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Research.

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Editorial Notes

The recent period has been a very active one for INEB, and upcoming months will likely be equally so. One notable event over the past few months has been INEB's participation, along with the Inter-religious Climate and Ecology (ICE) network, in the climate change meetings in Paris known as COP21. INEB led a meditation session at one of the venues, and joined in talks and activities with other interfaith leaders. INEB's participation is one indicator of a growing presence of faith-based groups around the world in pressuring for genuine action on climate change.

INEB also played a leading role in organizing and hosting a major public speaking event by Sogyal Rinpoche on "The Art of Living and Dying" in Bangkok on December 19. In a packed auditorium at Thammasat University, Sogyal Rinpoche brought an engaging talk to conclusion with a beautiful description of the death of his aunt, who was widely known for her humility and profound knowledge of the Dhamma.

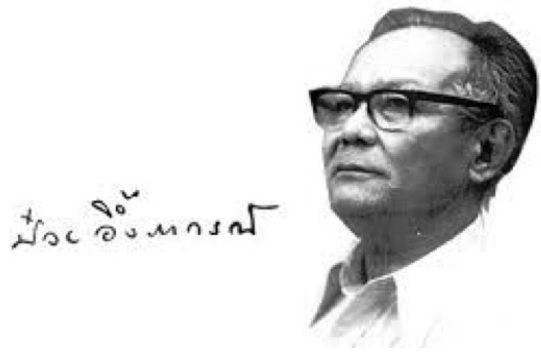
We are now energetically completing the organizing for what will be a really excellent biennial conference in Sri Lanka from 22 to 28 January 2016, entitled "Converging Streams: Engaging for Holistic Development – An Interfaith Dialogue for Peace and Sustainability.

The INEB Institute team is equally busy preparing for the first term of the English for Engaged Social Service program, to start 22 February. The INEB Institute is also making very good progress in its curriculum proposal with Arsom Silp Institute of the Arts. The collaboration with Arsom Silp will allow us to offer our MA in Socially Engaged Buddhism as a recognized degree-granting program. We hope to begin our inaugural year in August of 2016, in a program that will take a comprehensive look at the work of engaged Buddhists in the modern period. The program will also take students to meet with engaged Buddhists of all major traditions in Thailand and Taiwan, as well as in Nagpur and Bir, India.



9 th March 2016

Puey Ungpakorn's Birth Century



The Quality of Life of a Southeast Asian
(From womb to tomb)



While in my mother's womb, I want her to have good nutrition and access to maternal and child welfare care.

I don't want to have as many brothers and sisters as my parents had before me, and I do not want my mother to have a child too soon after me.

I don't care whether my father and mother are formally married, but I need them to live together in reasonable harmony.

I want good nutrition for my mother and for me in my first two or three years when my capacity for future mental and physical development is determined.

I want to go to school, together with my sister, and to learn a trade, and to have the schools impart social values to me. If I happen to be suitable for higher education, that opportunity should be available.

When I leave school I want a job, a meaningful one in which I can feel the satisfaction of making a contribution.

I want to live in a law and order society, without molestation. I want my country to relate effectively and equitably to the outside world so that I can have access to the intellectual and technical knowledge of all mankind, as well as the capital from overseas.

I would like my country to get a fair price for the products that I and my fellow citizens create.

As a farmer, I would like to have my own plot of land, with a system which gives me access to credit, to new agricultural technology and to markets, and a fair price for my produce.

As a worker, I would want to have some share,

some sense of participation in the factory in which I work.

As a human being, I would like inexpensive newspapers and paperback books, plus access to radio and TV (without too much advertising).

I want to enjoy good health, and I expect the Government to provide free preventive medical service and cheap and readily available good curative service.

I need some leisure time for myself, and to enjoy my family, and want access to some green parks, to the arts, and to traditional social or religious festivities.

I want clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. I would like to have the security of co-operative mechanisms in which I join to help others do things which they cannot do alone, and they do the same for me.

I need the opportunity to participate in the society around me, and to help shape the decisions of the economic and social as well as the political institutions that so affect my life.

I want my wife to have equal opportunity with me, and I want both of us to have access to the knowledge and means of family planning.

In my old age, it would be nice to have some form of social security to which I have contributed.

When I die, if I happen to have some money left, I would wish the Government to take some of it, leaving an adequate amount for my widow. With this money the Government should make it possible for others to enjoy life too.

