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Engaging with Suffering,
Realizing Freedom:

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Editorial Note

Hello Friends and Readers,

Thank you for your interest in the third and final issue for 2561 (2018), which contains a constellation of articles and other writings for you.

In Ajarn Sulak's cover story entitled *The True Human: The Path to Morality in Human Society*, he wrote about how fortunate he was that his first kalyanamitta – virtuous companion – which was his father. Ajarn Sulak said that his father always treated him like an adult, and “laid the groundwork for the development of moral courage in me, especially the capacity for fearless speech and empathy for other people.” His article emphasizes that mental training guides moral training and contributes to the understanding of the causes of suffering. Ajarn Sulak's article is the speech he gave on 23 June 2018, at the Jee Jin Foundation, Bangkok, commemorating their 60th anniversary.

Our friend, Craig Lewis, conducted an in-depth interview with Venerable Pomnyun Sunim of South Korea, which is most inspiring and provides insight in to his personal journey and beliefs. Through Lewis's thoughtful questions, Venerable Sunim shared how one day near the end of a school year a monk challenged him by asking the provoking questions: Where did he come from?, and Where was he going? Then “Suddenly, the monk shouted at him asking: ‘Well why are you so busy if you don't even know where you're from or where you're going?!’” These questions reached before his birth and after his physical death and send him on the path of self-discovery and of understanding human suffering.

When Lewis asked Venerable Sumin about his thoughts on the path to peace regarding in current day relations between North and South Korea he said: “I believe we are very close to success because we have experienced failure before. We failed in the past because we thought it would be easy, we applied overly simple approaches. But by learning from our failures we can plan our approach more carefully.” [. . .] “We could easily fall back into war and hostilities, or we could use this opportunity to resolve age-old conflicts. [. . .] If peace can be established, then security and order can follow, not only on the Korean Peninsula, but throughout East Asia.”

Jane Rasbash, another close friend, wrote about the Wild Boars' fighting spirit that kept them alive while trapped in the flooded cave in Northern Thailand. Their plight and rescue effort drew international attention with support arriving spontaneously to aid the Thai rescue team and families.

Jane shared how Coach Ekk prepared the boys with

the skills, determination, and inner and outer discipline that contributed to their survival. One of the boys, Chatthahan Saklakul, said that, “Pi Ekk is a good coach because he does not put pressure on us – he taught us to meditate for a few minutes to calm down and have concentration before a game.” Even after the successful rescue mission was over the boys and their coach “showed humility, gratitude and a determination to be good citizens.” As Jane said, “there is much to learn from the respectful and humble way the coach and the young boys conducted themselves.”

The first Sombath Somphone Public Lecture was delivered by our close friend Lahpai Seng Raw, founder of Metta Development Foundation in Myanmar. Her presentation took place during the 7th Chula-ASEAN Week and 4th Parliamentary ASEAN Community Forum when she spoke about ASEAN responses to historic and contemporary social challenges. She clearly stated that, “it is unrealistic to expect the psychological and physical pain caused by an unjust, oppressive system to heal and go away on its own. The root causes for the pain need to be addressed, for as long as the culture of inflicting pain with impunity is allowed to exist, the pain will continue to grow, without ever having a chance to heal.” Seng Raw concluded by saying, “With common enterprise, the situation is not without hope, and we must ensure that future generations are able to truly enjoy freedom and peace. In contrast to the failures of the past, that should be our contemporary legacy today.”

Please read the country reports, and other writing on various topics such as the new initiative on female Buddhist leadership for social transformation, the recent account of the School for Wellbeing, and the piece on the international conference on Buddhism, suicide prevention, and psycho-spiritual counseling. Ajarn Sulak has also give us some timely and relevant suggestions for the newly appointed Thai Sangha Supreme Council to consider and implement.

For those of you who are members of INEB's Advisory Committee and Executive Committee, our next meeting will be in Kathmandu, Nepal, for three days from November 28 – 30. During the first day 3 separate panel discussions will explore several topics specifically about Nepal to prepare the members for the meeting. These topics include a situational analysis of Nepal's Buddhist communities and Dalit communities, as well as education for empowerment and spirituality. Members will also visit schools in Buddhist temples and ancient cultural sites.

We at *Seeds of Peace* send you wishes of joy, happiness and harmony as 2018 comes to an end and thank you for your continued support and good wishes through the year.

India:

A Life in the Service of Ambedkarism

Mangesh Dahiwale



Raju Kamble, an eminent Ambedkarite, breathed his last at 2.10 am on August 16, 2018, in Vancouver, Canada. He was 64. His death is a great loss to the Ambedkarite movement. When the international reach of Ambedkarism was limited only to a few immigrants from Punjab to the western hemisphere, it was Raju Bhau (elder brother), as he was fondly addressed, who traveled to North America, Europe, Middle East and Southeast Asia to build what is now known as the Ambedkar In-

ternational Mission (AIM). His grasp of the philosophy of Babasaheb Ambedkar was firm and clear. He came from a humble background to but rose to heights in both professional and social fields.

In his early days when he was working at Engineers India Limited (EIL) in New Delhi, Raju Bhau was so fully devoted to the mission of Babasaheb Ambedkar that he worked tirelessly for the incipient Backward Classes and Minorities Employee Federa-

tion (BAMCEF). He was well known in the Delhi Dalit circles as 'BAMCEF Kamble'. Such was his devotion to the cause of liberation of Dalits. Though he was a top class engineer, he never forgot ground level activism. In fact, his efforts were always directed towards uplifting the people on the ground.

While in Malaysia to work in the oil sector, Raju Bhau developed contacts with the Dalits in Malaysia. He developed close ties with Tamil speaking Dalit politicians there. With the help of Malaysians and local Dalits, he was instrumental in organising the First World Conference of Dalits in Malaysia. The conference brought stalwarts from the Ambedkarite movement on one platform, including Bahujan Samaj Party founder Kanshi Ram, in 1998. He continued to work to develop Dalit networks in Southeast Asia.

Mobilising Ambedkarites

When Raju Bhau moved to the Middle East, he developed a network of Ambedkarites in the Middle East. His strategy of mobilisation was unique in the Gulf countries. He networked

with not only the rich technocrats from the Ambedkarite communities, but also mobilised the labourers working there. It is to his credit that several networks of Ambedkarites are thriving in all the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Later, he shifted to the US and immigrated to Canada. This was perhaps a very important phase for him to develop the networks of Ambedkarites in North America. He meticulously networked with Dalits from many different States in India living in North America. He also brought many non-Indian sympathisers of the Dalit movement together through the annual celebrations of Ambedkar Jayanti.

He arranged international conferences and seminars to build the voice of the Ambedkarites and extend solidarity with the similarly discriminated communities like the African Americans in the US and Burakumins in Japan. The present development and standing of the AIM owe it to the indefatigable efforts of Raju Bhau.



Spreading the Thought

One of the remarkable contributions of Raju Bhau was to distribute the writings and speeches of Babasaheb Ambedkar to individuals and institutions throughout the world. He was ever ready to send the blue volumes anywhere in the world. Thus, he played an important role in disseminating the thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar.

Raju Bhau also arranged very remarkable Buddhist conferences where he invited people from all over the world in Nagpur. He was a visionary. He realised the importance of spreading the Ambedkarite movement out of India so that it wins friends all over.

His untimely death is a great loss to all of us and particularly to the movement

for dignity and self-respect. Raju Bhau will continue to inspire us with his dedication and commitment to the cause of the downtrodden and discriminated. Now, it is upon us to take forward his mission with the same zeal.

Dr. Ambedkar International Mission

The Dr. Ambedkar International Mission (AIM) was founded in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in April 1994 by Non Resident Indians (NRS) Ambedkarites. The objective of AIM is to contribute to the overall development of the untouchables/Dalits/Tribals/Buddhists, whose population in India is over 250 million.

It also aims to create a sense of identity, and works to regain the self-respect

lost due to the 2000-year-old caste-based exploitation and oppression.

In the last 22 years, AIM has grown into an international organisation with functional units in the US, Canada, France, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Malaysia, Japan and Australia.

AIM was an active partner in the first-ever Dalit International Conference organised by the Dalit International Organisation in Malaysia in October 1998. The second and third international conferences were

organised by AIM with the active support of the Indian Progressive Front in Malaysia, December 2011 and Guru Ravidass Sabha in Paris, July 2014, respectively.

The 4th International Dr Ambedkar Convention is scheduled to be held on September 22, 23 at Fukuoka, Japan

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Mangesh Dahiwale
(The author, a Buddhist and Ambedkarite scholar, is coordinator, Centre for Dalit Studies)

Indonesia:

Buddhist Woman Imprisoned for Complaining About Mosque's Speaker

Apriadi Gunawan Jakarta, *The Jakarta Post*, Tue, August 21, 2018

A Chinese-Indonesian woman of the Buddhist faith has been sentenced to 1.5 years in prison for complaining about the volume of the azan (Islamic call to prayer) that was blasted from a speaker of a mosque near her house.

Meiliana, 44, a resident of Tanjung Balai, North Sumatra, was found guilty of blasphemy as stipulated

under articles 156 and 156A of the Criminal Code on blasphemy, the Medan District Court said on Tuesday.

"[We] declare that the defendant is legally and compellingly proven guilty of [...] committing blasphemy against a certain religion that is professed in Indonesia," presiding judge Wahyu Prasetyo Wibowo said.

"[We] sentenced the

Picture : MRG online



defendant to one and a half years in prison.”

Meiliana is one of the first people to have been sentenced to prison for complaining about the volume of a mosque’s speakers, despite a plea from the Indonesian Mosque Council, now led by Vice President Jusuf Kalla, for mosque staff to use loudspeakers wisely.

Meiliana reportedly said the azan was “too loud” and

“hurt” her ears, and asked a neighbor to lower the speaker’s volume.

Her remark, made in 2016, is believed to have triggered the worst anti-Chinese riot in the country since 1998, with Muslims who claimed to have been offended by her words burning several Buddhist temples.

During the riot, the angry mob destroyed prayer

equipment, Buddha statues, tables, chairs, lamps and several cars and motor-bikes, the police said.

The police arrested 19 people for their role in the riot. Eight were charged with looting, nine with malicious destruction of property and two with inciting violence. All were given one to four month jail sentences.

Meiliana’s lawyer, Ranto

Sibarani, said they would appeal the verdict.

“We will appeal the verdict because the judges could not prove that our client has committed blasphemy,” he told *The Jakarta Post* over the phone.

Human rights activists have criticized the law enforcers for prosecuting Meiliana, saying that the case should have been settled out of court.

“This is an old case that was brought up again,” M. Isnur from the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute (YLBHI) told the *Post* recently, adding that public pressure was likely the main driver of her prosecution.

“In a blasphemy case like this, [law enforcement officials] often listen to the MUI’s fatwas.”

Meiliana is the latest individual prosecuted under the nation’s controversial blasphemy laws, under which dozens of people have been sent to prison, including former Jakarta governor Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama.

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Recommended Reading

Some Thughts
On Peace

Published: Kosei Publishing
Writer: Nikkyo Niwano



Female Buddhist Leadership for Social Transformation



The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), the Xiang Guang Mountain Temple of the Luminary Sangha, and the Association of Buddhist Sangha Lifelong Education (ABSLE) are collaborating on a new initiative that focuses on female Buddhist leadership for social transformation. During a three-day planning meeting in May 2018, ordained and lay women from several Asian countries were hosted by the Luminary Sangha and ABSLE at the Xiang Guang Mountain Temple in Taoyuan, Taiwan. The beautiful urban mountain-top temple's natural environment was very conducive to a productive planning meeting. The women participating in the meeting represented two of the Buddhist traditions and unique country perspectives, as well as what Buddhist women have experienced in Asian countries.

The first morning session began with a presentation about the trends and gender issues common to world religions by Prof. Hsiao Lan Hu.

She spoke of the "Declaration toward a Global Ethic," which was drafted and signed by religious leaders at the Parliament of World's Religions in 1993. The Declaration has four irrevocable directives, one of which is the commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women. She said that the understanding is that you have to nurture a culture that would support each directive. Sometimes new cultures have to be born to sustain the directive. Since gender issues are common to world religions, this is true of women in Buddhism as well.

Venerable Zinai Shi (ABSLE) facilitated, using consensus principles that examined how women empowered women, the background of the values from monastic training, the sangha community of practice, and the 6 components of harmony. Women need to empower women because they may internalize the gender bias of the patriarchal society that strongly influences religious practices and beliefs. It is within

this context that the participating women brought a deep commitment to advancing the role and practice of women in Buddhism by drawing inspirations from Buddhist teachings.

The fact that the participants consisted of both ordained and lay women with deep and varied experiences within their country and regional contexts brought valuable insights to the planning process. Many stories about how women empowered women were shared and experiences examined, which helped formulate and refine the group's 10-year goal and objectives. The goal of Female Buddhist Leadership for Social Transformation is to empower Buddhist women so that all fourfold Buddhist communities are equally capable of fully engaging with social issues locally, regionally, and globally, with values guided by the Buddha-Dharma. The specific objectives to accomplish the goal are:

1. To have full quality ordination for women renunciates in all Buddhist traditions;
2. To improve education for Buddhist women, both monastic and lay;
3. To work together to support and nurture sustainable models for community living, such as the eco-temple model.

By the close of the planning meeting, the participants had agreed on a basic design to educate women as Buddhist leaders for social transformation. Then, after identifying the learning outcomes and their collective resources, they also agreed to the next steps that had to be taken. Using the group's collective resources of platforms and networks, existing successful models and information, internet technology education, digital libraries, etc., and space resources will optimize the ability to reach out to women throughout the East and Southeast Asia region, and enhance their learning experience.

During the next two years a newly designed framework will be put in place that supports Buddhist

women from Asian countries designated by the initiative. This framework integrates key components of empowering women through training, learning, sharing, appreciation, commitment, and role models. The next steps were also identified, which included everything from formulating student guidelines, faculty, resources, and acquiring financial support.

As a first step, the faculty will meet either in 2018 or early 2019 to design basic curriculum building blocks followed by in-country training (to be scheduled in 2019) that will concentrate on strengthening potential participants' English language skills. In addition to the intensive English course, in-country training will include other elements such as non-violent communication, deep listening, power-sharing, empowerment, and gender awareness. Again, this in-country preparation is essential for supporting the students to understand basic concepts that will help them deepen their learning experience.

The first international two-week course will be launched in 2020 as a pilot for approximately 30 women students, both ordained and lay, supported by 10 faculty. Interested countries will be encouraged to send three participants consisting of ordained and lay women, who will form their own learning community that can support each other after returning to their home country. The pilot course will be critically examined by the faculty for necessary changes, including feedback from the first group of students.

INEB looks forward to collaborating on this initiative with ABSLE and the Luminary Sangha as an opportunity to provide core education and learning resources to Buddhist women. The initiative will also serve to shift the power relations and gender dynamics among Buddhists, thereby expanding the space for both ordained and lay Buddhist women. Preparing female Buddhist leadership for social transformation is essential for all four-fold Buddhist communities to live in harmony and serve society.

Re-Awakening to Our Inter-connected World:

An International Conference on Buddhism, Suicide Prevention, and Psycho-Spiritual Counseling

Jonathan S. Watts



As much as concerns about health and well-being persist in the lesser developed parts of the globe, we have been witnessing in the last few decades declining levels of well-being in the so-called highly developed countries of the world. Japan is a principle example of this when its suicide rate skyrocketed in the late 1990s as a still ongoing economic recession started to take root in society. Suicide and a wide variety of forms of mental illness are not only plaguing Japan today (17th rank in the world, 18.5 suicides/100,000), but have taken hold in South Korea (#2, 28.9) and other East Asian societies, where the drive for success coupled with self-sacrifice is so strong. The pressures of modern industrial society are also trickling into the so called lesser developed countries of Asia that have become

rife with suicide, such as Sri Lanka (#3, 28.8), Nepal (#7, 24.9) and India (#11, 21.1).

Japan has been known for its unique culture of condoning or accepting suicide, such as the noble samurai taking his life to accept blame for failed duties. Zen Buddhism has at times appeared to be part of this culture, offering the warrior or the stoic the power of mind to accept death. While Buddhism has a unique tradition of contemplating and engaging with death directly and fearlessly, it's foundational ethic is one of non-violence and non-harming, seeking to avoid death. With this complex and unique culture, a movement of Japanese Buddhist priests from a wide variety of traditions has emerged in the last decade to proactively engage in the chronic suicide problem in Japan. Their

practices range from emergency telephone and internet counseling to group counseling, healing ritual, and community building.

From November 6-8, 2017, the Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB) and the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) @ Kodosan under the leadership of Rev. Shojun Okano hosted a groundbreaking international conference on Buddhism, suicide prevention, and psycho-spiritual counseling. This was the first half of a combined conference held in conjunction with the Jodo Shin Hongan-ji Denomination Research Institute and the Ryukoku University Research Center for Buddhist Cultures in Asia (BARC), who hosted the second half of the conference in Kyoto from November 9-10. This conference was the culmination of a decade of research and activism on this issue by IBEC and its Engaged Buddhism Project under Research Fellow Jonathan Watts (INEB Executive Committee). The conference was co-organized with priests from the Association of Buddhist Priests Confronting Self-death and Suicide and the Soto Zen Denomination Research Center. Speakers and participants included a number of exceptional Japanese priests involved in suicide prevention as well as Japanese public health officials. As suicide is not necessarily the core mental health issue in other countries, we assembled international participants from fields like psychiatry and psychotherapy, substance abuse, youth counseling, elderly care, hospice care, and Buddhist chaplaincy training from the United States, Sweden, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, and Bhutan. A final recognition should be extended to Tom Eskildsen and his team of simultaneous translators who most beautifully interpreted between English and Japanese over the week. The following is a review of essential themes that emerged from the five days of presentations, and were further consolidated during the final

group discussions in Yokohama and Kyoto.

