders and emphasizing retreats, American insight meditation posits itself as getting at the essence of Buddhism, unhindered by religious ritual and focusing instead on personal transformation. Grounded in a western conception of an autonomous self, this interpretation of meditative practice neglects to recognize the value of Buddhism’s communal, ritual and doctrinal elements, positing personal liberation as somehow separate from the liberation of others. Further, it constructs a “cultureless” space only through the normalization of white culture. The structure of these organizations creates a practice

which is most readily accessible to people with class privilege, and most inviting to white Americans. In recent years, organizations such as the Seattle Insight Meditation Society have taken active steps toward outreach and cultivating inclusive, accessible spaces. Other organizations, such as East Bay Meditation Center, have formed directly out of the perceived need for practice that is accessible to marginalized populations. This paper explores the ways in which racism and classism have shaped the development of insight meditation practice in the United States and explores the strategies employed by Seattle Insight Meditation Society's People of Color and Allies Sangha as well as the East Bay Meditation Center to foster inclusive, accessible practice.

Insight Meditation in the United States: A Brief History

Popular discourse on Buddhism in the United States is shaped by a dichotomous representation of "White" and "Asian" Buddhisms. A widely accepted "charting" of the evolution of "American Buddhism" begins with the arrival of Japanese and Chinese Buddhist immigrants to the West Coast of the United States during the nineteenth century. This arrival paralleled the "discovery" of Buddhist thought and art by transcendentalists on the East Coast who were engaging in travel to Asian countries.[6, p. 2] In the next century, the Immigration Act of 1965 resulted in an influx of South and Southeast Asian immigrants and their Buddhist practices; at the same time, Buddhist philosophy was being incorporated into the countercultural philosophies of mostly white American Beats, hippies and feminists.[6] "Fed up with the trappings of religion," the early Buddhist converts of the 1970s went to Asia and brought back a Buddhism stripped of context and distilled to its perceived essence: meditation.[12, p. 218]

It was during the 1960s and 1970s that *vipassana*, or "insight" meditation first became popular among convert Buddhists in the United States. Around 1971, Westerners who had studied in Burma began returning to the United States and offering Buddhist meditation retreats. In 1974, Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein began offering summer meditation courses at the Naropa Institute. In 1976, Kornfield and Goldstein founded the Insight Meditation Society, which quickly became the most active insight meditation center in the west. In 1981, Kornfield co-founded a sister center on the west coast called Spirit Rock, which would eventually develop the Community Leader Training Program, offering the insight meditation community formal mechanisms for evaluating and initiating its teachers.[7, p. 168] Since the 1980s *vipassana* has become the fastest-growing meditative discipline in the United States.[7, p. 165]

The western adaptation of *vipassana* meditation derives largely from the teachings of Burmese monk and meditation teacher Mahasi Sayadaw.[7, p. 166] Many American *vipassana* teachers studied under Mahasi, including the founders of SIMS and Spirit Rock. Mahasi offered teachings of *vipassana* meditation practice extracted almost entirely from its Theravada Buddhist context, deemphasizing monasticism and all devotional, ritual and doctrinal elements, and instead focusing solely on meditation practice.[7, p. 167] American teachers studying under Mahasi were rarely introduced to the wider Theravada religious world. Upon bringing the practice back to the United States, *vipassana* became something taught by laypeople to an almost exclusively lay audience, thus leaving the practitioners "free to package the *vipassana* practice in American cultural forms and language." [7, p. 169]

White Supremacy and the Appropriation of *vipassana*

This “repackaging” process was steeped in an orientalist understanding of Buddhism in Asia and unspoken but pervasive attitudes of white supremacy. In *Race and Religion in American Buddhism*, Joseph Cheah defines white supremacy as “the conscious or unconscious promotion and advancement of the beliefs, practices, values, and ideals of Euro-American white culture, especially when those cultural values are represented as normal.” [5, p. 4] Cheah argues that the American *vipassana* meditation movement was shaped by a process of “racial rearticulation,” referring to the “acquisition of the beliefs and practices of another’s religious tradition and infusing them with new meanings derived from one’s own cultures in ways that preserve the prevailing system of racial hegemony.” [5, p. 59] Rather than looking to immigrant communities for leadership in Buddhist practice, American converts actively established separate spaces for the appropriation of Theravada traditions, disregarding any religious practice grounded in the temple as the “baggage” of immigrant Buddhists. [5, p. 69]

Racialized Spaces

When you’re a person of color in a white space, white people think it’s incumbent on you to reach out and speak to them. If you don’t reach out, you won’t be spoken to.