These are what life is all about, and what development should seek to achieve for all.



"From Womb to Tomb" have been translated into 13 languages, which are Karen, Burmese, Khmer(Cambodia), English, French, Bahasa (Indonesia), Japan, Korean, Lao, Thai, Tibetan, Vietnamese. Hopefully, it will continue to be translated into numerous other languages.

Those whom interested for translating, please contact : secretariat@inebnetwork.org

Remembering a Great Scholar

Book Review of Exploration and Irony in Studies of Siam Over 40 years



Did you renew your subscription?

May we remind our readers to renew your subscription or help others who cannot afford to pay for *Seeds of Peace*, so that the publication will be available to all who seek something to read beyond what is provided by the mainstream mass media. The suggested rate is USD 50.00 per year. If you can provide more support, we would be very grateful for your generosity. Your money will go to support INEB activities for grassroots people in SE Asia.

Burma :

Anti-Muslim Buddhist Group Moves toward Myanmar's Mainstream

Timothy McLaughlin and Hnin Yadana Zaw

Yangon (Reuters) : Swathed in crimson robes, 77-year-old Ashin Tilawkar Biwonsa shuffles through a crowded conference room with the help of an aide, his supporters standing in respect as he takes a seat at the head of a table under a portrait of his own image.

It is from here, at an unremarkable roadside monastery just outside the city of Yangon, that the abbot is propelling the radical Buddhist group he co-founded into the mainstream of Myanmar's politics.

Four bills drafted by his Committee for the Protection of Race and Religion, better known as Ma Ba Tha, have been passed by parliament and signed into law. Critics say the new laws effectively legalize discrimination against women and the country's minority Muslims.

Along with political clout, Ma Ba Tha is also ratcheting up its public image ahead of elections in November that will be the first free vote in Myanmar in the last 25 years. At time of priutiug elections have taken place. The radical Buddhist group has regular programming on one of the country's most popular satellite TV channels and has launched a magazine.

"There should be law-makers in parliament who

are reliable for the country," Ashin Tilawkar Biwonsa said in an interview. "There might be some people, especially Muslims, who are working on weakening Buddhism, so we need strong people for our religion."

Ma Ba Tha has shown no signs of contesting elections itself but says it will "remind" the public of candidates who opposed its four laws. These include Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and her opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), which is going head to head with conservatives and military figures in the polls.

Established two years ago, Ma Ba Tha sprang from the "969" movement, a loose collection of monks linked to a wave of violence against the country's Muslim minority in 2012 and 2013.

Senior Ma Ba Tha officials said the 969 movement had raised awareness about threats to Buddhism from a burgeoning Muslim population, but was disorganized and lacked leadership.

"It was (concerned with) only the symbols of Buddhism," said Ashin Tilawkar Biwonsa.

Now, a growing number of professionals are offering their expertise on everything from media relations

Ashin Tilawkar Biwonsa (top), 77, Ma Ba Tha's founder and chairman, talks during a meeting at Ma Ba Tha's head office in Yangon August 26, 2015. REUTERS/Soe Zeya Tun



to legislation, helping to shape Ma Ba Tha into a slick organization with popular support and real political clout.

One such expert is Aye Paing, who spent two decades toiling as a lawyer in Myanmar's musty courtrooms before finding a dramatic new use for his legal skills.

Aye Paing and a team of Ma Ba Tha-linked lawyers drafted the protection of race and religion bills, the last of which was signed by President Thein Sein on Monday.

Lawyers, economists, IT experts and other professionals had made Ma Ba Tha "very efficient, systematic and legal" said Aye Paing, 52, who wears a black "taik pone", a short collarless jacket worn over a shirt that is common among Myanmar's legal professionals.

"We discuss, give advice

and share our visions," he said.

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

In another sign of its growing influence, foreign diplomats regularly visit the group's monastery headquarters.

One was U.S. ambassador Derek Mitchell, who went there twice in May to discuss "the need for increased interfaith dialogue" and "the importance of keeping religion out of politics", according to a statement from the U.S. embassy in Yangon.

Myanmar's revered and influential monks led many pro-democracy protests during nearly half a century of military rule in the Buddhist-majority nation. But after a quasi-civilian, reformist government took power in 2011, some outspoken monks claimed

Islam was eclipsing Buddhism and weakening the country.

