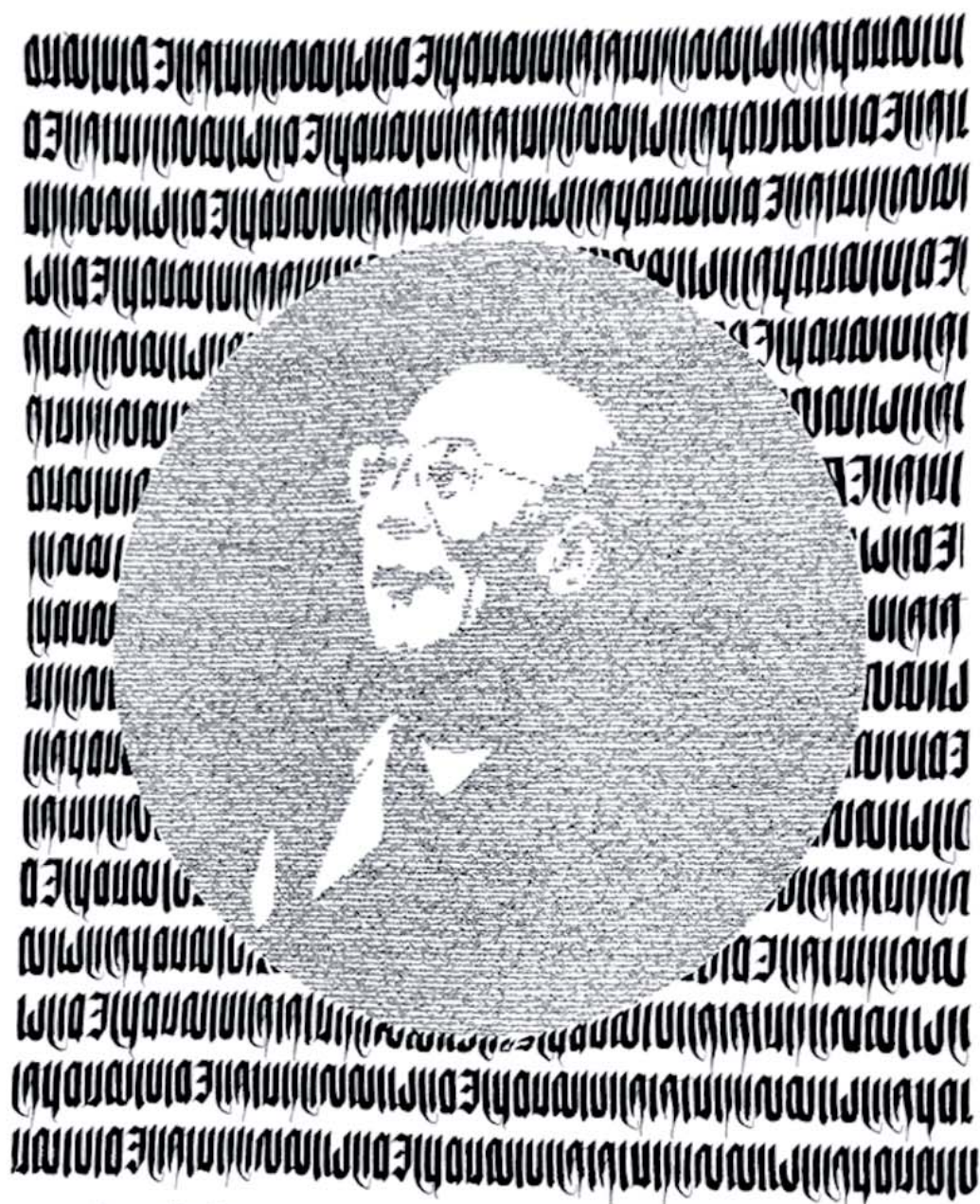


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The 14th Dalai Lama on His 80th Birthday

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Editorial Notes

We have been very saddened by the injuries, loss of life, and destruction caused by the major earthquakes that shook Nepal in April and May of this year. From our members and affiliate organizations in Nepal we have learned that official government policies have sometimes created obstacles for delivery of aid, and that certain groups, such as indigenous Buddhist communities, have often been overlooked by official agencies. This has made the grassroots organizing and relief efforts of our affiliates and members, often led by local monastics, more crucial than ever in getting aid to those who need it most. The relief work is urgent and ongoing, and much long-term assistance will be needed for rebuilding.

INEB is proud to have assisted in organizing the second successful international conference of the Inter-religious Climate and Ecology Network (ICE), which took place in South Korea this year. The themes of climate change, sustainability, and resilience brought together participants and speakers from 25 countries from the 24th of April to the 2nd of May. The conference was an important step forward in networking, sharing of information, and planting the seeds of collaboration between very diverse communities of faith from around the world. For further information, readers can look forward to a full report in the next issue of *Seeds of Peace*.

Since January of this year INEB staff have continued to prepare the ground for two new institutions of higher learning that will build on INEB's long history of creating alternative training and educational opportunities for grassroots activists. The first of these is the School of English for Social Service, which we hope to begin in late January of 2016. This will be a three- to four-month program that will help to take the English skills of grassroots social activists to an advanced level. Students will learn English while also studying the key personal and social challenges that characterize our world at present. Students will receive instruction in meditation and other life skills, visit with monastics and intellectuals, and undertake cooperative work projects, all in an English language medium.

INEB's second project is a master's program in Socially Engaged Buddhism. This will be a program for young adults who want to dedicate their energies towards both personal growth and social transformation, and to exploring how they can best integrate the two, using the entire history of socially engaged Buddhism as the focal point of study. Students will not only study texts but also meet with engaged Buddhist in four sites across Asia, while also putting the skills of meditation, listening, and open inquiry into practice. We hope to begin this program in August of 2016.

In regard to upcoming events, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who has been a patron of INEB since its inception, will celebrate his 80th birthday on July 6th of this year. We are grateful for the outstanding example he has given the world of a monastic who has come to stand for wisdom and compassion as a result of his acts of intellectual integrity, his simplicity, and his kindness. We wish him good health, a long life, and many more years of moral and spiritual leadership.

Finally, the INEB biennial conference will take place from the 15th to 20th of January 2016 in Sri Lanka. The conference will focus on holistic development from a variety of Buddhist perspectives. 2016 will be the first year of actively working towards the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which are in turn a continuation of the Millennium Development Goals. We see this as an ideal time to reflect on the last 15 years, to look at how successful the Millennium Development Goals have been, and to bring the views and practices of Buddhist social activists into more active dialog with these goals. Hopefully, doing so can contribute new perspectives and dimensions to public understandings of these goals, and lead towards greater collaboration as we enter a new phase in working to realize them. Please contact the INEB secretariat or visit the INEB website for further information.

India :

20,000 attend Dalai Lama's teaching at Sankisa pilgrimage site

TibetanReview.net, 02 Feb 2015



His Holiness the Dalai Lama during the final day of his teaching in Sankisa, UP, India on February 1, 2015. (Photo courtesy/Tenzin Choejor/OHHDL)

Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, spent three days at Sankisa, historically known as Sankasya, in Farrukhabad District of the Uttar Pradesh state of India, beginning Jan 30. The purpose was pilgrimage as well as to offer prayers and give religious teaching. The site is the most westerly of the eight principal places of Buddhist pilgrimage. He was received by the state's Minister for Technical Education Mr Alok Kumar Shakyas and also met with and had lunch with the state's young Chief Minister Mr Akhilesh Yadav on Feb 1.

Accompanied by monks of his Namgyal Monastery, the Dalai Lama, on reaching the

site, offered a series of prayers at the foot of the stupa there after doing three prostrations.

The visit was organized by the Youth Buddhist Society of India whose President, Mr Suresh Chandra Baudha, welcomed the Dalai Lama, along with the district administration and police heads.

Before beginning his teaching, which was on Dhammapada, on Jan 31, the Dalai Lama blessed an impressive new replica of the Sankisa Ashokan pillar that stands some 40 metres tall and is topped by a whole elephant capital complete with trunk and tail. The estimated 20,000 people who attended the

teaching included about 500 Indian Buddhist monks; about 1,000 Tibetans, many having travelled from Delhi; and about 50 foreigners from East Asia, Europe, North America and other parts of the world. The teaching began with a recitation of the Mangala Sutta in Pali by local monks, followed by the Heart Sutra mantra.

The meeting with the state's chief minister took place when the Dalai Lama returned to his hotel after concluding the teaching on Feb 1. On the issue being taken up by him, the chief minister promised help for a Buddhist learning centre being planned by the Youth Buddhist Society of India at Sankisa,

which falls within the chief minister's electoral constituency of Kannauj.

The Dalai Lama also blessed a chörten (Stupa) built by the Shechen Monastery to fulfil the wish of the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche who wanted such a project to be undertaken at Buddhist pilgrimage sites. The Rinpoche's current reincarnation was present during the ceremony.

Sankisa is also one of the four unchanging sacred Buddhist sites which include Bodhgaya, where all Buddhas attain enlightenment; Sarnath, where they begin their teachings; and Shravasti, where they extend the teaching and defeat doctrinal opponents. At Sankisa all Buddhas descend to earth after spending the Rainy Season Retreat in the Heaven of Thirty-Three, teaching their mothers reborn there. Tibetan Buddhists celebrate the Buddha's descent from the Tushita heaven every year on the 22nd day of the ninth month of their traditional calendar.

The Dalai Lama had visited Sankisa for the first time in 1960, some nine months after coming into exile in India.

On Feb 2 morning the Dalai Lama left New Delhi for a tour of Germany, the USA, Switzerland, Norway and Denmark.

.....

How India Is Squandering Its Top Export: The Buddha

Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse

India and Nepal gave the world one of its most precious resources -- the Buddha. Yet neither country truly values this extraordinary legacy, let alone takes pride in it. In the Buddha's own birthplace and homeland, his teachings are marginalised, his wisdom is unappreciated, and his legacy is invisible in society.

The pervasive neglect of this treasured inheritance is an inestimable loss. After all, few products from this region have ever been so widely valued and respected, or travelled as far and as successfully, as the teachings of the Buddha.

Yes--yoga, curry, basmati rice and Bollywood have their global influence. But Buddhism has transformed whole

societies in China, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, Japan and more, is fast penetrating the Western world, and continues to touch the hearts and minds of millions around the world.

And yet, amazingly, this intense global interest is barely evident in the lands where the Buddha himself was born, became enlightened, and taught.

It is unfathomable that neither governments nor the vast majority of people here in India and Nepal truly cherish the Buddha today or hold him in their hearts and minds as one of their own.

This lack of concern for their Buddhist heritage is both a leadership failure and an endemic societal blindness. In Nepal, interest in Buddhism

only seems to be roused when someone claims the Buddha was born in India, at which time the Nepalese zealously declare their own country as his birthplace -- even though neither Nepal nor India existed as entities 2,500 years ago.

In India the blindness extends from the failure of India's educated elite to learn about, appreciate, and preserve their country's Buddhist heritage all the way to those who make a living selling Buddha's pictures and bodhi beads at pilgrimage sites, and to the fake monks and charlatans who score donations from unsuspecting Buddhist pilgrims.

And this disregard for Buddhism is manifest every where, like at the bookstore at Varanasi airport -- the gateway for countless pilgrims to the sacred site of the Buddha's first teaching -- which carries not a single book on Buddhism in the midst of its rich Hindu and Indian collection.

And it is manifest even at the most sacred Buddhist shrine in the world, the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya, where the Buddha became enlightened,

which remains under majority Hindu management -- a situation akin to having the Vatican or the Kaaba in Mecca run by a majority of Buddhists, or a Jewish congregation run by mostly Protestants.

Secularism and political correctness in India

It is not easy to explain this wilful neglect. To some extent the plight of Buddhism in India today may be a legacy of the country's long colonial history, which seems to have led to a wholesale embrace of secular values at the cost of forsaking India's own profound spiritual heritage.

One recent example is the supposed revival of Nalanda, the world's oldest and greatest Buddhist university, which predated the founding of Oxford University by 650 years. The project's first Chancellor, Amartya Sen -- in the name of a firm "distinction between religious studies and the practice of religion"-- indicated he would tone down any Buddhist or spiritual teaching in favour of a secular curriculum. Indeed Prof. Sen writes about Nalanda with no mention of its Buddhist heritage.

India purports to value its heritage, but in practice acts more in accord with Western, worldly, materialist and non-spiritual values than with the profound wisdom its traditions have bequeathed to the world. And so, while India proudly claims its place as the world's largest democratic country, the Buddha remains a stranger to most Indians.



Indeed, India's educated intellectuals know more about Marx and Marxism than about Buddha and Buddhism.

Western secular political correctness is on display even at the entrance to the Nalanda ruins, where the historical marker fails to mention that the university and its huge, invaluable library were actually destroyed in 1193 by Muslims on religious grounds because its texts did not uphold the Qur'an. The government prefers to tell visitors simply that the destroyer was a man by the name of Bakhtiyar Khilji.

Diluting the truth and watering down historical facts in the name of secular political correctness serves nobody. On the contrary, denying reality and burying the truth actually nurture extremism, even in traditionally non-violent cultures like Burma where Buddhists have acted violently towards Muslim neighbours.

Imagine the anger and accusations of anti-Semitism that would erupt in New York City if the government and scholars actively toned down the history of the Holocaust. For that matter, imagine how

Indians would react if officials and scholars toned down past British exploitation and misdeeds in India.

Scholars, journalists, panelists and experts will do more to serve peace and harmony today by telling the truth about the Muslim destruction of Nalanda and other Buddhist icons -- historically in India and recently in Afghanistan -- than by hiding it.

Western and Indian apologists for Islam argue that they are promoting tolerance, and that other religions have also engaged in destructive behaviour, like the Christians during the Crusades. They also have a habit of praising Buddhists for their generally non-violent response to provocation.

This form of apparent tolerance is more akin to a sophisticated political correctness than to genuine tolerance and open-mindedness. Imagine covering up a brutal assault by praising the victim for not retaliating and by diverting attention to other assaults.

By contrast, telling the truth, which includes naming the

assailant, is essential to nurture true love and compassion, which in the Buddhist view is inseparable from wisdom. Such honesty would do much to temper the impulse for revenge and retaliation, and even to reveal the truly heroic and courageous nature of non-violent response. In fact, that's precisely how Indian historians salute Gandhi's greatness and fearless non-violence -- by exposing, not covering up, British brutalities during India's Independence struggle.

In the case of the Hindu and Muslim destruction of Buddhism in India, however, India has unfortunately opted for a more cowardly political correctness. It has given in to the pressure of violence and intimidation, but has failed to reward non-violence with any protective action. Thus, while the Delhi airport decks out a special terminal for hajj pilgrims, there is no comparable support for Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India.

Only two religions matter in India

However, secularism alone cannot explain India's wanton

neglect of its Buddhist heritage, as witnessed by ongoing Hindu-Muslim sensitivities that show religion still does matter in the country. Hindus, for example, are incensed by the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi occupying the site of an ancient Hindu temple, and they even destroyed the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in order to build a Hindu temple; Muslims in Bengal and in neighbouring Bangladesh and Pakistan have attacked Hindu temples.

Yet India has no compunction about refusing to allow Buddhists to run the holiest of their sites, completely brushing off the fact that Bodhgaya is to Buddhists what Mecca is to Muslims. And so, perhaps it is not just secularism at play here, but rather that when push comes to shove, the only religion with influence in India has to be fanatical and violent--whether its adherents are orange-clad or green-clad.

In fact the demise of Buddhism in India is attributable to both the country's major religions, with Islam in effect finishing off what Hinduism began. Thus it was Brahmanic pressure from



the 5th century onwards that converted so many Buddhist temples into Hindu places of worship, with Muslim invaders then destroying what remained.

The legacy of this ancient religious imperialism remains evident today not only in Hindu management of Buddhist sacred places but is even enshrined in the Constitution of India itself. There, Article 25 declares that "reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly".

Whatever the historical antecedents, today's sad reality is that the governments and people of Nepal, India, and Bihar are notoriously poor hosts to the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who come here every year to pay homage and respect to the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha. From the top echelons of leadership to the lowest beggar syndicates in the streets, there is no evidence of any inclination to accommodate, help or be kind to these pilgrims from afar, beyond extorting money from them in every conceivable way.

To be fair, we cannot blame the woes of Nalanda, Bodhgaya, or Sarnath entirely on non-Buddhists. Mahayana chauvinists and Theravada elitists also operate in their own worlds, and the Buddhist temples around Bodhgaya rarely join in solidarity on any issue less mundane than obtaining an electric line or

improving water supply. Rather than celebrating their common heritage in shared teachings, meditation, devotional rituals and festivals, they often seem more intent on promoting their own sects and drowning out each other's prayers with their own particular liturgies on blaring amplifiers.

In response to my criticisms of India's lack of care for its Buddhist heritage, my Hindu friends are quick to note that Buddhism is essentially part of Hinduism and that Buddha was an avatar of Vishnu. Regardless of philosophical issues, that argument falters on simple human, social and emotional grounds, since Hinduism's gains, glories, and leverage are never shared with Buddhists.

Neglect of Buddhism is India's loss

Whichever way one looks at it -- whether merely through the worldly lens of business, politics, national pride, export opportunity, foreign policy or for deeper spiritual reasons -- the pervasive neglect of its Buddhist inheritance is truly a sad loss for India.

Even from a purely secular, business perspective, places like Bodhgaya and Lumbini are potential gold mines. Just within my own short stay recently in Bodhgaya, two foreign heads of state visited the Mahabodhi Temple to pay their respects.

Indeed, foreign dignitaries, army generals, and other notables regularly come

to Bodhgaya not for any conference or negotiation but simply to pay homage, not to mention the thousands of pilgrims who come on a daily basis from all over the world -- Europe, Russia, south and southeast Asia, China, the Americas, Australia and more.

And if some politics are inevitable, India actually holds a foreign policy trump card, because Bodhgaya and the other Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the country are assets that transcend all sectarian and political divisions, including on sensitive issues like Tibet. After all, these pilgrimage sites are sacred to all Buddhists of every tradition -- without exception -- and thus remain eternal reminders of the elemental truths the Buddha taught.

From a simple export value perspective, compare the quality of India's rich Buddhist heritage and the respect it commands worldwide to the embarrassingly shoddy quality of so many of India's other products -- from postage stamps that don't stick to door latches that don't fit. How sad that India does not cherish, let alone market, one of the greatest creations it has ever produced -- the stainless teachings and wisdom of Gautama Buddha.

And even from the point of view of simple national pride, it's worth remembering that neither Vishnu nor Shiva would attain Indian or Nepalese citizenship today because they are gods. By contrast the Buddha was an actual human being from their own land, whose wisdom, teaching and

example continue to touch the hearts and minds of millions around the world, including in the land of India's arch-nemesis, China. It is almost incomprehensible that neither India nor Nepal today shows any vested interest in his legacy.

A matter of attitude

Given this pervasive disinterest and neglect, it is not surprising that any real improvements in Bodhgaya and other Buddhist sacred sites are largely the initiative of foreigners or Tibetan refugees, who usually have to bribe their way at every step to get anything done.

The Indian government and people's lack of regard for such generous contributions from abroad is well illustrated by a recent incident in the impoverished region of Dhungeshwari, where the Buddha practised austerities for six years before attaining enlightenment.

There Delhi bureaucrats imposed a massive Rs 9 million fine on a school started by a Korean Buddhist monk for 500 local disadvantaged children, and thereby forced the school -- unable to pay the fine and cut off from outside funds -- to close temporarily.

When the school went to court -- a brave action, especially in Bihar -- to appeal the unjust ruling, a high court judge to his credit quashed the fine and publicly upbraided the Government of India for penalising a Buddhist-run school that was helping India's poorest and doing what the government itself should have

been doing.

In this rare case, justice was eventually served. But the lengthy bureaucratic harassment that preceded the judgment points to a larger attitudinal problem in India's perspective on Buddhism altogether.

One component of that attitude stems from caste issues that are still so powerfully dominant in India today. Millions of Buddhists in the state of Maharashtra, who were brought to the Buddhist path by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, are less committed to the teachings of the Buddha than to their wish to be free of the stigma of their low caste status. Important and understandable though that wish is, such a social and political agenda may not be helpful either to their own spiritual path or to Buddhism altogether.

Thus, a highly educated Indian friend accompanying me to my daily meditation at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya was recently quizzed by the Indian security guards as to why he was coming there every day, and was he an authorised guide. Assuming that Buddhism was either for foreigners or for the lowest caste Indians, these security guards could not fathom what the interest of an educated high-caste Indian might be.

And if this puzzlement exists at the very entrance to Buddhism's most sacred shrine, there may be little hope for a change of attitude towards Buddhism in Indian society or in the Indian national psyche at large.

India and China play the Buddhist card

Recently India has started to show some signs of mild interest in relating to its Buddhist heritage, particularly in the Himalayan region, largely because China is so actively providing support for Buddhist sacred sites on the other side of the Himalayas.

In that regard, it's worth recalling statistical estimates that about 20% of Chinese are Buddhists, compared to less than 1% of Indians in the land of the Buddha's enlightenment -- a percentage that has not changed in centuries. In fact, China has by far the largest Buddhist population in the world (amounting to more than half of all the world's Buddhists), while India's Buddhists amount to less than 2% of the world's total.

In contrast to the long history of neglect of Buddhism in India, China celebrates a number of historic and iconic Buddhist scholars and patrons. For example, the Chinese revere Xuanzang, to whom Buddhists are indebted for keeping record of the most sacred sites of the Buddha's life and enlightenment. And the patronage of generations of Chinese dynasties and emperors (like Emperor Ming in the Han dynasty, Emperor Wu in the Lang dynasty, and Empress Wu Zetian in the Tang dynasty) has ensured the survival of Buddhism outside the land of its birth.

And this patronage is not just ancient or historical. Even

today it's revealing to observe the sheer magnitude, detail, and scale of care and veneration lavished by China -- a supposedly atheist country -- on the preservation of the Buddha's finger bone at Famen Temple in Xi'an, for example, compared to the sub-standard way the Buddha's relics are treated at the National Museum in New Delhi, where even the reliquary was a donation from Thailand.

Of course we will never forget that the Chinese destroyed Buddhist temples, texts and teachers, both in the 1950s and during the Cultural Revolution. But those actions, over a very short time period, were politically not religiously motivated, and a strong revival of Buddhism is now underway in China.