-Tuere Sala

Despite its history cultural appropriation, insight meditation is an attractive practice to many Americans seeking liberation from suffering. In “Reading the Eightfold Path,” Charles Johnson explains that “for African Americans especially [. . .] the Path becomes the richest of refuges from a predominantly white, very Eurocentric and culturally provincial society almost completely blind to the dignity and deeds, well-being and needs, of people of color.” [10, p. 69] However, insight meditation has been institutionalized in such a way that it is accessible primarily to people with class privilege. Further, the spaces established for the practice of insight meditation are often predominantly white. People of color looking to engage in meditation practice are often discouraged by white meditation communities that refuse to acknowledge their own racism, or the effects of racism on personal suffering.

By constructing meditation as a purely personal journey, white meditators can close their eyes to unique suffering (*dukkha*) caused by racist oppression. When the deeply-held western belief in an autonomous, independent self intersects with spaces regulated by racial hierarchy, the ability to name suffering experienced historically, communally, or interpersonally based on systems of oppression becomes extremely difficult.

Marlena Willis has been organizing meditations for people of color since the early 1990s and continues to teach at East Bay Meditation Center. In a telephone interview, Willis explained that in her experience, one manifestation of “white liberal racism” is in the argument that because marginalized peoples and communities were not having their basic socioeconomic needs met, they were somehow “not yet ready” for Buddhism. Buddhism, then, is considered reserved for an elite class of people with the time and energy to work on themselves. Experiences of oppression are regarded as somehow outside (and thus inferior to) the personal work being done in meditation. This attitude is grown out of a white supremacist

culture that assumes an independent, isolated self, and dismisses the ways in which suffering can be lived communally, historically and interpersonally.

In “Waking Up to Racism,” bell hooks explains that “when people of color are reluctant to enter predominantly White Buddhist settings it is not out of fear of some overt racist exclusion, it is usually in response to more subtle manifestations of white supremacy.” [3, p. 279] White supremacist culture often manifests by dismissing or ignoring the needs and suffering that are specific to people of particular cultures and races. This includes the ways that those sufferings may be triggered by the retreat setting itself. In “Staying on Your Seat: the Practice of Right Concentration,” Larry Yang reports that on a seven-day *metta* retreat during which he was the only person of color, he approached the teachers, wanting to talk about his feelings of isolation and anger at inequity, and “the response was that a teacher would discuss it with me after the retreat was over because the focus was on *metta* practice.” [13, p. 160] Yang went on to leave the retreat on the sixth day. Such dismissals of the experiences of people of color are characteristic of the white supremacist attitudes pervasive in many meditation centers.

Strategies for Inclusivity: Affinity Groups at Seattle Insight Meditation Society

In order to “retrofit a multicultural pattern into a cultural pattern that has been going on for a while,” existing organizations must take on the slow work of training new dharma teachers, creating accessible spaces designed to meet the needs of people of color, and offering antiracist trainings to dharma leaders. [9, Yang] One strategy is creating affinity groups for people of particular identities to sit together in a community that feels safe.

Seattle Insight Meditation Society offers an example of creative and successful strategizing toward inclusivity from within a white-majority organization. Sala and Bonnie Duran, both SIMS dharma teachers, started the People of Color Beginners Course: a six-week insight meditation course for people of color, through SIMS. In the course, meditators are taught how to practice insight meditation. This helps to build confidence and familiarity with the practice so that it can be continued in any setting, and “so that when you’re in a white group it doesn’t matter what they say or what they do.” [11] Sala stressed the importance of expressing doubts, frustrations, and obstacles to other members of the sangha in one’s practice. Meditation can be a very isolating experience, during which meditators not only run into their own suffering and demons, but struggle with feelings of inadequacy and incompetence



Figure 14: SIMS logo

in the practice itself. “In my practice,” said Sala, “it feels like you’re doing it wrong continuously.” This is a common feeling, and one of the reasons why community is so important within the sangha. But “if you don’t have a group you’re connected to, you don’t know that other people are struggling just like you.”

Often, racism exists as a “huge blind spot” within individuals who have seemingly attained tremendous spiritual clarity.[1] White-dominated organizations may want to reach out to people of color without working on racism within their own communities. Michele Benzamin-Miki is a former student of Thich Nhat Hahn and teaches “a hybrid of zen and *vipassana* meditation” at various People of Color sitting groups, including East Bay Meditation Center. In a telephone interview, Benzamin-Miki articulated some of the challenges to fostering racial inclusivity in meditation communities. She explained that often, attempts at inclusivity fail because members of the meditation community are unwilling to “do their homework” around racism. According to angel Kyodo williams, “any time we’re part of a system that perpetuates oppression, ultimately we’re suffering in keeping that system going.”[9] Cultivating accessible, multiracial spaces can allow for deeper, more expansive practice for people of the dominant culture.