Now, Ashin Tilawkar Biwonsa says Ma Ba Tha has 250 offices nationwide. He couldn't estimate how many supporters it has, but in June more than 1,500 people attended the group's annual conference in Yangon.

Ma Ba Tha recently struck a deal with Myanmar's popular satellite television provider, SkyNet, to broadcast its sermons.

The broadcasts would help the public "know the truth" about Ma Ba Tha, said Khine Khine Tun, 25, an articulate former teacher and interpreter who heads the group's international relations department.

Through media training courses, she said, she has learnt to speak to visitors with a smile, confounding expectations of the abrasive and sometimes confronta-

tional style for which the group is known.

The television deal bolsters an information campaign that already includes a bi-monthly magazine with a circulation of 50,000 that contains sermons delivered by Ma Ba Tha monks nationwide.

RACE AND RELIGION

In contrast to long-delayed legislation on banking, mining and property, the Ma Ba Tha-backed "race and religion" bills moved swiftly through parliament.

One bill requires some women to wait at least three years between pregnancies. Another requires Buddhist women to seek official permission before marrying a non-Buddhist man.

This will stop Muslim men "torturing and forcing (Buddhist women) to change religion," Ashin Tilawkar Biwonsa said.

Suu Kyi and her NLD opposed the laws. But government officials and politicians rarely criticize Ma Ba Tha, because they either sympathize with the group's views or fear upsetting its many supporters during an election year.

"They are afraid of Ma

Ba Tha," said May Sabi Phyu, the director of the Gender Equality Network, a women's empowerment group that opposed the bills.

Any plans to sway voters would be "violating the law," said NLD spokesman Nyan Win, adding: "It's the government's responsibility to

control and stop them."

(Additional reporting by Andrew R.C. Marshall in YANGON; Editing by John Chalmers and Raju Gopalakrishnan)

France :

Love Letter to President Hollande

Sister Mai Nghiem

Dear Mr. President,

This morning four military planes crossed the sky over our mountains. They made me think of France. I have been in California for a year, but these past days my heart and thoughts go out unceasingly to my native country.

My thoughts also go out to you, Mr. President, father of a country in shock, who must, at this hour, cope with a painful and complex situation under extreme political and media-driven pressure which must cause you, no doubt, stress-filled nights without rest.

Thank you for accepting this difficult task to be captain of the ship and to do it with a great sense of responsibility and necessity.

On the night of the 13th of November many of the members of my French family died. A part of me died with them. And from the vulnerability of my wounded heart, a voice makes itself heard: the echo of my cries in the sobs of my Syrian

brothers and sisters, the echo of my despair in the calls for help of all the men and women who suffer, a little bit everywhere, from the loss of their loved ones, from the violence, the terror and the war.

I know from the depths of my wounded soul, today more than yesterday, that I wish no family to have to shed these bitter tears.

As Pope Francis said in his acclaimed speech to the US Congress, "Let us remember the Golden Rule: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'"

Mr. President, we learn in history books that by humiliating the Germans in the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 we gave a springboard to Hitler in his rise to power, that the bombardment of Cambodia in 1973 served as fodder for the recruitment campaign of the Khmer Rouge, and how the war in Iraq became kindling for the fire of Islamist fanaticism.

A copy of Aung Zay Yathu, a weekly promoting nationalism published by Ma Ba Tha, is seen at the head office of the Buddhist group, in Yangon August 26, 2015. REUTERS/Soe Zeya Tun



Korea :

Seoul Temple Drama Ends in Activist Arrest

Bangkok Post, 11 Dec 2015



In the current world crisis it is easy to get caught up in the urgency (though very real), the agitation and the frenzy around us.

May we all, while responding to the imperative need to protect the population, also take time to remember, to listen and to learn from history and from the memories of those who witnessed it;

May we all, in a world where the past may be brought back to life in a very real and poignant way (as in the recent movie "The Son of Saul"), honour through our responsible, intelligent and awakened actions the remembrance of so many who died and suffered, and not allow any chance that our children may have to re-live such trauma;

May we all work together, work to build a world where attentive and compassionate listening to the suffering endured by both sides prevails over the unnecessary escalation of violence that no one wishes for, where the desire for deep and genuine understanding triumphs over our prejudices, our fears and our thirst for vengeance or power;

So that together we may,

as Gandhi said, not just keep ourselves from making the world blind, but also light a spark of life, of hope and of love in the eyes of its inhabitants.