In general, suicidal tendencies arise out of a cluster of major life events or traumas that lead to unbearable stress and suffering. From these core causes, a lack of support from others and one's environment and/or a lack of personal resources or access to resources push the person in suffering into even more desperate avenues of coping. In this way, suicide becomes a perceived solution to ending the suffering. The Buddhist monk/chaplain/caregiver's role in this situation is two-fold: 1) as a spiritual counselor, perhaps better expressed as a "spiritual friend" (Skt. *kalyanamitra* 善知識) to journey together with the suffering person as a confidant rather than a preacher offering solutions; 2) as a social worker or "gatekeeper", who has numerous community and social connections and an understanding of the kinds of resources that can help each particular individual.

There are a wide variety of explanations in Buddhist thought and corresponding practices to engage with suicidal tendencies, depression, and psychological illness. A basic understanding as expressed by the Thai master Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is that suffering only arises when "self" arises. In this way, there are classical methods, such as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipatthana*) that develop one's ability to see how "self" arises and to harmonize the schism between mind and body, or somatic and cognitive awareness, through developing mindfulness with breathing. This fundamental practice of harmonizing and calming (*shamatha*) can empower a person to learn how to "hold" emotions as mindfulness provides a "gap" or "space" in which the mind does not tumble into its normal reactive, neurotic thought patterns. This helps to develop emotional resiliency and can lead into the deeper practices of insight (*vipassana*) and the Tibetan Buddhist understanding of transmuting negative emotions into their non-dual, enlightened



opposites. One of the essential breakthroughs of such insight is seeing that the crisis of identity and the sense of dark emptiness is not annihilation and death, but rather the dawning of the luminous awareness of total potentiality and the interconnection of all life—the positive, life-affirming side of “voidness/emptiness” (Skt. *sunyata* 空). While many of the participants at the conference are using the power of meditative mindfulness to navigate the problems of the suffering, neurotic mind, some come from more devotional perspectives of the Buddhist tradition that involve chanting, such as Amitabha Buddha’s name. This perspective contrasts the somewhat individualized notions of personal transformation through meditation, with an emphasis on relationships with others and the importance of “encounter” with a higher meaning.

There was also extensive discussion on the emerging meeting points of Buddhist/Asian philosophy with Western psychology. There was a feeling among the group that it is not only Buddhism that is being transformed and modernized by scientific thought. Modern psychology and the

Cartesian mind/body dualism is also being transformed by a variety of Buddhist “non-theistic” understandings of the interdependence of somatic/body, affective/emotion, and cognitive/mind. Many speakers also noted how western counselling studies are now recognizing the role religion and spirituality can play in mental health by fostering a deeper understanding of the meaning of life and a pathway to deeper personal growth. Another important area of East-West synergy is the understanding of the interdependence of self and society and the influence of structural and cultural causes on suffering. While Buddhist thought has been seen as weak or underdeveloped in this area—relying on a fatalistic interpretation of karma to explain social injustice—Rev. Okano pointed out the fundamental understanding in the *Lotus Sutra* of the connection with the ultimate and mundane and the importance of action in this world. Socially Engaged Buddhists and western Buddhists have also been using the ideas of Systems Theory to understand the interconnections in developing ethical institutions and social systems.

While there was a certain amount of debate

on how much Buddhist monks/chaplains/caregivers can or should get involved in social issues, there was certainly a fundamental agreement on how social problems—like economic downturn, community breakdown, relationships mediated by technology, various forms of discrimination, etc.—traumatize the individual. Many of the presenters focused on the psychological and social problems of young people from East Asia, South and Southeast Asia, and the West. The breakdown of the family and the replacement of spiritual and cultural values with those of hyper-competition and achievement are seen as common social causes of depression and suicide in the young generations. A few speakers spent significant parts of their presentation outlining the structural and cultural systems that have led to psychological trauma in their communities, such as the caste system in India and the destruction of rural community in Japan. In this way, a social-ecological model of suicide prevention was suggested in which the micro level of personal care is harmonized with the macro level of “systems care,” and advocacy for systems change, as presently found in public chaplaincy in the United States. Finally, some presenters pointed out the poor understanding of both religious and health professionals of the structural and cultural causes of mental illness. While health professionals may tend to rely on psychological and bio-medical explanations of mental illness, a number of presentations highlighted how Buddhist religious professionals may rely on erroneous understandings of karma to explain suicide that cause great harm to bereaved families as well as further psychological damage to those struggling with thoughts of suicide.

In this way, there was also extensive discussion on the work of training Buddhist monks/chaplains/caregivers to properly engage with the mentally ill and suicidal. The first step in most traditional Buddhist contexts is reforming the

outdated monastic training system in which monks are usually trained as ritualists and preachers. As seen above, there is the need to modify or even correct interpretations of ancient teachings in light of modern contexts as well as providing new forms of education on social issues and systems to empower monks to regain their status as community and civil society leaders. The training *process* is obviously essential as the rote memorization of texts and the study of ritual minutiae is replaced by experiential learning and relational exercises to develop the caregiver as a listener and communicator.

The Buddha himself provides a perennial model in his style of teaching, which was never to provide answers but to assign tasks or exercises through which students came to their own realization. Indeed, the very notion of each individual possessing their own buddha-nature is congruent to modern forms of professional interfaith chaplaincy, where the client or patient is empowered to find their own solutions; that is, to realize their own unique form of enlightenment. A training process along these lines develops the monk/chaplain/caregiver from preacher to “spiritual comrade” (Skt. *kalyanamitra* 善知識), who walks the path of suffering together and provides a safe space for exploring inner traumas through intimacy and presence. As the individual in suffering begins to discover what they need on their own terms, they may also call on the monk/chaplain/caregiver to provide meaningful rituals, such as those special memorial services provided by the Association of Buddhist Priests Confronting Self-death and Suicide.



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To read the full conference report and access to numerous articles on Buddhist suicide prevention and psycho-spiritual counseling, access the JNEB homepage @ jneb.jp/english/

SCHOOL FOR WELLBEING: SOUTH-EAST ASIA CAMPUS OF THE RIGHT LIVELIHOOD COLLEGE

Hans van Willenswaard



“Seeds of Peace” are offered from the co-design workshop by: (from left to right) Pema Rinzin, CNR/RUB (Bhutan), Hans van Willenswaard, School for Wellbeing (Thailand/the Netherlands), Nadaraya Manickam (India/Malaysia), Till Stellmacher, Coordinator, Right Livelihood College, Bonn (Germany), Suthipand Chirathivat, Chula Global Network (Thailand), Manfred Hornung, Heinrich Boell Foundation SE Asia (Thailand/Germany), Surat Horachai, Faculty of Political Science/Chula Indian Studies Centre (Thailand), Dej Poomkacha (Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation) Thailand, Wallapa van Willenswaard, School for Wellbeing (Thailand), Jirayudh Sinthuphan, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University (Thailand), Montawadee Krutmechai, PhD of Right Livelihood College (Thailand), Victor Karunan, MAIDS, Chulalongkorn University (Thailand/India) and Dorji Wangchuk, Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH/Contentment Foundation (Bhutan).

The message that the School for Wellbeing was to be admitted as ninth campus of the Right Livelihood College popped up in my inbox the eve of Ajarn Sulak’s 85th birthday celebrations. An appropriate birthday present for the single person in Thailand who received the prestigious Right Livelihood Award (RLA). Ajarn Sulak was recognized with the RLA, known as the “Alternative Nobel Prize” in

1995 for “... his vision, activism and spiritual commitment in the quest for a development process that is rooted in democracy, justice and cultural integrity.” The award enabled Ajarn to start the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM). SEM was envisioned as an “alternative university.” Even before SEM, Ajarn founded Wongsanit Ashram, INEB and various initiatives in the field of education,

publishing and advocacy. An impressive and unusual sequence of programmes for holistic co-teaching, leadership training and cross-cultural exchanges unfolded over the years. A new branch was grafted on the gradually growing common tree in 2009 when the School for Wellbeing Studies and Research was founded. This “independent platform for action-research” resulted from the international Gross National Happiness conference in Nongkhai and Bangkok, Thailand, two years earlier. The mother organization of all these initiatives is the Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation, established by Ajarn Sulak in 1968. The 50 years jubilee was celebrated on 5 August 2018.

Over the years, the School for Wellbeing shaped collaboration with the Right Livelihood College and the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), in addition to the founding partners of the first hour: Chulalongkorn University (CU) Faculty of Political Science and the Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH. The annual Chulalongkorn University Right Livelihood Summerschool, CURLS, is one of the major activities of the School for Wellbeing. Other programmes are the Towards Organic Asia (TOA) agroecology and mindful markets network, the New Spirit initiative for education reform (managed by Suan Nguen Mee Ma social enterprise), and more recently the *Earth Trusteeship Platform*.

By means of a co-design workshop and MOU signing ceremony on Friday 20th July, one day prior to the start of CURLS 2018, 21 July – 4 August, we offered our humble “seeds of peace” towards the realisation of Ajarn Sulak’s vision of an “alternative university”. Dr. Till Stellmacher, RLC Coordinator based at University of Bonn, was present. He replaced RLC Founder/Director Dr. Anwar Fazal and represented the Right Livelihood

Award Foundation. The next day Nnimmo Bassey, a passionate environment defender, architect, poet and RLA laureate from Nigeria, delivered the Right Livelihood lecture on the theme of CURLS 2018 “Healing Earth, Healing Society, Healing Self.” Nnimmo’s warm presence – he conducted a much appreciated workshop for the CURLS 2018 – participants was very much felt – stood symbol for the truly global outreach of the Right Livelihood College, and our friendship with partners in Africa.

In the CURLS workshop, Nnimmo Bassey cited one of his poems, and CURLS participants joined in chorus: “*Dried tear bags, Polluted streams, Things are real, When found in dreams, We see their shells, Behind military shields, Evil, horrible, gallows called oilrigs, Drilling our souls.* We thought it was oil, But it was blood. We thought it was oil, But it was blood.”¹

The recognition of Ajarn Sulak with the Right Livelihood Award, back in 1995, also enabled him to organize the international gathering on *Alternatives to Consumerism* (ATC), a groundbreaking endeavor with long lasting impact. Wongsanit Ashram at the end was too small for this thoroughly prepared event: the 2,500 rai (400 hectares) memorial park Buddha Monthon, Nakhon Pathom province – inaugurated in the year 2500 (1957), marking a unique turning point in Buddhism from the original realisation of Enlightenment – became the venue for the collective ATC effort. ATC brought an enormous diversity of likeminded groups and independent persons together. It can be considered the actual start of the “alternative university” envisioned by Ajarn Sulak. The colourful festival lasted for weeks including pre- and post- gatherings in locations spread all over the country. The ATC event in Buddha

¹ To Cook A Continent. Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa by Nnimmo Bassey, Pambazuka Press, 2012.



Monthon involved a diversity of Buddhist monks and nuns from nearly all Buddhist denominations, including from Tibet/India; as well as spiritual leaders rooted in various world views including those of indigenous people. The international gathering became an important impulse for the alternative movement “network Thailand”, connecting friends from all continents.

Ajarn Sulak never stood still. He fired up young people and pioneering spirits to keep building and renew efforts in the “post ATC” era. By now, we can modestly but with confidence speak of a true university. It manifests itself as a lively cluster of independent but inter-connected higher learning initiatives in Thailand and the region.

Wongsanit Ashram, notwithstanding the pressure on the eco-system of the surrounding agri-business that only increased over the years, maintained its position as the focal point of learning and research of the “critical holism” movement. It empowered other connected locations, in Thailand and the region, to bloom as decentralized but interconnected initiatives.

Development of the alternative university

In the middle, after his lecture and discussion with Thai panel, Nnimmo Bassey, Founder/Director Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), Right Livelihood Award laureate 2010, former chairperson of Friends of the Earth International, and one of Time magazine’s Heroes of the Environment in 2009.

will never be a linear process of superficial growth. Our hard-earned progress is rather a circling path with ups and downs and unexpected turns and twists. External resistance in terms of donor withdrawal from “rich” Thailand, political stupor, suppression and increasing cultural shallowness are the backdrop of the alternative university’s emergence. The mainstream one-dimensional tunnel vision of economics continuously hammers on increased consumerism, acceleration of domestic consumption and aggressive competitiveness. However, organic growth of transformative civil society collaboration and its ultimate fruition is real. The celebration of 50 years of the *Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation*, in the same year that Ajarn Sulak celebrated his 85th anniversary,

articulates a time perspective that urges for active patience and dynamic contentment in which our passionate long term determination and creativity can be rooted.



So, why collaboration with the Right Livelihood College (RLC) fits so well in this perspective of an emerging learning, research and advocacy network in the South East Asia region? Firstly, because the major activities of the College are realized around some 150 Right Livelihood Award laureates who globally share a strong vision on transformation towards genuine sustainability, justice and wellbeing for all, including Mother Earth. Laureates are all unique characters whose wisdom and experience transcend mainstream knowledge and skill's "transfer." The only way to catch up with them is through experiential learning and co-creation. Secondly, because RLC campuses are independent, civil society driven, units in universities of good reputation which produce 'disruption' where it is needed most. They are non-formal social innovation labs, however in a position of sufficient connections with the mainstream university system to facilitate career advancement that enables independent researchers and advocates to acquire positions of influence, according to their skills. Dr. Anwar Fazal, the founder/director of RLC says "***RLC aims to be five things: a hub, a catalyst, an incubator, a multiplier and an accelerator.***"

RLC campuses are (with the School for Wellbeing as the proposed 9th campus):

- University of Bonn, Germany
- University of Lund, Sweden
- Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia
- University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria
- Universidad Austral de Chile
- University of California Santa Cruz, USA
- Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India
- National University of Cordoba, Argentina
- School for Wellbeing Studies and Research, Wongsanit Ashram, Thailand

Right Livelihood Award laureates and likeminded activists do risk their lives and freedom. This became clear not only from Ajarn Sulak's life story, marked by persecution for lèse majesté in Thailand, and the inner urge to transform from an architect into an activist felt by Nnimmo Bassey, after the violent death of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria. But equally pervasive from the story of the forced disappearance of Sombath Somphone, close friend of Ajarn Sulak, in Vientiane, PDR Laos in 2012. His wife Shui Meng Ng shared her feelings about the disappearance, and showed the award winning documentary film 'Waiting for Sombath Somphone.'

The four day module spent at Chulalongkorn University campus, Bangkok, risked to become a heavy load for the CURLS participants. But at the right moment, they moved out of the concrete jungle of Bangkok together with CURLS Coordinator Narumon Paiboobsittikun to the sister projects of theatre community *Makhampom*, and *7 Arts Inner Space*, centre for art, both in Chiang Dao, North of Chiang Mai. Here, they could – guided by art therapist Anupan Pluckpankhajee – open themselves to Nature, and turn inside for silent reflection and contemplative art work, interspersed with the great joy of community singing to discover

inner healing and collective happiness. This second module was followed by exploratory action-research in a remote village in the Chiang Dao area, where they stayed at home with indigenous Karen families. The simple village life provided a new perspective on 'healing society,' as well as on the local wisdom of care for the forest: 'healing Earth.'

Back at Chulalongkorn University for the concluding module, the CURLS group joined the '7th Chula-ASEAN Week and 4th Parliamentary ASEAN Community Forum' with their presentations. CURLS 2018 participants and resource persons were from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Bhutan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nigeria, Netherlands, Singapore, Philippines, USA, Japan and Germany. A highlight of the ASEAN week was the first Sombath Somphone Public Lecture, delivered by Seng Raw Lahpai, from Myanmar. Seng Raw is the founder of Metta Development Foundation, one of the biggest NGO's in Myanmar, and recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award. The title of her speech was: *ASEAN Responses to Historic and Contemporary Social Challenges*. She

stated "... it is unrealistic to expect the psychological and physical pain caused by an unjust, oppressive system to heal and go away on its own. The root causes for the pain need to be addressed, for as long as the culture of inflicting pain with impunity is allowed to exist, the pain will continue to grow, without ever having a chance to heal." She concluded her speech, "With common enterprise, the situation is not without hope, and we must ensure that future generations are able to truly enjoy freedom and peace. In contrast to the failures of the past, that should be our contemporary legacy today." CURLS 2018 firmly expressed their commitments to engage with joy and dedication in this *common enterprise*.

Together, we dedicate our intentions to the vision of Ajarn Sulak's alternative university, and cross the threshold to "the next 50 years" of the *Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation* with determination and deep gratitude.