Creating a New Space: East Bay Meditation Center

The East Bay Meditation Center is a Buddhist organization in Oakland, California founded on the principles of inclusivity and accessibility. Some of the founding members of the organization were involved with Spirit Rock and saw the need for accessible multiracial Buddhist spaces. The organization aims “to foster liberation, personal and interpersonal healing, social action, and inclusive community building.”[4] EBMC has taken concrete steps to make their space inclusive to people of color, low income people, LGBTQ people and people with disabilities.[4]

EBMC actively works toward accessibility for low income people and people with disabilities. The Center offers free courses by running entirely on donations and volunteer work, drawing on the Buddhist principle of *dana* or generosity.[4] According to one member, this practice is radical because it is “not an economy of exchange, but an economy of gift.”[4] Recognizing that car access is often a requirement at insight meditation centers, EBMC is strategically located near a public bus line.[1] Further, the organization is committed to being scent-free to respect people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Syndrome. As someone who suffers from chronic illness, Marlena explained that she was truly “touched by the real willingness to reach for those who aren’t often included and held with care. It’s a wonderful example of compassion, love, and



Figure 15

the bodddhisatva vow.”

EBMC has been called the most diverse spiritual community on the planet.[4] In order to create a space that feels comfortable and safe for people of color, EBMC holds some meditation courses and retreats that are exclusively for people of color. Otherwise, they attempt to cultivate a multiracial space by having all events comprised of at least fifty percent people of color, fifty percent European Americans.[9] According to Larry Yang, “that demographic reorientation is an awareness practice [. . .] we’re expanding the personal mindfulness practice into a collective experience.”[9] At EBMC, each step taken toward opening doors to marginalized populations is grounded in Buddhist principles. In this way the organization recognizes inclusivity and accessibility as essential to practice, reframing the Western understanding of liberation.

Conclusion

Where does the liberation of the self intersect with the liberation of all suffering? As a self-identified white practitioner, Arinna Weisman explains that “our practice of liberation will remain only partial unless it embodies the exploration of privilege and a commitment to end it.”[8, p. 151] EBMC provides antiracist trainings such as “Being Mindful and White in a Multiracial World,” to draw connections between practice and an understanding of systems of privilege and oppression.[9, Yang] Likewise, if the starting point of one’s practice is the acknowledgment of the interconnectedness of all suffering, it seems inevitable to address the systems of oppression that shape the organizational structures and teachings of Buddhist organizations in the United States.

Meditating for the liberation of all sentient life is not a metaphysical concept it is also a physical act that involves the location, accessibility, cultural practices and demographic makeup of the community. When it is not held separate from the systems that isolate us from each other, meditation can be a liberatory act both spiritually and politically.

The distinction between a “Buddhist” and a “meditator” is complicated when viewing meditation through a racial justice lens. While not all meditators identify as Buddhists, all meditators seeking to liberate themselves from suffering must acknowledge the ways in which their suffering is connected to the suffering of others. To do this, it is necessary to acknowledge structural oppression shaping the culture and context of their practice, and their own internalization of oppressive attitudes. Buddhists meditate for the liberation of all sentient life; it is this extension beyond the self that has been lost in the process of appropriating *vipassana* practice. To actively challenge institutional racism in meditation centers and racial conditioning in oneself is to deepen one’s understanding of suffering and the path toward its cessation. Meditating for the liberation of all sentient life is not a metaphysical concept it is also a physical act that involves the location, accessibility, cultural practices and demographic makeup of the community. When it is not held separate from the systems that isolate us from each other, meditation can be a liberatory act both spiritually and politically.

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Part V

Future Forward: Education and Interreligious Dialogue

Creating a Language for Conversation: Liberation Theology and Socially Engaged Buddhism

By Alemayehu Bahta

In recent years there has been a rise in interreligious dialogue. Defining interreligious dialogue can be a difficult task, but the Pluralism project based at Harvard University creates a concise definition of pluralism that can be equally applied to interreligious dialogue as “the energetic engagement with diversity, the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference, the encounter of commitments based on dialogue.”[1] This growing desire to engage different religious traditions stems from the global environment that we find ourselves in; whether one is situated in the United States or South East Asia, there is an awareness of a global community. Unlike previous eras, in the contemporary age, religious traditions live in close proximity to one another and on occasion, consciously and unconsciously share thoughts. Therefore, living within this global community requires a conversation among numerous religious traditions, so that there is no longer the distinction of us and them, but the unified “we.”

Creating a communal identity between a variety of religious traditions will break the deeply rooted barriers between the groups, while assisting the traditions to learn from one another and collaborate in shared goals. Hence, the focus of this paper is to deepen the conversation between Christianity and Buddhism. Though the two operate on two separate planes of philosophy and theology, there is a common ground in the realm of Liberation Theology and Socially Engaged Buddhism. Using the thoughts from two thinkers, Gustavo Gutierrez and Thich Nhat Hanh, of Liberation Theology and Socially Engaged Buddhism respectively, there is room for a fruitful dialogue. Accordingly, this paper will examine the relationship between Liberation Theology and Socially Engaged Buddhism through conversation and the creation of a mutual language. So that the two traditions may begin to understand one another at deeper levels, but more importantly to foster a learning experience between the two traditions in hopes of working together to better the global society.