Mr. President, I am confident that the history books and the generations to come will remember you as someone who knew how to bring quiet strength to a nation that so needed it amidst chaos, fear and anger; as a shrewd captain who knew how to bring his ship into calm waters; as the wise and courageous commander of the guardians of real peace; as the shepherd who knew how to take care of his sheep beyond the borders of his fields.

For we all prefer the cheerful chirping of blackbirds to the screaming of missiles, the free and majestic flight of the hawk to the scrambling of jet fighters.

Please know, Mr. President, that in these somber hours you do not walk alone on this arduous path. The thoughts of support and courage of many go with you.

With all my gratitude and confidence,

Your child among others,
.....

Seoul: A fugitive South Korean labour leader surrendered on Thursday to police who had besieged a major Buddhist temple in Seoul where he had sought sanctuary from arrest for the past month.

After a negotiated settlement between police and Buddhist leaders, Han Sang-Gyun was allowed a choreographed exit from the Jogye Temple complex, surrounded by hundreds of uniformed police.

Han, the head of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), had sought refuge in the temple following a massive anti-government demonstration on November 14.

Armed with a warrant for his arrest on charges of inciting violence during the protest, police had given him an ultimatum to surrender. But a police threat to storm the temple and remove Han by force was postponed after the leader of the Jogye Order – South Korea's leading Buddhist organisation – appealed for more time to resolve the standoff.

South Korean religious venues had a long history of providing refuge for political activists, most notably in the 1980s when many young pro-democracy activists who were on the run from police sought

sanctuary in Catholic churches.

Although there was no legal reason preventing police entering such venues, they had traditionally opted not to do so for fear of triggering a public backlash.

The last time police raided the Jogye Temple – to bring out seven labour activists in 2002 – the move sparked widespread criticism.

In the end, Han emerged from his hiding place and, after paying respects at the main temple, was allowed to address his supporters and the waiting media, before surrendering to police who handcuffed him and bundled him into a waiting van.

"I have been fighting to stop laws that would make it easier to dismiss workers. It seems this has made me the most wanted fugitive in the country," Han said.

"I will bring my fight to court and to jail if necessary," he said.

Wearing a headband with the slogan, "Abolish the temporary workers' system," Han raised a clenched fist and led his supporters in chanting anti-government slogans before turning himself in.

The Jogye Order, which has millions of followers, had been mediating with the government ever since



Korean Confederation of Trade Unions President Han Sang-gyun, second right, walks to turn himself in to police at Jogye Temple in Seoul, South Korea

Mr Han took refuge in the temple.

One monk said the activist had been on hunger strike for the past 11 days, taking only a little water and some salt.

Mr Han's union had been a driving force behind the Nov 14 rally that drew around 60,000 people to protest labour reforms and other areas of government policy.

The rally saw numerous violent clashes with police who used pepper spray and water cannon to disperse protestors.

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Laos :

Laos Must Come Clean on Sombath

Andrea Giorgetta
Bangkok Post, 15 Dec 2015

Today marks the third anniversary of the enforced disappearance of prominent Lao civil society leader Sombath Somphone.

Sombath was last seen at a police checkpoint on a busy street in the Lao capital, Vientiane, on the evening of Dec 15, 2012. Sombath's disappearance was captured on a CCTV camera placed near the police checkpoint. CCTV footage showed that police stopped Sombath's car and, within minutes, individuals forced him into

another vehicle and drove away. The CCTV footage clearly shows that Sombath was taken away in the presence of police officers.

After three years, there is little evidence that Lao authorities have undertaken a serious and competent investigation of Sombath's disappearance. Instead, there has been near total silence, insinuations, and contradictory declarations regarding Sombath's fate or whereabouts.

Lao authorities' recent

claim that authorities were still conducting an investigation and "trying their utmost efforts" is belied by the fact the last police report on the probe was issued on June 8, 2013.

Following an official visit to Laos in September 2014, a delegation of members of parliament from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) member states declared Lao authorities had "erected a brick wall of silence" on the status of the investigation.

As a result, the MPs believed there was no active investigation and accused the government of a cover-up for state officials implicated in his abduction.

This assessment was reinforced in January 2015, when the Lao government insinuated that Sombath's disappearance might have been the result of a conflict with a criminal group.