This is in sharp contrast to the historical Brahmanic persecution of Buddhists and the subsequent centuries-long decimation of Buddhism in India by the Muslims, from both of which Indian Buddhism has never recovered.

Yet, rather than emulate Buddhism's resurgence in China, India -- ever suspicious of Chinese spying -- still erects bureaucratic barriers for many of the hundreds of thousands of Chinese Buddhists eager to visit India on pilgrimage each year. But India should understand that just as an Indian Hindu might feel more comfortable with a British Hindu than with an Indian Muslim, Sri Lankan or Ladakhi Buddhists regard these visiting Chinese pilgrims simply as fellow Buddhist

brethren.

And just as Muslims, destitute, colonised or downtrodden in their own lands, might take pride as fellow Muslims in Saudi Arabia's power and wealth, or like Jews around the world might take pride in Israel, so Buddhists in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and other places that suffered foreign invasion, or in small, poor countries like Bhutan, might rejoice in China's emergence as a superpower.

In sum, rather than succumbing to old fear-driven habits and suspicions, India might learn from and even join with the Buddhist renaissance in China by proudly proclaiming its own land, heritage and sacred sites as the birthplace and source of the Buddha's enlightenment, wisdom and teachings.

Returning Buddhism to its rightful place

In this article, I've tried to point to some possible historical, political, strategic, religious, philosophical, caste and other explanations for this region's heedless squandering of its rich and profound Buddhist heritage. But, whatever the reasons to date, the bottom line is that it doesn't have to be this way.

A conscious shift of view, not difficult to achieve, could not only acknowledge but take tremendous pride in the legacy of a man whose contribution to humankind remains unsurpassed.

In this materialist era in which greed is literally

Muslim, Buddhist leaders denounce religious strife

Bambang Muryanto, The Jakarta Post, 05 Mar 2015

destroying the earth on which our survival depends, the need to hear and contemplate the Buddha's truth on the interdependent nature of all reality is more pressing than ever. At the policy and behavioural level, such contemplation might even temper excess consumption, prevent further resource depletion, preserve endangered habitats, and leave the planet in a habitable condition for our children.

What exceptional satisfaction and esteem India and Nepal could enjoy in the world today if they were now to take full ownership of the life and teachings of one of the most remarkable and brilliant human beings ever to walk the earth. With relatively little effort, the extraordinarily rich ancient heritage of India and Nepal could merge with expanding current needs and interests in the world to leave an unparalleled legacy to all beings and to the earth itself.

This article may sound harsh in some of its critique, but nothing milder will do if we are to see the fundamental shift in attitude and view now needed to return Buddhism to its rightful, precious, and crucial place in the history, culture, and tradition of India and Nepal.

.....

Muslim and Buddhist leaders from South and Southeast Asia have issued the Yogyakarta Statement, which refuses the use of Islam and Buddhism in the politics of discrimination and violence.

In the statement, religious leaders from 15 countries called on Muslim and Buddhist communities to maintain peace because Buddhism and Islam are two of the world's largest religions.

"We reject such abuse and pledge to counter extremist religious interpretations and action with our authentic primary narratives of peace," declared Sri Lanka Council of Religion for Peace president Bellanwila Wimalaratana Anunayake Thera, representing the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka, at Borobudur temple, Magelang, Central Java, on Wednesday.

Bellanwila pointed out that Islam and Buddhism had similar teachings, such as peace, love, compassion and a commitment to justice for all mankind.

Both religions also respect the sanctity of life and human dignity as a basis to ensure basic human rights without discriminating between race, color, language or religion, he went on.

The Yogyakarta Statement,

addressed to all the people of the world, is the result of a high-level summit of Buddhist and Muslim leaders entitled "Overcoming Extremism and Advancing Peace with Justice", which lasted for two days in Yogyakarta and at Borobudur.

The event was organized by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the Council of Buddhist Communities (Walubi) and sponsored by the International Forum on Buddhist-Muslim Relations (BMF).

"We also recognize the need to strengthen governmental measures against religiously motivated discrimination and violence," Bellanwila said.

Based on international instruments such as Article 20 of the ICCPR and the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, he said all states should fulfill their responsibilities to protect their citizens from religious and racial discrimination and violence.

Meanwhile, the International Movement for a Just World president Chandra Muzaffar, representing Muslim leaders, said leaders of both religions would encourage solidarity, joint strategic actions, education, advocacy and prevention of the emergence

of conflicts.

"We will also develop the effective use of media for positive messaging, particularly social and alternative media," said Chandra.

He went on to say that the meeting was very important in light of the potential for conflict between Buddhist and Muslim communities in the Southeast and South Asia regions, such as in Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

"If we want peace and justice, it is very important for Buddhists and Muslims to come together because these are two major world religions. If we look at Southeast Asia in particular, where 42 percent of Muslims and 40 percent of Buddhists are found, we find two almost equal communities and they must have good relationships," Chandra argued.

He added that the rise in religious extremism in various corners of the world could not be generalized. However, usually the conflicts, under the name of religion, arose if there was oppression, occupation or poverty caused by the pilfering of natural resources.

MUI chairman Din Syamsuddin said extremism also developed from religious misinterpretations.

Din expressed hope that the religious leaders would spread the Yogyakarta Statement in their respective communities.

"The Yogyakarta Statement is very meaningful. It is not for Buddhists and Muslims only; it is for the whole world," he said.

Religions for Peace deputy

secretary general Rev. Kyoichi Sugino said his organization would translate the Yogyakarta Statement into nine languages.

"We will send it to young people around the world, so they can correct their leaders if they speak out wrongly," said Sugino.

a friend of his died of an accidental drug overdose.

"He was just 20 years old," said the father of three teenagers. "Because of drugs, he died at a very young age."

Eeng, 56, sells chips at a traditional market in Jakarta. She said she believed drug users caused problems for their families and friends.

"What they do is too risky," she said. "So it's OK if drug smugglers are sentenced to death."

Like many who support the death penalty here, 26-year-old Riska Martina Sitepu said she believed the severity of the punishment served as a deterrent to would-be drug offenders.

"Drug smugglers deserve the death penalty," said the office worker. "Life imprisonment doesn't suit them."

She said Joko's stance on the death penalty, so far refusing to offer clemency to convicted drug offenders since taking office last year, was the right move.

Even if someone in her own family was facing the death penalty for drug crimes, she said, she would agree with it.

"Those drug convicts on death row have destroyed the lives of so many people," she said.

Too harsh

Other Indonesians, however, believe capital punishment is too harsh a penalty for convicted drug smugglers.

"The death penalty is inhumane. I prefer life imprisonment," said Fransiska

Happy, a 36-year-old homemaker.

Sigit Wibowo, a 27-year-old teacher, said he believed the death penalty was wrong in all cases.

"No one has the right to take away someone's life, no matter what," he said.

For 24-year-old student Bernadina Cisasiandri Wersun, capital punishment ignored the possibility that people convicted of drug crimes could reform.

"Why doesn't the government give them a more humane punishment, like life imprisonment? My point is to give people the time to change," she said. "I believe that they can change if they are given life imprisonment."

Muliawan Margadana, a mining company director, called the death penalty "a shortcut" that failed to address the root problems of drugs in Indonesia.

"Such issues can actually be addressed by enlivening social infrastructure like schools," he said. "Religions also have a big role in making sure that young people don't use drugs."

Margadana, who is also chairman of the Jakarta-based Association of Catholic Graduates and Intellectuals in Indonesia, said Joko's recent pursuit of the death penalty reflected poorly on his administration and the country as a whole.

"I think this is a bad policy of the president. He should be able to cancel the death penalty for the sake of humanity," Margadana said. "By implementing the death

On Jakarta's Streets, Opinions Divided on Executions

Ryan Dagur, 8 Mar 2015



Police officers line up in preparation for the transfer of two Australian drug convicts on death row, from Bali's Kerobokan Prison to Nusakambangan, last week. (EPA Photo/Made Nagi)

As Indonesia's government pushes forward with the planned executions of convicted drug smugglers, including two Australians, there are also sharply differing opinions on capital punishment among the public.

On the streets of the capital some residents interviewed offered support for President

Joko Widodo's tough stance against leniency for drug criminals, while others believed Indonesia's renewed pursuit of capital punishment reflected poorly on his administration.

"I support the death penalty," said Sukirman, a 43-year-old food seller in Central Jakarta.

Sukirman said the son of

penalty, he violates human rights and shows how uncivilized we are as a nation.”

‘Zero political gain’

Joko announced last year that he would not be lenient when dealing with drug-related crimes.

In January, Indonesia went ahead with the executions of six convicted drug traffickers, five of them foreigners. Since then, preparations have moved forward for other executions, including those of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, two Australian nationals convicted for their roles in the so-called “Bali Nine” drug-smuggling operation.

Authorities last week announced that the pair had been transferred to an island prison where their executions appear to be imminent. This comes despite the Australian government’s repeated requests for leniency.

Some analysts have attempted to explain why Joko has pushed forward with carrying out the death penalty so early in his term.

Some have argued that it is part of an attempt by Joko to show “decisiveness,” one of his perceived weaknesses among critics during the lead-up to his

July election victory.

Yet it is also likely that there is no public consensus on capital punishment in Indonesia.

Political analyst Yohanes Sulaiman says there are no reliable public opinion surveys on the issue, and he believes answers to such a poll would swing wildly depending on how one frames the question.

For now, he said, the Indonesian media have framed it as a question of stemming drug abuse and standing up for Indonesian nationalism — most of the next round of planned executions involve foreigners, while Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s suggestion of foreign policy repercussions should the executions proceed have galvanized supporters of the death penalty.

Combined with frequent statements of support for the death penalty from Indonesia’s political elite, it has created an environment where Joko believes it is important to show decisiveness on this issue, Yohanes says.

“I tend to think that Jokowi wants to forge an image of himself as a leader and a father of a nation,” said Yohanes, who is a lecturer at the Indonesian National Defense University.

However, he also believes

the death penalty is not a key issue for most Indonesians, who may be more interested in the anti-corruption platform on which Joko ran, and was elected, last year. That may mean Joko has little to gain, politically, by proceeding with the executions, yet much to lose if he does not.

“I don’t think Jokowi is going to get any popularity boost by executing the Bali Nine suspects,” he said. “But if he doesn’t execute them, people will say he’s weak, he’s not as strong. So basically, Jokowi is painting himself into a corner. This has zero political gain for him.”

Religious views

The death penalty has also proved divisive among religious groups.

Said Aqil Siradj, chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, said in an interview that drug smugglers should be sentenced to death.

“The impact of such a crime is very massive,” he said. “That’s why we choose to support the heaviest punishment against drug smugglers as it can decrease the number of people getting addicted to drugs.”

Philip K. Widjaya, secretary

general of the Indonesian Council of Buddhist Communities, said his organization believed the death penalty was an appropriate punishment for drug crimes.

“We don’t want a small group of people to harm a big number of others,” he said. “That’s why we don’t mind the death penalty being implemented.”

Other religious leaders, however, are strongly opposed.

“The death penalty violates the right of a criminal to have repentance and to change,” said Fr. Peter C. Aman, a moral theology lecturer at the Jakarta-based Driyarkara School of Philosophy.

Fr. Paulus C. Siswantoko, secretary of the Indonesian Bishops’ Conference’s Commission for Justice, Peace and Pastoral for Migrant-Itinerant People, said that the Catholic Church opposed the death penalty.

“No one, including the state, has the right to take someone else’s life,” he said. “It is hoped that the state plays its role of education for criminals. We believe that people can change.”

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Lao :

The Sombath Initiative

The Sombath Initiative was conceived in early 2014 and publicly launched on 11 December 2014.



The Advisory Board of the Sombath Initiative currently includes:

- Walden Bello, Member of the Philippine House of Representatives, Akbayan Party
- Paul-Emile Dupret, Political Advisor, European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)
- Murray Hiebert, Chair of Southeast Asia Studies, Center for Strategic & International Studies
- Angkhana Neelapajit, Founder, Justice for Peace Foundation
- Lee Rhiannon, Senator for New South Wales, Australian Greens Party
- Charles Santiago, Member of Parliament, Democratic Action Party, Malaysia; Chairperson, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights
- Ng Shui Meng, spouse of Sombath Somphone

Note: Members of the Advisory Board serve in a personal capacity. Professional affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.

Background:

Sombath Somphone is a Laotian citizen from a poor farming family. In the early 1970s he received a USAID scholarship to study at the University of Hawaii in the fields of Education and Agriculture. After his graduation in the early 1980s, he returned to Laos, with the intention to work to rebuild his home country which had been devastated from its thirty years of war for independence.

Sombath Somphone's work which spanned for nearly four decades had largely focused on youth empowerment, alternative education, and sustainable development. He has received wide recognition for his efforts, including the UN ESCAP Award for Poverty Reduction

in 2002, and the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership in 2005.¹

In October 2012, Sombath served as Co-chair of the 9th Asia-Europe People's Forum, a benchmark civil society conference in the Lao PDR. The event, widely praised as highly successful, raised hopes of paving the way for a wider dialogue between the Lao citizenry and the state. Then, on December 15, Sombath was stopped by traffic police in Vientiane and taken away in another vehicle. The abduction was captured on CCTV, and he has not been seen since.²

The Lao government continues to publicly express concern over Sombath's disappearance, but has done virtually nothing to investigate it. While the voices of individuals, organizations and governments from around the world have grown in concern, those within the Lao PDR have fallen silent in fear.³

The exact reasons for the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone are not known, but it is clear those responsible want the issue of his abduction to also disappear, along with his vision and voice for a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable future for his country.

Rationale:

The Sombath Initiative was established in 2014 to ensure that Sombath's Disappearance

will be resolved and that his vision on sustainable development will continue.

The Sombath Initiative has two objectives:

- 1) To seek resolution to the case of Sombath Somphone's disappearance, and
- 2) To carry forward Sombath's ideas and ideals.

As noted, the global reaction to the enforced disappearance of Sombath has been remarkable. The case has also bought considerable attention to related issues of human rights, governance and development policies in the Lao PDR. To date, a loose network of family, friends and concerned groups has been instrumental in furthering this campaign. But to sustain, intensify and optimize the work, longer-term strategies, increased organizational capacity, and more substantive support are needed.

Future efforts will fall broadly under the two objectives, and cross-cutting activities.

Objective One : To seek resolution to the case of Sombath Somphone's disappearance:

A primary task is to continue work with and among those human rights groups already involved to optimize symbiosis and impact, and to catalyze additional action.⁴ The primary aim is to sustain direct and indirect pressure on the Lao government to accept its responsibilities regarding the

abduction of Sombath Somphone. Related issues include other enforced disappearances, the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, weak governance and judicial processes, restrictions on freedom of expression, association and other civil rights, and risks by activists as well as ordinary citizens who stand up for their basic rights.

In addition to the Lao government, campaign targets will include the media, the UN Human Rights Council (which the Lao PDR is campaigning to join), UN mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review and Special Rapporteurs, ASEAN (which the Lao PDR will chair in 2016), the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, and major donors to the Lao PDR.

Objective Two : To carry forward Sombath's ideas and ideals.

Many of the practical approaches and methods Sombath pioneered continue through various organisations and projects within the Lao PDR, and such field-level work will not be a central focus of The Sombath

Initiative. But just as Sombath's name cannot be spoken in most official gatherings within the Lao PDR, neither can the broader questions he was asking be openly discussed. Hence, another primary aim is to support wider awareness, analysis, documentation and dialogue about Sombath's broader vision, as well as the effects of and alternatives to the current development and investment policies. Issues will range from ecological, small-holder agriculture to value-centered/learner-centred education, from participatory planning to cultural preservation, and from Gross National Happiness to environmental sustainability. Common threads throughout will be youth, civil society, community involvement and the restrictive environment faced by those working to advance these causes. A network of like-minded organisations will be formed regionally to support these efforts.

Cross-cutting Activities:

The Sombath.org website and related pages on Facebook, Google+, and Twitter will be maintained and upgraded to reinforce both objectives. Continued monitoring and

analysis of related developments will feed into additional posts, content, media releases, documentary and informational materials as appropriate. Regional workshops, seminars, press conferences and other actions will be organised and/or augmented. Attendance of Lao participants at relevant events will be supported, as well as international speaking and advocacy tours for family members. To preserve autonomy and avoid risk to those working locally, The Sombath Initiative will not work directly in the Lao PDR. Efforts will continue, however, to strengthen linkages and exchange with local individuals and regional groups to serve as a voice raising concerns when appropriate.

Administrative Structure of the Sombath Initiative

An administrative umbrella and fiduciary oversight for The Sombath Initiative are provided by Focus on the Global South based at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. A three-person team, including Sombath's spouse and a Focus staff member, currently handles management functions, although this will evolve as resources permit the employment

of staff.

An Advisory Board is in place, and the network of associated organizations and individuals will be further developed. It is hoped that like-minded organizations, and individuals and friends of Sombath will come forward to support organizational support and financial support for this initiative.

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¹ See <http://sombath.org/who-is-sombath/work/> for more about Sombath and his work.

² See <http://sombath.org/video/> for the CCTV and other information about Sombath's abduction.

³ See <http://sombath.org/global-concern/> and <http://sombath.org/news/>

⁴ These include Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Commission of Jurists, International Federation for Human Rights, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances, UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance, and others

Siam :

DSI summons Dhammakaya monks

Post Reporters, Bangkok Post, 05 Mar 2015



Wat Phra Dhammakaya said it welcomed 100,000 faithful Wednesday to its wian thian and nighttime celebrations of Makha Bucha Day. (Photo by Pattarapong Chatpattarasill)

The Department of Special Investigation (DSI) has summoned the abbot of Wat Phra Dhammakaya — Phra Dhammachayo — and other monks from the temple for questioning.

The temple and the monks are accused of receiving more than 1 billion baht from suspects in the 12-billion-baht Klongchan Credit Union Co-operative embezzlement scandal, and will have to attend the DSI in person rather than sending lawyers.

The DSI issued the summons on Tuesday evening in response to prosecutors' instructions, said Pol Col Paisit Wongmuang, deputy chief of the DSI, in his

capacity as head of the team probing the Klongchan scandal.

Phra Dhammachayo and the other Wat Phra Dhammakaya monks named as recipients of cheques from the Klongchan scandal suspects will have to come to the DSI for questioning, said Pol Col Paisit.

The prosecutors want DSI investigators to expand their probe to look into 878 cheques worth 11.3 billion baht that were paid by the co-operative under former chairman Supachai Srisupa-aksorn, the key suspect in the scandal.

According to the DSI, Mr Supachai allegedly also withdrew about 1.9 billion baht in cash from the co-operative.

Of the cheques, 15 worth more than 800 million baht were paid to Wat Phra Dhammakaya and the abbot Phra Dhammachayo.

A number of legal entities and companies that also received cheques between 2009 and 2012 from the Klongchan suspects will have to be questioned as well, he said.

The DSI team investigating the scandal has not yet managed to interrogate Phra Dhammachayo because the monk earlier sent lawyers to meet investigators on his behalf.

But this time the abbot will have no choice but to come in for questioning in person, he said.

Meanwhile, Paibul Nititawan, chairman of the National Reform Council (NRC) committee on reform and protection of Buddhist

affairs, said the committee agreed on Tuesday that at least three rounds of public hearings will be organised to allow Buddhists and other concerned parties to give their opinions about proposed reforms it is debating. The first hearing will be held next Wednesday at parliament.

Asked about a threat by a group of monks to stage a symbolic movement on March 12 to pressure the government and NRC to dissolve the religious committee, which last month revived the embezzlement claims about the temple, Mr Paibul said they were afraid of losing benefits obtained by exploiting problems in the clergy. The groups are connected with Wat Phra Dhammakaya, Mr Paibul said.

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Junta to pass law banning homosexuals from monkhood

Kongpob Areerat, <http://prachatai.org>, 10 Mar 2015

The junta cabinet has approved a bill on religion which can be used to prosecute, with jail terms, people who propagate 'incorrect' versions of Buddhist doctrines or cause harm to Buddhism. The bill also posts jail terms specifically for homosexual monks.

In recent decades, although Theravada Buddhism, the prominent Buddhist sect in

mainland Southeast Asia, remains the most popular faith in Thailand, followed by about 90 per cent of Thais, the conventional practices and doctrines of Buddhism and the institutions which promote it have lost their ability to attract followers. This religious gap is filled with Buddhist cults which have managed to attract hundreds of thousands of

followers, such as Santi Asoke, a Buddhist sect which promotes simple communal lifestyles whose founder was disrobed by Thailand's Buddhist monastic authorities in 1989, and Dhammakaya, a controversial commercialised version of Buddhism which has attracted billions of baht in donations from its followers. Viewing these developments as threats, prominent Buddhist institutions have come up with the legal mechanisms to control Buddhist practices and regain power.

Since 2006, the Sangha Supreme Council (SSC), known in Thai as 'Mahathera Samakhom', the governing body of Thai Buddhist clergy, and the National Office of Buddhism (NOB), the secular office under the Prime Minister's Office responsible for promoting Buddhism, have unsuccessfully tried to propose a 'Bill to Patronise and Protect Buddhism', written by the two organizations. The draft bill was rejected under

previous military and civilian governments, who recommended that the contents of the bill should merely be included in monastic rules, but not apply to the general public. However, in August 2014, the junta cabinet, which sees Buddhism as a part of the Thai identity, has approved the bill and is preparing to submit it to the National Legislative Assembly. It is now under consideration of the Council of State.

Pointing to the importance of Buddhism to the nation, the draft bill says "Buddhism is one of the pillars of the Thai nation and is the religion that most Thai people adhere to. Therefore, Buddhists should be united in patronising and protecting Buddhism to make it prosper and enhance Buddhist principles and ethics to develop the quality of one's life." In addition to these vague sentiments, however, the bill will allow the SSC and the government to punish anyone deemed to threaten a narrowly

defined version of Buddhism promoted by the authorities.

For Sulak Sivaraksa, one of the founding members of International Network of Engaged Buddhists and a historian who is renowned for his criticisms of the SSC, the bill clearly shows the SSC's desire to gain more prominence in Thai society.

"This bill shows blind stupidity and lust for power," said Sulak. "The Sangha Supreme Council is a very weak council. It doesn't have its own identity. That's why it wants to show that it has power, which is regrettable," he added.