Recommended Reading

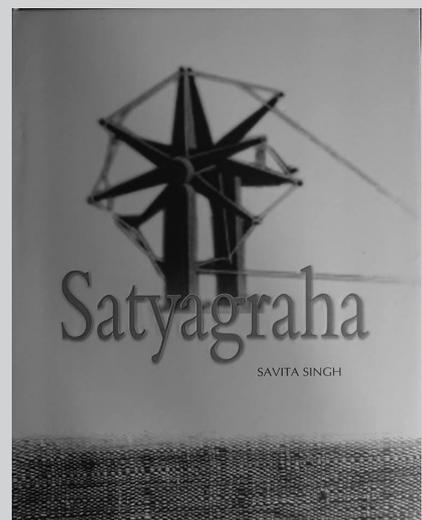


Satyagraha

Editor: Savita Singh
Publisher: Director, Publications
Division

Great and Good Friends

Writer: Trevor Merrion,
William Bradford Smith
Publisher: International Cultural
Promotions Limited



First Sombath Somphone Public Lecture
delivered at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2 August 2018¹

“ASEAN Responses to Historic and Contemporary Social Challenges”

by Lahpai Seng Raw

Founder of Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar

I can understand at a personal level our shared concern about the disappearance of Sombath Somphone, who is also a recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award.

My husband passed away on a plane crash in Yangon 40 years ago. I gave birth to our son one month after. I felt devastated, as if my world had come to an end, and so when I met Ng Shui Meng for the first time in 2015 in Manila, I thought how terrible it must have been for her, not knowing where her husband was - whether he was dead or alive. On that occasion, I also met Edita Burgos, whose son, Jonas, was abducted in daylight from a shopping mall in 2007. Suddenly, I felt the pain of my widowhood was trivial compared to what Shui Meng, and Edita must be going through - not being

able to move on, waiting for information and answers from authorities that are not forthcoming. Most of us, I am sure, can imagine the pain of not knowing where our loved ones are.

On the home front, Kachin state in Myanmar, instances of enforced disappearance are not uncommon, either. To cite one well-documented case,² on 28 October 2011, Sumlut Roi Ja, a 28-year-old Kachin ethnic woman, her husband and father-in-law were arrested together while working in their cornfield in Kachin State by soldiers of Myanmar Government's Light Infantry Battalion 321. The two men managed to flee but Sumlut Roi Ja was unable to escape the grip of the soldiers. The fate of the young Kachin mother remains unknown until this day; although presumed dead, her body has not

¹ Delivered in the framework of the 7th Chula-ASEAN Week and 4th Parliamentary ASEAN Community Forum on “The ASEAN Community in Focus: From the Summit 2018 in Singapore to the ASEAN Summit 2019 in Thailand”, July 31th – August 3rd, 2018.

² United Nations A/HRC/19/67 Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

been found.

This is not happening only to us, as a number of other countries in the ASEAN region also have worrying lists of similar cases. The connecting point in these gross abuses of human rights is that, despite claims to be on the path to reform, compelling evidence of ongoing 'State repression' can still be seen in several countries that have a recent history of dictatorial and unjust rule. Enforced disappearances, however, are only an obvious form of State repression.

In Myanmar's case, equally unresolved are the political and ethnic grievances that have been the root cause of armed conflict since our country's independence in 1948.

I would like to make the point, then, that it is unrealistic to expect the psychological and physical pain caused by an unjust, oppressive system to heal and go away on its own. The root causes for the pain need to be addressed, for as long as the culture of inflicting pain with impunity is allowed to exist, the pain will continue to grow, without ever having a chance to heal.³

So let us not be intimidated by State repression. We must not let Sombath, Jonas, Roi Ja and other victims disappear from the face of the earth, forgotten as if they never existed. Civil society organisations must not become paralysed by fear of State power. We must continue to strive together

until a satisfactory explanation of each case of enforced disappearances is achieved.

Now, let's move into the main theme provided to me. What are "ASEAN responses to historic and contemporary social challenges"?

To summarise, in recent years ASEAN's longstanding policies have been "constructive engagement"⁴ or "turning battle fields into market places"⁵ among neighbours. But, in Myanmar's case, it has to be asked if this has really proven effective, where conflict continues and it must be questioned who is really benefitting from the transitional impasse. Simply extracting timber or natural resources in areas where there were long-standing armed struggles only profits powerful elites and selected business groups, but they do not bring any benefit to the local people. Indeed, unbridled exploitation – whether through extracting resources, seizing lands or imposing dams – can fuel the political and economic causes of conflict even more. Thus while "changing battlefields to market places" can sound a good slogan in theory, economic prioritization and international focus on development needs much greater analysis, research, participatory consultation, and policy understanding if it is to truly succeed in the field.

To illustrate this, I would like to explain the bigger picture of the long-running conflicts and unaddressed issues of political rights, equality and

³ South Africans can talk about healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, because the old oppressive apartheid system is gone - whereas in the Burma/Myanmar context, the repressive security services are still an entrenched power. How can there be healing when the abuse continues?

⁴ The term "constructive engagement" was developed by the Thai Foreign Ministry in the 1990s after the events of 1988 in Burma. It was popularised by then Thai foreign minister Arsa Sarasin.

⁵ The "changing battle fields to market places" was the concept of then Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, also after 1988 to 1991.

genuine union in my country. Even now, despite many claims and promises of nationwide peace, there are over 100,000 refugees (mostly Karen and Karenni) in official camps in Thailand, tens of thousands of refugees and migrants, legal and illegal, in Malaysia, and hundreds of thousands of mostly Muslim refugees in Bangladesh.

The graphics show the intensity of armed conflict since 2011, following the national election when the latest reform process started under the government of President Thein Sein. You will see that it is very challenging, developing a healing approach to the major challenge of our time: the civil war.

What is more, here you see that the selected and elected parliament of both military and political party representatives has actually approved a defence budget that far exceeds any other government sector. This further confirms the government's lack of political will to resolve the conflicts by peaceful means – a failure that has continued since independence in 1948. Attempting to solve the conflicts by force, however, has proven to be very counter-productive, squandering precious resources – human, economic and natural – over many decades. Today, my country has the worst social, health and humanitarian indicators in the ASEAN region, which is of grave concern to all neighbouring countries.

A blackboard at a government school announced for the 2015 school term, that the school will not issue a national identity card for “mixed children.”

So from your first day of school, you are faced with discrimination. In Myanmar, this has become one of the greatest ethnic crises of our times.

Located on a crossroads in Asia, Myanmar is a land of ethnic diversity, with several people historically living on both sides of present-day

international borders. In Myanmar, however, ethnic designations are selectively applied. In practical terms, the 1982 citizenship law is only used to question the citizenship of inhabitants of perceived Indian or Chinese ancestry, whose numbers increased under British rule. In contrast, ethnic nationalities who are considered to be indigenous to Myanmar, such as Bamar, Kachin, Karen or Shan, are exempted from this law.

Complicating the picture further, there are also selective differences in the ways that populations with Indian or Chinese-related histories are treated. Most obviously, the ethnic Chinese population in the Kokang region of northern Shan State are designated as “Kokang” as one of the “135” nationality people of Myanmar in respect of historic linkages, although inhabitants of the same ethnicity living outside the Kokang territory are considered to be “Chinese.”

In contrast, no such indigenous designations or full citizenship rights under the 1982 law have been allowed in the present-day Rakhine State to those perceived to be of Indian ancestry, predominantly Muslims, even though different nationalities have historically lived on both sides of the present-day frontiers with Bangladesh and India. Since the 1950s, increasing numbers of the Muslim population in north Rakhine/Arakan have advocated nationality rights as “Rohingya” nationality people. But, until now, this has not been accepted by the Myanmar government, who continue to describe them as “Bengali,” despite the fact that many families have lived on the Myanmar side of the frontier for many generations. For their part, both the Bangladesh and Indian governments accept the citizenship rights of Rakhine, Buddhist, and other Myanmar-linked people who have historically lived on their sides of the current borders. It is a very complex and often contradictory situation that was exacerbated

in the borderlands under colonial rule.

For example, another case in point is of this young Rohingya girl who has been arrested and sentenced to one year in prison for leaving an IDP camp. She was born in Myanmar, speaks Burmese and has passed her government matriculation exams. But she does not enjoy full citizenship rights despite Myanmar being the only homeland that she has known.

To address these inequalities, we need transparent, just and inclusive citizenship laws, that are fairly and uniformly enforced, to protect the rights of all people.

As you can see, there is a great deal of complexity in the issues of citizenship and identity in Myanmar.

Some of the issues are common internationally. Others are more specific to Myanmar. Two of these are currently very acute in Myanmar: fear and resource ownership. There is a rising wave of fear among the majority of Myanmar people that they will become victims of terrorism, and that a significant demographic change will be a threat to their identity and culture. This has led to unreasonable and sometimes uncontrolled explosions of aggression and violence against a minority group.

On the other hand, many non-Bamar, co-founders of the nation, also fear discrimination, unreasonable punitive measures, and the loss of ownership and control of resources on their traditional land. As a result, many civil society actors don't dare to touch this issue, considering it an electric 3rd rail, because it is so complex and we don't know where to begin.

The consequences of these failures are grave. Because we have unresolved political grievances, more issues of concern are still arising on a daily basis, despite hopes for democratic change in our country. Even worse, the Myanmar

government still allows a judicial system to operate that tolerates the military and other well-placed persons to commit criminal acts with impunity, as both UN agencies and international human rights organisations frequently testify. In Myanmar today, an unreformed judicial system is being used to punish those who speak out and seek reform.

Many of you must have heard of the two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, who have been detained since 12 December 2017. At the time of their arrest, they had been investigating the killing of 10 Rohingya Muslim men and boys in a village in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

The key witness in their case, police officer Moe Yan Naing, who testified that Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo had been framed, has himself been sentenced to an undisclosed prison term for violating Myanmar's Police Disciplinary Act. It is a very worrying test-case for freedom of expression in our country.

The general public must be allowed to express grievances without unnecessary restrictions and in a non-violent manner. Equally important, the public must be able to exercise these fundamental rights without fear of reprisals and violence on the part of the police or political prosecution.

As an example, a recent anti-war protest in Yangon was peaceful. When the police told the protesters that they were assembling in a prohibited area, the organizers agreed to disband. However, riot police then forcibly dispersed the protesters, aided by a group of unidentified, self-described "citizens." These plain-clothes' thugs attacked the protesters right before the eyes of law enforcement officials, who did nothing to stop them.

My point about democracies not being perfect is intended as a warning to those who come to "democratic" power through elections, that they should be cautious about regarding themselves the

sole and absolute dispensers of solutions to the problems that their countries face. This is especially the case in my country, Myanmar.

Democracies have to constantly work at having an open dialogue and discourse, reflection and inclusion, so that the best answers can be found to complex challenges. A case in point is that Western democracies, even after undergoing an evolutionary period of over 200 years, are still grappling to find answers to issues related to the enjoyment of people's rights. In a fast-changing world, democracy will always be a "work in progress."

For democratic governance to succeed, people must appreciate democracy and use its potential. Reliance on 'strongmen' (or women) leads to a culture of impunity, corruption, failure and repression against which there may be little recourse until the system eventually collapses or another 'strongman' tries to take control.

At root, I don't think the political crises in Myanmar have been unique in the modern world, which is why the continuing endeavors in our country for peace and reform are so important. A Union of equality was agreed upon at independence, but it has never been achieved. Until it is, there will always be instability and under-achievement in the country, which, in turn, always raises the prospect of refugee flight and political uncertainty in the region.

In the meantime, an unrepresentative elite — both militarily and largely mono-ethnic — is attempting to take ever more control of the country by force. Sad to say, this is a symptom of the problem, but has now become a cause of the problem, with no just or immediate solutions in sight.

As Myanmar citizens, we only hear about the big powers outside the region when it comes to humanitarian aid, peace processes, development, human rights.

So where is ASEAN in all of this?

In line with their policies of "constructive engagement," it is important for ASEAN neighbours to recognise that Myanmar is still at the beginning of a period of critical change — not at an end. Based upon their own experiences (for better and worse), they need to ensure that meaningful and inclusive peace and reform processes are supported that are sustainable and just. Discriminating on the basis of "race" is not acceptable in the modern international world. And yet, sadly, the idea of peaceful coexistence with the Rohingya is anathema to the majority of Myanmar citizens.

Myanmar's challenges are many, and they also impact the ASEAN community and other neighbouring countries. Over the years, many of these countries have also experienced conflict, refugees in flight, humanitarian emergencies, weak energy, health and education infrastructures, conditions of extreme poverty and economic under-achievement.

Needless to say, democratic reform can only be achieved through the engaged efforts of civil society across the region. Without these shared activities and rights, modern nation states and societies will never be stable, and it is important that international bodies and organisations, such as ASEAN, ensure that the promotion of such inter-community understandings are the bedrock upon which international progress and advancement are achieved. In the modern world, which is now embarked on an "age of acceleration," international entities like ASEAN should not be bodies for elites but reflections of their peoples and constituent parts.

Pope Francis in his homily at the July 6 Mass for Migrants spoke of "the silence that thinks 'it has always been done this way'" and "the silence of 'us' as opposed to 'you'" among the "many silences." After all, we are all inter-connected as

human beings. Ubuntu, the African concept, conveys this best: “I am because we are.”

In closing I would like to say how proud I am that organisations like SEM, Metta and compassionate civil society are working together across communities and borders to support the common universal values of respect, justice, inclusion and equality for all. May we all be proud to be part of ASEAN, and long may our joint

endeavors for a better world continue. With common enterprise, the situation is not without hope, and we must ensure that future generations are able to truly enjoy freedom and peace. In contrast to the failures of the past, that should be our contemporary legacy today.



International Buddhist Support for the Rohingyas Is Still Needed

We seem to have arrived at an age of “zero tolerance” for immigrants, refugees, and for people in our midst perceived as “different” by those who stake out positions of dominance here in the U.S. and in many other parts of the world. As Buddhist practitioners who see the oneness of all beings and our responsibilities to them, we are called to act and write and practice generosity on behalf of those in need.

We continue to hold in mind the suffering of Burma’s Rohingyas, a million of them in dreadful camps in southern Bangladesh. Monsoon rains have turned these camps into treacherous fields of mud, marked by landslides, and plagued by sickness and disease.

Since launching our appeal in April, our letter to Myanmar sangha and government authorities has been signed by more than 1,200 Buddhists from 45 countries. Clear View Project has received and distributed \$25,000 in donations to support these refugees.

To continue this momentum, please ask your sangha members to sign the letter, include our

appeal in newsletters and mailing lists, and donate for Rohingya support. You can donate to Clear View Project (tax-deductible) or to any of the service organizations listed.

We are in the process of translating our website and letter to the Myanmar sangha into various languages—we now have versions in Spanish, French, and German. Translations into Japanese and Burmese are in the works. This is an important step in making our appeal for Rohingya refugees more globally accessible.

Reconciliation and return is our deepest hope. Towards that end, we are looking to Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim friends inside Myanmar who are promoting peace, justice, and interfaith harmony. Their path is courageous.

Thank you for supporting this important cause.

Peace and Metta,

Hozan Alan Senauke

Buddhist Humanitarian Project

www.buddhisthumanitarianproject.org



มูลนิธิ สัตหิราโกส - นาฏ pradipa
SATHIRAKOSES - NAGAPRADIPA FOUNDATION

SNF



Suggestions for the Newly Appointed Sangha Supreme Council

If the members of the Sangha Supreme Council (SSC) uphold proper moral conduct (irrespective of their ecclesiastical ranks and titles) and possess moral courage, which would enable them to understand more clearly the ways of the world and to devote their lives to Buddhism, they would adopt the following suggestions.

1. On Settling a Disciplinary Case of Dispute (*Adhikarana*)

Monks must correctly understand and conduct themselves in accordance with the rules of the discipline of the Order. Strict and clear rules on financial affairs must be legislated and enforced. Temple money must be separated from personal money. A committee must be established to audit a temple's bank accounts every month. Both monks and laypeople should be on this committee. Phra Dhammachedi (Ghee Marachino) had employed this practice when he was the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Thonburi. Monks' personal bank accounts must also be open to scrutiny. The practice of providing monks with monthly (food) allowance (*Niccabhatta*) should be abolished henceforth.

After these financial matters are taken care of, monks may serve as a model of humility and simplicity for laypeople, helping them to not travel down the ruinous paths of squandering wealth (*Apayamukha*). Here, the initiatives of Phra Ajarn Subin Paneeto in Trat province should be carefully studied.

2. A Temple Should Be a Temple

Many temples today look more like a gated community or commercial establishment than a monastery. It will take some time to reform this aspect. For instance, temples should have more green spaces. They should be open to visitation by anyone who seeks the meaning of the true life. A good example of a green temple is Wat Plak Mai Lai of Phra Khru Sudhammanart (Somneuk Natho). Also, please see the conservationist activities spearheaded by Phra Ajarn Paisal Visalo in Chaiyaphum province. These activities have been extended to other provinces, including Bangkok. Phra Ajarn Paisal's book *Buddhasasana Thai Nai Anakot* [Thai Buddhism in the Future] is a prescient distillation of the problems and challenges confronting Buddhism in the kingdom.

3. Ecological Conservation

Monks must tell lay devotees to stop using plastic bags, Styrofoam products, etc, when making material contributions to temples. Many hospitals and universities have started to campaign against the use of these products. Moreover, lay devotees should be encouraged to donate organic food and meat products that involve as little animal cruelty as possible. Laypeople should try to make the consumption of these goods a part of their daily life as well.