In June 2015, the government claimed the case of Sombath's disappearance was "complex and difficult to solve quickly." However, this statement is at odds with the findings of a leading international expert on forensic investigations who concluded in December 2014 that the case of Sombath's disappearance remained "eminently solvable".

Lao authorities have adopted the same tactics with regard to other cases of enforced disappearance in the country.

One such case involves five student leaders who were arrested in October 1999 in Vientiane for planning peaceful pro-democ-

racy demonstrations. For many years, the government denied it had even detained the five. However, between 2003 and 2011, government statements evolved from denials to ambiguous statements and, finally, to timid admissions.

Two of the former student leaders are believed to be imprisoned in solitary confinement while a third one died in a Vientiane prison in September 2001.

The fate of the two others remains unknown. In June 2015, in response to recommendations made during the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review (UPR) investigating allegations of enforced disappearance in the country, Laos dismissed the allegations as untrue.

As Laos prepares to assume the chair of Asean in 2016, the issue of Sombath's enforced disappearance looms over the country.

Any discussion of Sombath's disappearance has been stifled. Apart from damaging the country's reputation, the failure to make any progress on the issue of enforced disappearances was likely a decisive factor in Laos' unsuccessful bid for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council in October 2015.

In keeping with their long-established policy of non-interference with each other's internal affairs, Asean member states -- with the notable exception of Singapore -- have remained completely silent on the issue of Sombath's disappearance. This is no longer tolerable.

While few expect regional governments to openly



A Thai activist holds placard with portraits of Lao civil society leader Sombath Somphone during a demonstration of the anniversary of his disappearance (Laos embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, 15 December 2015)

criticise Vientiane over Sombath's disappearance, Asean member states must be more willing to engage the Lao government on the issue of enforced disappearances.

Countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia, which have experienced hundreds of cases of enforced disappearances stemming from traumatic political turmoil, have taken some steps to address the issue.

They could use their experience to engage the Lao authorities and lead by example. The benchmark for a successful Asean chairmanship will not be determined by the number of high-level meetings that Laos will be able to organise but by the progress its government will make in addressing crucial human rights issues, including enforced disappearances.

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Siam :

Monk protest misguided

Editorial, Bangkok Post, 30 Nov 2015

The firebrand monk Phra Buddha Issara missed the irony of his protest at the US embassy on Friday. He led 200 self-described patriots to oppose comments last week by US ambassador Glyn Davies. The ambassador had directly criticised heavy sentences given recently for those convicted of lese majeste. No one, he said, should be imprisoned for peaceful speech.

The monk led the protest on Witthayu Road on Friday afternoon. The crowd was

largely good-natured, holding signs in English and Thai. Phra Buddha Issara and friends made the point that the monarchy is a special and revered symbol of all Thais. They felt the ambassador's words were inappropriate, undiplomatic and even meddled with the country's internal affairs. After making their points forcefully, they dispersed.

As was to be expected in such an important and touchy subject, there appeared to be misunderstanding. In

his speech last Wednesday at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, the US ambassador dwelt at length on the US respect and regard for the monarchy. First-hand reports said that "Mr Davies stressed the deep respect and admiration the US held for the monarchy". Then he criticised the lengthy sentences recently handed down on lese majeste convictions.

Mr Davies was hardly the first or the most critical of the law. The United Nations, the European Union and NGOs involved in human rights investigations have previously harshly assailed the heavier sentencing. In several cases in the past two months, lese majeste defendants have been convicted of multiple offences, and have received longer prison sentences than murderers.

Foreign diplomats and friends, just like Thais, realise the necessity of a lese majeste law. The US ambassador was both narrow and clear in his speech. He said the US government is "concerned by the lengthy and unprecedented prison sentences handed down by Thai military courts against civilians for violating the lese majeste law".

Just as Mr Davies did not criticise Section 112 of the Criminal Code, Phra Buddha Issara and his small band of nationalists did not address what the ambassador actually said.

Since the military coup of May 22, 2014 junta chief and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has drastically increased attention on lese majeste violations. Acting

in his role as chief law enforcement officer, Gen Prayut has ordered stronger measures, and has employed military courts. Many arrests have been made secretly; most court proceedings have been confidential.

Phra Buddha Issara's group told bystanders that "all Thais are ready to defend the monarchy with their lives". Since reverence for the monarchy is strong, which renders any criticisms inconsequential, Mr Davies, like many others within and outside of Thailand, wondered logically why authorities resort to such harsh punishment.