History

Prior to diving into the complex philosophies of Gutierrez and Hanh it is important that we begin with a brief historical sketch of the movements. Liberation theology has its roots in mid 20th century Latin America. In the face of economic crisis and social oppression, liberation theology began as a reaction to both political injustices and the Roman Catholic hierarchy’s inadequacy to respond to oppressed Latin Americans. movement, however, did not stop there: over the course of nearly fifty years, liberation theology has grown and matured. Liberation theology in the broader sense not only focuses on the poor, as in the case of Latin America, but it also encompasses Black theology, feminist theology and

any other group dealing with discrimination. The key principle throughout each respective theology is to start from the vantage point of the oppressed.

The history of Socially Engaged Buddhism similarly has roots in Vietnam, in the 1960's. In light of the numerous wars taking place in Vietnam throughout the late 19th century to the mid 20th century, numerous Buddhist monks reacted to the war. Hanhs reaction to the wars and oppression was to engage monks in nonviolent social action.[9, p.36-38] Socially Engaged Buddhism then entered the West as a response to the protest against the Vietnam War and once the movement entered North America it was received well among Americans. In the last fifty years the movement has grown at significant rates and still holds the values of social justice at its core.

To solidify the talk discussion of liberation we now turn to a specific example of the theology in practice. In the face of great unease due to war in El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero embodies the heart of liberation theology. In the 1980's a new Revolutionary Government had taken power in attempts to end civil war and combat the former ruling party. The government killed nearly 3,000 people per month and created an environment of fear among the El Salvadorian people.[3] The peasants and farmers of El Salvador were forced to give up their land and behind these deadly injustices was the financial support of the United States government. Within this oppressive context, Archbishop Romero boldly criticized the governments actions against the peasants. Romero was a prophet in the true sense of the word, meaning he was the voice of God on behalf of the poor. The archbishops courage to stand up to the oppressors originated from his newly gained insight that "God needs the people themselves . . .to save the world . . . The world of the poor teaches us that liberation will arrive only when the poor are not simply on the receiving end of hand-outs from governments or from the churches, but when they themselves are the masters and protagonists of their own struggle for liberation." [3] Romero became consciously aware that God sought the poor; liberation was not only a future hope, but also a present reality, in the sense that to be saved was to be free from the oppressors of this world. This highly controversial theology would cost Romero his life, but only after he once again called the people of El Salvador to a higher standard in his last sermon when he concluded "one must not love oneself so much, as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us, and those that fend off danger will lose their lives." [3] Archbishop Romero was one of a few theologians who has not only properly interpreted the theology of liberation, but also truly experienced the heart of liberation theology.

To gain an inside vision of the Socially Engaged Buddhism movement we now turn to the work of Bernard Glassman and the practice of bearing witness. Glassman came from a secular Jewish family, but later on in his life chose to practice Buddhism and became an ordained priest in the order of Zen peacemakers. Glassmans work focuses on "three tenants: unknowing, or letting go of fixed ideas; bearing witness to joy and suffering; and healing ourselves and the universe." [2, p. 43] In attempts to embody this philosophy Glassman created retreats that hope to bear witness to human suffering, while maintaining to create peace. The most powerful and controversial retreat takes place at Camp Auschwitz. Participants are called to simply listen throughout the whole weeklong retreat, listen to the suffering, and listen to pain. Auschwitz provides the participants a real place for reflection on the nature of human suffering. During the retreat Glassman leads many sitting mediation practices so that participants can fully be present in the moment and bear witness to their emotions and

pain. The aim of the retreat is to instill an acknowledgment of suffering in the minds of participants. Once one is able to fully come to grips with the human suffering, then he or she is able to create peace, but as Glassman points out “making peace, making things whole is an endless task, that’s why we never stop doing it.” [2, p. 43]

Theology/Philosophy

Borrowing the language of a Christian theologian, we now move into Gutierrez’s *ultimate concern* in liberation theology. In Gutierrez’s theology, the ultimate concern for a theologian is the experience of the poor. This means theology must consistently be a critical reflection, so that it does not fall into a discourse of abstractions. [4, p. 31] Theology must acknowledge its historical framing and not be afraid to progress. Praxis of the poor must always be kept in the right hand while critical reflection in the other. The experience of those in oppression must come first and lead the way for theology. If liberation theology is done right than its *telos* should be a critique of social sin, meaning societal structures that oppress the poor. Theology mustn’t be afraid to incorporate the truth of the Word of God into the social or economic sphere. [4, p. 34] Once the ultimate concern has been properly interpreted it should lead to a liberating theology which will stop which will stop injustices is the real concern for liberation theology. It is not that it is simply social activism, but it an “ongoing process of theological-reflection that is structured by a continuous circle of action-understanding-action.” [5, p. 47]