4. Don't Forget to Teach Monks and Novices the Value of Art and Beauty

Many temples are already filled with art and beauty—mural paintings, sculptures, worshipping halls, etc. Monks and novices should come to appreciate how Beauty is interconnected with Truth and Goodness, as well as the value of historical artifacts. In the future, the demolishing of any old temple buildings should first be approved by the SSC. A monk should be appointed to be responsible for this matter.

Numerous monks in Nan, Phrae, and Chiang Mai provinces have shown us the correct ways to conserve the environment and historic buildings. The SSC should learn from their efforts—along with those of monks in the southern, northeastern and northwestern provinces. Generally speaking, the SSC has paid scant attention to monks in the latter regions of the country.

In the past, temples were not only places to learn the Dhamma, but also other 'worldly' subjects. For instance, Prince Damrong observed how Wat Mahathat offered many classes similar to the school for royal pages within the Grand Palace compound. Wat Thong Nopakul in Thonburi province is much smaller than Wat Mahathat. However, it too had offered classes on various subject matters until World War Two. When I was ordained as novice there, I noticed that the temple had an astrologer, a traditional (nonwestern) pharmacist, a witch doctor, a specialist on making holy water, etc. There were musical instruments at the temple. Monks learned to deliver sermons in the form of songs. As for the laypeople who lived in the temple compound, there was a watch repairer and a shoe repair person. The nuns (mae chi) who lived on the temple grounds taught people how to cook and the art of flower arranging. And so on. All of these activities have more or less disappeared from present day temples.

This reminds me of Phra Ajarn Rewatta Dhamma, a prominent monk from Burma who initially headed a Buddhist center, and later established his own monastery in Birmingham, England. He got municipal funding to build a place for the elderly at his temple—so they could come to meditate or just to enjoy the serene environment. It is open to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. This is something that Thai temples should emulate. When we send monks abroad as Dhamma ambassadors, they often end up promoting and conserving Thai culture more than the Dhamma. Thai temples or Thai Buddhist centers abroad are often the places to gather in order to perform merit-making and celebrate various festivals. Most people don't visit them to meditate or listen to Dhamma teachings. Interestingly, most of the monks who are responsible for spreading the Dhamma overseas have been foreign monks trained in the forest tradition of Phra Ajarn Chah Subhaddo. On the Dhammayuttika side, only the disciples of Phra Ajarn Lee Dhammadharo seemed to have played this role.

5. Education for Monks Must Emphasize the Three-Fold Training

Whether undertaking Pali studies or education at Buddhist universities, the importance of the Three-fold Training cannot be overemphasized. Monks must have time to meditate too. This is what combining theory and practice means in Buddhism: studying the Scriptures as well as practicing meditation. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Suan Mokh is exemplary in this respect. As for the teaching of disciples, Ajarn Chah Subhaddo is a worthy role model.

The new form of Buddhist education for monks did not stress mental training. Monks who disrobed without having previously undergone proper mental training tend to act immorally later. Pali scholars who have never practiced meditation

often lack virtue as well. According to MC Poonpisamai Diskul, Luang Vichitvatakarn was as an embodiment of this problem. Although she might have been exaggerating, her observation deserves to be reflected upon.

6. Temporary Ordination Should Be at Least Three Months

Anyone who wants to be ordained for less than one Rains Retreat should be a novice, not a monk. The whole ordination process should be simple and inexpensive. It should not be turned into a major feast for the whole community, for instance. And the preceptor should act like one; that is honorably and respectfully befitting a spiritual master.

7. Where to Begin Learning the Dhamma?

For lay Buddhists, P.A. Payutto's *A Constitution for Living* is the place to begin. New monks should read this book along with Prince Vajirayanvarorot's *Navakovat*. After that, they should tackle P.A. Payutto's masterpiece *Buddhadhamma*. (Even the abridged first edition of *Buddhadhamma* is already powerful and enlightening.)

8. Better Reform Radically the Two Buddhist Universities

The quality of education at these two universities has to be improved. Students must not feel that education at these two institutions is inferior to that of any secular university. Students must find education at these two universities invaluable for both this world and other worlds. They should be able to understand the mundane as well as touch upon the transcendental. For example, students should come to see the importance of Western science for the development of Buddhism. However, like Ledi Sayadaw, they should also realize that science can only deal with worldly matters, while

Buddhism can reach the highest ideal or Absolute Truth.

Some examples in this direction will suffice. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has organized academic conferences involving Western scientists. He has engaged in dialogues with them, enabling Buddhist monks and Western scientists to better understand one another. Mathieu Ricard is a French Buddhist monk and a scientist. He has argued for the harmonizing of head and heart and letting the Dhamma guide the world beyond the dominant political economic organization. David Loy is an American lay Buddhist who has recently contemplated on "a new Buddhist path" for social change and ethics in the world.

9. Against Revisionism

SSC must take firm action against revisionism; that is, those peddling pseudo-Dhamma. It must draw a clear line between True Dhamma and False Dhamma. For example, *The Study Guide for Right Practice of the Three Trainings* (currently in its 11th edition), which was published by The National Co-ordination Center of Provincial Meditation Institutes of Thailand, and has apparently received Sangha support, is filled with false teachings. One example will suffice: it claims that nirvana is literally the self (*atta*).

To my knowledge, this book is based on the teachings of the Dhammakaya sect. SSC should expel the Dhammakaya sect from the Order, as it had done with the sectarian Santi Asoke movement. Once this is done, SSC won't have to worry about the teachings and practices of the Dhammakaya sect. No longer part of the Order, the latter can teach and practice what it deems fit in the name of religious freedom.

10. Update All Teachings

The Five Precepts originated in an ancient,

agrarian society. The point is thus to reinterpret if not rewrite them for our contemporary world. Many of us live in (post)industrial societies. We are confronting the challenges of transnational corporations, imperial and geopolitical rivalries, neoliberal capitalism, climate change, rightwing populism and nationalism, mass migration, and so on. Morality (*sila*) is not simply about restoring or maintaining normal conditions which lead to individual happiness, but also concerns social and environmental justice. Buddhist teachings must be able to analyze and guide the practitioner who is living in complex situations and violent structures.

11. Long-Term Strategy

SSC should recognize Bhikkhuni ordination in the kingdom. Bhikkhunis should be part of the Sangha community. The Sangha in Sri Lanka has done so. And since the Thai Sangha was modeled after its counterpart in Sri Lanka, it should likewise pursue this policy. Thai Buddhism had actually derived from Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Bhikkhunis have played an important role in several countries. In Taiwan, there are six times more Bhikkhunis than Bhikkhus. They have not been involved in any sexual or financial scandal. Bhikkhuni Chao-hwei has shown us what the gift of the Dhamma in action looks like. In collaboration with a broad movement comprising of religious and non-religious people, she has nonviolently protested the Taiwanese government's reliance on nuclear power (even if for 'peaceful purposes') and legalizing casinos. Although she had been beaten up and arrested, she remains steadfast in her peaceful opposition.

Bhikkhuni Chen Yen founded the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. This foundation engages in *amisdana* (ranging from social services to education, medical care to environmental protection) not only in Taiwan, but

also worldwide. It is one of the world's largest humanitarian organizations.

(Anyone interested in reestablishing the Bhikkhuni ordination in the present world should consult *The Revival of Bhikkhuni Ordination in the Theravada Tradition*, by Bhikkhu Bodhi and *The Legality of Bhikkhuni Ordination* by Bhante Analayo.)

12. Learn from Other (Lay) Buddhist Organizations

There are several lay Buddhist organizations that have sought to apply the Dhamma in daily life and to create peace and social justice. One of them is Risho Kosei in Japan. Venerable Pomyun Sunim is a Korean Buddhist monk who has worked with Thai, Burmese, Lao, and Sri Lankan monks. Thich Nhat Hanh has opened the Plum Village in several countries as a place to teach the Dhamma and meditation. And so on.

SSC should also be aware of the existence of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). has been established for more than three decades. Its Secretariat is situated in Bangkok. As its name suggests, INEB has been a proponent of socially engaged Buddhism. To what extent is INEB similar to The World Fellowship of Buddhists, which is headquartered in Bangkok? SSC should seek to find out the answer.

The point of raising all these examples is to prod SSC to be more open-minded and expand its horizon. It should learn from Buddhist organizations worldwide.

13. No Television for Monks

Television is a leading means of inducing sensual defilements. Why donate it to temples? Why watch it?

The abode of a monk should be simple and equipped with only the bare necessities. It shouldn't even have an air-conditioner.

14. Put New Constructions on Hold

In the past, it seems that the bigger the building a monk built, the greater his chance of winning an ecclesiastical promotion. This must stop. It also means no more giant statues of the Buddha, Ganesh, Guan Yin, Chuchok, famous monks, etc. Rather, temples should focus on building the younger generation of monks and novices, enabling them to lead a noble and celibate life in a capitalist and consumerist society, to practice morality and the Three-fold Training. The future of Buddhism depends more on these young monks and novices than on giant statues.

15. Final Hopes

The centralization of power will corrupt SSC. It should avoid this path. During the absolutist

period, SSC had oppressed Kruba Srivichai, a central figure in the development of Buddhism in the northern provinces of the kingdom. It should not repeat this mistake.

Hopefully, the newly appointed SSC won't be like the old wine in a new bottle. If the younger generation of SSC possesses moral courage, it will be a boon to Buddhism. Immoral monks will be gradually driven away. In any case, the attainment and promotion of ecclesiastical ranks and titles shouldn't involve any payoffs. Rather monks should be selected on the basis of their ability alone.

I also hope that the new SSC will find my suggestions constructive, and will start solving the numerous challenges posed by capitalism and consumerism to Buddhism in the kingdom.

S

Kerala Floods - Relief and Rehabilitation

Kerala is suffering its worst floods for 100 years. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced and are living in over 1,000 relief camps set up in the State. There have been a number of deaths and many serious injuries. Many are missing. The numbers are rising all the time. But even in such a disaster, the ugly face of untouchability rises, and Dalits are discriminated against during relief efforts as reported by India Today on July 24, 2018. It has happened earlier during the Gujarat Earthquake, even the Tsunami could not wash away caste.

Dalits and the poorest people tend to suffer the most in natural calamities, not because they have

the poorest housing, and little or no reserves, but also from discrimination in relief and rehabilitation work. There have already been a number of cases reported of discrimination against Dalits in the relief camps. Two of the worst hit areas, Idukki and Vayanadu, have a high proportion of Dalits.

As the rains subside, thousands and thousands of people will have NOTHING when they return to their homes.

Please help us URGENTLY financially or in kind (collection centres Manuski, Pune, Nagaloka, Nagpur) with relief and long term rehabilitation work.

To make a donation please visit:

<http://manuski.in/donate>

<https://milaap.org/fundraisers/standforkerala>

The True Human: The Path to Morality in Modern Society



I

My paternal and maternal grandfathers were Chinese. They emigrated from China to Siam, and got married to local Thai-Chinese women. Therefore, my parents were second generation Thai-Chinese, and I am the third generation. Unfortunately, I didn't learn the Chinese language and cannot directly access the wisdom and morality of my ancestors. I have to rely on English sources instead. They had enabled me to translate some ancient Chinese philosophy into Thai, including *The True Human*, which was drawn from the work of the influential philosopher Zhuangzi. On the whole, however, the primary influence or foundation of my moral

development was Thai. I was lucky that my father had acted as my first kalyanamitta (virtuous companion). He encouraged me to question and to argue with him. No matter how much younger I was, he always treated me as an adult. In other words, my father had laid the groundwork for the development of moral courage in me, especially the capacity for fearless speech and empathy for other people.

In Thai culture, the parents and grandparents serve as moral figures and role models for the younger generation. Thus it is very demeaning to be castigated as “a kid whose parents have not brought up well.”

Temples act as another important site of moral cultivation. I was ordained a novice at Wat Thongnopakun. Buddhist masters there had planted the seeds of the Dhamma in me. Practicing the Dhamma is the way to the true life and the true human. In Buddhism, the true life is called “brahmacariya”. The true life is the Holy Life. If humans do not aspire for the true life or if they lack ideals, then they will just be mediocre. It seems that our modern education system and mass media are intended to trap people in the false life. As Buddhadasa Bhikkhu pointed out, the vast majority of people are being channeled toward a life in pursuit of immediate pleasures, money, and power—of “eating, sex, and status.”

Ananda, who was one of the Buddha’s principal disciples, once asked the Enlightened One whether having kalyanamitta is a part of leading the noble life. The Buddha responded in the negative and stressed that having kalyanamitta is akin to living the true life. It is already the whole of the noble life.

A kalyanamitta is someone who speaks without fear, who has the courage to tell us the truth, especially about things that we rather not hear. Needless to say, we all have good and bad qualities in us. The problem is that we prefer to hear only about the former. We don’t want to confront any embarrassing truth about ourselves. A kalyanamitta speaks sincerely and fearlessly about our flaws. A kalyanamitta trusts that we can change and be better people. The rich and powerful often surround themselves with sycophants and flunkies. As such, they are unlikely to hear any sincere and fearless speech. It is not surprising that the Buddha compares a kalyanamitta to the external voice of conscience.

What Buddhism calls “mental training” involves the use of our kalyanamitta’s fearless speech to cultivate critical self-reflection and to make the mind a servant of the heart. It also involves mindful

breathing, which enables the development of deep insights that support the gradual overcoming of the greed, hatred, and delusion in us. This is the path to the cessation of suffering—physical and mental. This is the path to the true human being. The true human being is able to minimize selfishness and self-attachment. The true human being is an “inter-being,” who acknowledges the interdependence in the web of life and exists for the well-being of all sentient beings. This implies that we are also connected to our enemies. Becoming a true human being is never easy and straightforward. But Buddhism provides some practical guidelines to achieve the true life. The starting point is often the cultivation of simplicity and humility. This is in contradistinction to the (Western) subjectivity that stresses arrogance and mastery—over other human beings, animals, and Nature. In Buddhism, the natural is born from the Dhamma. We all were born from the Dhamma. And so were all the animals, trees, rivers, mountains, and so on.

As such, we are all interdependent. If we are able to acknowledge and appreciate this interdependence, we will have a chance to transform greed into generosity, hatred into loving-kindness, and delusion into wisdom.

II

I’d like to emphasize again that Buddhism begins with simplicity and humility. Without this virtue, we may be too arrogant or self-attached to hear the truth that Buddhism has to offer. Once we are willing to learn from the Buddha, we should also incorporate a number of practices into our daily life, beginning with generosity. We can start by giving things that we don’t really need to people who need them. Then we can move a level higher by giving away things that we hold dear or love the most, including our



own life, for social justice and the common good.

All these involve material gifts or what Buddhists call “amisdana”. As important as they are, there is a higher form of giving: “Dhammadana,” or the gift of the Dhamma. The gift of the Dhamma is not about giving away Dhamma books, as often misunderstood, because that would simply be amisdana. The gift of the Dhamma involves fearless speech—having the moral courage to speak truth to power despite the consequences. The true human is generous in truth-telling.

In Taiwan, Bhikkhuni Chao-hwei has shown us what the gift of the Dhamma in action looks like. In collaboration with a broad movement comprising of religious people, Buddhist or otherwise, and non-religious people, she has nonviolently protested the Taiwanese government’s reliance on nuclear power (even if for ‘peaceful purposes’) and legalization of casinos. Although she had been beaten up and arrested, she remains steadfast in her peaceful opposition.

Among Thai Buddhists, how many of us truly understand or even better practice the giving of the Dhamma? Do we not see that the government’s defense budget is massive and that it is a violation of the First and Second Precepts? Do we not think that money should instead be used to fund welfare programs for the old-aged, the disabled, the poor, the sick, the youth, and so on?

In Taiwan, Bhikkhuni Chen Yen founded the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. This foundation engages in amisdana (ranging from social services to education, medical care to environmental protection) not only in Taiwan but also worldwide. It is one of the world’s largest humanitarian organizations.

In sum, Bhikkhuni Chao-hwei is a model of truth giving, while Bhikkhuni Chen Yen is that of material giving.

However, the highest form of giving is “abhaya dana”. Fear is always a part of human nature. We fear insecurity in life. We fear the loss of social

status. We fear sickness and death. And so on. Through mental training, Buddhism enables us to overcome fear. Abhayadana means the absence of fear. For instance, overcoming the fear of death does not mean that we are suicidal or do not value life. Rather, it means that we are able to see death and non-death equally well. Put another way, we are able to see both of them with wisdom and equanimity. In so doing, we are able to let go of our attachments.

III

Along with the different forms of generosity, we must also engage in moral training. “Sila”, or morality, is a set of suggestions on how not to exploit ourselves and others, on how to avoid misconduct. Sila is synonymous to “normal”. If we are normal and natural, (recall that the Dhamma is natural) we will not be slaves to greed, hatred, and delusion.

The Five Precepts (panca-sila) make us take heed of the following:

The First Precept suggests that we should abstain from taking life. If we cannot uphold it, other people and living beings will be harmed. Also, we will be mired in hatred. We will not be normal.

The Second Precept tells us to abstain from taking what is not given. Stealing may cause trouble to others. We too will be troubled because of greed. We will be deviated from the normal and natural path.

The Third Precept says that we should abstain from sexual misconduct. When we have sexually exploited another person, s/he will be violated. And filled with lust, we will not be normal and natural.