Monopolising Lord Buddha's teachings

In Section 8 of the bill on penalties, Article 32 states that anyone who propagates wrong versions of Buddhist teachings or, in others words, versions which differ from the SSC's interpretation of the Tripitaka, the ancient Buddhist scriptures, could face one to seven years imprisonment.

To effectively enforce this doctrinal monopoly of Buddhism, provincial Buddhist committees will be established under Article 14 of Section 3. One of the functions of these committees, as laid out in Article 16 of the bill, is to form a warning centre in each province against threats to Buddhism.

According to Venerable Phramaha Paiwan Warawunno, a liberal Buddhist monk known for his criticisms of the SSC, the content of the bill to protect Buddhism violates the rights of

individuals to interpret the Buddha's teachings. He pointed out that the Buddhist doctrines in the Tripitaka should not be monopolized by any specific institution, but should be open to all on individual basis.

"Whose interpretations of Buddhist doctrines are correct and shall be used as standards? Who will have the right to judge whether a specific version of the Buddhist doctrines is correct and point out that the others are not?" he questioned.

Venerable Shine Waradhammo, an undergraduate student monk at the International College of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, a Buddhist university in Bangkok, said that if the bill is passed it may become the religious version of the controversial Article 112 of the Criminal Code, aka the lèse majesté law.

"It will be a grave danger to education especially tertiary religious education of both monks and lay persons alike," he added.

Nidhi Eosewong, a prominent Thai historian and political commentator, also drew a comparison between the Bill to Patronise and Protect Buddhism and Thailand's lèse majesté law.

At a public seminar on 'Religion and State: We Won't Be Able to Separate in this Life' organized by Dome Front Agora, a student group at Thammasat University's Tha Prachan Campus in Bangkok on 21 February, Nidhi pointed out "No one really knows what the Lord Buddha taught word by word. You only have the

A spectacular Buddhist ceremony organized on October 2013 at the controversial Dhammakaya Temple, which continues to attracts billions of baht in donations from its followers (courtesy of Dhammakaya Post).



Tripitaka which was in fact written some 500 years after the Lord Buddha died. Therefore, even the oldest Buddhist scripture is written through an interpretative process.”

Tightening the rules against ‘sexually deviant’ monks

In an attempt to prevent men with sexual orientations other than heterosexuality from entering the monkhood, Article 40 under Section 8 of the bill stipulates that monks who perform, knowingly or unwittingly, an ordination ceremony for persons with “deviant sexual behaviour” can also be punished with a prison term of no more than one month.

Article 41 of Section 8 also states that monks who are ‘sexually deviant’ can be imprisoned for up to one month if they cause ‘harm and disgrace’ to Buddhism although the bill does not mention what kinds of actions are deemed harmful to Buddhism.

In countries where Theravada Buddhism is a prominent faith, such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Cambodia, the subject of homosexuality and monkhood is understudied. In Thailand, although homosexuality is generally accepted, since the Vinaya, the Buddhist monastic rules, stipulates that monks must be celibate, most monks choose to remain silent about their sexual orientation.

In Thailand, the SSC has never applied strict rules regarding this matter. Sulak said

that even some high-ranking monks in the SSC are themselves openly homosexual. Nonetheless, if the Bill to Patronise and Protect Buddhism is enacted, this could all be changed.

Venerable Shine believes that the disenfranchisement of people of alternative sexes and genders from the Buddhist monkhood is a form of violence and a violation of human rights.

“It seems as if people who took part in writing this bill hold prejudiced views against people with alternative sexes and genders. This is a form of violence and a violation of human rights because naturally gender and sex can’t be straightforwardly defined as male and female,” the monk told Prachatai.

He added that the application of this section of the bill is going to be problematic because it is based on prejudice.

“Although the bill states that only monks with alternative sexes and genders who cause harm to Buddhism could be prosecuted, the bill does not mention what sort of actions constitutes harm to Buddhism. Since the wording of this section of the bill already discriminates against monks with alternative sexes and genders, its application will be very problematic,” said the monk.

Religious hindrance to democracy

Besides the legal loopholes in the bill, Vichak Panich, a Matichon columnist and expert on Buddhism and religious studies, pointed out

that if the bill on protecting and patronising Buddhism is going to pass, it will become another obstacle to democracy in Thailand.

“This bill will give the SSC, which is already quite a dictatorial organization, since it is not transparent and elected, the power to prosecute not only monks but also lay persons who defy its authority,” said Vichak.

Vichak added that the version of Theravada Buddhism which is promoted by the SSC and the National Office of Buddhism (NOB) in Thailand always has two functions in Thai society.

“It [Theravada Buddhism] is promoted as a part of the Thai identity and nationalism. Moreover, it promotes the intangible concept of virtue and morality over freedom and rights. This lends support and justification for some groups of people in society to judge others,” said Vichak. “It is no surprise that this bill is being accepted under the current political regime,” added the religious expert.

In addition, according to Sulak, an attempt to further elevate the status of Buddhism in Thai society can backfire and become a grave danger to Thailand’s plural society.

In the 2011 version of the Bill to Patronise and Protect Buddhism, Article 4 states that Buddhism will be made the state religion of Thailand. However, in the current draft bill, which has been approved by the junta cabinet, the

statement that Buddhism is a state religion has been deleted.

“Although Buddhism is not the state religion now, Buddhism always assumes a state of paramountcy over other religions in Thailand and the Buddhist clergy already enjoy many privileges. If it is to become a state religion it might stir up some conflicts with other religious minorities in the country,” Sulak told Prachatai.

To sum up, Venerable Shine pointed out that the bill itself is counterproductive and would end up destroying Buddhism instead of protecting and patronising it.

“In order to thrive, religion must always be adaptable to societies to allow people to understand its practices and teachings, including, making itself open for debate and discussion. If this is prohibited, then the religion itself would be dead,” he concluded.

Sri Lanka/Tibet :

Buddhist Union - Spiritual Confluence or Geo-Politics?

Claude Arpi, 23 Mar 2015



The Dalai Lama meets senior Sri Lankan Buddhist monks

On March 19, an unusual event happened in Delhi.

The Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama met with a delegation of Sri Lankan Theros (senior monks), to discuss about Vinaya, the Buddhist monastic discipline. It is a rather rare occurrence, as the followers of the Buddha rarely 'exchange' their views on their respective interpretations of the Buddha's words.

The Dalai Lama told his Sri Lankan colleagues: "We are all followers of the same Buddha. At a time when scientific minded people are expressing some doubts about religion, many of them are expressing an interest in aspects of the Buddha's teachings." The Tibetan leader added: "To think of yourself as different from them, as someone

special, is to create distance and a barrier between yourself and others, which can lead to isolation and loneliness."

It is unfortunately what has happened between the different Buddhist schools over the years (or perhaps centuries). The Sri Lankan monks who attended the meet, were the heads of the three principal traditions of Sri Lanka: the Ramanya, Shiyam and Amarapura Nikayas; the President of the Mahabodhi Society was also present. The spokesman of the Sri Lankans later explained their presence in Delhi: "We discussed the Vinaya all day. We compared the Theravada and Mulasarvastivada traditions, which are the Vinaya traditions of Sri Lanka and Tibet respectively, and found no significant differences between

them."

During their meeting with the Dalai Lama, the Theros expressed the unanimous wish to see him in Sri Lanka soon.

This religious happening has however some strong political connotation and it is a direct outcome of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Sri Lanka.

In Colombo, Mr Modi affirmed: "Sri Lanka is where Buddhism has truly flourished." Later, he paid a visit to Sri Lanka's ancient capital Anuradhapura and offered prayers at the sacred Mahabodhi tree. It was a strong gesture, especially as he was accompanied by the Sri Lankan President, Maithripala Sirisena. Both spent 30 minutes at the Mahabodhi tree temple and performed some special Buddhist rituals.

Already during his official visit to Japan, the Prime Minister had reminded his hosts: "Buddhism from India has inspired Japan for over a millennium."

This is important at a time when China tries hard to take the leadership of the Buddhism movement in Asia.

On October 27, 2014, The Buddhist Channel, a global news platform which provides news on Buddhism, reported 'China lays claims to leadership of the Buddhist World'.

Xinhua elaborated: "Hundreds of the world's Buddhists gathered at an ancient temple in northwest China's Shaanxi Province to open the World Fellowship of Buddhists' 27th general conference. Congregating

around a relic said to contain one of the Buddha's finger bones at the Famen Temple in Baoji City, more than 600 representatives from 30 nations and regions were in attendance."

When it is convenient, Communist China believes in the Buddha (and in the reincarnation of Buddhist masters); already in 1957, on the occasion of the 2500th anniversary of Gautam Siddhartha's birth, Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier (and hardcore Communist), brought 'back to India' some relics of the Great Monk.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne, who, in October, attended the WFB in Shaanxi on behalf of the German Dharmadutta Society delegation from Sri Lanka, praised China: "Though not officially acknowledged, China is today home to between 200-300 million Buddhists thus making it the country with the world's largest Buddhist population. The restored grand Buddhist temples in Baoji and in close by Xian, and the impressive Buddhist cultural display at the opening ceremony of the WFB meeting if these are anything to go by, indicate that Chinese Buddhism has undergone a remarkable revival."

Beijing always finds sycophants to support its claims and eulogize China's 'correct' attitude.

The highlight of the conference was the speech of the Chinese-selected Panchen Lama, Gyalsten Norbu, who urged Buddhists worldwide to jointly strive for deepened exchange and cooperation and

work together to boost environmental protection and safeguard world peace. Norbu told the international gathering: "Buddhism has already integrated into the Chinese culture and it is recognized by the Chinese government. For over thousand years Tibetan Buddhism has become the precious gem of the Chinese nation."

Of course, there is another side to the coin: while Buddhism is promoted for 'political reasons' outside China, it is banned for entire sections of the society inside the country.

One can understand: 200 or 300 million 'official' Buddhists could be very subversive for the regime. Today, the membership of the Communist party is a small percentage of these figures. How could Buddha be more popular than Karl Marx in the Middle Kingdom?

Till the recent meet between the Sri Lankan monks and the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan

Buddhist tradition (known as the Nalanda tradition) has had very few contacts with the Theravada School or Hinayana, which is prevalent in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand or Laos. It is quite regrettable.

For political reasons (Beijing's pressure), the Dalai Lama has never been able to visit Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar or even Bangladesh where a tiny minority of Buddhists lives.

Sri Lanka's Modi initiative is most welcome; the time has indeed come for Dharamsala to create a South Asian Bureau for Buddhist Affairs to facilitate a Buddhist Union. A delegation of respected (Tibetan or Indian) Buddhist figures should at the earliest visit the South Asian capitals and start establishing contacts with local Buddhists.

With the strong support of the Modi Sarkar, it should not be impossible.

In this perspective, it was refreshing that New Delhi took

the initiative to host a dialogue between Theravada Theros and Tibetan/Himalayan monks of the Nalanda tradition on some aspects of the Vinaya. It was a first exchange since decades.

The Vinaya dialogue was organised by the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC). It was a long way from November 2011, when before the Global Buddhist Congregation (GBC), organized by the Ashoka Mission in New Delhi (with an attendance of some 900 monks and nuns from over 40 countries), Beijing objected to the presence of the Dalai Lama in one of the functions. After China threatened to call off the 15th round of the border talks between the Special Representatives, the then Indian government backed out: both the Prime Minister and President were suddenly too 'busy'.

Interestingly, the Sri Lankan and 'Nalanda' delegations informally met over tea at the

residence of Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju, a native of Arunachal Pradesh. The most respected Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche, a former prime minister of the Central Tibetan Organization, was present for the occasion.

This current dialogue should definitely be extended to other Buddhist countries of the region.

And there is no reason why a country that treats its religious minorities so badly, should take the leadership of the Buddhist movement in Asia. The problem is that Beijing has a lot of money to invest in 'soft' diplomacy and many are tempted.

Tail End: It is regrettable that Amartya Sen could not understand that it was one of roles of the Nalanda University to organize such fruitful dialogues.

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(Core Group: International Network of Engaged Buddhists,
International Movement for a Just World, Muhammadiyah & Religions for
Peace)



Yogyakarta Statement

FINAL STATEMENT: *Shared Values and Commitments*

We, Buddhist and Muslim leaders, recognize that our followers have developed together a harmonious relationship, which has become the foundation for building peace and prosperity in many parts of the world. Buddhism and Islam share in their respective scriptures and other canonical texts the importance of holistic and positive peace, which encompasses the notions of inner

peace, peace among humans, and peace with nature.

We reaffirm that Islam and Buddhism are religions of mercy and compassion committed to justice for all humankind. Both traditions respect the sacredness of life and inherent dignity of human existence, which is the foundation of all human rights without any distinction as to race, color, language, or religion.

We reject the abuse of our religions in support of discrimination and violence. Buddhism and Islam have been misused by some for their own political purposes to fuel prejudice and stereotyping and to incite discrimination and violence. We categorically reject such abuse and pledge to counter extremist religious interpretations and actions with our authentic primary narratives of peace.

We also recognize the need to strengthen governmental measures to prevent religiously motivated discrimination and violence. Based on universally accepted international legal instruments such as Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, we call on all states to take measures to fulfill their responsibilities to protect their citizens from religious and racial hatred, and incitement to discrimination and violence in the name of religion. Freedom of expression includes the obligation to respect each other.

We reaffirm our fundamental common values shared by our respective scriptures and other canonical texts as follows:

I.

Religious Diversity and Peaceful Co-Existence

Buddhism

“All religions should reside everywhere, for all of them desire self-control and purity of heart.”- (Rock Edict Nb7 Edicts of Emperor Ashoka, 269-232 BC)

“Contact (between religions) is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desires that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions.” “You are true to your own beliefs if you accord kindly treatment to adherents of other faiths. You harm your own religion by harassing followers of other creeds.”- (Rock Edict Nb12, Edicts of Emperor Ashoka, 269-232 BC)

Islam

“O humankind! We [Allah] have created you from a single [pair] of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another.” (The Qur’an 49:13).

“If God had so willed He would have made you a single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what he hath given you: So strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God.” (The Qur’an, 5: 48)

II.

Universal Mercy and Compassion

Islam

“It is significant that every one of the 114 chapters of the Qur’an --- except one --- begins with the proclamation “In the name of God, the Compassionate and the Merciful.” Compassion and Mercy are among the most exalted of God’s attributes. This is why the Qur’an says “And [thus, O Muhammad], We have not sent you, but as mercy to all the worlds” (The Qur’an 21:107).

Buddhism

“Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let your thoughts of boundless love pervade the world. Let your love flow outward through the universe, to its height, its depth, its broad extent, a limitless love, without hatred or enmity.”- (Sutta Nipata 149-150)

III.

Universal Justice

Buddhism

“One who, while himself seeking happiness, oppresses with violence

other beings who also desire happiness, will not attain happiness hereafter.”- (Dhammapada 131)

“While being completely law-abiding, some people are imprisoned, treated harshly and even killed without cause so that many people suffer. Therefore your aim should be to act with impartiality. It is because of these things — envy, anger, cruelty, hate, indifference, laziness or tiredness — that such a thing does not happen. Therefore your aim should be: “May these things not be in me.” And the root of this is non-anger and patience.” - (SRE I/RE XVI, Kalinga Rock Edicts, Edicts of Emperor Ashoka, 269-232 BC)

Islam

“O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, Or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor; for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve, and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well acquainted with all you do.” (The Qur’an, 4: 135)

“We sent aforetime Our apostles with Clear Signs And sent down with them The Book and the Balance Of Right and Wrong, that men May stand forth in Justice.” (The Quran, 57: 25)

IV.

Human Dignity and Non-Violence

Islam

“Now, indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam and borne them over land and sea, and provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favoured

them far above most of Our creation.” (The Qur’an, 17: 70).

“...if anyone slays a human being, ...it shall be as though he had slain all humankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all humankind” (The Qur’an 5:32)

Buddhism

“Whoever settles a matter by violence is not just. The wise calmly considers what is right and what is wrong. Whoever guides others by a procedure that is nonviolent and fair is said to be a guardian of truth, wise and just.” -(Dhammapada 256-57)

“Even though he be well-attired, yet if he is poised, calm, controlled and established in the holy life, having set aside violence towards all beings - he, truly, is a holy man, a renunciate, a monk.” -(Dhammapada 142)

V.

Living in Harmony with the Environment.

Buddhism

“As the bee derives honey from the flower without harming its colour or fragrance --- So should the wise interact with their surroundings.” (Dhammapada 49)

“One day a deity asked the Buddha, “Whose merit grows day and night, who is the righteous, virtuous person that goes to the realm of bliss?” Answered the Buddha, the merit of those people who plant groves, parks, build bridges, make ponds, dwelling places etc. grows day and night, and such religious persons go to heaven.”

-(Discourse on the Merit Gained in Planting Groves, Vanaropa

Sutta)

Islam

“For the true servants of the Most Gracious are only those who walk gently on earth” -- (The Qur’an 25:63) What this means is that by reducing one’s ecological footprint one is being faithful to God.

“And there are on earth many tracts of land close by one another (and yet widely differing from one another); and (there are on it) vineyards, and fields of grain, and date-palms growing in clusters from one root or standing alone, (all) watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have We favoured above others by way of the food (which they provide for man and beast). Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who use their reason. (The Qur’an 13:4).”

VI.

Pluralism, Tolerance, and Religious Freedom

Islam

“There is no compulsion in religion...” (The Qur’an 2:256)

“Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe? No soul can believe, except by the Will of God.” (The Qur’an 10:99-100)

Buddhism

“Let him not therefore think himself better (than others or) low or equal (to others); questioned by different people, let him not adorn himself. - (Sutta Nipata 918)

The Buddha says, “To be attached to a certain view and to look down upon others’ views as

inferior--this the wise men call a fetter.” - (Sutta Nipata 798)

Guiding his disciple called Upali on how to treat the follower of another religion, the Buddha clearly stated that he was to treat him with the same respect. Throughout his life the Buddha urged people to respect all religious people in spite of the differences of opinion between them.

VII.

Rejection of Hate, Hate Speech, Retaliation, and the Importance of Self-Introspection

Buddhism

“They insulted me; they hurt me; they defeated me; they cheated me. In those who do harbor such thoughts, hate will never cease. They insulted me; they hurt me; they defeated me; they cheated me. In those who do not harbor such thoughts, hate will cease. For hate is never conquered by hate. Hate is conquered by love. This is an eternal law. -(Dhammapada 3-5)

“Do not speak harshly to anybody; those who are spoken to will answer thee in the same way. Angry speech is painful, blows for blows will touch thee.” (Dhammapada 133)

“Do not look at the faults of others, or what others have done or not done; observe what you yourself have done and have not done.”-(Dhammapada 4.7)

Islam

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety and fear Allah, for Allah is well acquainted with all that you do.” (The

Qur'an 5:8)

Based upon our shared core values mentioned above,

We commit ourselves, through the facilitation of the core group of the International Forum on Buddhist Muslim Relations (BMF: International Network of Engaged Buddhists, International Movement for a Just World, Muhammadiyah and Religions for Peace), to implementing the agreed upon action plan and working to further strengthen BMF to:

- a) serve as a platform for intra-religious and inter-religious initiatives in education & advocacy;
- b) enable rapid reaction/solidarity visits/ early warning/ conflict prevention in the event of conflict;
- c) develop and provide tools and materials for constructive engagement and strategic common action, and;
- d) develop the effective use of media for positive messaging, particularly via social & alternative media.

We appreciate our Indonesian hosts, Indonesian Buddhist Association (WALUBI) and the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) for their warm hospitality and their offering us a critical opportunity to dialogue among ourselves.

Open Letter To: The President of Indonesian Buddhist Association (WALUBI)

From: Somboon Chungprampree, Executive Secretary, International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)

Dear Mr. President,

I recently read a news article from the *Jakarta Globe* (9 March 2015 <http://thejakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/jakarta/jakartas-streets-opinions-divided-executions/>) that quoted the Indonesian Council of Buddhist Communities as being in favour of capital punishment for all drug traffickers on death row, saying, "We don't want a small group of people to harm a big number of others. That's why we don't mind the death penalty being implemented."

INEB acknowledges that drug trafficking and drug abuse have harmed many lives and destroyed many families. Young people are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of drugs, with many falling prey to drug addiction, and criminal activities associated with drug peddling and drug trafficking. Harmful though drugs are to the wellbeing of the body and the mind of individuals,

families, and society, INEB maintains the position that as Buddhists, we should be advocating respect of all life, showing compassion and loving kindness to all sentient beings as taught by the Lord Buddha.

Hence, INEB cannot endorse the death penalty under any circumstance as that would be endorsing the taking of a human life.

We would like to send this letter directly to our Buddhist Brothers and Sisters and friends at WALUBI, in order to remind all of us to be compassionate to all human beings and help solve the root cause of the drug problem, rather than destroy those who are also victims of this problem as well.

May happiness and peace prevail for us all.

Yours in Dhamma,



ASIA 2015 GOLDMAN PRIZE RECIPIENT

Facing heavy government scrutiny and restricted use of tools like email or social media, Myint Zaw launched a nation movement that successfully stopped construction of the Myitsone Dam on Myanmar's treasured Irrawaddy River.

<http://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/myint-zam/>

Changing With the Breath: American Students Reflect on Social Activism With INEB Teachers

Sarah Simon and Allegra Lovejoy



At mid-morning during the week of March break, Murray Dodge Hall at Princeton University is still but not silent, as the circle of people gathered in the downstairs room breathe together, or gently walk back and forth across the creaking floor of the old building. By mid-afternoon, the same group is transformed, as students eagerly debate issues and ideas in small clusters, listen and question guest speakers, and laugh or sometimes cry together. In the evening, they can be found once more on the cushions, sitting straight and tall under their teacher's watchful eye. To the casual observer, the group might appear to

have entirely switched focus, like a high schooler transitioning from math class to soccer practice to a furious attempt to finish homework, taking on a different role and purpose with each transition. For the group spending the week in Murray Dodge however, the meditative practices and experiences of the morning often brought surprising insights as well as a common language into the afternoon engagement with social issues and change-making.

This week-long experience, titled "Changing with the Breath" by the group who planned the event, began with the idea that there is an important connection between personal

change and social change. In trying to describe the retreat to friends who did not participate, it's hard to find a label that fits. Buddhist? Sort of... Meditation? Some of the time... Social change? Thinking about it... Another unusual aspect of this retreat (perhaps especially for participants attending Princeton) was that activities happened in the heart of Princeton's campus. A short walk down Nassau Street, or return to a dorm room, could instantly shift the quiet and reflective atmosphere in Murray Dodge back to everyday sensations, and often meditations were accompanied by the hum of a lawn mower or a passing conversation.