On a similar note, Socially Engaged Buddhism as practiced and taught by Hanh has its ultimate concern in attempting to first acknowledge human suffering and then attempting to transform it. According to Hanh, “for forty-five-years, the Buddha said, over and over again, ‘I teach only suffering and the transformation of suffering.’ ” [7, p. 3] In Buddhism there are three different types of suffering: that caused by unpleasant feelings, the suffering of composite things and lastly suffering caused by change. [7, p. 19] In a well-known Sutra the Buddha is asked, “monks, are conditioned things permanent or impermanent? They are impermanent, World-Honored One. If things are impermanent, are they suffering or well-being? They are suffering, World-Honored One. If things are suffering, can we say that they are self or belong to self? No, World Honored One.” [7, p. 21] These words may push some to think that everything is suffering, but this teaching according to Hanh, “the Buddha says that he only wants us to recognize suffering when it is present and to recognize joy when suffering is absent.” [7, p. 21] Hanh makes it clear that the main cause of suffering is attachment. The only way to escape suffering is through detachment from views, desires and attachments, so that suffering ceases and joy abounds. [7, p. 21] All suffering is inherently a part of the human predicament and must become acknowledged before it can be transformed. Hence, Hanh interprets Buddha’s teaching as such: “we must stop trying to prove that everything is suffering. In fact, we must stop trying to prove anything. If we touch the truth of suffering with our mindfulness, we will be able to recognize and identify our specific suffering, its specific causes and the way to remove those causes and end suffering.” [7, p. 23] Hence, Hanh’s ultimate concern is the suffering of humanity and the entire realm of sentient beings.

The next place that Liberation takes us is to the notion that knowing and experiencing God comes from interactions with the poor. This complex idea stems from Biblical texts

such as Jeremiah 31 and 22 and Matthew 5 and 25 that speak of the neighbor and the poor in relation to God and Jesus. Gutierrez interprets Jeremiah 31:34, which speaks of no longer teaching one another about God, but instead “knowing” God in light of chapter 22, which reads as,

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; who says, I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms', and who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well is not this to know me? says the Lord. (22:13-16 NRSV)

Accordingly, Gutierrez is making the powerful claim based on the Hebrew biblical tradition that to know God is to do justice. Knowing God does not come from abstract theologies, but from works of love. Theology comes after the initial experience of service, but if “justice does not exist, God is not known.” [4, p. 151] A further explanation for Gutierrez’s bold claim is his working idea that God dwells within oppressed communities. In his interpretation of Jesus’ statement, “anything you did not do for one of these, however humble, you did not do for me.” (Matthew 25:25) Gutierrez argues that the people referred to as humble are actually the oppressed. So the foundational thought is that Christ is with the poor and when one works for justice he or she is actually working for Christ. Through actions of love with the poor a person enters full union with God, meaning fuller knowledge and experience. [4, p. 153] Therefore, Gutierrez asserts the idea that knowing God comes from service of the neighbor, but serving the neighbor is actually a service to God and the self.

In Hanh’s interpretation of Socially Engaged Buddhism, there is a foundational idea that sparks works of social justice—the notion of interbeing. This idea of interbeing, according to Hanh is the idea that all living beings are interconnected, meaning all actions have a direct or indirect consequence to others. In short, living beings are interdependent. This is the primary reason that society works for social equality, since all are interdependent, one’s suffering becomes another’s. This idea is beautifully captured by Hanh when he writes, “I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat, who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate, and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.” [6] Interbeing is even more than co-dependence, it is seeing the nonself in every situation. For Hanh, interbeing means doing social work in a nonpartisan fashion because we each have a piece in every side of every situation. From the oppressor to the oppressed, we are in all. [9, p. 41] Hanh furthers this idea when speaking of emptiness in relation to personal identity, “to be empty is to be empty of a separate self and full of nonself components that have come together to constitute what is called the self. The individual is not a separate entity.” [8, p. 15] This suggests that the primary cause for social justice is because in actuality there is really no such thing as the other, this is not to say the human autonomy is completely dissolved, but in a deeper, metaphysical way all beings are one. So when works for the other he or she works for the self and this interbeing fuels the work of social justice. In addition to this, the motive behind ethical behavior stems from the principle that there is nonduality

between who I am and how I act. This means a person is naturally his or her own actions, so that there is no separation between the internal nature of a person and his or her external actions towards others. Being truly ones self requires being ethical and reacting to injustices in the world.