The Fourth Precept deals with verbal misconduct: we should abstain from false speech. False speech leads to misunderstanding. In the end, we may even come to believe our own lies. For

example, many politicians and propagandists end up believing in the lies they told.

The Fifth Precept says that we should try to stay mindful by abstaining from intoxicants. Intoxicants can be reinterpreted to mean not only drugs and alcohol but also propagandas and advertisements. I would argue that claiming that Buddhism (or a Buddhist sect) is perfect and superior to all other religions (or Buddhist sects) is a violation of the Fifth Precept. For me, the teachings of the Dhammakaya sect are intoxicants that will lead the followers astray. Real Buddhism does not create blind followers. Rather, real Buddhists should practice the religion with understanding and mindfulness.

The Five Precepts should be practiced alongside the Five Ennobling Virtues (panca-dhamma). Thus 1) abstaining from taking life, we should also cultivate loving-kindness and compassion; 2) abstaining from taking what is not given, we should also have the right means of livelihood; 3) abstaining from sexual misconduct, we should practice sexual restraint; 4) abstaining from false speech, we should be sincere; and 5) abstaining from intoxicants, we should practice mindfulness and awareness. In fact, the Fifth Ennobling Virtue is the gist of Buddhism.

IV

Morality is the basis of a good person. A good person is someone who engages in mental training and learns to breathe mindfully. This practice paves the way to the realization that the self is but a void. The self is also always not-self. It is merely a place-holder. The recognition of interdependence and impermanence comes with this insight. Then the possibility for change and the overcoming of suffering may shine through. Suffering is personal as



well as social, such as massive economic inequality and unequal distribution of power. Therefore, we must not individualize suffering. Besides, suffering may be transnational, such as the ecological crisis and climate change.

Mental training guides moral training, and contributes to the understanding of the causes of suffering, which are rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion. The causes of suffering are readily apparent in and incessantly reproduced by capitalism, consumerism, and militarism. Also, mainstream education cannot provide access to the good, to the true life.

V

Contemporary education at every level, whether state- or private-run, seeks to emulate Western education. In other words, it aims to produce students who are smart, competent, bold, but often

immodest. Western education cannot teach about the good. It neglects mental training.

Because I was aware of the pitfalls of Western education, I founded the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) decades ago. It was established in honor of Sem Pringpuangkaew, who was both teacher and medical doctor. Above all, he was a model of virtue. In Buddhism, venerating the venerable is an auspicious act.

The Spirit in SEM refers to mental training. We use mental training to guide moral training in order to help both the teachers and disciples to cultivate normality and become one another's kalyanamitta. Education takes place in a peaceful and natural setting. However, the teachers and disciples would also have to go out and confront the suffering in the world and contemplate on their root causes. Next is the difficult part: the cessation of suffering through the moral path.

SEM operates locally as well as internationally. In particular, we have operated in

Burma for more than two decades, even during the period of oppressive military dictatorship. We have quite a number of kalyanamitta in Burma. They are all working to overcome suffering in Burma through nonviolent and moral means.

In the past two years, the scope of SEM’s activities has expanded. Now, we are offering an MA in Socially Engaged Buddhism. It is envisioned as an alternative education—that is, alternative to the mainstream. It adapts moral training to our contemporary world. Our (post) industrial societies are far more complex than the agrarian societies in the past. We must try to understand the injustices and violence embedded in our societies, including their class antagonism. This understanding will help

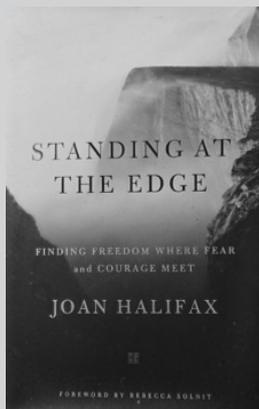
guide our quest for nonviolent social transformation.

SEM is not perfect. We have many limitations and have made mistakes. We have learned from them and are making the necessary corrections. We rely on the fearless speech of and support from our kalyanamitta in various countries to make SEM better. If you are interested in SEM’s activities, have any suggestions, or want to support us, we can become one another’s kalyanamitta.

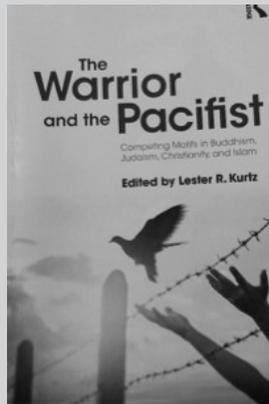


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A speech in Thai with simultaneous Chinese translation delivered on 23 June 2018 at the Jee Jin Foundation on its 60th anniversary.

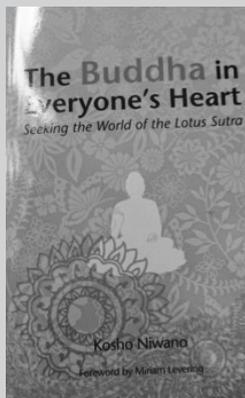
Recommended Reading



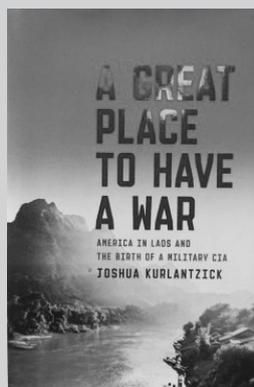
Standing At The Edge
Writer: Joan Halifax
Publisher: Flatiron Books



Rosemarie Freeney Harding
The Warrior and The Pacifist
Editor: Lester R. Kurtz
Publisher: Routledge



The Buddha in Everyone's Heart
Seeking the world of the Lotus Sutra
Writer: Nikkyo Niwano
Published: Kosei Publishing



A Great Place To Have A War
Writer: Joshua Kurlantzick
Publisher: Simon & Schuster

Engaging with Suffering, Realizing Freedom:

An Interview with Ven. Pomnyun Sunim

By Craig Lewis, photos by Ji Hea Kim Buddhistdoor Global | 2018-07-28

Korean Seon (Zen) master Venerable Pomnyun Sunim* (법륜스님) wears many hats: Buddhist monk, Dharma teacher, author, environmentalist, social activist, and podcaster to name a few.

Since entering the monkhood as a novice in 1969 and being fully ordained in 1991, Pomnyun Sunim has never been one to shrink from a challenge or shun adversity. He has founded and led numerous initiatives and movements founded on the Buddha's teaching to respect all living beings, including ecological awareness campaigns, promoting human rights and world peace, and the eradication of famine, disease, and illiteracy. He has been a tireless voice on the dangers of environmental degradation, and against societies and lifestyles based on overconsumption, and has engaged in humanitarian and human rights efforts at home and internationally.

In 1988, he founded the Jungto Society, a volunteer-run humanitarian organization that

aspires to embody the Buddhist teachings through social engagement and by promoting a simpler lifestyle in which people consume less. The Jungto Society seeks to address the problems and crises of modern society by applying a Buddhist world view of the interconnectedness of all things, and the principal that everyone can find happiness through Buddhist practice and active participation in social movements.

Pomnyun Sunim has actively engaged with North Korea for many years, campaigning for peace and supporting North Korean refugees through providing clothing, food, and medicine. In the wake of a crackdown on such aid efforts by the Chinese government, which resulted in the detention of Jungto members, the organization now focuses on



assisting North Korean defectors already settled in South Korea, providing counseling, and guiding them on cultural and social acclimatization.

A regular speaker at public venues such as community centers, libraries, universities, and churches, Pomnyun Sunim is renowned for his sharp and insightful Dharma dialogues, offered free of charge and expressed in simple layman's terms, with the aim of sharing his Dharmic message of happiness and freedom with people from all walks of life, backgrounds, ages, and religious affiliations. He extends his reach to audiences and practitioners across the globe through YouTube videos and podcasts.

Pomnyun Sunim has also had a major impact through his numerous books and written commentaries, which include *The Harmony of Work and Buddhist Practice*, *Class for Mothers*, *Commentaries I and II on the Diamond Sutra*, *Looking for Happiness in the World – In Search of a Hopeful Paradigm for Society*, and *A Treatise for*

Young Buddhist Practitioners.

In recognition of his invaluable humanitarian achievements, Pomnyun Sunim was a 2002 recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Peace and International Understanding, which has been called the “Asian Nobel Peace Prize.”

Buddhistdoor Global: Sunim, many of our readers will already know you as an outspoken advocate of socially engaged Buddhism and the founder of the Jungto Society, the Join Together Society, Good Friends, and The Peace Foundation, among others. Could you describe what first drew you to Buddhism and motivated you to become a monk?

Venerable Pomnyun Sunim: Growing up, I actually wanted to become a scientist. There was a Buddhist temple next to my school and during my first year of high school, the monk in the temple recommended that I become a monk. I rejected his

offer at the time because I thought that religious leaders weren't very realistic—in Christianity, it's taught that a baby was born to a virgin mother, while in Buddhism there's a story that a child was born who stood up immediately afterwards. Religions often ask people to believe these kinds of stories, but I couldn't believe them. If they were intended as symbolic messages, I could understand, but there's a tendency for religious leaders to make people take these kinds of tales literally. I didn't have any trust in those stories, so I told him that while I was happy visiting the temple, I didn't want to become a monk. One day, near the end of the school year, I was preparing for my exams, so I went to the temple to pray to the Buddha hoping to get good results. Because the monk was a great talker, I usually tried to avoid him while I was preparing for my exams, but he saw me that day and called me over.

"Where did you come from?" the monk asked me, and I replied that I had just come from school. Then the monk said, "No, before that, where did you come from?" And I replied that I had been at home. So the monk went on, "No, no, before you were at home, where were you?" He continued asking these questions, until I finally had to answer that I had come from my mother's womb. And once more the monk responded, "No, before that!" And I replied, "I don't know . . ."

And then the monk asked me: "Well, where are you going?" And I replied that I was on my way to the library. "And after that?" he asked. I said I would go home. "And after that . . . ?" Eventually, after many questions, I told the monk: "I'll die." And so the monk asked, "And after that?" And I replied, "I have no idea . . ."

Suddenly the monk shouted at me: "Well why are you so busy if you don't even know where you're from or where you're going?!" That gave me a

big shock and I was speechless for a moment. Then I asked him, "Is there anyone who knows the answers to those questions?" And he replied, "Everyone should know." So I asked him, "How can I know the answer?" And the monk replied, "Come and live with me at the temple." And that's how I ended up becoming a monk!

BDG: The Buddhist path is often framed as a very personal, internal journey of insight and realization. In your view, how does this internal practice translate into outward action, especially as manifested by engaged Buddhism?

VPS: Most people don't live their lives on their own, based on their own strength. Other animals, such as squirrels or rabbits, live according to their own strengths and abilities, but humans tend not to. People often ask for help—from other people, or from God. That's why people complain and are often in pain, because they're always asking for help, and when help doesn't come they start to suffer. And that's how they begin blaming other people.

Many people assume there is an almighty God who will listen to their wishes—that's how they pray, to some kind of mighty force. This makes people feel dependent on God for their lives, and they lack the strength to live for themselves. So the first thing people need to do is to learn how to become independent beings. If rabbits and squirrels can do it, then so can humans!

People's suffering often originates in their own greed and desires. When they learn to let go of their desires, then there's no need to pray to God. People need help not because they're weak or inferior, but because they are greedy, they have unfulfilled desires. The first cause of suffering lies in desire. The second problem is the ego—thinking

“I am right,” or anger arising from the thought that “I am right.” The third problem is ignorance, which turns a blind eye to the truth. These are the true causes of our suffering—not because we are inferior beings.

But we can help people lift themselves out of suffering by helping them realize these causes of suffering. When people study the Buddhadharmā, they can lift themselves out of suffering. The majority of people use their energy giving themselves a hard time, but when they need to they can convert that energy into helping others. When they begin to help the hungry, then they start to care about people or children in hunger-stricken countries, when in the past they only cared about their own children. They also start caring about the environment. Then their lives begin to change from, “I want to get help from society,” to “I want to give help to society;” there’s a shift in perception.

The easiest way to help society is to give money. Giving time, volunteering is a little more difficult. That’s how we encourage people to engage and do something for a good cause. Then people will find themselves confronted with questions about what aspects of society they want to change. The easiest way is to help those in need. The second way is to do something to mitigate environmental degradation. A more advanced level is to engage in peace activities, because this has a political aspect. The word peace is a neutral term, but when people begin engaging in peace activities, it becomes a political issue, which makes it a little more difficult. The next step is to advocate for civil rights, for example encouraging people to vote and making them realize that we are the masters and owners of our countries—not the presidents or politicians, who are the public servants to whom we delegate the right to govern.

One of the main teachings of Buddhism is that we reap what we sow. There is a cause when something happens, and there are conditions that dictate the effects: the effects will come when the cause meets certain conditions. It is really important when we sow seeds to be mindful of what kind of seeds they are. But the conditions under which the seeds are sown are also important. Sowing seeds can be compared to the internal practice of individuals, while environmental conditions, including soil, moisture, and temperature, can be compared to the environment in society. The results come when the seeds meet the soil. If one aspect is ignored, then the result will not be good.

If people think only internal practice is important, it is similar to focusing on the seed, while ignoring the nutrition of the soil. In other words, social environment and internal practice go hand in hand. That is the essence of the Buddhist teaching. However, religions tend to focus on only one aspect, and can go to extremes because of this tendency. In social movements, people often focus on changing the structure of society while ignoring internal practice. But the Buddha taught that those two aspects should go hand in hand; they cannot be separated.

About 2,600 years ago, the Buddha made a statement like this, but over the years, Buddhism has changed and many people focus only on the internal aspect while ignoring the environmental aspect. I believe we should go back to the true meaning of the Buddha’s teaching; not Buddhism in terms of religion, nor in terms of philosophy, but back to the religion in terms of the practice and lifting ourselves out of suffering. It’s not about knowledge, it’s not about belief, it’s about realizing the truth so that we can move toward attaining Nirvana.

At the same time, we can’t help but move



in the direction of changing society for the better. In modern terminology, this can be called engaged Buddhism, but I don't believe that engaged Buddhism is a new concept—it's already there in the teachings. We should go back to practicing engaged Buddhism as taught by the Buddha 2,600 years ago. That is why I help people to lift themselves out of suffering.

But we cannot stop there—once we are out of suffering, we should act to help other people out of their own suffering. The first step is to share the Buddha's teachings, with other people. There are people who don't have the opportunity to listen to the teachings and we need to improve the social environment so that more people can learn. If people are hungry, they should be fed; if they're sick, they should receive medical care; if children are uneducated, they should be given the opportunity to go to school; if there is discrimination based on race or gender, then they should be protected. This is the

principal behind my activities.

BDG: In 1988, you founded the Jungto Society as a grassroots organization based on Buddhist principals. Jungto is now active in numerous humanitarian projects. What is the philosophy behind this movement?

VPS: By integrating my two concerns—educating young people about Buddhism and social movement activities, I established the two principals of my work. However, there were no detailed teachings in the Mahayana scriptures, and Seon Buddhism only highlighted internal practice for individuals. I couldn't find any references to education for teenagers or social movements in the Buddhist texts. So I decided to approach the Buddhist teachings at their core.

I dug deep to find out what the Buddha was like and started studying scriptures that describe the

Buddha: What did Indian society look like when the Buddha was born? Why was the Buddha suffering in the environment that he was born into? Why did he decide to leave the secular world? How did he engage in his practice? What were his concerns during those six years of ascetic practice? What was his realization? What was his attainment? When he first met his disciples, what were his first teachings? What was his life like? He must have encountered many obstacles over the course of his life; how did he overcome these difficulties? Why was it inevitable for the Buddha to face these external difficulties and obstacles? I started conducting in-depth research into this. He was not a special human being, he was not a god-like figure, but he couldn't help but choose the path he took because he wanted to address the most contradictory aspects of society in India.

During my research, I realized that I, too, had been exposed to a very contradictory and distorted Buddhism, because the Buddhism I was taught lacked the social aspect that was emphasized by the Buddha. It was a very empty-sounding philosophy that didn't engage with society. So I started asking whether this kind of religion or philosophy could be of any help to people who are suffering, who are in need. The religion existed as a vested interest in society—it didn't provide any solutions for crucial social issues. There are many Buddhist cultural heritage sites in Korea, but Buddhism only existed as a heritage or a tradition, without offering any practical help to people. I think the same situation can be found in other religions. So I believe that we should go back to the concerns of the Buddha by adopting Buddhist principals to resolve our current issues.

BDG: You have been actively promoting peace between North and South Korea for many years,

and campaigning for the rights of Koreans living in the North. In the wake of the historic summit between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korea leader Kim Jong-un on 27 April, and the subsequent meeting between Kim and US President Donald Trump on 12 June, can you share your thoughts on the path to peace?

VPS: Since the Korean War ended, we have been living under an armistice treaty. Several attempts have been made to disassemble this cold-war structure, but all of them failed. There are people who are not very optimistic about the prospects for peace, because we've only experienced failure before. However, I believe we are very close to success, because we have only experienced failure before. We failed in the past because we thought it would be easy, we applied overly simple approaches. But by learning from our failures, we can plan our approach more carefully.