This was both a challenge and a blessing for students, since it offered a more comparable experience to the struggle of integrating mindfulness in daily life than might a retreat in an idyllic forest refuge. In retaining a connection to the outside world through location and activist visitors, participants were asked to integrate these exterior engagements with their mindfulness practices.

Another unusual decision was to carefully avoid the label “Buddhist” in retreat documents and initial discourse. Buddhist practice was very much a part of the retreat, but the retreat was not intended to fully address Buddhist spirituality, and did not expect any specific background in Buddhism of the participants. Instead, the retreat leaders emphasized principles of mindfulness and “small-b buddhism.”

Although the planning for “Changing With the Breath” began late in the fall of 2014, the ideas that motivated the retreat began to take root in Princeton with the arrival of Matt Weiner on campus three years prior as the new Associate Dean of Religious Life. As he settled into his new role, Matt began to make connections between the interfaith activists and engaged Buddhists, with whom he had worked with in his previous position at the Interfaith Center of New York, and students interested in mindfulness, interfaith dialogue, and activism on campus. Linking old friends to new friends seemed intuitive, and brought a breath of fresh air to both students seeking ideas and inspiration beyond the college campus, and activists invigorated by their interactions with curious and idealistic young people.

In just three years, Matt, the Office of Religious Life, and students organized talks with Thai activists Sulak Sivaraksa (who had visited in 2012 as well) and Ouyporn Khuankaew, meditation retreats over weekends and breaks, and, in the 2014–15 school year, visits from his Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa. While there was already a Buddhist and interfaith group on campus prior to his arrival, Matt offered exciting new outlets and possibilities to these students and their organizations.

To Matt, the two visiting teachers (Ouyporn Khuankaew and Jon Watts) and the five students (Philip Dang, Nick Horvath, Yun Yun Li, Damaris Miller, and Jenna Spitzer) who planned “Changing with the Breath”, the retreat was a natural growth from what had been taking shape at Princeton since Matt’s arrival. The first seeds were planted in early 2014 when Jon Watts, INEB board member and class of 1989 at Princeton, and Matt began discussing the possibility of connecting INEB with American universities. Later that spring Matt and Jon started talking with students about organizing a retreat, and after the Dalai Lama’s visit in the fall the group of coordinators began to meet in earnest. The idea was for the student team to shape the retreat in consultation with Ouyporn, Jon and Matt, based on the thought that learning how to develop a retreat is at least as important as going through one.

The team decided to schedule the retreat for the full week of spring break in order to provide a chance for students to explore the topics of mindfulness and social activism in a much deeper way than a talk or short

workshop. This was a purposeful decision based on the idea that a larger chunk of time was necessary to form a community and sink into the topics of the retreat, even though the coordinators were aware that some students might not be willing or able to dedicate the entire week. The team chose to invite students from other schools in the Northeast as well, hoping to broaden the group’s discussions and foster meaningful connections between participants. About sixty college students from other schools had also attended the Dalai Lama’s fall talk. By inviting this group to return to Princeton for the retreat the coordinators hoped to strengthen and reinforce the growing network of connections between college students interested in mindful social action.

Some of the visiting students were members of meditation groups at their schools, but others had no prior experience with meditation. Students brought a similar diversity of experience with social activism. The week was ‘interdisciplinary’ in the truest sense, where the disciplines of mindfulness and social change were united and explored in a way that revealed their deeply interconnected nature. Comparing Buddhist approaches to social activism, as taught by Ouyporn and Jon, with approaches that students and other guest speakers were familiar with, could reveal much overlap between them.

The first two days of the retreat were focused on learning and practicing meditation, supported by lessons on Buddhist concepts led by both Ouyporn and Jon. For some students, the retreat was an introduction to mindfulness practice and Buddhist

ideas, whereas for others, it was an opportunity to reframe and deepen their practice. The daytime schedule was led by guest teacher Ouyporn Khuankaew of the International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice near Chiang Mai, Thailand. Speaking of the intention behind this decision, Jenna Spitzer, one of the student coordinators, said, "Creating the right space was key... Making the environment one in which people felt safe and prepared to be vulnerable was, I think, what made the whole retreat possible."

Ouyporn had already visited Princeton's campus the previous two springs to offer talks, meditation workshops and one weekend-long retreat for women. As such, she already had relationships with several students who were eager to learn from her again. Ouyporn's joyful, firm teachings on the nature of the mind and suffering were reinforced by her bright smile and attentive presence. She filled the room with her air of quiet authority and generosity as a teacher. By starting the retreat with meditation and personal reflections, as well as periods of intentional silence, participants were encouraged to begin looking deeply into their own experience, rather than jumping directly to thinking about other people and society as a whole.

In the second half of the retreat, outside guests came to give presentations each afternoon, helping students think about service and social justice from different angles. Throughout the week, morning and evening meditations and reflections with Ouyporn and Jon continued to take place every day, giving participants

the opportunity to continue to ground their engagement with social work in mindfulness practice. Ouyporn's teachings provided a framework to approach personal suffering, and the chance to reflect as a group offered support for those facing individual challenges throughout the day. These group reflections were also an opportunity to practice listening with compassion to diverse experiences and opinions, an important foundation for the social themes that would come later in the week.

The value of this listening practice was reinforced on Tuesday afternoon by a workshop with mediation specialist, NYPD detective and practicing Buddhist, Jeff Thompson. Jeff discussed the mediation trainings he had designed and taught to NYPD officers, and described the techniques of listening and support that he brings to conflict resolution. Jeff often related his mediation work to his meditation, focusing on compassion and listening as essential ingredients in reaching an agreement. The day concluded with an activity where students divided into teams and were given the task to forge an agreement between their two conflicting businesses.

On Wednesday, Colin Greer and Noah Bernstein visited from the New World Foundation, a foundation that is uniquely dedicated to giving activists a voice in the distribution of effective funds for change-making organizations. Colin, a former professor of political theory at the City University of New York, spoke about his background, his perspective on social change and innovation, and his work to democratize the foundation. He urged students not to get lost in an

imaginary relationship to a better world, and to recognize that efforts towards social justice were all working from hypotheses, not fact. He said, "It is crucial to relinquish layers of distortion to move to truth," suggesting that to remain attached to a particular idea in the face of new information is extremely dangerous, and he described his ideal of "progressive disownership" of ideas as one becomes increasingly aware of the historical and social dimension of all ideas. It is no exaggeration to say that Colin's talk was electrifying to many in the room, as he swiftly shifted the climate of the room into a penetrating storm of social and political consciousness.

On Friday, four local activists joined the retreat for the morning, sharing in a short meditation before joining small groups to have a discussion about their work. These activists included a Burmese artist living in exile, an affordable housing coordinator, the manager of a soup kitchen, and a sexual abuse and rape crisis counselor. In the afternoon, more activists joined these visitors and the retreat for a meditation session, offered in response to their interest in learning tools for self-care and relaxation. These activists were as eager to learn about mindfulness practice as the students were to hear about their work. Some topics that came up with frequency in our discussions during the week were knowing when and how to act in situations of need or conflict, and focusing efforts where we could be effective, and this was an opportunity to put this orientation towards right ways of acting and thinking into practice.

Although participants came from many different levels of experience

with Buddhist philosophy and practice, the lessons of the retreat resonated deeply with each. During the retreat, students witnessed one another opening and sharing our experiences and our feelings during meditation sessions, or how we felt that topics were relevant to our external lives. Students also shared many moments of revelation during meetings with local activists, in which we heard the same ideas of selfless service, respect for all, and working together across difference repeated from the morning's lesson to how activists described their own work. Those moments of vulnerability and connection were a living testimony to how deeply the lessons were felt.

During and after the retreat, many students shared that they felt the lessons of the retreat would have a lasting impact. "The retreat reminded me that by sitting down, really listening, and connecting with myself and the people around me, I can find true strength and inspiration in what is already present," said Jenna Spitzer, a philosophy student at Princeton University, "Instead of focusing on the big, external changes, I was forced to realize that the real work begins in myself and in developing my capacity to appreciate and support life in each of my daily acts."

Naimah Hakim, a student at Princeton University who is active in anti-racism work on campus, felt a direct impact from the retreat on her work as a young activist. "The past several months have been especially heavy for many black Americans grappling with the physical, emotional, and existential wounds inflicted by the weight of racism. The development of my spiritual self has become



increasingly necessary against this backdrop. I feel grateful to have had an opportunity to take active steps towards self care, peaceful mindfulness, and renewal amidst a community of such compassionate and thoughtful individuals."

Andrew Nalani, a student from Uganda at Dartmouth University, told us how a few practices and ideas from the retreat have carried forward into his life. "Ever since the retreat at Princeton, I have paid more attention than I had before to three things in particular: returning to my breath, eating mindfully, and practicing loving-kindness. With the rush and hustle of college life, and with the desire to realize a more just world free of violence, it is very easy for me to give in to a driven self devoid of joy, rest and wellbeing. But after the retreat, I find myself taking moments during the day to return to the breath... It is the pauses in between my day's ventures that allow me to take care of

this being that allows, then, for authentic service to those around me."

Andrew also spoke about the impact of learning about mindful eating practice. "As a result from the retreat... I'm ever reminded of the phrase and intention to 'let the way we eat reduce the suffering of the world.' As a resident of the sustainable living center, a community that supports this intention surrounds me. I extend this intention in the work that I do as a student, and in the interactions I have through the loving kindness meditation we learned at the retreat. I am more able to be present with other people's and my own suffering, with joy, with the rush and hustle, and with moments of rest through this short meditation."

Nick Horvath, one of the student coordinators, found a much greater deepening of his practice during the retreat, and formed deep

relationships with other students and teachers. “Changing with the Breath was unlike any experience I have had before,” he said. “From amidst the challenges and excitement of young adult life, each participant brought a unique perspective and a desire to use his or her life for good in the world. Because of our determination and vulnerability, and quite a bit of help from our two wonderful teachers, we found the safety to take off our masks and examine our inner state as a first step for bringing peace and change to the world. This week gave each of us a practice that can help us ground our lives, and we practiced it together. But perhaps more importantly, it gave us the wisdom that by being present in our own communities and relationships was the most direct way to impact humanity. I have no doubt that the power of the time we shared together will have ripple effects far beyond our gathering.”

For many students, the sangha they found with other students and facilitators on the retreat was one of the most meaningful aspects for them. By the second day of the retreat, the group had formed a space of genuine support, presence, deep compassion, and vulnerability, in a strong contrast to the isolation that is characteristic of many students’ experience at American universities. After the retreat, several students affirmed how meaningful this experience of true sangha was for them. “The retreat has moved something within me that is impacting both my external modes of interaction as well as my internal state,” said Clara Färber, a student from Germany at Mt Holyoke College in

Massachusetts. “Being with so many other people that are so intentional in their actions has made me more hopeful about the world around me. Overall, I worry less and I am more motivated. I also feel like I have made real, important, deep friendships.”

For some students, the retreat community helped them feel less alone in their efforts to live a meaningful life. “This retreat was helpful because many of the participants were also engaging critically with this existential struggle. I was able to connect with a creative, intelligent group of like-minded activists with a spiritual side to them. Being part of a sangha—a spiritual community whose members care for one another’s well being—is the core of living a happy life and effecting meaningful change,” said Jacob Scheer, an engineering student at Princeton University.

Damaris Miller, one of the retreat coordinators, affirmed the strong impact of the sangha formed on the retreat. “Many students were able to experience their suffering more deeply than in their usual life and connect their suffering to the suffering of society while building a community. Several people mentioned they had tools that they could use after the retreat to continue their practice. The bond we formed as a community over the week seems very genuine and quite strong.”

Princeton University has continued its engagement with Buddhism through hosting the 17th Gwalyang Karmapa for a public lecture and a series of meetings with students two weeks later. Sixteen retreat participants returned to

Princeton to hear from the Karmapa and reconnect with one another. This meeting offered a chance to share how the retreatants had fared in their transition back to other communities, and how they were trying to integrate the lessons of the retreat into their lives.

It is early to say what will come from this inaugural effort to unite students on the East Coast of the United States around the topics of social engagement and mindfulness, but it is encouraging that many of the individuals from this retreat continue to stay in touch and work to integrate the lessons of the week into their lives.

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Postscript: As a member of the INEB Executive Committee, I would like to thank Matt Weiner for his exceptional work in making this retreat possible. I envisioned it as INEB’s first young bodhisattva training course in the United States, and I was very pleased that Matt and the students could create a truly “indigenous” retreat that reflected and also met the particular interests and cultural style of young Americans. - Jonathan Watts



Nepal - Earthquake Relief

Phakchok Rinpoche

Dear friends, I want to update you on our progress in Nepal. Thanks to your donation, the Chokgyur Lingpa Foundation has provided aid to over 25,000 families affected by the earthquake. Sending out more than 6,000 tents and 1,000 sacks of food, we have been able to reach nearly 30 villages in desperate need,

CGLF is one of the most effective organizations on the ground in Nepal today. With first-hand knowledge of the people and places most in need, an international support team and donations from the global community, CGLF is best-equipped to deliver desperately needed assistance to the mountain people of northwestern Nepal.

Our work is nowhere near finished as we begin to approach our next phase that focuses on rebuilding. Please continue to support our efforts by visit <http://earthquakerelief.cgif.org/>

“It’s very easy to read books on Buddhism, but what we really need is to apply and integrate the practice into every aspect of our lives”

Mindfulness and Awareness - Bringing Wisdom into Society: Achan Sulak Sivaraksha

One of Asia’s leading social thinkers and activists from Thailand, and founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, Arjan Sulak Sivaraksha spoke recently on Wisdom, more specifically on what it means in Theravada Buddhism. He talked about the cultivation of mindfulness and awareness and the importance of emancipatory change, both personal and social.

Excerpts:

“I am contending that people may be clever but not wise and that perhaps many people are too clever to point of being cynical and un-wise. The price of Pre-occupation with intelligence is the twilight of wisdom.

In Buddhism, wisdom has a special denotation that is different from the worldly sense or the general meaning of the word. Wisdom in Buddhism does not mean being clever or possessing intelligence and understanding of the kind associated with thinking. Wisdom is deeper than thinking. While thinking is restless. Fleeting and jumpy, wisdom is a concentrated, calm and prolonged state of mind, which also carries with it a sense of peace and happiness. This may be difficult to appreciate in an era in which multi-tasking is a favoured practice. In the world of multi-tasking, there’s little time for thinking and even less for achieving wisdom. On the contrary, wisdom must be cultivated through spiritual training.

Mindfulness is the precondition for and companion of wisdom. Wisdom is always guided and supported by mindfulness. The path of wisdom practice is exemplified in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness or the Four Satipatthana: body, feeling, citta and dhamma. The path leads progressively from the external –i.e., the body or what you see, smell, sense, etc. – to the internal; that is, feelings, states of mind or citta, and dhamma. Dhamma is the content of the mind. Each of these four is a domain of personal experience. The highest levels of meditation practice well enable us to cut the Gordian knot of the inner and outer division.

Why is mindfulness also fundamental for society or social change? Should social change come first, then followed by personal or spiritual change? Or is it the other way around? Neither way is correct because systemic and social change and spiritual change are the two sides of the same coin. We are a part of the world. And hence the kind of world that we create and change also change and constitute us. Gandhi is right to assert: “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Tibet Here, New Delhi
7 March 2015

A Critical Response to the Supreme Administrative Court's Decision

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My book *Nearly a Century of Thai Democracy Filled with Obstacles* was released on 30 April 2007; that is, several months after a military coup d'état that was dressed in reformist garb. It is a compilation of scattered talks and articles that I had previously given or written. It is divided into three parts—with the first part dealing with the contentious issue of monarchy and constitution in Thai society.

Later that year, on 28 September, the police qua officials in charge of Bangkok's print media illegitimately ordered the confiscation of my book as well as the prohibition of its sales and distribution. As a result, I filed a lawsuit against a number of state officials at the Central Administrative Court in 2008. The Court took two years to deliberate on it, and I lost the case. The legalistic reasoning used in its decision is dry and unjust.

Subsequently, I made an appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court, which took approximately another two years to decide on the case. It didn't overrule the Central Administrative Court's decision despite my testimony—excerpted thus:

That the first accused party or Bangkok's print officials prohibited the sales and distribution of the plaintiff's book as well as ordered its confiscation on 28 September 2007, alleging that it contains messages that might disrupt public order and social morality as well as potentially leading to immediate, negative repercussions on the king and public goods, the plaintiff was neither given sufficient information pertaining to the reasons behind this order nor the opportunity to present evidence contrary to the allegation prior to its enforcement. Since no rationalization was provided to support this administrative decision, it seems that it was based



on personal whims more than facts and rationality. The allegation is based on a literal and decontextualized reading of certain passages and sentences found in the plaintiff's book. This reading reflects the faulty assumptions and prejudices of the first accused party, which led them to declare that the book would disrupt public orderliness and morality, upset some people, or even make some readers lose faith in the monarchy. But a close and careful scrutiny of the matter would reveal clearly that the plaintiff's book is a collection of previously published essays and talks in 2006-7. It was released in April 2007. For instance, the chapter that appears on pages 3-27 is

the plaintiff's speech delivered on 7 May 2006 and was first published in the October-November volume of *Pajarasara* magazine. Likewise, the chapter on pages 28-31 is a talk the plaintiff gave on 10 December 2006 and was first published in the January 2007 volume of *Seeds of Peace* magazine. In other words, these articles originally appeared one full year before the first accused party ordered the confiscation of the plaintiff's book. During this period, there was no sign of social disorder or moral degradation resulting from the plaintiff's written or spoken words. Also, it appears that the plaintiff's words didn't upset any group of people. On the contrary, from 2006-7 till the present the plaintiff has been invited regularly by numerous education institutions and social organizations to give talks or lectures, to educate students or people at large. The plaintiff has dedicated his life to providing knowledge to society, domestically as well as internationally, for more than five decades. It is evident that the plaintiff has contributed to society and has stood steadfastly for justice and morality all his life.

I asked my lawyer to present this written testimony to the Supreme Administrative Court. It was submitted on 30 January 2013. In my closing oral testimony, I also requested the Court to take the abovementioned matter into consideration. But to no avail. The Supreme Administrative Court's decision is almost exactly the same as the Central Administrative Court's. To be fair, the Supreme Administrative Court claimed that my article had to be published in *Seeds of Peace* because no other Thai magazines would publish it—not because my article is “illegal.” (That the Thai print media lacked moral courage seems to be of no concern to the Court.) The Court also pointed out that *Seeds of Peace* isn't registered with Bangkok's print officials. As for the fact that one of my articles also appeared in *Pajarasara*, a Thai magazine, the Court didn't even mention about it. And this is what we call ‘justice’?

In this case, how can ordinary people trust the country's justice system? The judges in this country are overly legalistic. Worse, a number of their legal interpretations are found wanting. For example, the Appeals Court had sentenced the accused to imprisonment for defaming King Rama IV. Or the Court had claimed

that denigrating the buildings of the Royal Palace is akin to offending the king himself. But doesn't Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code apply to the defamation of the King, Queen, Heir-apparent or Regent of the present reign only? This article doesn't encompass insulting the monarchy as an institution at all. The Court weakly defended its decision by claiming that the monarchy is the symbol of the king, and hence it cannot be defamed. This logic is then extended to cover the protection of the Royal Palace from defamation.

When the lawsuit was at the Central Administrative Court, the police raised two points to attack my position. One, I wrote that tears filled the king's eyes as he left the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall on the 60th anniversary of his accession to the throne. I expanded this fact by speculating that the king might have felt overwhelmed by the sea of well-wishers who came to pay homage to him or by the grief of the loss of his elder brother who passed away on that very day six decades ago.

The police found my speculation inappropriate. Both the Central and the Supreme Administrative Courts agreed with the police. But doesn't legal principle say that if a message is ambiguous, the writer or speaker should be granted the benefit of doubt? And if the speaker or writer has disseminated illegal messages then s/he would be arrested? Since the police didn't arrest me, I presume that what I wrote isn't illegal.

Two, in my book I pointed out that most of the royal grandchildren were present on that auspicious occasion, including the ones whose father is an American. However, the four princes born to the Crown Prince were conspicuous by their absence. I then asked why this is so.

Again, the police found my question inappropriate—not even worth asking. Conversely, the police questioned my Thainess. By raising this inappropriate question, I had put my Thainess into doubt. Does this mean that being Thai implies being un-thinking, unquestioning and blindly obedient (to the powers-that-be)? If Thainess is defined as such, is it really conducive for the flourishing of human dignity and freedom?

Before I went to the Supreme Administrative Court on 19 March 2015, I had written a Facebook post asserting that the Thai judiciary system serves the government more than the cause of justice. As such, I didn't have high hopes that I would win the lawsuit. In a previous case, I was charged with obstructing the

construction of the gas pipeline in Kanchanaburi province. I defended my action by referring to the 1997 Constitution, which granted the basic right of nonviolent protest against the destruction of the natural environment, seeing it as a part of human rights. The Criminal Court then asked the Constitutional Court to deliberate on my claim. After approximately two years, the latter concluded that no such right existed in the 1997 Constitution. It didn't bother to provide any reason for its conclusion.

Fortunately, the Criminal Court acquitted me. Likewise, in the *lèse majesté* charge filed by General Suchinda Kraprayoon, I was also acquitted.

My experience with the Criminal Court has thus far been rather positive. Conversely, my experience with the Central and Supreme Administrative Courts has been outright negative.

I informed the Supreme Administrative Court that the police unjustifiably quoted decontextualized passages from my book. Moreover, I argued that the content of these passages is not unambiguous. Above all, and as a matter of fact, there hasn't been any public disorder resulting from my work. I referred to a legal precedent: the Criminal Court's decision to acquit me of the charge of *lèse majesté* filed by General Suchinda. In my testimony, I cited a crucial passage from the Court's decision:

The wording of the disputed sentences is strong, impolite, and inappropriate. However, when we look at the whole context of the talk and not only parts of it, we can clearly see that the intention of the defendant was to give a talk that was respectful and loyal to the monarchy. He did not want any group of people to abuse the monarchy for political purposes. Accordingly, what the prosecution refers to as constituting *lèse majesté* is not reasonable and contradicts the truth. The evidence is not strong enough to find the defendant guilty of *lèse majesté*.