Synthesis

Now that a map has been drawn out it is time to layout the path for conversation between liberation theology and socially engaged Buddhism. We can begin by examining points on convergence. In both Liberation Theology and Socially Engaged Buddhism there is a strong sense of exploring religious identity through experience. In the theology of liberation great emphasis is placed on action to free the oppressed, whereas socially engaged Buddhism choses to first properly understand the suffering of the oppressed before action. It can then be rephrased as Gutierrez insists; “we have here a political hermeneutics of the gospel” [4, p. 33] in comparison to the somewhat politically unengaged Buddhism. This not to say that Socially Engaged Buddhism is not concerned with politics, but in its current western context, socially engaged Buddhism has been primarily focused on personal suffering, without attempting to discover the societal root of suffering. Socially Engaged Buddhism must begin to acknowledge the suffering that is caused by institutions and consequently become involved in politics to transform suffering.

Another point of convergence is the notion of interbeing. Though the Buddhist understanding of interbeing is focused on creating a nonduality between the other and one’s own self, Christianity can also relate. In the Christian tradition there is the understanding that all beings are created in the divine image and therefore reflect God’s self through simply being. This may appear to be at odds with interbeing, but when examined closely the two share similar ideas because the principle involved in both is that no one is self without the other; “I” and “them” is actually a corporate “we.” Since beings participate and reflect the divine image, they are inherently interconnected and in the language of Hanh they are all interbeing. But interbeing must go further than simply acknowledging interconnectedness, interbeing must critically reflect on the experience of those who are oppressed and suffering and give way to a movement of reinterpretation. The fruit of true experience should be critical reflection in light of the modern day questions provided by the oppressed. From there Gutierrez notes, “theology as critical reflection thus plays a part in liberating humankind and the Christian community, preserving them from fetishism and idolatry as well as from a pernicious and belittling narcissism.” [4, p. 32] This idea can be equally applied to Socially Engaged Buddhist philosophy and the notion of detachment and unknowing. Every experience leads to a redefinition and reinterpretation and in the language of Glassman unknowing, detachment from particular views and conceptions.

Conclusion

Looking into the future of Buddhist Christian dialogue, it is of great necessity that the two traditions learn from one another’s age old wisdom and begin to explore Liberation theology and Socially Engaged Buddhism further. Though limitations arise, due to the notion of a deity, in any conversation between the Christian and Buddhist traditions, these limitations

should not be the end. Using the frameworks provided by both Gustavo Gutierrez and Thich Nhat Hanh, interreligious dialogue can and must take place because living in a global community requires participation and deep reflection from both traditions. If the two groups come to the meeting room with a shared language there can be a fruitful discussion, leading communities of faith to have develop a “we” relationship, rather “us” and “them.” The twenty first century presents a unique task for all religious traditions to peacefully live with another, while maintaining identity and working together for social justice. It is now the task and responsibility of leaders and scholars alike to engage with one another to further this discussion.

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Buddhist Youth Education in North America: Laying a Foundation for the Future of Engaged Buddhism

By Kait McDougal

As the Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche stated, “Wisdom and compassion are cultivated right from the beginning of a child’s existence.” [8, p. 175] This study examines the structures and approaches used in Buddhist youth education in North America and its relation to Socially Engaged Buddhism and identifies the aspects of Buddhist youth education that are critical to the development of young socially engaged Buddhists. It is vital to examine and understand the structure of Buddhist youth education in our exploration of Socially Engaged Buddhism because it lays the foundation for the future of engaged Buddhists and Buddhist culture in North America.

Belief and Experience

One of the very difficult aspects of articulating a consistent approach to Buddhist youth education is that Buddhism is a religion that begins with experience, rather than belief. For this reason, Buddhism is understood differently for each individual and the plurality of this understanding is encouraged in the very nature of Buddhist philosophy.[2] For many individuals in North America who have converted to Buddhism, the diversity in perspective is liberating and the transition from beginning with belief to beginning with personal experience makes more sense. The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche states that the goal of Tibetan Buddhist education is to “nurture the spiritual lives of children and youth by cultivating in them an awareness of their highest potential and providing them with the knowledge and skills to realize that potential.”[8, p. 175] This philosophy truly allows the child to discern her/his own path and blossom in her/his own given nature rather than being inundated with rules, requirements, and right practices that are often imposed by fundamentalist theistic traditions. Reverend Castro of Seattle Betsuin understands the concept of personal responsibility as a critical aspect of Buddhist youth education. He believes that theistic faiths that promote fundamental translations and perceptions of texts and traditions remove the need for personal responsibility and replace it with answers. He stated that beginning with experience rather than belief is essentially human, “More suffering has been caused to humanity by belief systems than anything else.”[2] It is crucial for young Buddhists to take personal responsibility for their choices and to learn from an early age the concepts of humility and gratitude in all that they do.