The situation in Asia is unfolding very dramatically on many different levels. Due to the rise of China, we exist in an environment of competition between the China and the US, and the global order is being re-established. We could easily fall back into war and hostilities, or we could use this opportunity to resolve age-old conflicts. My concern is how to reduce the risks while increasing the opportunities. Trump has brought us both risks and opportunities; I think the possibility is 49:51 of risk versus opportunity, so we are more likely to move toward peace. If peace can be established, then security and order can follow, not only on the Korean Peninsula, but throughout East Asia.

What is most important at this point is to implement the detailed agreements that have been drawn up between the two Koreas. In the Jungto Society, we have been praying for 1,000 days to

end the war and create peace. In 2017, we held two peace rallies in the presence of 10,000 people, and in March we sent a petition signed by 100,000 people to the White House calling for an end to the Korean armistice and a peace treaty.

If North Korea is willing to open their door, we will provide humanitarian assistance. However, the human rights issue in North Korea is a very thorny one. We are already involved in helping North Korean defectors living in the South. However, the question now becomes how to improve the situation. It will not be resolved by criticizing the North Korean regime—they will be the ones to actually improve the situation, so the question is, how can we resolve this issue in a gradual manner in cooperation with the regime. The North Korean government's priority is security, not human rights. Once security is guaranteed, their second priority will be economic development, and then we will be able to raise the issue of human rights. This will inevitably cause conflict and differences of opinion between our governments.

What's different about our organization compared with other humanitarian groups is that they want to focus on bringing down the North Korean regime, but we acknowledge their system, and we believe that their system should be maintained, and then when we can raise the human rights issue—it becomes a matter of their own choice and will be determined by their people. However, I also believe that we, as outsiders, must raise the issue of human rights because the protection of human rights is guaranteed under North Korean law, but it's not implemented and people are suffering there.

BDG: As we head into the 21st century, we see an increasingly unstable and politically divided world. How do you view the role of Buddhists and engaged

Buddhism in this era?

VPS: The impact of engaged Buddhism is limited at the present moment, but it will grow and should grow in the future, and I'm willing to play a role in this by engaging with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), with which I've been involved since 1993. However, I live in Korea, and my main concern is Korea's situation. I'm going to conduct my own experiments in Korea by setting precedents and successful examples here. Once a model is successfully established, then the next generation can easily adopt that model at the international level.

The first issue is alleviating the suffering of individuals in the modern world. There are many successful examples of this. I've seen countless individuals lifted out of suffering through their internal practice, or their practice with Dharma teachers, or simply through listening to Dharma talks—my own YouTube channel has about 100 million views. Many people have told me that my Dharma talks saved their marriage, or saved them from the brink of suicide, there are many similar accounts. And it's irrelevant to religion; people of different faiths can also listen to my talks. Our goal is to move beyond YouTube and find different ways of making happiness more available to the public.

Unfortunately, some people are skeptical about the identity of our movement because it can't be easily defined as a religious or a social movement. We are playing a crucial part in the movement to establish permanent peace on the Korean peninsula, which has been going on for quite a long time. Although the scale of our movement is fairly small, I want to spread our way of living, our attitude toward life, to the broader public so that they can adopt our values in their own lives.

BDG: Considering the critical global situation of manmade climate change, environmental degradation, pollution, and the human impact on wildlife populations, and so on, how optimistic are you that societies can make the necessary changes at this late stage?

VPS: Really, I think the chances are very slim, however, I will continue my work because human desires are not going to change easily. Convenience is addictive by its very nature, so people will not give up their conveniences once they've experienced them. People will only truly realize the importance of the environment when people start dying in large numbers, or when there's a major example of permanent and irreversible damage to the environment.

So there are two goals in this respect. The first is to reduce the rate of human damage to the environment. The second is to create a model for society for the next generation to live harmoniously after the irreversible damage has already been done. If there is a model, then there can be hope for the next generation—a model in which people don't merely follow their desires. If there is a model for society in

which we can acknowledge human desires but not simply follow them, it will be more sustainable. My concern is to create such a model, even at a small level.

We have already created this type of community in the Jungto Society—it's not closed at all, it's open to the public—and people living in that community are not chasing their desires. They don't consume very much, they are very satisfied with their lives. They also contribute to society, so they have a sense of a rewarding life.

I get a lot of questions about whether I think this can be successful on a larger scale. But it really doesn't matter from the practitioner's point of view whether it is a success or not, because I can't help but take that path as a practitioner. If it's a success, then I will be grateful. If we fail, then the next generation can continue the work and take the lessons we've learned to create success eventually. Our job is to take those first few steps that the next generation can follow at another level.



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Wild Boars

Su Su - Do not give up - Keep fighting

Jane Rasbash

The dramatic rescue of the young Wild Boar football team from deep in the Tham Luang Nang Non cave in Northern Thailand captivated people around the world. The extraordinary coach had been a novice monk for many years with experience of meditation practice along with a love of football, giving him the leadership and resilience to hold the group together in those dire circumstances. Some may question why he took the lads into the mountain. From my understanding, entering this kind of cave serves as both an adventure and an opportunity for meditation practice. What started out as a fun trip for a couple of hours ended with days trapped in the flooded cave and an almost impossible mission to get the boys out alive.

Nang Non is the great cave spirit believed locally to be a reclining lady, her body the mountain and her genitals the cave. In pre-Buddhist beliefs that are still honoured today, the cave spirits are said to keep the local areas safe so long as the spirits and dangerous powers of the mountains are respected. Outside the cave, religious traditions blend with Buddhist and Cave spirit shrines side by side. The families and friends of the trapped boys daily offered incense, candles and prayers to Nang Non, to return the boys safely.

Whilst in the cave, the boys adopted a Thai mantra 'Su Su', a uniquely Thai phrase often accompanied

by the 'V' peace sign loosely translated as 'Don't give up - keep fighting.'

Guided by Coach Ekk to conserve their energy and maintain good spirits, they organised teams to dig a hole some 15 feet deep into the cave in a bid to find a way out, whilst others looked out for rescuers and took care of the smaller boys, keeping them warm. They drank drips of water from stalactites, chanted together and meditated to stay positive and calm in the face of adversity. Su Su indeed! Respect!

When I lived in Thailand, I was taken a mile underground, into a similar kind of deep cave near Ubon by an extraordinary Thai monk. We meditated in a cavern at the end of a perilous journey through the cave. The meditation was so powerful. Along the way in some places the cave went very narrow and we had to crawl through. I imagine being so in the present moment, clambering through the darkness, avoiding rocks and strange looking underground insects, required a deep concentration conducive to *Ekaggata*, one pointedness. One had to be so in the moment so as not to be overcome by fear. I was told this cavern was deep beneath the Mekong river. When I read the account that the coach of the 12 boys had spent significant time as a young novice practicing meditation in caves, it gave a deep insight into how those young boys survived. This is a very special kind of practice. And I could picture so easily how a flash flood could trap people inside as the early monsoon rain did with the Wild Boars.

As the water levels rose, no contact was made for

more than a week. The elite Thai Navy Seals were called in to assist, and soon requested outside help as the diving conditions were so challenging. One of their ex-member Saman Kunan, who had volunteered his services, died from lack of oxygen after working 12 hours solid delivering supplies of air into the cave complex. Even after the boys were located, many of the rescuers, some of the world's best extreme cavers, doubted whether they could get the boys out alive.

Against the narrative of the World Cup, the Wild Boars quest showed another refreshing side of football as a tool for bringing communities together, offering opportunities for marginalised youth to become resilient, strong yet humble. Coach Ekk had the love of all the boys equipping them with the skills, determination and inner and outer discipline that greatly contributed to their survival. One of their teammates who had not gone into the cave said, *'Pi Ekk is a good coach because he does not put pressure on us - he taught us to meditate for a few minutes to calm down and have concentration before a game.'* (Chatthahan Saklakul)

This highlights a role for coaches as special ritual and spiritual guides. Allegedly their trip into the cave was an adventure, a kind of rite of passage. Local boys would go inside in groups and see how far they could get and write their names on the wall. It was one of these inscriptions, which may have been made by these boys or another group, that gave hope to the rescuers they were on the right track. The Wild Boar football team seems a great training for not only football skills, but also strength of spirit, determination and real team cohesion.

That several of the boys and the coach were 'undocumented,' some from marginalised ethnic groups, makes the story of their survival so powerful. This is quite normal in areas close to the Thai and Myanmar border. They would have few wholesome opportunities living in golden triangle areas where drug smuggling and all that goes along with it is rife. 'Undocumented' means they did not have any papers. It was widely reported that Fifa invited them to the World Cup Final in Russia if they survived and were well enough. A young boys dream! Hmm, I thought these kids would not have passports,

and the undocumented ones would be restricted on travel outside the local area, never mind the country.

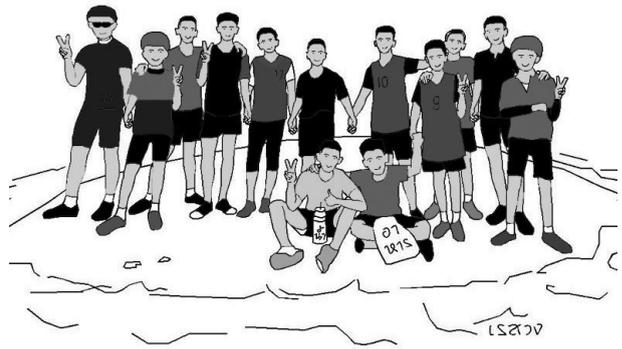
Having worked with migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand for many years, it was heart-warming that this story highlighted the strengths, resilience and talents of 'stateless' people, and sends a positive message around the world. All migrant worker kids, refugees and stateless people should be able to access human rights and fulfil their potential. The coach had been a novice monk for many years - most likely his only chance of any kind of education. He was from the Thai Yai ethnic group, and although permitted to cross the border to study in the temple, he was undocumented. One of the boys, Adul, came from the Wah ethnic group in Myanmar. Adul's parents wanted a better life for their son, and at 6 years old, took him to a Baptist church in Mae Sai and asked the pastor to look after him. Much has been said about Adul's language skills as he was the boy who spoke English to the cave rescue divers who first found him. It was also reported he spoke Thai, Burmese, Wah and Chinese. Being multi-lingual is not unusual in the hill tribe ethnic groups in Myanmar, where it is needed for communication and survival with different factions in society. However, for most of us with English as a first language, speaking four or five languages fluently is a great feat. I have read that the undocumented boys and the coach have now received Thai ID papers. Maybe in the future they can take up one of the fabulous invitations to a world class football match! More importantly, I hope their plight has highlighted this issue and raised compassion and more understanding for the millions of others in this predicament in Thailand and many other places in the world.

In Thailand, particularly rural Thailand, culturally the needs of the community are more important than the individual, which is quite a contrast to modern western cultural norms. That everyone pitched in with a kind of organised chaos is typically Thai in my view. Everyone genuinely wants to help and care for each other. Local vendors offered laundry services and vats of food for the rescue workers. The local rice farmers willingly allowed their land to be flooded. A consultative approach

is also typical. The local leadership, and authorities considered all the options and called on international help. The rescue was a huge coordination of some 10,000 people, all of whom I am sure have poignant memories and a story to tell. Thai friends told me that conflict in Thailand reduced at this time and the whole country seemed focussed on supporting the process. Muslim bird nest collectors came from Libong Island, near Trang in Southern Thailand, using their generations of knowledge scaling limestone cliffs to look for crevices from the mountain to get into the cave. The supreme patriarch organised all the Buddhist monks to chant and pray for the boys safe return, indigenous local leaders were doing their own rituals, incense was burned for the deva's of the cave. The parents and well-wishers paid respect to Nang Non alongside many other religious ceremonies. All forces on all dimensions were called upon. It is chilling that just after the last boy was carried out of the cave, the water pump broke causing more flash flooding, leaving the rescuers in the mountain running to escape leaving their equipment behind. After Mission Impossible became Mission Accomplished, there were ceremonies in many traditions, including hundreds of people paying respect to local deities and apologising for disturbing Nang Non.

After the ordeal, the boys and the coach showed humility, gratitude and a determination to be good citizens. Eleven of the boys ordained as novices for nine days and the coach as a monk for the Vassa (Buddhist Lent period) to accumulate merit to honour the Navy Seal who died in the rescue operation and show gratitude to their families and all who helped in the rescue operation. In Theravada Buddhism, such an act by young boys shows great devotion and respect. It was also a time for them to meditate and transition back to their normal lives after an extraordinary experience.

Many traditional cultures have rites of passage for youth to enter manhood where incumbents pass through dangerous, painful situations as well as periods of contemplation. Whilst I would not advocate youngsters getting trapped in a cave for this purpose, there is much to learn from the respectful and humble way the coach



and the young boys have conducted themselves. Their lives are changed forever, and I hope the bond they have forged will support them to navigate through life skilfully and meaningfully to live up to Coach Ekk's promise. "I would like to express my gratitude for people from the whole world, officials, and volunteers that came to help us — we promise to be good citizens to society. We will study and we will love people around the world the way the whole world loves the 13 of us."

I have high hopes they all will !

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Jane Rasbash

Jane has supported local NGOs working in Thailand and Myanmar for more than 20 years. The projects work with marginalised groups, e.g. migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand, ethnic youth groups and others from the hilltribe areas of Myanmar supporting access to rights, community led resilience and other local activities.

Footnote: I read numerous accounts of the rescue and aftermath from many different authors and talked to Thai friends. This moved me to write this reflection. If I have made any assumption or misrepresentation, I apologise and request you take this article as my perspective on these events. I am also aware that there is so much unsaid about the bravery, courage and indomitable spirit of all involved on many levels.

Christians and Buddhists in Dialogue: An Overview of the Past And the Present¹

Elizabeth J Harris,

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In the history of Buddhist-Christian encounter, there has been no single pattern of encounter. Each context has been different, conditioned by geographical location, colonialism, power relations, and the school of Buddhism or Christianity involved. Nevertheless, one significant principle is present. Where courtesy has been offered to Buddhists by Christians, courtesy has been returned, but when contempt has been shown, defensive opposition has been mounted. I will take three historical examples: Pre-modern China and Japan; Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka; the growth of dialogue in the twentieth century. I will then briefly pass to two areas of tension within Buddhist-Christian relations: monotheism and ‘unethical conversions.’

Pre-modern China and Japan

Christianity probably first entered China through members of the Church of the East, possibly from Syria, who arrived from the sixth century C.E. onwards. Evidence exists that the Church of the East sought to communicate Christianity through the thought forms of Daoism and Buddhism, and that this resulted in a synthesis of Dao, Christ and Buddha.² Within this period, there was not only respect and mutual learning between Buddhists and Christians, but also a sense of shared victimhood, since the Confucian-dominated state in the eighth and ninth centuries placed Christianity alongside Buddhism in state persecutions. Iconography also points to this mutual learning. The Church of the East sometimes depicted the cross resting on a lotus flower, and Christian figures have been found in Buddhist caves in eastern Turkestan.³

¹ This is a shortened version of a paper given at an Anglican-Lutheran-Buddhist Consultation, held in Myanmar in January 2017. It draws on Harris, Elizabeth J. ‘Buddhism and the Religious Other’, In *Understanding Interreligious Relations*. Eds. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt & David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 88-117.

² Palmer, Martin. *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the lost religion of Taoist Christianity* (London: Piatkus, 2001).

³ Fleming, Kenneth, 2002. *Asian Christian Theologians in Dialogue with Buddhism* (Bern: Peter Lang) pp. 40-41

'Taoist Christianity' in China did not survive as a separate religion. The next Chinese experience of Christians came in 1582 C.E., with the arrival of Jesuits, headed by Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). Ricci at first avoided confrontation, wearing Chinese dress, seeking elite patronage and adopting Chinese religious terminology, for instance 'Learning from Heaven.'⁴ He also challenged Buddhists to debate and successfully engaged some key scholars.⁵

Buddhists and Daoists, however, eventually opposed the Jesuits. The main reason was the eventual Jesuit insistence that those who engaged in Christian rituals should reject their former practices.⁶ The Chinese were not, according to the Jesuits, separating the two religious systems adequately. From the Chinese perspective, this was a failure of courtesy. Some Buddhists, therefore, launched defensive responses, which led to Jesuits being expelled from the province of Fukien.⁷

In Japan, the Jesuit, Francis Xavier, arrived with colleagues in 1549 C.E. and also opted for non-confrontation and the utilization of Buddhist terminology to communicate Christianity. Exactly the same thing happened as in China, namely Japanese Buddhists began to see Christianity as part of Buddhism. Xavier then started to condemn

Buddhism, causing Buddhists to respond with 'aggressive propaganda against the foreign intruder.'⁸ At the beginning of the seventeenth century C.E., Christianity in Japan was proscribed and did not return until the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, British imperialists were preceded by the Portuguese and Dutch, who controlled the maritime areas of the island. Research into these periods reveal that Buddhists developed a critique of the Christianity of their conquerors, through folk tales that represented Christians as uncivilized beef-eaters and Jesus as a heretic. One narrative, for instance, in a discourse of contempt, represented Jesus as the son of Māra.⁹ Formal communication between Buddhists and Christians in this period, however, was probably respectful.

In the British period, which stretched from the 1790s to 1948 and included the colonial unification of the island, a complex dynamic emerged. A number of Christian civil servants became scholars of Buddhism and, to these, Buddhists always showed respect, returning the respect that was shown to them. If Buddhists had only met these Christians in the nineteenth century, Buddhist-Christian relations in Sri Lanka would be

⁴ Brockey, Liam Matthew. *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China 1578-1724*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 2007) pp. 57-60.