However, the Central and Supreme Administrative Courts turned a deaf ear on these words. I didn't expect both Courts to read the whole book, but at least they should have read the "Foreword" by Chachawan Punpan, a science professor at Chiang Mai University. He writes:

A distinctive aspect of Sulak's work is his capacity to perceive ongoing and oncoming social

problems before society at large could. His role is that of someone who breaks the news of an impending crisis.

Sulak's intellectual power is able to produce a three-dimensional understanding of things. As such his audiences are able to see the truth that they have never noticed before. This probes them to question about structural injustice, capitalism, globalization, militarism, and even the monarchy.

Three-dimensional pictures are different from two-dimensional ones. Although two-dimensional pictures are put in motion and look realistic as on film, they cannot be seen from any angle. The viewer also does not have the chance to focus the picture by herself because it comes pre-focused by the producer.

On the contrary, the viewer can approach a three-dimensional picture from multiple points as allowed by the wavefronts. Each point not only reveals a different picture but also what has been previously veiled. This kind of picture makes the viewer realize that there are still many things that s/he doesn't know and is prevented from knowing.

The intellectual wavefronts that Sulak created and used to explain things are meant to stir up debate and foster independent thinking. It is hoped that the power of truth and goodness, along with a democratic way of being together, would lead to the creation of new wavefronts that clash with as well as supplement existing ones, generating clearer understanding. Society would be backed up by moral courage and would increasingly overcome prejudices such as the ones created by fear.

It seems that the police and the judges still perceived things two-dimensionally. They lacked the capacity to focus pictures independently. They are unaware of their own prejudices, especially caused by hatred, partiality, fear and delusion. Ordinary people cannot trust them to work on their behalf.

I pity these police officers and judges. I will perform good merits for them so that one day they may see justice, display moral courage, and realize that justice is not reducible to the law.

Patronage system breeds malaise in the monkhood

Phra Paisal Visalo

The problems surrounding the Dhammakaya temple and its abbot Dhammachayo are serious in themselves. But they also reflect larger and more acute malaises in the Thai Buddhist clergy.

For starters, the Sangha Council's controversial ruling on the Dhammakaya issue has posed questions over each elder's moral judgement and the serious flaws in the clergy's governing system.

More specifically, the crux of the problem is the closed clerical system which centralises governing power within a small group of 20 elders without any internal monitoring and auditing mechanisms. It is a system that is accountable to no one. The lack of transparency has given rise to rife nepotism and abuse of power to give favours to the elders' networks.

The emphasis on personal ties explains why the elders turn a blind eye to misconduct by wealthy monks. Worse, they continue to back these influential monks, giving them tacit support or even moving them up the ecclesiastical ranks, which helps the monks expand their networks further.

That the Dhammakaya temple and Dhammachayo have managed to stay popular throughout these years also shows the weakness of Buddhists themselves for they have little understanding of dhamma principles in Buddhism.

There are widespread false understandings even concerning the most basic matters in Buddhism such as *boon* or merit. For example, many believe the more they donate, the more merit they will gain. This is tam boon or making merit to acquire more things, not to let go of things according to Buddhist teachings. When there is misunderstanding at this basic level, there is no need to talk about their understanding of higher dhamma such as nirvana.

Not knowing what Buddhism is about, it is easy

for them to be misled by false teachings and ready to turn a blind eye to irregularities of their gurus. In other words, the Dhammakaya controversy shows a lack of knowledge of Buddhists themselves about their own religion. It also reflects a failure of the clergy and the clergy's education system.

In addition, the popularity of Dhammakaya, especially among the middle class, is linked to the widespread misconduct of mainstream monks. Monks' scandals do not only routinely make headlines, but people see with their own eyes what monks should not do every day.

Fed up, many in the middle class feel attracted to the Dhammakaya monks who appear more strict and orderly. Not realising that the teachings of Dhammakaya and the conduct of its abbot have more far-reaching adverse impacts, they fiercely oppose any moves by the clergy to punish Dhammachayo/Dhammakaya while letting other rogue monks get off scot-free.

Punishment or not, the more crucial question is why we have rogue monks in every nook and cranny. The answer does not lie only in the inefficiency of individual abbots or the elders in the Sangha Council.

The main problem is the governing system of the clergy itself. The closed and unaccountable system breeds problems and fosters widespread violations of monastic codes of conduct. This centralised system has not only rendered the elders weak and inefficient, it has put their moral standards up to public question.

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<http://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/487126/patronage-system-breeds-malaise-in-the-monkhood>.

Buddhism and Sex: An Interview with Phra Chai Worathammo

Original interview by: Kritsada Supawattanakul, Thailand Information
Center For Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism (TCIJ)

Translated by: Chirapon Wangwongwiroj

Today we talked with Phra Chai Worathammo, a Thai Buddhist monk who is trying to explain gender, sex and relationships through the lens of Buddhism. In addition, we have critiqued that the nature of Buddhism in Thailand today is marked by the refusal to change, despite a rapidly evolving society. Buddhist segregationist rules based on sex and gender have excluded many women and non-heterosexual people from the religion. These systems are deeply institutionalized in Thai Buddhist society and are very difficult to remove. Phra Chai hopes that one day those in higher positions in Thai Buddhist institutions will hear his plea and review these misguided and outdated rules.

Gender and sex are traditionally taboo topics in Buddhism. Sexual misconduct and non-heterosexuality are considered a sin or bad karma from past lives that prevents one from reaching the purity of Buddhism. Yet, sexual desire (whether heterosexual or non-heterosexual) is a natural part of human behavior; so in this regard, Buddhism and human nature can be considered as reflecting a disharmony that is hard to resolve. Many religions around the world seem to be conducive to only heterosexual males, and Buddhism is no exception.

TCIJ interviewed Phra Chai Worathammo, a Buddhist monk who is actually willing to discuss gender and sex. Phra Chai Worathammo started doing so after he realized that the rigid interpretation of the scriptures and the oppression of non-normative gender and sexual roles actually causes suffering to particular groups instead of freeing them. This interview delved into this controversial realm and served as an invitation for all Thai Buddhists to pause and ask the question, “What has happened to Buddhism in Thailand?”



Can the problem of sexual discrimination and the obsolete interpretations of the Buddhist scriptures in Thailand be fixed? Phra Chai did not believe so. “The most we can do,” he said, “is to keep talking until we are heard. That is all we can do.”

TCIJ: You have been ordained as a Buddhist monk for over 25 years. What did you see or hear that made you decide to start talking openly about gender and sex?

Phra Chai: The turning point was around 1995. I attended a workshop on social issues that discussed gender and sex. There were both gays and lesbians present at that workshop. On the fourth day, when gender and sex were the topic, the room was filled with uneasiness despite the past three days being filled with joy. It took a while before the mood got better. This moment clicked for me. I was intrigued to learn more about these issues.

That incident clearly showed me that gender and sex are taboo in Thailand. When we don't discuss them, there is lingering uneasiness and misunderstanding. One day, there was an incident that brought up this issue, it became a problem—one that we could not find the root of.

At that point, I started to research what in particular is causing this suffering. I started by discussing it with my

close friends, including Ajarn Chalidaporn, and approaching sexual equality advocacy organizations; there was only a handful of them back then, but I kept on looking and looking until I got to this point. Lately, I've been researching the issues of sex in Buddhism, including the views on gays and *pandakas*. (Pandaka is a gender term in the Pali Canon that refers to a mix of features including homosexuality, voyeurism, and impotence among others.) As I continued searching, I also found discrimination against women such as forbidding women from getting ordained and unequal roles of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. I see this as a longstanding discrimination to the point that it is now hard to notice it.

TCJ: So what you are trying to do is to apply the Buddhist principles to various issues, particularly sex, and then explain them?

Phra Chai: That is correct, although you have to understand that I am but one voice in the large institution that is Buddhism; it is impossible that everyone will agree with me. I am merely presenting a different viewpoint that is contemporary and easy to understand, unlike the Buddhist statutes that have not been clearly explained, or interpreted too conservatively are not responsive to the needs of modern society.

TCJ: For virtually every religion, sex is a taboo topic. It's forbidden. It's a sin. Am I correct in saying that religions provide very little room for discussions about sex? Why haven't the religions adapted?

Phra Chai: Let's explore it from a spiritual angle. When Buddhism states that something is bad karma, it can hurt the gays, lesbians and intersex people that are supposedly recipients of bad karma. We cannot forget this. Even for the heterosexuals, I believe the religious restrictions can make them uneasy. Issues including masturbation, pregnancy, teenage sex, or extramarital pregnancy can be very limiting.

In reality, most people do not stay within the religious boundaries. When religion-induced criticisms spread people feel bad about themselves. I don't think religion should go in this direction. Religious teachings should make people feel good about themselves—maybe not to the extent that Buddhism validates sexual relationships. What Buddhism should do is help uplift humanity—and its natural sexual desires—along with the core Buddhist teachings and not make people feel bad.

My observation, from the various trainings I

have conducted, is that most heterosexuals also feel upset and insulted by religion. They just don't know how to express this hurt and ultimately keep it inside themselves.

This is precisely why I believe it is not only non-heterosexual people that cross the boundaries set by religion; heterosexuals do too. This is one of the key tipping point that should lead us to examine what Buddhism truly intends to say about sexual behavior. Ultimately, you will find that Buddhism is not that concerned with the topic of sex. What Buddhism really cares about is how Buddhists can find enlightenment. In other words, as the Dalai Lama said, Buddhism is concerned with helping people discover the ocean of wisdom within themselves. This is the core of all religions: to find oneself. Similarly, in the case of theistic religions, the goal is to find God within.

TCJ: The 3rd Precept of Buddhism isn't necessarily limiting one's gender or sexual orientation, but rather forbidding sexual misconduct in the form of promiscuity.

Phra Chai: Correct. You can say that the 3rd Precept is an extension of the 2nd Precept—do not steal. The 3rd Precept gets specific by forbidding sexual affairs. This rule is present in every religion, not just Buddhism.

TCJ: When we laypersons talk about this 3rd Precept, we often say "Do no wrong to others' wives and daughters." For the part that says "do no wrong to others' wives", it's still possible to use your own interpretation. However, in the case of the others' daughters, it becomes less clear since sexual relationships in our modern society do not only happen under the institution of marriage. Today, we have to acknowledge that teenagers or university students have sex, and everyone of those sexual partners are someone's children. So when the 3rd Precept is addressed in our laypersons' terms, sex ends up being taboo in Buddhism, i.e. it forbids sex outside marriage. What are your thoughts?

Phra Chai: I didn't do any homework on this question. (laughs) But I've thought about this: How should teenagers view this precept? In a way, our society expects teenagers to not engage in sex, probably because teenagers are still in school and hence unable to take care of themselves. On the other hand, if we want to teach the teens, we have to help them feel and understand that they are still unable to take care of themselves financially. Every single penny they receive goes towards education. However, if parents decide to let them make their own decisions, there are many factors to be contemplated. For example, what if the

girl becomes pregnant? Alternatively, the parents have to make sure both parties use birth control. But what if the condom broke? It's not easy to figure everything out. There are people who barely make it through this stage. Some girls get pregnant in school. Some girls are abandoned when their partners realized they are or were pregnant.

These troubles are part of why this precept exists: to prevent unfortunate events from happening. So when teenagers spend time together, they ought to learn what consequences their actions will bring. Buddhism has set the boundaries, but we do not deny individuals choice. However, I also disagree with this precept in a way. When we stress this precept to the teenagers, and someone happens to break it, he or she feels terrible about themselves. In the case of a female student getting an abortion, others may view her as morally reprehensible, but I think about how she will be mentally afterwards and whether she will have the motivation and strength to continue her education.

TCIJ: So if two university students are a couple and they sleep together, are they wrong by virtue of having sex with someone still under the care of his or her parents?

Phra Chai: In a way you can say that. If you examine the 3rd Precept, it forbids sexual relationships with someone under the care of various parties, including parents and bhikkhunis. Generally speaking, one is not allowed to have sex with someone who is still under the care of adults. However, the 3rd Precept is not totally binding in this regard; it also mentions the individual's freedom to consent to sex. So it does not mean that if you are a single, 30 years old and having sex, you have disobeyed the 3rd Precept. There is mention of age, but it is unclear. In the past, society did not view youth in the same manner that our society does today. I want to see it like this: If an individual is mature enough to make his or her own decisions, he or she can be considered as no longer under the care of an adult.

TCIJ: Ultimately, this 3rd Precept has to be more properly defined to address the needs of modern society.

Phra Chai: Exactly. But the best thing to do is for the members of modern society to control their sexual behavior. If they can control their desires, it can help alleviate some trouble.

TCIJ: Buddhism in Thailand is viewed as discriminatory. For example, during the ordination ceremony, the monk

officiating the ceremony will ask if you are a man.

Phra Chai: This happened because in the past there were no female ordinations—no bhikkhunis (female monks). The question is asked in order to separate the male and female, and to clearly identify that the ordained person is a male. If the person is a female, she was not allowed to be ordained. Afterwards, when there were bhikkhunis, this question is then interpreted as who can be ordained.

Now, the question "Are you a man?" has multiple interpretations. You can be a man in terms of your physique or sexual attraction. If you take the latter interpretation, then it means that intersex and gay people are not allowed to be ordained. To this point, my take is that there are 77 provinces in Thailand, and each of the officiating monks has his own interpretations. It all depends on the monk's interpretation of this question. In general, the monks in the outer provinces have allowed intersex and gay people to be ordained, while the monks in the larger temples in Bangkok have not.

TCIJ: Is it necessary to ask this question?

Phra Chai: It is a practice that has been passed on for generations. It's a Buddhist statute. So I cannot answer whether it is necessary. One possible reason that it is asked is to use it to select people. One important point to note is that Buddhism has become an institution; this is why the selection is taking place. If we look back to the earliest days of Buddhism—back when the Buddhist teachings had not been institutionalized, the Buddha was someone who discovered valuable truths and imparted his wisdom to others. In those days the Buddha allowed a pandaka to be ordained. As it turned out, the pandaka ended up having sex with someone near his temple. This led to the rule forbidding pandakas from getting ordained.

If we dig deeper, the forbidding of pandakas from ordination did not originate from the Buddha, but from the society, the Sangha community and the monks who do not understand. These groups asked the Buddha to create the statute that prevents the ordination of pandakas. In those times, there was a discriminatory attitude towards pandakas already, so all pandakas are subject to this discriminatory statute that originated from one pandaka. So now, pandakas or anyone who is born with intersex traits are forbidden from monkhood.

TCIJ: In this case should we say that Buddhism is democratic? Or simply discriminatory?

Phra Chai: I view it as democratic but inconsiderate of minority interests. Democracy has many forms. One of the forms that we never question much is the one where the majority makes a decision without stopping to think about whether the decision can oppress others.

TCIJ: Do you think that questions like this one should be changed today?

Phra Chai: It should. There are many intersex people that miss the opportunity to ordain or need special consideration to be able to ordain. Those that are already ordained should not be forced to leave the monkhood, and there should also be ways to make the religion more open to this group of people.

TCIJ: But Thai society views these people as degrading to the religion.

Phra Chai: Actually, it's not just this group of people that is causing others to lose faith in Buddhism. Heterosexual men are partially to blame too. News about Buddhist monks running off to have sex are equally harmful to the religion. We should not generalize, but instead find fault with the individual themselves. When we criticize sexuality, the only one group that is never faulted is heterosexuals, even though heterosexual Buddhist monks have wronged the religion as well. Yet we tend to only blame the intersex people and the pandakas, and hence disallowing them from ordination. You can see how it is unfair.

TCIJ: Usually the religious statutes are regarded as one of the holiest religious documents; they're virtually untouchable. Now you're talking about changing some of the clauses to be less discriminatory towards non-heterosexual people. How possible is this?

Phra Chai: Yes, it is difficult. We probably cannot do much except to keep talking about it and hope they hear us. We have to keep talking in case one day we cause them to ponder whether these limitations are hurting anybody. We should especially tell people in influential organizations to realize that Buddhism itself has always tried to break down the caste system, and other forms of discrimination and segregation. In fact, Buddhism had some success in the past, yet we have been oblivious to the discrimination based on gender and sexuality today. I wonder if we will ever have the wisdom to realize that preventing women, intersex people and pandakas from ordination is a form of discrimination, which may even be more severe and worrisome than the caste systems of the past.

TCIJ: Is it stated clearly in Buddhist scriptures that being *pandaka*, intersex or non-heterosexual is a result of past karma? Or is it subject to interpretation?

Phra Chai: The teachings about karma have to be clarified. When we claim their sexuality is a result of past karma, it's like we're judging them. Do you know what they have done in their past lives? Unless you have the *nana* (vision) to see the past, teachings about the consequence of karma are passed on from generation to generation. We can talk about it, but we cannot prove it.

As the story goes, Phra Ananda used to disobey the 3rd Precept, causing him to be born as a *pandaka* in one of his lives. I think this is where people got the belief that being born gay or lesbian is due to bad karma. When people try to analyze the law of karma, they often believe that if the effect is something in a particular category, the karma that caused this must be in the same category as well. For example, if a man is born gay, he must have disobeyed the precept that is about sex, which is the 3rd Precept. Is this logic sound? Teachings about karma can sometimes be harmful; instead of looking forward, people get attached to the past. Ultimately, this type of thinking does not help with one's spiritual growth. Another case in point is the issue of ordination of women. Buddhism teaches that being born a woman is the result of bad karma because, unlike men, women cannot get ordained. Yet, in actuality, the fact that women cannot get ordained today is because the Supreme Sangha Council does not accept it. This is what should be blamed instead of karma, which led to this notion that being born a woman is due to bad karma.

TCIJ: Have you ever tried to find answers to why Buddhism in Thailand has the tendency to discriminate against these people?

Phra Chai: Part of it is that sex is a very personal matter. Most of the religious texts are based on the Buddha's search for the truth, conveyed in the form of tales or legends. These texts are very pure in nature, i.e. there is no content about sex. There is nothing in the Buddhist stories that can taint the Buddha's name or distract from the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Sex, therefore, is viewed as something vile or evil.

Now, what separates homosexuals from heterosexuals is the fact that they like the same sex. Buddhism ends up not only avoiding the topic of sex, it also distances the non-normative gender and sexuality from the religion by virtue of letting the notion that the opposite-sex relationships are the acceptable form of

relationships take hold—or by suggesting that people who are attracted to the opposite sex are more likely to understand the Dharma. Buddhism denies any discussions about sex, and those with non-normative behavior are systemically excluded because of this.

TClJ: If we want to change the view of Thai Buddhists on this, how do we do it?

Phra Chai: It can't be done. The best we can do is to keep talking about it. Since I've started doing this work more than ten years ago, I've come to realize that things can't be changed, but we can still express our opinions so that those who are willing to listen and agree with us will understand the right approach to this matter.

TClJ: Do you think Buddhism is keeping up with the times?

Phra Chai: If we look at the big picture, I can't say. There

are some schools, such as Phra Paisal's, that try to apply the core of Buddhism to contemporary issues, but in general Buddhism in Thailand is varied. You can say Buddhism has adapted enough. You can also argue otherwise. I think it is more likely the latter. However, I must admit that Buddhist schools are focused more on practice than on semantics when compared to the 1950s. You would find that back then, there weren't that many schools that focus on the practice itself. Today, more people understand the foundations of mindfulness. On the other hand, there's also an increasing presence of the trendy materialistic form of Buddhism, where you paste gold leaf on the Buddha statues or sacred marker spheres (Luuk Nimit). So, it's hard to tell whether Buddhism has adapted quickly enough, but I can say for certain that there are many areas in which by it hasn't done so.

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Women in Buddhism

Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen (Dr. Carola Roloff), Senior Researcher in the field of Buddhism, Academy of World Religions, University of Hamburg, Germany

Speech at the Governing Council Meeting of the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC)

December 11 2014, Rajgir, Bihar, India

Dear Venerables, most respected friends in the Dharma,
First of all, I would like to thank our Secretary General, the Most Ven. Lama Lobzang and his “core group” for giving me the opportunity to briefly speak on the subject of Women in Buddhism. Over the next ten minutes, I will touch upon three topics:

1. The role of Buddhist women according to the Buddhist canonical texts
2. The present situation of Buddhist women in the three mainstream traditions of Buddhism
3. The possible role of IBC with regard to women's empowerment

Yesterday was International Human Rights Day, and I think it was an auspicious sign that HRH Ashi Kesang Wangmo, Princess of Bhutan, served as our president. Many in the assembly expressed the opinion that Buddhism in the 21st century must include gender equity.

The Role of Buddhist Women According to the Tripiṭaka

In brief, among the World Religions, Buddhism can be proud that 2600 years ago Lord Buddha, the Awakened One, considered the issue of gender equity to be important. The Buddha was far ahead of his time. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya 8.29 the Buddha explains what makes a human rebirth precious. That is, a birth that is free from the eight inopportune circumstances that are not conducive to living the spiritual

life (aṭṭha akkhaṇā asamayā brahmacariyavāsāya). One of these eight inopportune circumstances is to be born in a place where one does not find bhikkhunīs, bhikkhus, upāsikās, and upāsakas. The Buddha decided to establish the four-fold community. He did not adopt the caste system into which he himself was born, but said for example in Sutta Nipāta 1.7, verse 142¹ :

*One is not an outcaste by birth, by birth one is not a priest (brahmin),
by deeds one becomes an outcaste, one becomes a priest (brahmin) by deeds.*

What counts are our deeds, not what we are. The Buddha did not intend to create two new castes, a caste of men and a caste of women. He did not distinguish between a precious male or female birth, but spoke about a precious human rebirth, and how we can make best use of this human potential, without harming others or discriminating against others.

The Present Situation of Buddhist Women in the Three Mainstream Traditions of Buddhism

During our First Founding Members Conclave in 2013, we agreed that although Buddhist women have more educational opportunities today, the low position of women within the world's Buddhist communities is one of the greatest challenges Buddhism faces at present. Why? Favoritism towards males, and gender stereotyping, still persist in many Buddhist societies. Women cannot participate equally in the study, practice or teaching of Buddhism in all Buddhist traditions. Gender equity needs to be recognized, and circumstances changed, so that women and men's opportunities and status will fully accord with Buddhist principles of equanimity.