In her article on Buddhism and children in North America, Rita M. Gross points out the malleability of children; they possess the capacity to question basic facts and also accept what is said to be truth. She argues that children who are pressured with a belief system and told what to think and recite will be palpable products of that development. Gross discusses the very different approach of Buddhists as encouraging children to grow into adults who will be inquisitive and non-judgmental.[6, p. 171]

Defining Terms: Buddhism and Socially Engaged Buddhism

For the purposes of this paper, we can understand Buddhism as a deep searching of oneself and the world to obtain *understanding*. This understanding is the source of each person’s personal philosophy, their ability to make choices, and the perspective through which they choose to engage with the world outside of themselves. In comparison, we can understand engaged Buddhism as a *response to understanding*. Therefore, the faculty of engaged Buddhism is to obtain understanding and to use it as a starting point for deeply engaging with response to understanding.[9] The necessity of *response* articulated in socially engaged Buddhism will help to better articulate the specific aspects of education that are crucial to socially engaged Buddhism, but may be overlooked in the broader Buddhism.

Creating Tradition: Buddhism in North America

This paper does not include an in-depth look at Asian Buddhism, but focuses explicitly on Buddhism in North America. The focus will be on North American Buddhism because the

structure of this tradition is currently developing and has yet to reach a state of regularity. The majority of North American Buddhists are compiled of immigrant populations and converts to Buddhism. Because of the short spanning attachment to Buddhism in North America, traditional roles and practices predominant in Asian Buddhism are not yet clearly defined.[7] These include a long-standing monastic tradition, a culture that embraces Buddhist practice and thought based on familiarity and longevity, and traditions concerning temple communities and spiritual development of families and communities. Because of the newness of Buddhist practice in North America, these are all movements to be navigated and discerned and the advancement in defining these traditions will contribute to the future ability of North America to define and develop the culture surrounding Buddhism.[7, p. 347]

One of the characteristics of Buddhism that is pertinent to better understanding religious education in North America has to do with the primarily lay-driven aspect of practice in North America.[6, p. 173] In Rita M. Gross's study on Buddhism and children, she found that in Asian Buddhist practice, there are distinct roles observed by both lay Buddhists and monastic Buddhists; it is recognized that it is not feasible for a person to take on the deep questions of monastic life and to simultaneously have a prominent role in a career and family.[6, p. 172] Gross states that this engrained structure, separating monastics from lay-people, is not predominantly observed by North American converts. For this group, there is not a preexisting understanding of the lay and monastic roles that are traditionally observed in the Asian Buddhist tradition.[6, p. 173] Gross also points out that the culture of North America promotes a successful career and the building of a family, rather than a focus on monastic life. However, the converted North American lay-Buddhist is also often interested and driven to explore practices that require more time and dedication than that of the traditional lay Buddhist of Asia.[6, p. 173]

The collision of these cultural norms and individual desires have resulted in the frustration of many North American lay Buddhists who feel that there should be more time for their Buddhist practice and simultaneously more support and structure for their children's religious education.[6, p. 174] Gross points out that it is a lack of knowledge concerning the traditional separation of monastic and lay individuals that has led to both the criticism of and frustration with Buddhist youth education in North America.[6, p. 174] The product of this frustration has been progress in the direction of creating more children's activities and teachings at local temples, specifically while parents are practicing meditation or in a service at the temple.[6, p. 175]

Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that children should be a part of every aspect of Buddhist practice with which parents are engaging.[6, p. 175] This familial consistency encourages personal responsibility from an early age and recognition of individual's engagement with life. Thich Nhat Hanh believes that "because American Buddhism will be lay Buddhism for the foreseeable future, practicing Buddhism in families should be a priority." [6, p. 176][7, p. 339] He encourages family meditation time and safe spaces in the home where any family member can take refuge and be quiet.

Seattle Betsuin: Translating the Dharma

Seattle Betsuin has been in existence for about one hundred and ten years and Reverend Castro has been working with the temple for about twenty-six years.[2] Seattle Betsuin is cur-

rently an ethnically diverse and multigenerational community of both native and converted Buddhists of the Seattle area.[1] During an interview with Reverend Castro, he described some of the difficulties that the Buddhist community had in translating not only the Dharma and texts, but the entirety of the Buddhist religion to fit the culture and dominant language of the United States. This transition happened roughly from 1920-1950 as the number of people who both practiced Buddhism and spoke English increased.[2]

In order to accommodate this shift, Seattle Betsuin designed their own standard curriculum for youth education in Dharma teachings beginning in the 1950's. This took the form of workbooks that were given to children who attended the temple.[3] The workbooks contained stories from the life of the Buddha, instructions and descriptions of Sunday services at the temple, hands-on activities, definitions of Buddhist terms, and answers to questions about the Buddha and Buddhism.[3] In the 1960's, Buddhist Churches of America began to design workbooks that could be used throughout the United States. These readers were more detailed than the readers created by Seattle Betsuin; they were geared towards providing a student with all of the basics of Buddhist practice.[5] Through providing more historical background, these details gave the reader a more developed framework through which to engage with Buddhist practice and tradition.