⁵ Lai, Whalen & Michael von Brück. *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multi-Cultural History of Their Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis) pp 69-70.

⁶ Brockey. *Journey to the East*. pp. 301, 316 & 360.

⁷ Lai & von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism* pp. 71-72.

⁸ Thelle, Notto R. 'Japanese Religions and Christianity'. In *Christianity: The Complete Guide* (London: Continuum, 205) pp. 630-653, here p. 652.

⁹ Young, Richard F. & G. S. B. Senanayaka. *The Carpenter-Heretic: A Collection of Buddhist Stories about Christianity from 18th Century Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Karunaratne Sons, 1998).

very different today. However, another group of Christians came to the country - independent evangelical Protestant missionaries, driven by an exclusivist theology.

When the missionaries first arrived, the majority of Buddhists, in spite of an ongoing awareness of the above-mentioned folk narratives, sought a respectful and pragmatic co-existence with the missionaries. The missionaries, however, refused to reciprocate. Their preaching and writings condemned Buddhist philosophy and practice as atheistic, nihilistic, pessimistic, irrational, linked with the demonic and morally impotent.

This and the increased building of churches and Christian schools gradually changed Buddhist attitudes. The missionaries moved from being a tolerable presence to being a threat to Buddhism, necessitating resistance. An early strategy was to address petitions to the British administration, objecting to missionary methods and suggesting a code of conduct based on respect. When these produced no results, the monastic Sangha wrote reasoned responses to Christian accusations, which were taken from village to village.¹⁰

When Buddhists gained printing presses in 1855 and 1862, their exchanges with Christians became more polemical and populist, under the leadership of monks such as Mohottivattē Gunānanda, who, in 1862, founded the Society for the Propagation of Buddhism, in antagonistic response to the Church of England's Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.¹¹ Buddhist-Christian

debates also took place, the last of which was at Pānadurē in 1873, when Gunānanda threw back at Christianity exactly the same accusations that the missionaries had made against Buddhism. The point had been reached when the Buddhist hope for reciprocated courtesy had been replaced by reciprocal demonization.

The Growth of Dialogue in the Twentieth Century

During the twentieth century, moves were taken by both Christians and Buddhists towards greater rapprochement. One of the earliest Christian centres that sought to engage positively with Buddhism was founded in 1959 in Japan - the National Christian Council Center for the Study of Japanese Religions. In 1976, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture was founded at Nanzan University, a Japanese Roman Catholic institution. At the same time, two Jesuit priests, the German, Hugo M. Enomiya Lassalle (1898-1990), and the Japanese, J. Kakichi Kadowaki (b. 1930), were discovering that Zen meditation could contribute positively to Christian spirituality. Their books on this influenced Roman Catholics globally.

In Sri Lanka, a remarkable group of Christians arose in the mid-twentieth century, including: Lynn de Silva (1918-1982; Methodist); Yohan Devananda (1928-2016; Anglican); Aloysius Pieris s.j. (b. 1934; Roman Catholic); and Michael Rodrigo o.m.i. (1927-1987; Roman Catholic). De

¹⁰ Young, Richard F. & G.P.V. Somaratna. *Vain Debates: The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth Century Ceylon*. De Nobili Research Institute, Vol. 23 (Vienna: University of Vienna, 1996) p. 66.

¹¹ Malalgoda, Kitsiri. *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1800: A Study of Religious Revival and Change* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976) p. 220.

Silva called for an informed debate between Buddhists and Christians. Devananda established a Christian ashram, Devasaran ārāmaya, which drew on Buddhist forms of spirituality. Pieris called Christians to be ‘baptised’ in the waters of Asian spirituality, as Jesus was baptised in the Jordan by John, and set up a centre for inter-religious encounter and research, the Tulana Research Centre. Rodrigo, towards the end of his life, went to live in an entirely Buddhist village in the south of Sri Lanka to engage in a dialogue of life, where he was tragically killed in 1987.

A notable example of a Buddhist move towards rapprochement was the Kyōto School in Japan, founded by Nishido Kitarō (1870-1945), who engaged both with Christian mystics and western philosophy, and re-visioned Zen as a result. Keiji Nishitani (1900-1990), a member of the school, presented a paper in Heidelberg in 1938 on ‘Nietzsche and Eckhart,’ which encouraged Christians to re-think the ultimate nature of reality as embodied in the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the light of the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).¹²

In 1980, David Chappell (1940-2004), a Christian who identified as a Buddhist later in life (Chappell 2005), started an East-West Project from the University of Hawai’i. A Japan chapter of the project began in 1982. At the Project’s second conference in 1983, Masao Abe, a Zen Buddhist influenced by the Kyōto School, and John Cobb, a

Christian theologian, started the International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter, which came to be known as the Cobb-Abe group, continuing for 20 years. At the 1987 conference, the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (SBCS) was formed, which has pioneered new forms of exchange, through conferences, its journal (*Buddhist-Christian Studies*), other publications and, more latterly, its website. In 1997, a similar organisation began in Europe, the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies (ENBCS), which holds a biennial conference with invited speakers on a theme central to Buddhist-Christian Studies.

The twentieth century also saw the birth of specific forms of Buddhist-Christian encounter, such as inter-monastic dialogue, engaged Buddhist-Christian co-operation, and dialogue between women. Inter-monastic dialogue was pioneered by the Christian monk, Thomas Merton (1915-1968), who died in Bangkok through accidental electrocution at a meeting of Inter-Monastic Aid (AIM), where he had encouraged his Christian monastic colleagues, ‘to devote themselves to serious engagement with the spiritual riches of the East.’¹³ His challenge was taken up and, now inter-monastic dialogue is firmly established within Christian monasticism, both in Asia and the West, with an on-line, international journal, *Dilatato Corde*.¹⁴

Engaged Buddhist-Christian co-operation is well-known to readers of ‘Seeds of Peace.’ Rita

¹² Ueda, Shizutero. ‘Jesus in Contemporary Japanese Zen. With special regards to Keiji Nishitani.’ In *Buddhist Perceptions of Jesus*. Eds. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Gerhard Köberlin & Joseph Götz (St Ottilien: EOS, 1999) pp. 42-58.

¹³ Blée, Fabrice (William Skudlarek with Mary Grady trans.) *The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011) p. 27.

¹⁴ See www.dimmid.org

Gross (1943-2015), for instance, claimed that ‘the prophetic voice’ had been missing in Buddhism.¹⁵ In saying this, she realized she was drawing on Christianity and Judaism. Similarly, Thich Nhat Hanh was influenced by Martin Luther King and Thomas Merton. As for dialogue between Buddhist and Christian women, one of the finest published examples of Buddhist-Christian dialogue I know featured two women – Rita Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, both members of the SBCS. The dialogue covered their journeys into Buddhist-Christian encounter, critiques of their own traditions, what was liberating in the two traditions, what they found inspiring in the other tradition, and what resources each tradition possessed to aid global sustainability.¹⁶

The twentieth century, therefore, saw the birth of positive, structured dialogues between Buddhists and Christians, and also a dialogue of spirituality. It also saw the arising of ‘dual belonging,’ namely people who call themselves Christian-Buddhist or Buddhist-Christian, because they draw from both religions in their spirituality.

Monotheism

From the earliest Buddhist-Christian encounters, that Buddhism was a non-theistic religion featured in dialogue. For instance, the Jesuit, Ippolito

Desideri (1684-1733), who reached Tibet in 1716 and studied Buddhist texts under Tibetans, found that the Tibetans had difficulty with his belief in an eternal, creator God.¹⁷ Within the nineteenth century colonial narrative outlined above, when Christian missionaries condemned Buddhists for their ‘atheism,’ Buddhists, particularly later in the century, utterly condemned Christian theistic belief. This condemnation culminated in the writings of Anagārika Dharmapāla, who argued that the God of Judaism and Christianity was violent and capricious.¹⁸

In the twentieth century, however, more positive responses towards the Christian concept of God arose, as Buddhists were drawn into dialogue with Christians. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906-1993), for instance, gave the Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures in 1967 at the Thailand Theological Seminary, Chiang Mai, on Christianity and Buddhism. In them, he demonstrated knowledge of the New Testament and equated Dhamma (seen as the Law of Nature) with God and the Tao of Taoism.¹⁹

The Kyōto School, as I have already explained, created a different parallel - between God and śūnyatā (emptiness). Masao Abe stated, ‘Where Buddhism talks about Emptiness, Śūnyatā, roughly speaking it may correspond to the Christian mystic notion of ‘Das Nichts’ or ‘Godhead.’²⁰ To cite one

¹⁵ Gross, Rita M. *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1993) pp. 133-135.

¹⁶ Gross, Rita M, & Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

¹⁷ Zwilling, Leonard (Ed.). *The Mission to Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri, s.j.* Boston: Wisdom, 2010) p. 44.

¹⁸ See Guruge, Ananda (Ed.). *Return to Righteousness: a collection of speeches, essays and letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala* (Colombo: Ministry of Social Affairs, 1991 (1965).

¹⁹ Santikaro Bhikkhu, 2001. ‘Jesus and Christianity in the Life and Work of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’. In *Buddhist Perceptions of Jesus*: 80-103.

²⁰ Abe, Masao. *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1995) p. 76.

more example, Ayya Khema (1923-1997), a German-born convert to Buddhism, addressing the Eckhart Society towards the end of her life, stated, ‘In the course of talking on the comparison between Christianity and Buddhism and engaging in ecumenical dialogue, I have come to the conclusion that God (or Godhead) and Nibbāna are identical – that they cannot be anything else.’²¹

Not all Buddhists agree with Buddhadasa or Ayya Khema. The concept of monotheism or God in Christianity still remains one of the most challenging areas for Buddhist-Christian dialogue, particularly in Asia, with its legacy of European colonialism.

‘Unethical’ Conversions

I have shown that proselytization in nineteenth century Sri Lanka led to mutual demonization. This did not die with the end of colonialism. Conversion is a source of conflict, where Buddhists suspect that

Christians are using ‘unethical’ methods, namely misrepresenting Buddhism or promising material goods in return for church attendance. In Sri Lanka, in May 2004, mistrust of Christians was so high that a ‘Prohibition of Forcible Conversions Bill’ was tabled in Parliament by the *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU – National Heritage Party). In June 2004, the Minister of Buddha Sasana presented another similar bill. Neither, I believe, has yet passed into law but the controversy remains, not only in Sri Lanka but also in Cambodia, Thailand and perhaps Myanmar.

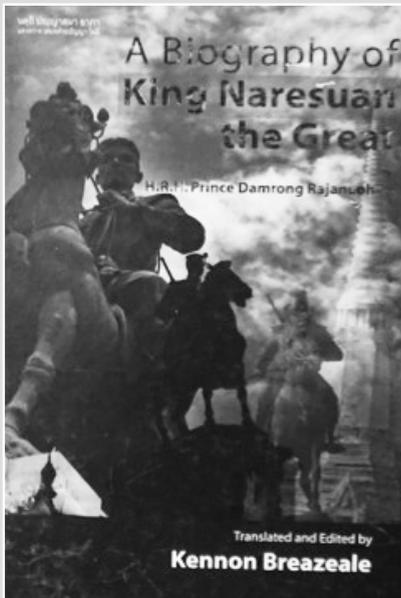
Conclusion

I am convinced that Buddhists and Christians have much to gain from in-depth dialogue and mutual learning, but I am aware that barriers to this reciprocity still exist. Let me finish with words from Michael Rodrigo, who taught me so much when I studied Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 1980s:

Buddhism and Christianity must grow together. This demands a radical self-emptying. The kenosis of the Jesus community today, drawn from Jesus’ self-emptying (Philippians 2: 7) must be matched with the selflessness, *anattā*, of the Buddhist *sasana* [dispensation] of today, as closely as possible. For unless there is this basic human trait operative in religion and society, there is no truly human.²²

S

Recommended Reading



A Biography of King Naresuan the Great

Editor: Kennon Breazeale

Writer: H.R.H Prince Damrong Rajanubhab

²¹ Ayya Khema. ‘Mysticism is no Mystery’. Eckhart Review, Spring 1996: 44-57, here p.45.

²² Rodrigo, Michael, 1988. ‘Buddhism and Christianity: Towards a Human Future. An Example of Village Dialogue of Life’. In Fr. Mike and His Thought Vol. 2. Ed. Milburga Fernando (Colombo: Centre for Society and Religion, 1998) pp. 19-29, here p. 20.

Saturday, June 16, 2018

Dear Acharn Sulak,

Thanks again for kindly squeezing in a minute of your time for me this morning at your home. It's good to see that you're still in top form!

Perhaps you may recall that I visited you there once before, about 15 years ago, mainly in relation to my dispute with King Prajadhipok's (sic) Institute – *which eventually went to the Supreme Administrative Court as Case #889/47* - and also to put a question to you about a minor matter viz a curious omission from one of your books – *I forget which one* – to which you replied with admirable brevity, “*Good question.*”

As I mentioned to you this morning, I am concerned about the risk of *lese majeste* charges (*whether they be of substance or merely constitute legal harassment*) in relation to the scheduled internet publishing, perhaps in a month or so, of my Bangkok journal circa 2006 of daily entries, made whilst living and working close by Sripatum University, and more recent reflections on the thoughts expressed therein.

Of particular concern to me, is the area of personal opinions and observations I make in the book, in relation to the quid pro quo expected from the vast majority of those wearing the uniform of a Thai government official in maintaining the status quo. From my personal experience with a recent President of the Supreme Administrative Court during my suit, I am acutely aware of the ugly face

of feudalism in modern Thailand - usually hidden by a mask of avowed loyalty to king, religion and country. As the plaintiff in the above-mentioned suit, I was unable to obtain legal representation for ‘neither love nor money’ - while the Law Society of Thailand as well as noted lawyer Thongbai Thongbao both quailed at the mention of KPI Secretary General, Noranit Sethabutr, as the defendant.

The over-arching purpose of my writing is two-fold: ‘*to speak the truth to power,*’ and to provide an alternative to prevailing orientalist narratives. Since 1990, I struggled in vain to obtain secure employment in the anti-intellectual education system, and eventually opened my own home school, and the humble income it provides is adequate to sustain the simple life I prefer to live – as indeed it must, because I have no other source of income and only meagre savings. However, the unofficial status of my school, coupled with the necessity to operate outside the legal restrictions of my retirement visa, further increase my vulnerability to intimidation and other punitive measures, legal and otherwise, by the powers-that-be.

It is with this in mind that I seek a fuller understanding of the consequences which publication of the book in its current form would likely present, and I hope that you are able to suggest where - given the above circumstances - such assistance may be found.

Regards,
Gary Richard Conigrave

PS: Your comment (which I read only yesterday) that the passing of King Bhumibol has left a hole in your heart really seemed to hit the mark in expressing feelings I was unable to articulate myself. We continue to mourn the passing of the man.

Dear Sulak,

I just received *Seeds of Peace*, Vol.34, No 2. Congratulations for 50 Years of SNF! I must confess: there is no other Journal, including Christian, which I have read over the years page after page, article after article, news after news, than the strange and motivating reflections born in a completely different cultural and religious human setting! Thank you for leading me towards viewing present and future, life and world, not only in contradictions but integratively by the way clearly defined by peace mindness. Thank You!

For some time, I have tried to find out about the attractive and animated drawings on the title-page of 2/2018(2561). Realizing my innocence, I dare to ask you, whether this is something like a mandala, which animates to meditate, but what? As an Asian, I probably would understand, but as an older Western, I don't find the point of entrance to a – I am sure - meaningful message. So, please, do help me!

How are you? Somewhere in 2/2561, I read that you are still teaching, writing, travelling! Are you supposed to visit the US? Will you come to Europe too? Do you know about Trump's secret strategy in (North-East) Asia? He may have other means and armies of interference than misusing "Cold-War-Monks" in South-East-Asia!!

Hope you and your family are fine. Peaceful greetings from experiencing 'summer-in-spring', including from Inge,

Wolfgang Schmidt

Dear Sir/Madam,

Firstly, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Alex Nguyen - I am an independent learner, working on alternative education and social changes in Vietnam.

Last month, I had a chance to participate in CURLS 2018 and met Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa. I have read about him and am really impressed by his wisdom and understanding. I recorded his speech and sent it to my community in Vietnam, and they were inspired so much by his sharings.

Next month, from 6th to 16th September, our team from a Vietnamese community of independent learners, The Soil Project, and 2 Vietnamese Educators, will go to Cambodia and Thailand for getting a sense of learning about some alternative education models. It will be our honor if we can meet and listen to his talk.

For these reasons, we are writing this letter in order to ask for permission to visit Ajarn Sulak. We expect to have the deep discussions about Buddhism, social transformation and education with Ajarn.