The most pressing issue relating to women in Buddhism is the lack of full ordination of nuns in the Theravāda and Tibetan traditions. Sri Lanka, like India, had a strong bhikkhunī tradition up until the 11th/12th century. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the bhikkhunī order was first revived in Sri Lanka. Now there are more than 1,200 bhikkhunīs in Sri Lanka. Progress is also being made in Thailand. On November 29, 2014, the first bhikkhunī

ordination in Thailand took place in Songkhla. Eight bhikkhunīs were ordained. Maha Nayaka Mahindavamsa Maha Thero, the preceptor, made an announcement in front of the assembly of 20 bhikkhus and 18 bhikkhunīs that he had appointed Ven. Dhammananda bhikkhunī as the first pavattinī of Thailand. A pavattinī is a senior bhikkhunī who has at least 12 vassas (Pāli: "rains") and is entitled to give full ordination. In Sri Lanka, the highest position is Maha Nayaka. All the three sects of the Sri Lankan Theravāda tradition have Maha Nayakas. Mahindavamsa is the Maha Nayaka of Amarapura. He has a close relationship with the Thai Royal family. Prince Prising, son of King Rama III, was once the abbot at the temple where Mahindavamsa is now abbot. Among the 20 bhikkhus who took part in the ordination, 17 were Thai monks from the south. All the bhikkhunīs were the most senior in Thailand.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the number of bhikṣuṇīs is growing, but so far the novice nuns, who were first ordained by Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣus, have not been fully ordained in that Vinaya tradition, but in the Dharmaguptaka tradition. We discussed this very difficult situation in detail with H.H. the Dalai Lama and leading bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs from all Buddhist traditions during the First International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Saṅgha in 2007 at the University of Hamburg. This discussion, and all the 68 papers delivered, were published in 2010, and are available for anyone who has an interest². On an academic level, we have gathered a lot of information, but it has not reached the Buddhist communities on the grass-roots level. Many wrong views concerning women and the issue of ordination continue to be perpetuated. Therefore, educational campaigns are needed to communicate the most important facts.

Some of the well-educated śrāmaṇerikās (novice nuns) practicing Tibetan Buddhism are very interested in receiving full ordination, but they want to receive it from their Tibetan lamas. All the heads of the various Tibetan Buddhist nikāyas are supportive, and have expressed their support in letters, which are published in Tibetan and English on the internet.³ But unlike in the Theravāda tradition, to date, no leader in the Tibetan tradition has taken action and conducted an ordination. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is looking for international support and agreement on this

¹ Na jaccā vasalo hoti, na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo, kammanā vasalo hoti kammanā hoti brāhmaṇo.

² See: <http://www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org/> [23.12.2014].

issue, and has suggested that we should have a second conference, but this time in India, either in Bodhgaya or Sarnath, or in Delhi or somewhere like that. This leads me to my third and last point:

The Possible Role of IBC with Regard to Women's Empowerment

In 2013 we agreed that IBC should provide gender education and training to its members, and should practice true gender equality in all aspects of its planning, and empower both genders to bear its responsibilities equally and not trivialize culturally and socially constructed gender biases. Why empower both genders? Are men not already powerful enough? The point is: Women and men both need empowerment. we can see this if we take the IBC as an example. If nuns are not explicitly invited to become members of the IBC, they cannot participate and you will have no women whom you can elect. In my view this is a kind of structural violence. Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa and Ven. Samdhong Rinpoche may consider it cultural violence. The fact is that we are missing women's perspectives in the IBC. Gender studies show that when women make up at least one third of an organization, not only the structure, but also the quality and effectiveness of that organization starts changing and are improved. So it must be the IBC goal to reach at least a level of one third female members' participation in the general assembly and its governing body in the near term. From the past thirteen International Sakyadhita Buddhist women's conferences, we know that there are many, very capable and well-educated Buddhist women, especially in the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese traditions. They are running huge temples. Also in the West, it is mainly the women who are running or co-running most of the Dharma centers. And, for example, the world's largest Buddhist welfare organization, the Tzu Chi Foundation, was started by a Buddhist nun. Imagine all this potential benefitting the Buddha Dharma! To empower women we need female role models. Yesterday, I went through this IBC Governing Body leaflet. It does not give the impression that women are truly included or important:

Council of Patrons: 11 male, no female
 Supreme Dharma Council: 26 male, 2 female
 Presidium: 8 presidents—one of them HRH Ashi Kesang Wangmo Wangchuk, the Princess of Bhutan

Vice Presidents: 11 male, no female
 Secretary General male
 Deputy Secretary Generals 9 male, 2 female
 Executive members 23 elected, the nominated executive members are not listed, among those listed there is 1 female
 Global envoys 3 male, 2 female
 Advisory committee 2 male, 2 female

In total, among the 102 members listed, there are only about 10 women — 10%. Our goal must be to at least triple that number in the near future. This does not mean that men will lose their posts. We just have to increase the number—as you suggested yesterday.

When I received the agenda for this meeting, I was very happy to see that the organizers had planned for a discussion about the formation of new standing committees on women's empowerment, and interfaith and intra-Buddhist dialogue. These are important matters, but unfortunately we did not have the time to discuss them this time.

So, please, I request that the new working group take this issue seriously and try very hard to get women's organizations involved: the Tibetan Nuns Project, the Ladakh Nuns Association, the Bhutan nuns foundation, the huge bhikkhunī associations of Taiwan and Vietnam, as well as the bhikkhunī association of the Jogye order in Korea and so on. I am sure that Sakyadhita International would be most happy to provide you with their respective contact information. The new President is Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. I suggest that you make her one of the advisors and ask her to help encourage the nuns and laywomen to join you. There is a long list of work that needs to be done. And there are many young nuns and laywomen who are very devoted to Buddhism. So we should try to make use of their great potential to serve the Dharma wherever needed.

I hope that at our next meeting enough time will be given for the formation of new standing committees on women's empowerment, and interfaith and intra-Buddhist dialogue. It is not enough to pass resolutions. We need to give Buddhism a female face if Buddhism is to remain relevant in the 21st century.

Thank you very much for your kind attention!

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³ See: http://www.bhiksuniordination.org/letters_support.html [24.12.2014].

Putting an End to Buddhist Patriarchy

In order to become a force for social change, Buddhism needs to rid itself of enduring ills—the barring of female ordination first among them.

Ajahn Brahm

On December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, an African-American woman refused to obey a bus driver's order to give up her seat to a white passenger. This simple act of defiance became one of the most important symbols of the modern Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

Before she passed away in 2005, Rosa Parks became a Buddhist—at age 92. One can speculate that this female icon—and fierce opponent of discrimination—chose Buddhism because it lends itself to the advancement of social justice causes.

She was right.

Buddhism should advance the particular social justice issues described in United Nations Millenium Development Goal Number Three (MDG 3): Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. For Buddhism to grow in our modern world, we need to do more than teach meditation, preach inspiring sermons, and make the sutras available online. We are good at studying, publishing, and spreading the word of Buddhism. Where we have not been very successful is showcasing the compassion and selflessness of the dharma by our actions. We have written many more words in our books than what few kind words we have spoken to the poor, lonely, and desperate. We have built so many more temples than orphanages.

Theravada Buddhism's current male leadership, in particular, needs to clearly demonstrate its commitment to MDG 3 through the acceptance of bhikkhuni [nun] ordination. Only then can the Theravada sangha use its considerable influence to make a fairer world—one where

people are judged by their character, not by their gender.

Theravada Buddhist monks, generally speaking, are very conservative. Claiming to be the guardians of “original Buddhism,” they consider one of their most important duties the preservation of these precious early teachings. However, monks of all traditions in all countries—and Buddhist lay scholars as well—accept that there were fully ordained women, called bhikkhuni, in the lifetime of the Buddha. Moreover, in these early teachings, the Buddha clearly states that he seeks to give full ordination to women:

Ananda, once I was staying at Uruvela on the bank of the river Neranjara [present day Bodh Gaya] under the Goatherd's Banyan tree, when I had just attained supreme enlightenment. And Mara the Evil One came to me, stood to one side, and said, 'May the Blessed One now attain final Nibbana; may the Sugata [Buddha] now attain final Nibbana. Now is the time for the Blessed Lord's final Nibbana.'

At this, I said to Mara: 'Evil One, I will not take final Nibbana until I have bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, lay men, and lay women followers who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, knowers of the dhamma, trained in conformity with the dhamma, correctly trained and walking in the path of the dhamma, who will pass on what they have gained from their teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear, until they shall be able, by means of the dhamma, to refute false teachings that have arisen and teach the dhamma of wondrous effect.'

Theravada Buddhists should have an advantage over other major world religions because their tradition explicitly gives equity to women. Christianity has no tradition of gender equality in its priesthood—nor does Islam, Judaism, or the various schools of Hinduism. Buddhism stood ahead of its time in granting such status to women from “when [the Buddha] had just attained supreme enlightenment” at Bodh Gaya.

Nevertheless, there remain two significant obstacles to the acceptance of bhikkhuni ordination in Theravada Buddhism: (1) Ignorance about who makes the decisions that govern the sangha, and (2) Ignorance of the Vinaya, the rules established by the Buddha that restrict what decisions may be made.

As to that first point, for instance, many monks in Thailand argue that a 1928 ruling from the Sangharaja [head Buddhist monk] of Thailand, Phra Bancha Somdet Phra Sangharacha Jiao Gromluang Jinawarn Siriward, banned the ordination of female monks:

It is unallowable for any bhikkhu to give the going-forth [ordination] to women. Any woman who wishes to ordain as a samaneri [novice nun] in accordance with the Buddha's allowances, has to be ordained by a fully ordained bhikkhuni. The Buddha laid down the rule that only a bhikkhuni over 12 vassas [an annual three-month retreat] is eligible to be a preceptor [ceremonial guide who delivers vows]. Since there are no more fully fledged bhikkhunis to pass on the lineage, there are thus no samaneris who have obtained a proper ordination from a fully fledged bhikkhuni.

Besides the antiquity of the ruling, one could also point out that the Sangharaja of Thailand, together with the Thai Council of Elders [senior monks], is only permitted to rule on matters directly concerning the monks and novices of the two main Thai Buddhist sects, Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttanikaya. They are not legally empowered to rule over the affairs of other monastic groups, such as Mahayana monks or nuns. The wait will never end for those well-meaning monks holding out hope that the Thai Council of Elders will sanction the legitimacy of Theravada bhikkhunis. The Thai Council of Elders, after all, is not legally entitled to rule on matters beyond its remit.

As for the Vinaya, the second obstacle that I listed, each monastic community is bound to act within its rules.

Renowned Theravada scholar monk Bhikkhu Analayo argues that the Thai Sangharaja's 1928 ruling—and thus, the Vinaya in its current form—has no bearing because it directly contradicts the Buddha's original teachings. In a recent publication, “The Revival of the Bhikkuni Order and the Decline of the Sasana,” Analayo argues persuasively that the Buddha gave authority for bhikkhunis to receive ordination in a dual ceremony—both in a sangha of bhikkhunis and then in a sangha of bhikkhus.

By restoring equity to women in the Theravada sangha through reinstating bhikkhuni ordination, we will address the inferior status of women in many Theravada countries, promote gender equity in education, and thereby make a strong statement in support of the third UN Millennium Development Goal: gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In a recent paper, scholars Emma Tomalin and Caroline Starkey explore the role that Buddhism in Thailand and Cambodia plays in maintaining gender disparity in education. Ultimately they ask, “What is the relationship between the reassertion of women's traditional ordination rights and female empowerment through education?” Since, as they note, “several scholars, both Thai and Western, have implicated Buddhism as one explanatory factor for the historical inequality between genders, particularly in the poorest areas,” many advocates of bhikkhuni ordination see “a direct relationship between the low status of women in many Buddhist traditions and the inferior status of women within Buddhist societies.”

By fixing our own house first, we have the considerable opportunity and moral authority—through our books and sermons—to inspire our Buddhist followers to work toward gender equality in spheres other than religion. Such action would lead to a world with less violence, better health, and more prosperity.

Ajahn Brahm is a British Theravada monk and abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Serpentine, Australia.

Fostering Peace, Inside and Out

by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

At the beginning of a new year it is customary for us to express our hopes for peace in the year ahead and to wish each other peace. But to actually achieve peace is by no means an easy task. Real peace is not simply the absence of violent conflict but a state of harmony: harmony between people; harmony between humanity and nature; and harmony within ourselves. Without harmony, the seeds of conflict and violence will always be ready to sprout.

When I reflect on the challenge of achieving peace in today's world, I have found it useful to treat the subject under three main headings: (1) The Obstacles to Achieving Peace—the barriers that maintain tension and foment conflict; (2) The Prerequisites of Peace—the goals we should pursue to achieve peace; and (3) The Means to Realizing these Goals. Each can in turn be analyzed into three secondary aspects.

1. The Obstacles to Achieving Peace

(1) Profit-seeking: Driven by the urge to expand profits, global corporations and other mammoth enterprises flood the market with harmful or frivolous commodities. They spend billions on advertising, despoil the natural environment with toxic waste, and scuttle laws that protect workers and consumers. They take wild risks which, when successful, benefit management and shareholders, and when failures, push the costs on to the public. The neoliberal economy has led to wider inequality of incomes and wealth. Recent figures reveal that the richest 70 people now own more wealth than the poorest half of the world, while in the US a mere 40 individuals own as much

wealth as the bottom half. High levels of income inequality are associated with economic instability and crises, whereas more equal societies tend to be more stable and to enjoy longer periods of sustained growth. Greater economic equality contributes to peace. More unequal societies show higher rates of violent crime and lower levels of social trust; more equal societies have lower crime rates and greater social trust.

(2) Plunder: Since the dawn of the industrial era we have been plundering nature's treasures with reckless abandon. Today, this extractionist frame of mind drives us ever closer to the edge of calamity as rapacious economic activity disrupts the natural climate cycles on which human life depends. The big fossil fuel corporations plunder the earth for oil, coal, and gas, clearing ancient forests, blasting mountains to bits, and drilling down into the ocean depths. They transport the substances they extract over vast distances from source to refinery to market. Factories fill the skies with carbon dioxide, particulate matter, and harmful toxins. Extraction operations discharge toxic waste into rivers and lakes, poisoning the water resources on which whole communities depend.

Cumulative carbon emissions are cooking the planet and warming the seas. We've already had a taste of the future in the strange weather events that occur with greater frequency: droughts, floods, heat waves, and crop failures. As large regions of the earth turn barren, we will face mass migrations that can raise tensions and ignite violent confrontations. States may fail, unleashing chaos and giving the chance for tyrants to seize power and launch campaigns of conquest.

(3) Power projection: Driven by narrow economic interests, the powerful nations seek to enhance their might by projecting strategies of full-spectrum dominance across the globe. They finance ever more sophisticated weapons systems, spend billions on armaments, and spy on their citizens. They manipulate international protocols to their advantage, heightening tensions among old rivals. Weapons corporations thrive on the tensions, which they regard as new opportunities for profit. Global hostilities boil, and in certain hot spots periodically explode in outbursts of lethal violence.

2. The Prerequisites to Achieving Peace

(1) Protection: To achieve real peace, we need a global commitment to protecting people everywhere from harm and misery. This commitment must be rooted in a universal perspective that enables us to see all people as brothers and sisters, worthy of care and respect regardless of their ethnic, national, and religious identity. As Americans we can't go on thinking that American lives are more important than the lives of people elsewhere—in Iraq and Afghanistan, in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. We can't think that only the lives of middle-class people count, but not the lives of black youths in Chicago, herdsmen in Ethiopia, rice farmers in the Philippines, or factory workers in Bangladesh. Rather, we must regard all people as endowed with intrinsic value, which we must affirm by establishing greater economic, social, and political justice.

(2) Preservation. The greatest challenge of our time is to avoid climate chaos. The earth is our irreplaceable home, and if we destroy it, we will have no other place to go. At the rate we're spitting out greenhouse gases, within a few decades we may raise the earth's temperature to the point where the planet becomes inhospitable to human life. All the money in the world will be worthless on a planet where the grain belts have withered and oceans have turned deadly acidic.

We need to start making a rapid and full-scale transition to a new economy powered by clean and renewable sources of energy. The sun, wind, and heat of the earth are capable of providing us with all the energy we need. The main obstacle to date has been the lack of

political will, whereby a band of powerful corporations, lobbyists, and compliant politicians reject the hard truths of science and even the clear decrees of rational self-interest.

We must stand up against moneyed interests and press our governments and civil groups to expedite the transition to a clean-energy future. Our window of opportunity is closing, and we must act fast before it slams shut. We need a sense of urgency, as if our clothes were on fire, an urge to act to preserve this precious planet—a miracle in a sea of cosmic dust, a blue-green pearl teeming with living forms.

(3) Prosperity. While extreme wealth for a few means misery for many others, prosperity is a good in which we all should be able to share. There is certainly enough wealth in the world to ensure that everyone can obtain sufficient food, clothing, housing, and medical care. The problem is not lack of wealth but its uneven distribution.

To lay the foundations for real peace, both national policies and international institutions must give precedence to uplifting people from the worst extremes of poverty. In today's world, 900 million people live in perpetual food insecurity, while at least two billion suffer from malnutrition. Six million people a year, over half of them children, die from chronic hunger and related illnesses. The UN estimates that it would take just \$30 billion a year to solve world hunger, a small fraction of the \$737 billion that the US spent on defense in 2012. Tackling global hunger is not only a moral and ethical obligation but a policy that would have positive economic impacts and promote global solidarity. It could be a giant step in the direction of world peace.

Here in the US, some 50 million people—one out of seven—live in poverty. A half-century ago, the US had a social system that, while far from perfect, excelled in its public services. Over the past 30 years, many of these services have been downgraded or slashed. As the wealthiest country in the world, we can easily provide for the basic needs of all our citizens. But this will require new values. Instead of exalting individualism and ambition, we should prize cooperation and compassion. Instead of inciting competition, we should nurture harmonious

communities and social solidarity.

3. The Means to Realizing these Goals

(1) Prayer, meditation, and contemplation. People of faith should root transformative action in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation, and contemplation. While traditionally such practices serve as stepping stones to the realization of a transcendent goal, today we need a wider spiritual vision that can encompass the divine and the mundane, the transcendent and the immanent, in an integral whole. By bringing us into intimate contact with the transcendent ground of justice and love, practices like meditation and contemplative prayer empower us to bring greater justice and love into the world. By purging the toxins of greed, hatred, and selfishness from our hearts, these practices open us to the universality of suffering, awakening our compassion and inspiring us to become a source of good for others.

(2) Peace. Peace is not only the goal of our efforts but also a means for reaching that goal. Peace belongs to the means because in order to establish peace, we must be peaceful ourselves. If our minds are agitated by anger and resentment, our efforts to promote peace are more likely to create more conflict and perhaps ignite more violence. An angry mind is not a reliable instrument for promoting peace. But when our minds are peaceful, our bodily actions will be peaceful, and we will convey an ambiance of love, care, and mercy, which will help to establish peaceful relations.

(3) Participation. While the pursuit of meditation and other spiritual practices as a private quest for inner awakening and liberation may have fit the worldview of past historical eras, in today's world our emphasis must shift toward a more participatory kind of spirituality, one that unites the quest for inner peace with the commitment to world peace, human unity, and planetary preservation. Our devotion to contemplative practice can inspire in us a stronger aspiration to promote social and economic justice, to preserve the planet's vital ecosystems, and to heal long-standing enmities. At the same time, our active commitment to the well-being of others can nurture our own spiritual growth, deepening our compassion and strengthening our moral integrity.

There are many venues through which we can embody participatory spirituality in action. We can support organizations that advocate for poverty alleviation, address climate change, and promote the ethical treatment of animals, immigration rights, and better pay for fast-food workers. We can write to our congressional representatives, expressing our views on the issues that most deeply concern us. Our votes, too, express our values and conscience. Although the electoral process in this country has been badly skewed in favor of Big Money, our votes still count and can make a difference.

To express conscience in action, we can sign petitions, join marches, and participate in demonstrations. In New York this past September, 400,000 people walked peacefully through the streets on the People's Climate March, demanding that world leaders tackle the climate crisis. In cities across the country, low-wage workers have been demanding better wages and other conditions that will enable them to live with dignity. In many cities as well, people of all ethnic backgrounds have joined hands to protest police brutality against communities of color.

While the endeavor to achieve peace may often be frustrating, we should remember that nothing truly worthy can be achieved without effort. Peace and justice may be slow to arrive, but we will never obtain them without a struggle.

Let us make 2015 a year in which we firmly commit ourselves to the pursuit of real peace. Then, a year from now, we can look back at 2015 and consider our time to have been truly well spent.

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www.tricycle.com/blog/fostering-peace-inside-and-out

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The Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, a Theravada Buddhist monk, is a translator of Buddhist texts from Pali into English and the founder of Buddhist Global Relief.

STRENGTHENING BUDDHIST MUSLIM UNITY

Ven. Bellanwila Wimalaratana Anunayake Thera

Like many other countries Sri Lanka is also a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society. Sri Lanka's population is constituted of followers of four different religions namely, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Yet, unlike some other countries, Sri Lanka has been fortunate in being able to maintain, to a very commendable level, religious harmony among the followers of the above mentioned four religions. Apart from a few sporadic instances, there have been none of the major religious conflicts which have now started to plague certain countries in the world. All four religions, their followers, the majority of religious leaders and the political authorities in general have played a big role in fostering, promoting and sustaining this inter-religious cooperation, appreciation and harmony. This good will, cooperation and understanding that exist between the Buddhists and Muslims-the followers of Islam- demonstrate the possibility and practicability of forging a unity in diversity.

This unity has a long unbroken history running back to over a millennium, which otherwise has been chequered by revolts, wars, conflicts, political intrigues etc. Buddhist-Muslim unity has stood the test of time, both during the times of prosperity and adversity of the country. The Muslims did not come to Sri Lanka as invaders or proselytizers, but as migrant traders, utterly committed to their livelihood. Perhaps they are possessed of an inborn ability of commitment to their undertaking and also the special knack of winning the confidence of others and this made the Muslims acceptable to members

of all strata of life, ranging from the ordinary villagers to the royalty.