Figure 16: Seattle Betsuin is located at 1427 South Main Street in Seattle, WA

In both the Seattle Betsuin readers and the readers developed by the Buddhist Churches of America, many words and concepts that were originally tied linguistically to the Christian tradition were used to describe the Dharma and characteristics of the Buddha. Buddhist churches adopted Sunday services and Sunday/Dharma schools as an attempt to integrate the culture of the United States with the religion of Buddhism.[2] Words such as 'sin', 'grace', 'faith', and 'disciple' were used in translation, even though these words and concepts are most often associated with Christianity.[3] In the early twentieth century, Asian Buddhist Temples also began to adopt techniques employed by Christian churches in the United States such as Sunday school (or Dharma School), hymns, and textbooks.[7, p. 338] With these structures being so new even in the Asian Buddhist church, there is much foundation to be laid in North America concerning formal structures for Buddhist education.

Seattle Betsuin: Curriculum Today

The workbooks that are used at Seattle Buddhist Church today were also developed by the Buddhist Churches of America and emphasize the history, philosophy, and Dharma of Buddhism very explicitly. The workbooks are divided by age group and build upon one another.[4] While the workbooks of the past seemed more simplified, the current workbooks are very detailed and provide in-depth information on many aspects of Buddhism. These modern workbooks are similar to textbooks while the older versions were more akin to stories and exercises.

Some of the primary concepts emphasized in the current Sunday school classes at Seattle Betsuin are interdependence, gratitude, and impermanence.[2] The present-day workbooks provide exercises in self-awareness, community recognition, and respect for others and the earth.[4]

Seattle Betsuin: Life with the Dharma

After visiting Seattle Betsuin on Sunday, May 13th, 2012 to spend time observing a Sunday/Dharma School full of third, fourth, and fifth graders, it is evident that curriculum cannot stand alone in Buddhist youth education. The theories emphasized by Reverend Castro of gratitude, impermanence, and interdependence are only concepts on paper until they are exemplified and modeled by the families, teachers, and community of young Buddhists. During my visit, volunteers Susie Taketa and Julianne Tosaya taught Dharma School.

The first portion of Dharma School is always dedicated to reflecting on what was said or presented in the larger service and attempts to make it as relevant as possible for the youth. For example, Julianne considered the collaborative piece of music that was presented to the congregation as the representation of a community working together to create something beautiful and unique.[1]

I was able to ask Susie and Julianne about the routine for Dharma School after the students had left and I found out that the curriculum is not the most prominent resource they use for teaching. They generally try to have a conversation with the youth about the service, and then do a craft or create something that connects to a Buddhist teaching.[1]

Seattle Betsuin also provides opportunities for the students to work with elders in the community and do service in the Seattle area. It is evident that Seattle Betsuin is attempting to teach about the communality of Buddhism from the very beginning of youth education. Reverend Castro believes that “to be Buddhist is to be an ecologist and a conservationist;” [2] he understands Mother Earth to be a witness of our actions and that we are responsible to her for her gifts of life and provision. This philosophy is one that has been embraced by the youth education program at Seattle Betsuin and has encouraged youth to engage with the world around them.

Critical Aspects of Socially Engaged Buddhist Education

In regards to Buddhist youth education, the goal of socially engaged Buddhism is for a child to gain the skills and knowledge necessary for them to realize their potential, to share that potential with the world,[8, p. 175] and to translate from *understanding to understanding and response*. [9] From this short exploration in Buddhist youth education in North America, I will discuss the items I believe to be crucial aspects to cultivating a socially engaged Buddhist child. 1) A sense of community within the Buddhist tradition allows the child to feel supported and gives the child a space to ask questions; [7, p. 347] 2) encouragement in asking questions and seeking understanding in every aspect of life will foster children who seek peace, understanding, and plurality in perspectives; [2] and 3) recognition from each child of her/his own impermanence and interdependence and the relationship of those concepts to a responsibility to humanity will invoke a sense of global community and personal

responsibility to the world.[6, p. 168]

Developing a child's understanding of her/himself in relation to everything else is essential to cultivating young socially engaged Buddhists. This cannot be taught with merely a textbook, but must be modeled and reflected upon through relationships and practice. The culture and structure surrounding Buddhist youth education in North America is still being discovered, and the future of Socially Engaged Buddhism lies within the foundation of that structure.

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