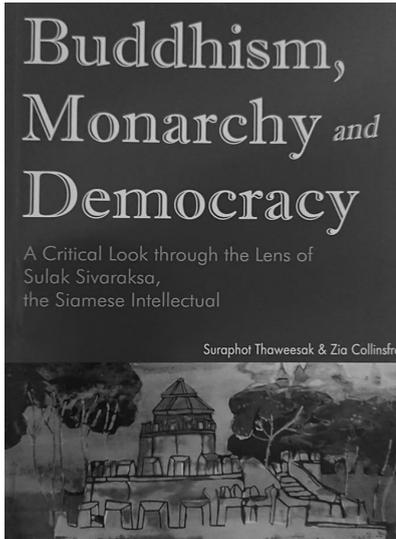
Briefly, the Vietnamese community of independent learners is a network and community that supports the paradigm shift in society and education towards sustainability. Our work focuses on four major activities: promoting alternative education and gap years building a sustainable community and model for sustainable development; promoting entrepreneurial spirit and social enterprise; connecting, collaborating, creating ecosystems and networks of alternative education, social entrepreneurship and sustainable development in the region.

Not to mention, The Soil Project is our alternative educational model, founded with the aim of changing the way that traditional education model have been implemented, including educational philosophy, goals, and methods. The learners (seeds) focus on learning the related subjects in order to build the essential foundations for understanding themselves and preparing for their future career with the implementation of new methods, including self-directed, project-based, experiential, and mindfulness-based learning.

Thank you for your consideration.

I'm looking forward to receiving the offer from you,

**Warmest regards,
Alex Nguyen**



Buddhism, Monarchy and Democracy

By Suraphot Thaweesak and Zia Collinsfree

Jordan Baskerville

Walking into the library at Wat Thong Noppakhun in Thonburi, Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa's family temple, one is confronted, near the entrance, by two large bookshelves stacked to the brim with books. Upon closer inspection of these titles, one is inevitably struck by the fact that Ajahn Sulak has authored every one of these tomes over the course of his multi-decade career as a socially engaged Buddhist, historian, activist and man of letters. Given the sheer volume of Ajahn Sulak's writings, it is a tall order – without reading his entire corpus – to definitively grasp his positions on the most important issues of the day. Fortunately, for those interested in socially engaged Buddhism generally, and in the thought world of Ajahn Sulak – arguably the most important contemporary critical voice in the Thai Buddhist world – Ajahn

Suraphot Thaweesak's *Buddhism, Monarchy and Democracy*, has been translated into English. Zia Collinsfree has done impeccable translation work here, rendering Thaweesak's original Thai language best seller into highly readable and accessible English. Apart from Ajahn Sulak's autobiography, *Loyalty Demands Dissent*, Thaweesak's book is the most important summary of Ajahn Sulak's thought in English to date.

The book is divided into three main chapters: Ajahn Sulak's thought on Buddhism, monarchy, and democracy. Included also is an introduction, a chapter on Sulak's critical methodology, and conclusion. It is abundantly clear that Ajahn Thaweesak spent considerable time poring over the many written works that have defined Ajahn Sulak's long career. Thaweesak includes a number of important Thai voices that have

engaged, over the years, with the discourses covered in this book including Somsak Jeamteerasakul, Thongchai Winiachakul, Nidhi Eoseewong and others. These critical scholars offer important counterpoints to Ajahn Sulak's positions that add to the balanced approach taken by Ajahn Thaweesak.

I do not seek to summarize the entire book as there is too much ground to cover in a single review; I will only highlight a few of the numerous insights found there. The chapter on Buddhism begins with a discussion on Ajahn Sulak's historical view of the Thai sangha, the problems it has faced and its limitations. In one telling passage, Sulak discusses the beginnings of the Thai critical-reformist Buddhist tradition that he represents with Ajahn Buddhadasa's founding of Wat Suan Mokh in 1932. Thaweesak describes this event as

“a hugely significant overhaul of the Siamese religious institution” (54). Sulak sees older strata of the Sangha as a democratic model capable of offering inspiration for the ordering of modern-day society, despite the fact that the Sangha’s contemporary form has been undemocratically shaped by state policy.

With regard to the monarchy, Sulak’s view is clear: a proper Buddhist monarch (Dhammaraja) should be a humble figure serving the people. Ajahn Sulak also believes the Thai monarchical system must be reformed to more closely resemble modern European monarchies. In this regard, Ajahn Sulak’s common reputation as a ‘radical conservative’ comes into play: he believes in the role of moral elites, yet is a proponent of grassroots organizing, and the power and insight of the poor.

If one is a follower of Thai politics and news, the question of Ajahn Sulak’s views on democracy are at times perplexing. He was one of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s most vocal critics yet, as this book makes clear, he is supportive of democratically elected governments – no matter how intolerable. Thaweesak has done an impeccable job of condensing Ajahn Sulak’s views on democracy into readable form. For Ajahn Sulak, blind deference to Euro-American democratic traditions is a foolish and dangerous undertaking, as implementation of this type of system inevitably leads to dominance by moneyed interests, including transnational corporations, at the expense of the middle and poorer classes and the environment. Ajahn Sulak’s views on a more ideal form of democracy are nuanced and

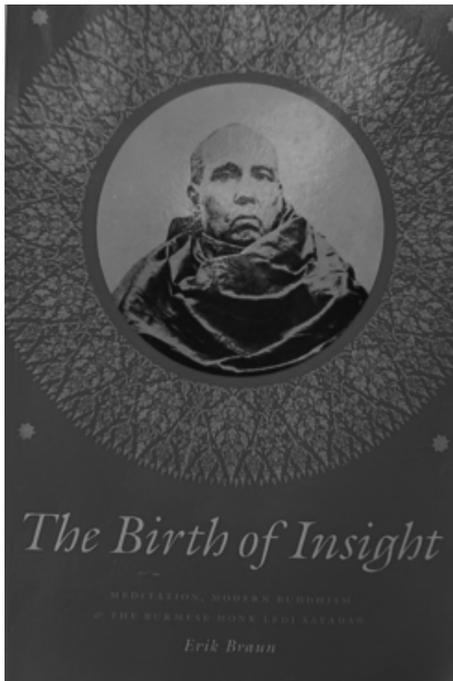
complex, as Thaweesak reiterates. That being said, Thaweesak’s book makes clear that Ajahn Sulak champions democracy, albeit a form of democracy that includes a highly regulated economic system whereby corporations and the rich, through state control, are prevented from gaining inordinate power and wealth. He is a proponent of policies that are at odds with structural violence such as universal health care and a living wage – a model most resembling some of the Scandinavian social democracies.

In summary, this book is an incredibly valuable contribution to Thai historical studies, Buddhist studies and works on monarchies in general. The central criticism I have is that quotations are not cited in footnotes, leaving the reader to search for the source materials in the Thai edition. *Buddhism, Monarchy and Democracy* deserves to be read by students of Thai history and Buddhism, and should be republished by a University press where it can find a broader audience and hopefully spark wider discussions on the topics it covers as well as Ajahn Sulak’s legacy within the Thai intelligentsia.



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The Birth of Insight: Meditation, Modern Buddhism, and the Burmese Monk Ledi Sayadaw

by Erik Braun.

The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Sulak Sivaraksa

When Burma fell under British rule in 1824, many senior Burmese monks were in panic. The position of Supreme Patriarch was ultimately swept away along with the monarchy. (Traditionally, when a monarch ascended the throne, he would appoint his Buddhist teacher as Supreme Patriarch.) However, these monks strove to transform the crisis into an opportunity. On the other hand, Thai monks, especially in the capital city, were dependent on royal patronage, and therefore they tended to behave as obedient servants of the state.

The Theravada Buddhist monk Ledi Sayadaw (the latter word meaning “respected teacher”, the title that the people bestowed upon him) played a highly influential role in this period, which Erik Braun has admirably captured in his book. The Venera-

ble Ledi Sayadaw was born in 1846—toward the end of the absolute monarchy. When the monarchy was abolished and the last king was sent into exile, the Venerable preached that the people were now the patrons of Buddhism instead of the monarchy.

Ledi Sayadaw was highly learned in the Scriptures, especially the Higher Doctrine (*Abhidhamma*). At the same time, he practiced and taught insight meditation to the people. The Venerable upheld that alongside generosity and moral training, the people must also practice meditation. Anyone could meditate—even the meat butcher and the alcohol seller. Additionally, he convinced his followers to become vegetarians. As an aside, Phra Lokanatha, originally known as Salvatore Cioffi, took hundreds of Thai monks on a pilgrimage to India

a few years after the 1932 Revolution. Unfortunately, all except one of them deserted Phra Lokanatha before reaching India. That person was the Buddhist novice Karuna Kusalasaya. Toward the end of his life, Phra Lokanatha lived in Burma. He too was a strict vegetarian. He claimed that Thai monks were too smug and attached to their ecclesiastical titles.

Ledi Sayadaw was an active preacher and prolific author. Moreover, he established chapters of lay disciples everywhere he travelled to teach the Dhamma. Generally speaking, Burmese Buddhists practice the Dhamma more strictly than their Thai counterparts.

The Venerable also corresponded with Buddhist scholars in England such as Mrs. Rhys Davids and Miss I. B. Horner, both from the Pali Text Society in London.

Like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Ledi Sayadaw was proficient in the Buddhist scriptures and texts. However, unlike the former, he focused on the Higher Doctrine. Meanwhile, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu felt that the Higher Doctrine was superfluous; it is not necessary for the practitioner of the Dhamma to pay attention to this scripture. In any case, both monks were open-minded with practitioners of other religions. Both of them saw the importance of Western science for the development of Buddhism. However, Ledi Sayadaw felt that science could only deal with worldly matters, while Buddhism could reach the highest ideal or Absolute Truth. At the same time, he didn't reject the existence of spirits and ghosts, and accepted that there is life after death as well as Heaven and

Hell. He claimed that science couldn't prove their existence, but the practitioner of the Dhamma could.

Ledi Sayadaw was also similar to Ajarn Chah Subhaddo in the sense of establishing a lot of monasteries. Of course, he was born well before these two Thai Buddhist masters. The Venerable passed away in 1923 at the age of 77 years old—after being ordained for 57 years. His leading disciples include Mohnyin Sayadaw (1872-1964) and Saya Thetgyi (1873-1945). The latter was a lay Buddhist who could teach meditation as well as any monk. He had received training from the Venerable himself. Saya Thetgyi was the teacher of U Ba Khin (1899-1971), who in turn taught S.N. Goenka (1924-2013). Goenka was an Indian who was born in Burma. Goenka was responsible for popular-

izing *Vipassana* meditation first in India and then worldwide, including Siam. Goenka also taught meditation to inmates.

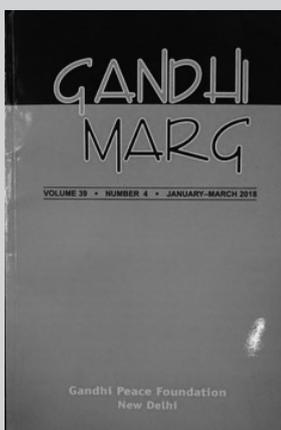
Among Ledi Sayadaw's students who became prominent monks were Sunlun Sayadaw (1878-1952), Mogok Sayadaw (1899-1962), Mingun Sayadaw (1870-1955), and Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-82). Mahasi Sayadaw is well-known internationally. Phra Phimolatham (Ard Asapbho) had sent Thai monks to learn *Vipassana* meditation with him in order to disseminate this practice back home. Mahasi Sayadaw also sent some Burmese monks to Chonburi province to establish a Dhamma center.

Anagarika Muindra and U Ba Khin were the teachers of Jack Kornfield (born 1945), Joseph Goldstein (born 1944), and Sharon Salzberg (born 1952). Today, these three individuals are meditation masters. They teach *Vipassana* meditation according to the Burmese tradition. They co-founded the Insight Meditation Center in New England and Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California. Kornfield was also a student of Ajarn Chah and was influenced by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

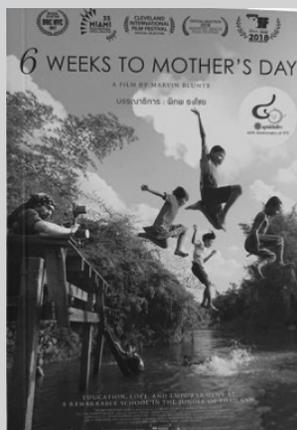
In this book, Erik Braun shows that he knows Burmese and Pali well. It is well-written and finely detailed. It is 'un-put-downable' to be more precise. As such, my only criticism is that the font is too small for an old man like me to read.



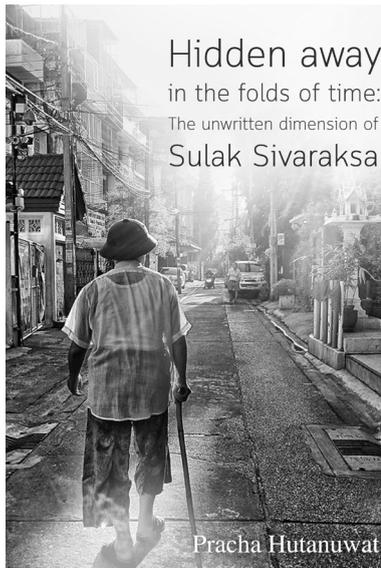
Recommended Reading



Gandhi Marg
Volume 39 Number 4
Publisher: Gandhi Peace Foundation
Editor: John Moolakkattu



6 Weeks To Mother's Day
Editor: Pibhop Dhongchai



Hidden away
in the folds of time:
The unwritten dimension of
Sulak Sivaraksa

Pracha Hutaniwat

'Hidden away in the folds of time: the unwritten dimension of Sulak Sivaraksa' is a fascinating read. Its core is an interview and appended are significant lectures by the subject.

Having but recently read the first, albeit unauthorized, substantive biography of Justin Welby, the current archbishop of Canterbury, this reviewer, who has known Sulak since the 1950s, is struck by the similarities of the two subjects. The Welby biography and this most recent Sulak publication confirm that both were privileged by being brought up in economic high security but one qualified by a fractured home life; both given, nevertheless, emotional security and close caring attention; both an immediate and accessible network of influential and powerful friends and acquaintances; and both given an education of a prestigious stamp. All was firmly rooted in the cultural character of their countries: Welby's in a respectful tolerant Anglicanism, Sivaraksa's in a similarly respected Buddhism. Both were to

Hidden away in the folds of time : The unwritten dimension of Sulak Sivaraksa

Robert McCloy

become risk-takers to a high degree taking on a heroic character. Certain of the positions adopted here are two persons seen by many onlookers as authoritarian.

Whilst in earlier years a certain ambivalence in their views can be recognized, this was to yield in moments of personal conversion to unwavering conviction. Both largely spent their formal education in recognizably collegiate institutions, which though distinctive had certain common characteristics: an endowed singleness of purpose, largely monocratic leadership, daily corporate religious observance, communal living [eating, sleeping, instruction, deliberation, and social interchange] and of a relatively small number wherein most would know one another.

There were, nevertheless, distinctive differences. Welby's inner life overtly and consciously focused upon an awareness of a very personal Jesus, Sulak's subjected to a contemplative and disciplined routine of meditation, rooted in a Buddhism of personal mindfulness allied to a commitment to ethical practice. Decisively, both took on missions with a common distinctive stamp: the reconciliation of strife-riven communities. Most notably, apart from brief employment with the BBC, to which he alludes in this publication, Sulak has delibera-

tively avoided any form of office, be it that of a permanent academic, politician or administrative official, preferring to stand outside formal structures which often excited his ire. Welby, by contrast, readily accepted employment within commercial enterprise, including that of being a very successful oil industry executive, seemingly unbothered by its cramping structures. When resolved to focus on their respective missions, Sulak sought not to engage as a subordinate but as a relatively solitary prophet, whilst Welby, duly ordained, accepted church-assigned roles. Sulak's solitary prophetic role has enabled him to speak out on a whole range of issues. Most notably, he has seriously challenged the undemocratic character of Thailand's government, the materialistic obsessions of the state and its institutions. Nor has the West escaped his censure: its selfishness, greed, and secular register have all been roundly castigated.

This book is a timely focus upon the contributory factors that have motivated this powerful prophetic voice. It is unflinching in its analysis and draws from Sulak answers that a more cautious subject would have glossed over or expressed with greater equivocation, which, of course, immeasurably adds to its appeal.

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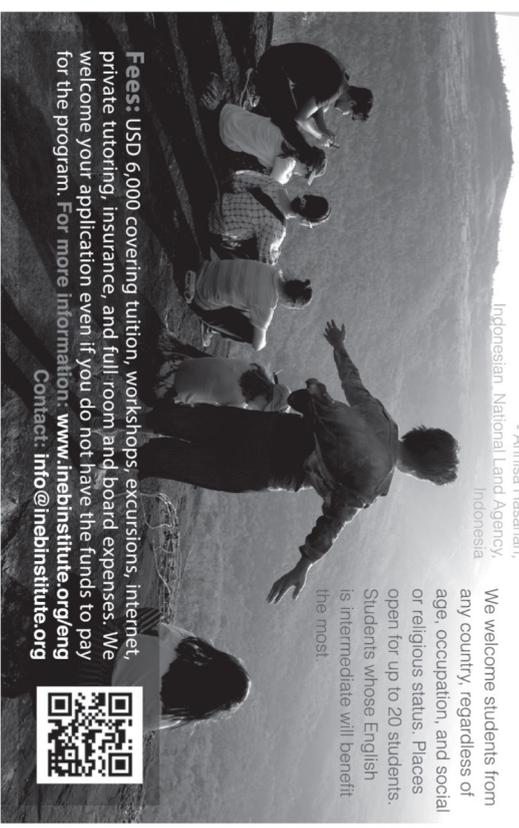
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- Annisa Hasanah,
Indonesian National Land Agency,
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