It is seen that they were not only ready to adapt and adjust themselves to new conditions and circumstances, but also to accommodate, respect and appreciate others. They did not encounter any problem in mixing with the Sinhala Buddhists and even marrying into Sinhala families and conducting their day to day life activities, not creating any conflicting issues. What was marked in them was their ability to understand that religion is a personal matter and with this understanding they were very successful in maintaining their religious identity and being utterly faithful to their own faith, while being appreciative of the faith of the majority community to which their Sinhala Buddhist wives belonged.

The beauty in these early Muslim settlers was that they were ready to get fused into the new social and religious milieu, absorbing all factors that were conducive to promote their livelihood and through that to the success and advancement of unity, progress and stability. Though they went to the mosque to offer prayers, they went to the Buddhist temple to learn a little of Buddhism, more about Buddhists way of life, Sinhala language and other cultural and social features. It is surprising and also very fortunate that these Muslims who migrated to Sri Lanka as traders were a special brand of Muslims who did not have even an inkling of what we now call 'fundamentalism'.

So were the Buddhists, who were by nature a nation that epitomizes hospitality. Being tempered by Buddhism, a religion promoting peace, good will, equality

and unity, the Sinhalese perhaps exerted much influence over the Muslims to further cultivate their innate good naturedness, thus bringing the two ethnic groups together, more firmly bonding them with bonds of humanity and brotherhood. In this background the Muslims were extremely content and satisfied, feeling quite secure and safe, in their adopted motherland. They were never worried about finding their original roots. They were so much intertwined with the Sinhalese, their culture, ways of life and with their religion, they felt more at home in their adopted home, that is Sri Lanka.

This mindset developed to such a level that often the Muslims joined the Sinhala political leadership that gave them protection and security and accepted them as an important section of the nation's population. Having had more exposure to international and religious persecution, intrigue and pressure, especially at the hands of colonial powers, they always looked at the western powers that were seeking a foothold in Sri Lanka with suspicion. The Muslims were well aware of the ulterior motives of these colonial western powers ever since the arrival of the Portuguese to Sri Lanka in 1505. Hence, they kept the rulers, the nobility, as well as the common people well informed about various schemes, and plots these powers were hatching against the local rulers.

It could be said that this was not done purely for altruistic reasons, but taking into consideration the issues involving their own security and safety. As whatever the motive may have been, this helped to develop trustworthy reciprocal relations between the Sinhala Buddhists and the Muslims. This help rendered by the Muslims was much appreciated also by the members of the Buddhist clergy, who by then had developed close rapport with them.

Historians have found evidence to prove that at times of need the Muslims even processed and produced weapons for the Sinhalese rulers to fight the Portuguese. Besides that they even joined hands with the Sinhala Buddhists to fight against the Portuguese. It is pointed out that they even mediated to obtain the help of South Indian rulers in their battles against colonial powers.

The religious tolerance exhibited by the Sinhala Buddhist rulers contributed in no small measure to further

promote the Sinhala Buddhist and Muslim unity and trust. This helped Muslims to further strengthen their ties with the Sinhala Buddhists. The strengthening of these ties is seen by their joining at different levels the political administration of the country and also as officers connected with Buddhist religious activities. They even joined the ceremonial procession held in honour of the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha. They were able to carry out these participations without causing any conflict of religious interest. They have been so understanding and accommodating.

Of course, things do not remain rosy forever. When conditions change relations and the behavior of the public also undergo appropriate changes. As Buddhists, we understand this change very well, for the Buddha explains all changes in accordance with his basic teaching on causal relations.

The early seeds of dissent were planted by the western colonial rulers, who in order to maintain their political power, adopted the well known policy of 'divide and rule'. This brought about suspicion not only between different ethnic groups but among members of the same nationality.

This situation was further complicated by the social and economic changes that took place locally. The peaceful harmoniously organized life was disturbed and punctured by social inequality and economic disparity, leading to discontentment and disunity. These adverse conditions were exacerbated once the colonial powers left, leaving the political administration in the hands of the locals, of whom the Sinhalese naturally was by far the largest segment.

The euphoria caused by gaining independence did not last long. Once the common enemy had left the shores, the people in Sri Lanka had to settle issues which were perhaps purposefully left over by the colonial rulers for reasons better known to them. Though all ethnic groups were united in getting rid of colonial rulers, once they were gone, the local leaders did not succeed in peacefully settling the important issues.

Even in these rather disturbed conditions, the Muslims to a great extent managed to adopt their usual attitude of accommodation, maintaining their age old

practice of being a part of the Sinhala Buddhist social milieu. But when the Tamils began to find fault with the majority Sinhala Buddhists, alleging discrimination and agitating for their rights, the Muslims also felt the heat of the situation, though they did not become vociferous at the beginning. While the northern and eastern Tamil population sought to solve their problems, even by resorting to extra-democratical methods, the Muslims continued to work with Sinhala people. The selection of Muslim members as their parliamentary representatives even in areas where there was a Sinhala majority, shows not merely their passivity or openness to important issues, but their pacifistic attitude towards them. They opted for a peaceful solution and not for violent protest.

However, due to pressure from the younger generations and perhaps also due to international Muslim resurgence and influence, the Sri Lankan Muslim also had to change their strategies. This resulted in forming a political party to represent their people. Besides, since recent times, the Muslims also seem to have developed a new desire to search for their roots and develop a separate

identity, which is not as conducive as their original stance, which had been for the unity, stability and prosperity of the nation.

This new trend, it appears, should be given serious thought by all stakeholders to this issue. It is the responsibility of the political authority, the religious leadership and also of enlightened moderate followers who earnestly wish to see a stable and a united Sri Lanka, which is the home of all Sri Lankans. Confidence building, the practice of equality, complete abandoning of discrimination, readiness for appreciating and accommodating others points of view, are a few of the preliminaries to be set in place. These have to be gradually accomplished through dialogue and consensus.

In this, religious leadership should play a dynamic role presenting the political authority and persuading the religious adherents to go back to times of peace and unity, which all dream of as the best solution for this dormant issue, not allowing it to be exploited by interested parties.

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Mindfulness & Awareness

BRINGING WISDOM INTO SOCIETY

LERAB LING, MONTPELLIER, FRANCE

Awakening in the Age of Ecological Crisis

David Loy

Let me begin by emphasizing what most of us already know about climate change. First, it's the greatest threat to human civilization ever, as far as we can tell. Second, it's not an external threat but something we are doing to ourselves. And third, our collective response remains, if not completely negligible, very far from adequate.

Yet climate breakdown is only part of a much larger eco-crisis. We cannot blame the degradation of nature simply on recent increases of carbon in the atmosphere. If we are to avert climate disaster and our own potential extinction, we must address our longstanding degradation of the natural world in all its forms. Humanity has been exploiting the natural world for most of its existence. Today, however, business as usual has become a threat to our very survival.

E. O. Wilson, the renowned Harvard biologist, predicts that by the end of this century about half of all the Earth's plant and animal species will become extinct or so weakened that they will disappear soon thereafter. Scientists tell us that there have been at least five other extinction events in the Earth's history, but this is the fastest ever, and caused by the activity of one particular species: us.

The whole eco-crisis attests to the fact that we are a globalizing civilization that has lost its way. The crisis of nature is, at heart, a crisis of civilization. Shifting to renewable sources of natural energy will not by itself resolve our collective preoccupation

with never-ending economic growth—and the often meaningless production and consumerism it entails—that is incompatible with the finite ecosystems of the earth. Many things could be said from a Buddhist perspective about why this fixation on growth cannot provide the satisfaction we seek from it, but let's take a look at one particularly revealing example: what Mitsubishi is doing with bluefin tuna.

The Japanese love sashimi, and their favorite variety is bluefin tuna. Unfortunately, bluefin tuna is also one of the world's most endangered fish. But the Mitsubishi conglomerate, one of the world's largest corporate empires, has come up with an ingenious response: It has cornered close to half the world market by buying up as many bluefin tuna as it can as the worldwide population plummets toward extinction. The tuna are imported and frozen at -60°C in Mitsubishi's massive freezers, for they will command astronomical prices if, as forecast, Atlantic bluefin tuna soon become commercially extinct as tuna fleets try to satisfy an insatiable demand—primarily Mitsubishi's.

From an ecological standpoint, this response is immoral, obscene. From a narrow economic standpoint, however, it's quite logical, even clever, because the fewer bluefin tuna in the ocean, the more valuable Mitsubishi's frozen stock becomes. And it's the nature of economic competition that corporations like Mitsubishi are sometimes encouraged or “forced” to do things like that: if you don't do it, someone else

probably will. That's how the "tragedy of the commons" plays out on a global scale.

The example above is one of many that point to a fundamental perversity built into economic systems motivated by profit, which tend to devalue the natural world into a means, subordinated to the goal of expanding the economy in order to maximize profits. This focus often overshadows our appreciation of the natural world, which means that we end up destroying real wealth—a flourishing biosphere with healthy forests and topsoil, oceans full of marine life, and so on—in order to increase numbers in the bank accounts. As the enormous gap between rich and poor continues to widen worldwide, most of that increase goes into a very small number of accounts.

Such perverse logic ensures that sooner or later our collective focus on endless growth—on ever-increasing production and consumption, which requires ever more exploitation of our natural resources—must inevitably run up against the limits of the planet, and it just so happens that's happening now. Today it's not enough for us to meditate and pursue our own personal awakening; we also need to contemplate what this situation means, and how to respond.

Many Buddhist teachings are relevant here, especially their emphasis on interdependence and nonduality. We consider ourselves and others to be separate entities, pursuing our own well-being at the cost of theirs in ways that the eco-crisis repudiates. As Earth-dwellers, we're all in this together. When China burns coal, that pollution doesn't just stay above Chinese skies, nor does nuclear radioactivity from Fukushima stay only in Japanese coastal waters. The same is true generally for humankind and the rest of the natural world; when the ecosystems of the earth become sick, we become sick. In short, the ecological crisis is also a spiritual crisis: we are challenged to realize our interdependence—our larger "self"—or else. What the earth seems to be telling us is, "Wake up or get out of the way."

From this perspective, the problems that challenge us today are even more intimidating. Facing seemingly intractable political and economic systems,

we could easily despair. Where to start? Those who control our current economy and political systems also profit the most from them (in the narrow sense), so they tend to be little inclined to—and often incapable of—making the systemic changes necessary.

We can see that institutional change can only come from the grass roots, and signs are growing that more and more people are fed up with waiting for economic and political elites to take action. As the author and environmentalist Paul Hawken points out in his recent book *Blessed Unrest*, a vast number of large and small organizations are working for peace, social justice, and sustainability—perhaps two million, he now estimates. This is something that's never happened before: it's as if the organizations have "sprung up" from the earth as its immune system responding to the cancer that now threatens our survival.

But while the necessary response has begun, it's easy to overlook what's happening, because the mainstream media are not interested in publicizing or encouraging that transformation. Six megacorporations now control 90 percent of the media in the United States, and they make their profits not from informing us but from advertising. Their perspective inevitably tends to normalize consumerism, including the political system that aids and abets it. Unsurprisingly, they promote "green consumerism" as the solution to the eco-crisis—personal lifestyle changes such as buying hybrid or electric cars, installing solar panels, eating locally, and so on. As Bill McKibben has pointed out, however, even if many of us do everything we can to reduce our individual carbon footprints, "the trajectory of our climate horror stays about the same." But if the same number of us work all-out to change the system, he continues, "that's enough."

Yet there's more: the ecological crisis, and the larger civilizational predicament of which it is a symptom, is just as much a crisis for the Buddhist tradition, which needs to clarify its essential message in order to fulfill its liberative potential in the modern world.

One of the important developments in contemporary Buddhism has been socially engaged

Buddhism, and service—prison dharma, hospice work, helping the homeless, and the like—is now widely accepted as an important part of the Buddhist path. Buddhists have become much better at pulling drowning people out of the river, but—and here’s the problem—we’re not any better at asking why there are so many more drowning people, or what’s pushing them into the river upstream.

At the same time as Buddhist organizing for social and economic justice has floundered, the mindfulness movement has seen incredible success. Mindfulness offers an individualistic practice that can fit nicely into a consumer corporate culture focused on efficiency and productivity. Although such practices can be very beneficial, they can also discourage critical reflection on the institutional causes of collective suffering, or social dukkha. As Bhikkhu Bodhi has warned: “absent a sharp social critique, Buddhist practices could easily be used to justify and stabilize the status quo, becoming a reinforcement of consumer capitalism.”

Recently I read a passage in *Everybody’s Story: Wising Up to the Epic of Evolution*, by Loyal Rue, that stopped me in my tracks, because it expresses so well a discomfort with Buddhism (or some types of Buddhism) that has been bothering me for some time. Rue writes that religions such as Christianity and Buddhism will keep declining as it becomes increasingly clear that they can’t address the great challenges facing us today. He cites two basic problems: cosmological dualism and individual salvation, both of which “have encouraged an attitude of indifference toward the integrity of natural and social systems.”

Cosmological dualism is obviously an important aspect of Christianity, one that distinguishes God in his heaven from the world he has created. But Buddhism also dualizes insofar as this world of samsara is distinguished from nirvana. In both traditions, the contrast between the two worlds inevitably involves some devaluation of the lower one: so we are told that this realm of samsara is a place of suffering, craving, and delusion. And in both cases, the ultimate goal is individual salvation, which involves transcending

this lower world by doing what is necessary to qualify for the higher one, whether that is eternity in heaven with God or attaining nirvana.

One can point to aspects of the Buddhist tradition that do not support cosmological dualism, especially the famous statement by Nagarjuna, founder of the Madhyamaka school, that “there is not the slightest difference between nirvana and samsara.” Yet that claim must be balanced against (for example) the early Buddhist doctrine that nirvana involves the end of physical rebirth, or the Mahayana Pure Land schools that contrast this world with Amitabha’s Pure Land.

Buddhists don’t aim at heaven: we want to awaken. But for us, too, salvation is individual: yes, I hope you will become enlightened also, but ultimately my highest well-being—my enlightenment—is distinct from yours. Or so we have been taught.

When it comes to the nature of enlightenment, however, most of us aren’t sure what to believe. Since many modern Western Buddhists reject the idea of rebirth, it is not surprising that a this-worldly alternative has become popular in the West, where understanding the Buddhist path as a program of psychological development helps us cope with personal problems, especially our “monkey mind” and afflictive emotions. This has led to innovative types of psychotherapy as well the recent success of the mindfulness movement, which represents the culmination of this trend in Western Buddhism. Buddhism is providing new perspectives on the nature of psychological well-being and new practices that help to promote it—reducing greed, ill will, and delusion here and now, for example, but also sorting out our emotional lives (not a big issue in Asian Buddhism) and working through personal traumas.

This development has been largely beneficial, but it has a shadow. The common presupposition of the more secular Buddhism is that my basic problem is the way my mind works, and the solution is to change the way my mind works, so that I can play my various roles (work, family, friends, etc.) better, so that I fit into this world better. Most of Asian Buddhism is concerned with escaping this world, since samsara can’t be

changed, but for much of contemporary Western Buddhism, the path is all about changing myself, because I'm the problem, not the world.

So while traditional Asian Buddhism emphasizes ending rebirth into this unsatisfactory world, much of Western Buddhism, especially Buddhist psychotherapy and the mindfulness movement, emphasizes harmonizing with this world. That means neither is much concerned about social engagement that works to change our world; both take the world (including its ecological crisis and social injustice) for granted, and in that sense accept it as it is.

Both approaches encourage a different way of reacting to the eco-crisis: ignoring it. When we read or think about what is happening, how do we react? We become anxious, of course, but Buddhists know how to deal with anxiety: we meditate, and our unease about what is happening to the earth goes away—for a while, anyway. Needless to say, that is not an adequate response.

The point here is that Buddhist difficulty with social and ecological engagement can be traced back, in part, to this ambiguity about the nature of awakening. And this ambivalence is a challenge we can't keep evading: we really do need to clarify what the essential message of Buddhism is.

There is an alternative way of understanding the Buddhist path, one that is not reducible to the either/or of escaping this world or simply harmonizing with it. The path of personal transformation is about deconstructing and reconstructing the self, or, more precisely, the relationship between the self and its world. Because my sense of self is an impermanent psychosocial construct, with no reality of its own, it is always insecure, haunted by *dukkha* as long as I feel separate from the world I inhabit. We usually experience this as a sense of lack: something is wrong with me, something is missing, "I'm not good enough." Consumerism encourages us to perceive the problem as a personal lack: I don't have enough money, I'm not famous enough, attractive enough. . . . Buddhist practice helps us wake up from this bad dream.

A really important social implication of this

deconstruction and reconstruction of the self brings us back to social engagement, including eco-dharma. As we start to wake up and realize that we are not separate from each other, nor from this wondrous earth, we also begin to realize that the ways we live together, and the ways we relate to Mother Earth, need to be reconstructed as well. That means not only social engagement as service, but finding ways to address the problematic economic and political structures—the institutionalized forms of greed, ill will, and delusion—that are deeply implicated in the eco-crisis. Within such a notion of liberation, the path of personal transformation and the path of social transformation are not really separate from each other. We must reclaim the concept of awakening from an exclusively individualistic therapeutic model and focus on how individual liberation also requires social transformation. Engagement in the world is how our personal awakening blossoms.

It just so happens that the Buddhist tradition provides a wonderful archetype that can help us to do that: the bodhisattva. We overcome deep-rooted self-centered habits by working compassionately for the healing of our societies and the healing of the Earth. This is what's required for the Buddhist path to become truly liberative in the modern world. If we Buddhists can't do that, or don't want to do it, then Buddhism might not be what our world needs right now.

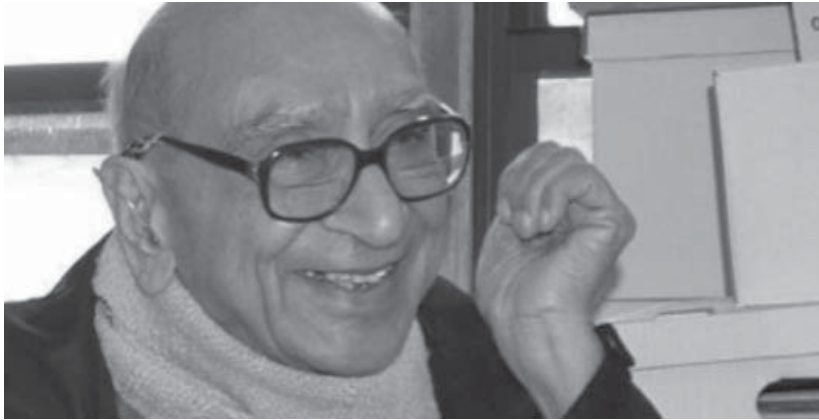


David Loy is a writer and teacher in the Sanbo Zen tradition. His newest book is *A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment, Evolution, and Ethics in the Modern World*.

Narayan Desai

(24 December 1924 – 15 March 2015)

George Lakey



I found Narayan Desai a bright spirit. I first met him in 1965 at the first international conference of nonviolence trainers, organised by War Resisters International in Perugia, Italy. A warm, expansive energy, looking for occasions to smile. I liked him immediately. Given the year and the topic, I was on a mission to share US experiments in training, especially from the civil rights movement. He was eager to share the experience in training people in Shanti Sena.

Cultural collision ensued. Shanti Sena was all about de-escalation

techniques, and the inner spiritual and psychological preparation to remain nonviolent in the midst of hysterical mob violence. The civil rights movement was all about escalation, using nonviolent confrontation to force a crisis that would induce changed policies and structures. Shanti Sainiks sought common ground. Civil rights workers sought polarisation.

Two sides of Gandhi's theory and practice, in the same room in a beautiful hill town in Italy.

It was a grand collision of the two of us, including the dimension

of 'youthful Western enthusiast' vs 'older Asian wisdom'. Narayan and I both learned a lot, were stimulated by our arguments, and emerged friends.

He later found himself an opponent of Nehru's daughter (Indira Gandhi, the prime minister-turned-iron-lady) and handled more polarisation than he wanted. I later found myself being a nonviolent bodyguard for human rights activists in neighbouring Sri Lanka (partially occupied by India by then), supporting a reach for common ground in their situation of civil war.

Who knows what kind of application of nonviolence each of us will need when, if we live long enough?

I especially loved Narayan's turning to singing when his heart weakened, finding that was a healing thing to do for a wounded heart. On many occasions Narayan would burst into song, his smile expressing his thanks that we would put up with it.

We're lucky to have had Narayan for all these years. Rest in the peace you so much cherished, friend.

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<http://peacenews.info/node/7992/obituary-narayan-desai>

Ms. Lalita Banomyong

(5 March 1929 - 3 May 2015)



Ms. Lalita was the eldest daughter of the late Mr. Pridi and the late Lady Poonsuk Banomyong. Mr. Pridi is a father of Thai democracy and a former regent of Siam (1941-1945).

Notes from Lerab Ling

We barely recognize each other at Montpellier train station; nine years is a long time. He walks, and speaks more slowly, but his warmth towards me is evident. He falls asleep in the car on the way to the monastery, as Moo, Pichai, and Brigitte, our kind driver, chatter away. And then, when he awakes, he throws off the years as we climb a precipitous cliff-side road to Lerab Ling, a dramatic, small piece of Tibet hidden in the Larzac mountains of the Languedoc.

There are many people milling around the temple grounds; in solem contemplation, or buying books and trinkets, coffee and cake, at the Wind-horse boutique. Some of the speakers, including Ajahn Sulak, are signing books and sharing a few words with the curious. Then, he disappears, escorted by the charming Matteo Pistono, only to return later telling of meetings and inner sanctums.

There is a party in the evening. A beautiful woman sings jazz songs in a soothing voice, and this being France, there is wine to wash the food down at suppertime. As the evening rolls on, we retire to the studio flat, Ajahn, Moo, Pichai and I, and it is as if we are suddenly back in Bangkok. Or Wongsanit Ashram, and the breezy night air is full of the language of history and philosophy, and the culture and rituals and monk of Tibetan Buddhism. Ajahn Sulak is happy to see me, and I, feel like a man who has never had a father, who then, when he finds one, discover what he has missed throughout his life. The sleep that follows is long and serene.

At six o'clock in the morning. He is at desk preparing notes for his speech later that day, and then playing patience with cards, it is as I remember. Best to get your thoughts down early, before the fog of day wears them away. He gives me two packs of cards by way of encouraging this discipline.

After breakfast I walk around Lerab Ling, and can hear a Tibetan horn being blown, which sounds like the distant, even, bellowing of some mystical bull, or perhaps, more appropriately, a mystical yak. And behind it, the throaty, growling chant of monks. A silent woman chastises me with sign, for walking around the stupa in the wrong direction, apologise, saying that I am a nul, and she makes me walk around it clockwise.

Ajahn Sulak addresses the crowd inside the tem[ple, Matteo Pistono by his side, gently posing questions. Afterwards, Matthew will say that people approached him saying they cried while listening to Sulak's word. He can have that effect. His message,

and that of Sogyal Rinpoche, his host at Lerab Ling, and indeed that of His Holiness Dalai Lama,

Is a uniquely simple one; that the cultivation of loving kindness can cure all human ills. There, surrounded by Buddha images giant and small, fantastic manifestations of spiritual minds, the mostly French crowd are hushed, absorbing the simplicity of this idea, and the powerful presence of these man who are living examples of it. Rinpoche closes the conference with a teaching, then bestows the ceremonial Khata, the long white Tibetan scarf on Sulak and the other speakers. I had arrived late into the hall, and, when he sees me, he takes the scarf from off his neck and places it around mine.

Later, Brigitte takes us to Rinpoche's meditation hut overlooking the Larzac mountains. There are buzzards circling, waiting and driving, and one can imagine that deep meditation could turn this mountain range into the Himalayas, and a child of the Tibetan diaspora could imagine he was home, and that his home was finally free. The wind, which had been howling since I arrived at Lerab Ling, dropped, and wish the sun beginning its downwards path, I saw and felt again that the idea of loving kindness, and now of solitude, worked well enough for man, and was all he really needs.

At night we dine in the village of La Lunas, which seems to be lost in time among the scrub and naked rock of the Larzac peaks. At table, Ajahn addresses me: 'You know Danny, I am very happy to see you. IN your own country, they dint even like you, they say you are a cockney! But I can see that you have Buddha-nature.' Yes, indeed. It is a reminder that there are so many in life who are quick to blame the poor for being the poor, and the uneducated for being uneducated, and who will not see, their "Buddha-nature"

On the morning of Sulak's departure, Rinpoche comes to the flat to invite him to the mountain-top retreat for tea. Once we are there, he gives Sulak another scarf, and an envelope, and tells him that he will be coming to Bangkok, and then the two say their goodbyes. We leave for Toulouse in the car, and the long mountain roads snake down to the pretty villages and vineyards of southern France. Then, with a promise to visit Bordeaux, he and Pichai leave to catch their plane to Istanbul, then to Bangkok and home. I will miss him

Denny Campbell 2015



A History of the Thai-Chinese

Sulak Sivaraksa

by Jeffery Sng and Pimpraphai Bisalputra. Published by Editions Didier Millet, Singapore. 448 pages. USD \$39.90

Prior to releasing *A History of the Thai-Chinese*, Jeffrey Sng and Pimpraphai Bisalputra co-wrote the book *Bencharong and Chinaware in the Court of Siam: The Surat Osathanugra Collection*. Pimpraphai is author of several Thai books on the Thai-Chinese such as *Sampao Siam: Tumnarn Jek Bangkok* [Siamese Junk: A History of the Chinese in Bangkok] and *Nai Mae* [Lady of the House]. This latest collaboration with Jeffrey is also built on her previous researches.

Jeffrey is a Singaporean and Pimpraphai's husband. Jeffrey wrote this beautiful and well-researched book in English. But he could not have done it alone without Pimpraphai's assistance and provision of the relevant Thai sources. The end result is another important book on the Thai-Chinese, especially the Chinese who became Thai.

Perhaps it's only in Siam that the Chinese 'lost' their identity. We can't really observe this phenomenon elsewhere in Asia Pacific. Why? One reason might be because many Chinese intermarried. They had Thai wives; or they married local born Chinese who were very much Thai. Pimpraphai's book *Nai Mae* attests to this fact. And unlike Chinese elsewhere,

those in Siam worshipped tablets bearing the names of female ancestors. Moreover, in general Thai wives were gladder to have daughters than sons. From this perspective, the only good thing about having sons is that they could be ordained as Buddhist monks. When Chinese husbands allowed their Thai wives to practice alms giving and later when they took part in their sons' ordination, Thai-ness gradually 'displaced' their Chinese identity.

This book narrates the diverse impacts of overseas Chinese and their descendants on Thai society. Quite a few of them were held in favor by the Thai court. One son of a Chinese father and Thai mother even became king.

A number of Thai-Chinese daughters became royal concubines. One even became queen. Unfortunately, the authors didn't go into great details on some of these highly interesting characters. Also, an important female figure that the authors didn't mention at all is Lorm Hemachayart. She was very wealthy and more capable than the ordinary male Chinese rich merchant. She also acted as a leading liaison between the community and the temple. Another wealthy female

sustainer of Buddhist temples was Khunying Sun. Given her devotion and contribution, the king even named a temple after her: Wat Suntharikaram.

How Buddhist ordination marked the transition from Chinese to Thai is not sufficiently spelled out in this book. Moreover, the authors didn't touch on overseas Chinese who became leading monks in the kingdom such as Somdet Phra Puttajarn (See) of Patumkongka temple and Phra Sasanasophon (Orn) of Ratchapradit temple. Both were infact ethnic Chinese. Many well-known and important monks were also Chinese descendants, including the Supreme Patriarch (Yoo) of Wat Saket (Temple of the Golden Mount), Phra Pattaramunee (Inn) of Thongnopakun temple, (Both of whom were well-known astrologers) Somdet Phra Vanarat (Heng) of Mahathat temple, and Phra Thammachedi (Gee) of Thongnopakun temple. The latter two monks were both excellent administrators and Pali scholars. And we need not mention Bhikkhu Buddhadasa.

I am not being over-critical. Understandably, the authors had to be selective. They can't include every issue and everyone. The information

gathered by the authors is already impressive, covering the Ayutthaya period to the present. They also tried to establish links between political events in Siam and China.

I will however offer a slight correction. The first bank to be established in the kingdom was the Chino-Siam Bank. It was founded by Siow Yu Seng with the royal title of Chalong Nanart. Unfortunately, King Rama VI didn't support this bank, and it eventually went belly-up. If the Siam Commercial Bank (the venue for this book launch) didn't receive royal backing from the very beginning, it would have gone the way of the Chino-Siam Bank.

Put differently, royal support was fundamental for Chinese merchants and government officials, especially in times of trouble. Absent royal backing, it would have been extremely difficult for them to get back on track. At the same time, if they got too close to the king, severed their Chinese roots and became Thai, and devoted their lives and wealth to sustaining Buddhism, then they

might lose most of their possessions in one to three generations.

Another commendable feature of the book is the provision of brief biographical sketches of leading Thai-Chinese figures and their respective lineages in Siam. For example, in the southern part of the kingdom several Thai-Chinese prospered as government officials, and they were members of the Na Songkhla and Na Ranong families. One such figure needs to be highlighted: Phraya Ratsadanupradit (born Khaw Sim Bee), a member of the Na Ranong family. He was governor of Trang province. King Rama VI held him in high esteem, and he almost became a government minister. Likewise, Prince Damrong had great appreciation for this provincial governor, often affectionately calling him "Sim Bee."

However, when dealing with the Na Songkhla family, the authors did mention that one of the family members served as the last Chao Phraya of the Rattanakosin era. But they failed to state that his younger brother became the Regent to the king

in the beginning of the present reign.

Accounts of Thai-Chinese who excelled in the arts and culture are also apparently missing in the book. The name "Sathirakoses" was nowhere to be found. But at least the authors reproduced Puey Ungphakorn's classic "From Womb to Tomb" in their book.

I will end this short review with a footnote. Kukrit Pramoj received most of the credits for the Sino-Thai rapprochement in 1975. But we must not forget that he had rabidly attacked Chinese Communism prior to this diplomatic gesture. And we must not forget the three 'ambassadors'—Sang Phathanothai, Karuna Kusalasaya, and Aree Pirom—who served as the secret backdoor communication channel with Chinese ruling officials in the 1950s. However, when Sarit Thanarat came to power, they were imprisoned for being pro-Beijing. In any case, without their prior efforts it might have been more difficult for Bangkok to normalize ties with Beijing in the 1970s.

Puey Ungpakorn, Founding Father of Modern Thailand

By Stefan Collignon¹

As we approach Puey Ungpakorn's 100th birthday, it is fortunate to be reminded by Sulak Sivaraksa's book what an extraordinary person the

former Governor of the Bank of Thailand and Rector of Thammasat University was. Sulak's book² tells us a very personal story of how he met

and got to know Puey over the years. We discover in Puey a humble human being who has made an extraordinary contribution to the transformation of

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² Sulak Sivaraksa (2014): *Puey Ungpakorn : An Honest Siamese in a Class of His Own*; (translated by Zia Collinsfree). Bangkok. ISBN: 9786163070364 - 6163070364

PUHEY UNGPAKORN

Ein ehrlicher Siamese eigener Klasse



Sulak Sivaraksa



Projektkomitee der Nationalen Feier zum 100. Geburtstag Puey Ungpakorns,
in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Verlag Stiftung für Kinder

Thailand into a modern nation. The Magsaysay Award for honest public service in 1964 gave international recognition to this outstanding man.

Puey, the man

Puey Ungpakorn was born in Bangkok on March 9, 1916 and died in July 1999. The fourth child of an immigrant Chinese fishmonger, he was one of the first students who enrolled at the newly opened Thammasat University, then called the University of Moral and Political Sciences (มหาวิทยาลัยวิชาธรรมศาสตร์และการเมือง). The guideline of the university was "to teach students to love and cherish democracy". After graduation, Puey earned a scholarship to study economics at the London School of Economics in 1938. The LSE was still under the influence of William Beveridge (1879 –1963), the father of the British Welfare State, who had preceded Lionel Robbins (1898–1984) as Director of the School. Building a modern Welfare State and

the great debates between Keynes and Hayek were inspiring students in those days, just as Karl Popper's recently completed *The Open Society and its Enemies*. Puey stayed in London until 1944, when he was parachuted back into Thailand as a Special Operations Executive for the Free Thai Movement to fight Japanese occupation. He resumed his studies after the War, and, in 1949, Puey was one of the first Thai students to receive a PhD from the LSE.

Puey Ungpakorn became governor of the Bank of

Thailand in 1959 where he served for 12 years until 1971, far longer than any of his predecessors or successors (the average tenure of BoT governors was less than 2 years before, and less than 4 years after his reign). These were the crucial years which laid the basis for Thailand's economic development for decades to come. A solid financial infrastructure was built which later financed the dynamic middle class of the Asian Tiger economy. A nation of peasants started to accumulate the skills necessary to become a regional manufacturing hub. GDP per capita doubled during Puey's governorship and prices were stable with inflation well below 5%. Financial solidity attracted foreign investment and opened not only the economy but Thai society in general. In fact, given the fiscal conservatism of Thai governments, which kept public debt low and encouraged private investment, the job of the Bank of

Thailand's governor was more important than that of the finance minister.

Puey was repeatedly named by Bangkok gossip as a potential Prime Minister, or minister, but he always stayed away from these corrupting offices. However, he did give advice to authoritarian military dictators, Generals Sarit and Thanom, but he also served the democratic Prime Ministers Seni and Kukrit Pramoj, and repeatedly solved problems with the international financial community caused by corrupt leaders. Maybe Puey had understood that, at an early stage of development, economics must precede democracy. However, this realism did not stop him from giving wholehearted support to Thailand's emerging democracy movement. In fact, it strengthened his democratic commitments. In 1966, he became dean of the Faculty of Economics at Thammasat University and with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation he set up training schemes for future civil servants and also instituted long-term research projects for improving living standards in Thai villages.

After General Thanom's return to power in 1975-6 and the brutal massacre of democracy activists at Thammasat University, Puey went into exile to England. The extreme right accused him of being "a communist". This was the only charge they could fabricate against an honest democrat who sought to adopt the principles of the modern welfare state he had learned in England to the modern Thailand he dreamt of. In 1977 Puey suffered a stroke which left him handicapped until his death in 1999.

The legacy

Puey's influence on a whole generation of young Thais was profound and Sulak's book bears witness to his magic. However, I would like to emphasize the role of Puey as a founding father of modern Thailand by laying the foundation for economic development. His role cannot be overestimated. It is of a similar nature as Alexander Hamilton's role as the first Treasury Secretary of the United States. If Thailand were a Republic like America, Puey's picture ought to be on a baht note like Hamilton's is on the ten-dollar note. Puey's greatness is not so much measured by his practical accomplishments, which were nevertheless remarkable; his greatness is more like the radiance of the magic cat that keeps the mice away.

I know that many activists in the Thai democracy and NGO movements believe that money corrupts and they may be shocked when I say that Puey's greatest accomplishment was the establishment of a stable and growing monetary economy. Let me explain.

When Siam abolished Absolutism in 1932, it was a traditional, closed and holistic society in the sense described by Popper. Village community gave protection and stability, but also demanded subordination to tradition and hierarchy. Individual liberty, human rights, democracy made little sense in this environment. The emerging cultural elite in Bangkok sought economic development and wished to become part of the modern world. This meant improving economic prosperity, but also changing the consensus about what is right and wrong in society. Such a transition is

always painful and rarely free of violence. Germany, on its way to modernity, has caused two world wars and 50 million deaths, and only became a civilized state when it installed a social market economy with stable money. Compared to that, Thailand's path to modernity was remarkably peaceful. As governor of the Bank of Thailand, Puey contributed to this transformation.

Nevertheless, the Thai experience with democracy has its black and grey spots. Its curse is "corruption". Corruption is the consequence of a confused amalgam of traditional holism and modern individualism. It is the attempt of the powerful to use status and positions to amass wealth and money. For example, after Prime Minister General Sarit Thanarat's death in 1963, it was discovered that he had owned a trust company, a brewery, 51 cars and some 30 plots of land, most of which he had given to his dozens of mistresses. This is a distortion of how a modern monetary economy works, and the greater the distortion, the slower is economic development and the worse are the social conditions.

Puey stood for a different Thailand, a modern Thailand, a humane Thailand. One of his most famous writings is the manifest for social welfare called "The Quality of Life from Womb to Tomb", where he described his vision of "what life is all about, and what development should seek to achieve for all". It is a document that contains the spirit of his early LSE years in the context of a modern Thailand. Unfortunately, this Thailand is still an unaccomplished promise.

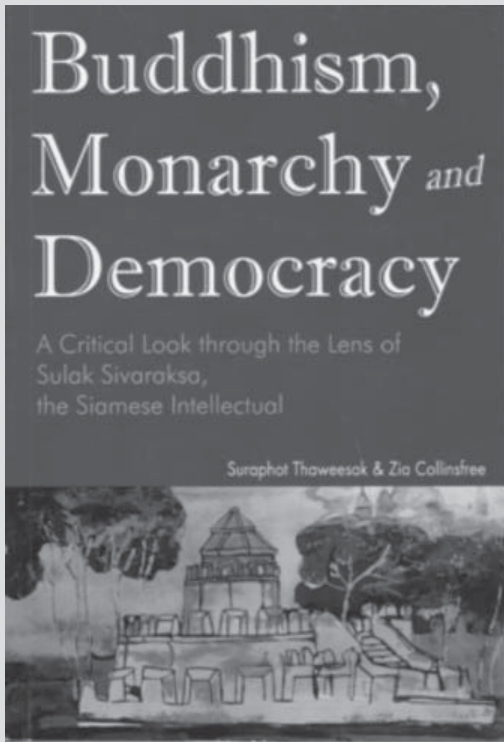
What makes Puey so interesting is that this modern

Thailand could only come about by setting up a modern, stable and well-functioning monetary economy. Economists are often too preoccupied with the short term to see the normative implications of money. Money is not just a piece of purchasing power, a claim on wealth. Money comes into being because individuals make promises and contracts; financial assets are commitments based on trust. They bind individuals together, while simultaneously they give each party the freedom to say yes or no. This very freedom makes them equal. Thus liberty and equality are norms that are indissolubly linked and the monetary economy is the framework within which they blossom. In a truly modern society, individuals are not isolated nor are they repressed by custom and convention and group pressure. They are united by choice and respect for the other with all her or his individual differences.

Of course, norms and facts often do not coincide. But the gap is incomprehensible unless one has a valid norm, and without this recognition one cannot fight for a better word. A stable monetary economy, with the development of financial and other contracts anchors, the norms of liberty and equality in the daily practices of social life. This, Puey understood.

Thailand's young Turks – and Sulak was one of them – have campaigned all their life to close the gap between modern norms and ancient practices, but Puey laid the foundations that gave them a purpose. For this we ought to be grateful to the great and simple man Puey Ungpakorn.

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Buddhism, Monarchy, and Democracy:

A Critical Look through the Lens of Sulak Sivaraksa, the Siamese Intellectual, by Suraphot Thaweesak, English translation by Zia Collinsfree.

Theodore Mayer

Suraphot Thaweesak is a social critic and professor of philosophy whose public questioning of Thai Buddhism, politics, and society led in 2011 to a charge against him of *lèse-majesté*. Under Thai law, such charges are easy to bring forward, and they carry the harshest punishments of any *lèse-majesté* laws in the world. The charges were finally dropped, but it took a year before he was cleared.

In 2013 Suraphot spent the year studying the thought of another Thai social critic who had survived at least three charges of *lèse-majesté* over the course of many years—Sulak Sivaraksa. This book is the result of Suraphot's research into Sulak's thought on Buddhism, the Thai monarchy, and democracy. The book was published in Thai in February of 2014, just three months before a military coup raised serious questions—yet again—about the prospects for democracy in Thailand.

A major Thai bookstore chain, Se-Ed, reported that the book was a bestseller, and the book's distributor, Kled Thai, said the book ranged from first to fifth place in its own daily sales during the National Book Fair in Bangkok in 2014.

Readers of *Seeds of Peace* can find an excellent review in English of the Thai edition of this book by Thanet Arpornsuwan in *Seeds of Peace*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Sep-Dec. 2557 (2014). Readers can find that review by searching “seeds of peace magazine” via an Internet browser and then clicking on the correct volume. Thanet gives an eloquent and accurate reading of the central features of Sulak's thought as presented by Suraphot. Since that work has been done so well, I will comment only briefly on other aspects of this book that might be of interest to readers of the English version.

Systematic inquiry by one

Thai social critic into the thought of another makes this English translation of special interest to a broader public. The fact the book was intended for a Thai audience allows the attentive reader to glean insights into the shape of Thai debates on Buddhism, monarchy, and democracy that might be hard to gain otherwise. This is in large part due to Suraphot's effort to locate Sulak's thought within the Thai context especially, but also within larger philosophical or social-critical contexts.

As Suraphot does this one gets a sense of the understandable angst among Thai intellectuals about the never ending cycle of coups that have re-established power from above on an average of once every four years and seven months since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932. This tone permeates the questions that form the central thread of the book. Why does mainstream Buddhism keep

condoning the status quo? How is it that monarchical power has come to be even less accountable and open to criticism now than it was in the past? How can genuine democracy be established?

Suraphot describes Thai society as passing through a Dark Age, enshrouded in myths about the interconnections of Buddhism, the monarchy, and democracy. In response he cites Kant's argument that "the public use of one's reason must be free at all times, and this alone can bring enlightenment to mankind" (p. 16). Furthermore, following Michael Wright he sees this work of public reasoning as fulfilling the promise of the Renaissance that began in Europe but was never completed there, and is now the patrimony of the whole world. All this is especially true of the Renaissance when seen as "a struggle for rights, free thinking and the right to be governed according to justice and sound reasoning" (p. 17).

For Suraphot and for many of the Thai thinkers cited in this book, Sulak's significance as a public intellectual has resided in his willingness to ask bold and critical questions of Buddhism, the monarchy, and democracy, on a continuing basis and for perhaps longer than anyone else. It is for this reason that his thought bears systematic analysis. Whether one agrees with Sulak or not on particular points, Sulak continues to assist in this way in the progress of the "Thai Renaissance" that Suraphot hopes is still unfolding.

Sulak's role as an outspoken but ultimately friendly critic of Thai royalty is of great interest. Sulak has not shied away from critiquing royalty, and the more radical Somsak

Jeamteerasakul (now in exile) has expressed profound appreciation for Sulak in this regard. Both see a monarchical institution that is neither accountable nor open to criticism as a key reason that democracy and free and open public debate have had to struggle as much as they have in order to assert themselves in Thailand.

Sulak's critiques are "friendly" in the sense that Sulak believes in the monarchy as an institution. Secondly, his image of the role of the monarchy holds to a very high moral standard. The monarch should be a servant of the people, and should have the moral courage to accept criticism and to stand consistently for justice. The monarch should in fact display all the best qualities of a Buddhist practitioner who is chosen to lead the people. These views are based on Sulak's understanding of the Buddhist ideal of kingship. Therefore his critiques are of the kind that Talal Asad described as an invitation to a fellow practitioner to change their practice so as to fulfil the promise of a tradition (in this case Buddhist kingship), rather than an attempt to demolish another's stance or argument (Asadw in "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam").

There is much else of interest in this book. Suraphot's careful study of John Rawls and Michael Sandel on whether public intellectuals should articulate their moral positions within the language of their own religious traditions or not, for example; and deciding that Sulak's open use of the language of religion towards a common moral standpoint puts him in the company of Martin Luther King Jr, Gandhi, and Ambedkar.

Also of interest are other thinkers' perspectives on Sulak and his work: Nidhi Eosiwong comments, for example, that Sulak is unusual among Thai intellectuals in linking "Thainess to the destiny of the whole world," in the sense that for Sulak aspects of Thainess—the simplicity of village life and the substance of Buddhist teachings—can contribute practically to confronting global crises that arise from consumerism, materialism, and greed (p. 200). Kasian Tejapira views Sulak as a perennial outsider, yet one who has the undeniable and remarkable ability to bring together people of different viewpoints for exchange, learning, and finding solutions.

In spite of some burdensome passages and some redundancies, the reader will find much here that is worthy of their time, in an easily readable and sound translation. In particular one has the chance to study how Buddhism may be seen as a liberating force as it develops alongside both traditional institutions and the struggle for democracy in a country that has long known authoritarian rule. If the Thai Renaissance is indeed on the near or far horizon, Sulak, Suraphot, and many of the thinkers cited in this book will surely be seen as among those who hastened its arrival.

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