This is doubly so since His Majesty the King has said that such punishment actually ends up hurting him and the monarchy.

But the issue is broader than that. Phra Buddha Issara's demonstration on Friday was clearly illegal. It violated the new law on public assembly and, before that, clearly breached the regime's injunction against political gatherings of more than five people.

It is a good sign -- as the ambassador remarked -- that the group was not detained for stating its position in a peaceful manner.

It would greatly boost the country's image if the military leaders reconsidered harsh restriction of free speech. There may well be a need for special laws in these special days of reform. But at the same time, the military regime needs to hasten reform and help reconciliation by listening to alternative views rather than silencing them.

.....

Truth Is Best, Mom Oui Tells Regime

Nauvarat Suksamran, Bangkok Post, 21 Dec 2015



Sacked economy czar MR Pridiyathorn Devakula placed a garland on the statue of Puey Ungphakorn

Former deputy premier MR Pridiyathorn Devakula urged the government Sunday to reveal the “truth” about the country’s economic situation.

Speaking at a ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of reformer Puey Ungphakorn’s birthday in Chai Nat’s Nong Mamong district, MR Pridiyathorn, also known as Mom Oui, said the government had to tell the truth about Thailand’s current financial state to help the country get through the current economic hardship.

He added the government should not make unrealistic promises as it would cause people to lose faith.

“The government hopes to impress people. But if it can’t keep its promises, people will be disappointed. So, the government has to pro-

vide a simpler explanation to the public to encourage them to help address the country’s problems together,” said MR Pridiyathorn.

He said, however, the government was on the right track in boosting investment by putting funds into the agricultural sector as it would help alleviate farmers’ distress. He added that the government should also accelerate its work on economic stimulus projects.

MR Pridiyathorn said Puey’s measures to help tackle economic issues in remote areas was a good model as agriculture is the backbone of the country’s economy.

Puey, a former economist and member of the Seri Thai (Free Thai) movement during World War II, was a role model for the public as he promoted co-operation between the public and private sectors to help enhance the livelihoods of people in rural areas.

Puey was a pioneer in

launching integrated rural development which covered development of careers, education and public health to create a self-reliant community, MR Pridiyathorn added.

Meanwhile, Boonsom Akkarathamakul, assis-

tant to Thammasat University’s rector for alumni affairs, said Puey encouraged students to work with people in remote areas so they could experience the problems they faced.

His Holiness in conversation with HM the King

Bangkok Post, 21 Dec 2015

The highlight from a biography of the late His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara the Supreme Patriarch is a record of his conversation with His Majesty the King, according to the cover article of *Maitichon Weekly*.

Two books of the same title, Bowon Mahaborphit, were published to commemorate the cremation ceremony of His Holiness last week.

The first 368-page book features a detailed biography of the late Supreme Patriarch, including his diary.

The second volume is a collection of photos from his childhood up to the time of his death.

“A special section in the diary is a record of His Holiness’s dharma discussions with His Majesty the King. It takes the form of questions and answers, with His Majesty asking His Holiness about what he was interested in,” the article said.

When His Majesty the King entered the monk-

hood on Oct 22, 1956, the Supreme Patriarch (who had a monastic rank of Phra Sobhaganabhorn at that time) was appointed his guardian and adviser.

His Majesty the King still made regular visits to his guardian for dharma talks after he left the monkhood, according to the story.

During later periods, His Majesty would invite the Supreme Patriarch and 15 other monks to Chitralada Palace to receive offerings every Monday.

He would spend hours conversing with His Holiness during those occasions.

His Majesty the King also had officials record His Holiness’s preaching, his instructions to newly ordained monks and his night time advice on meditation courses so he could listen to them later.

As for the dharma discussions, His Holiness wrote all of them down by hand.

His Majesty once asked



Awarded the top honour of guiding His Majesty in 1956, an extraordinary man, aged 43, was charged with advising the King on matters from ceremonial procedures and behaviour to the study of Buddhist dhamma scriptures.

whether it is true if one experiences visions as one goes into a state of meditation. His Holiness said most of them are really visions.

“Most visions are fantasies, constructed by what the mind is clinging on to. In other words, they are illusions. They constitute things we have probably thought about or seen which made a mark on our minds,” the Supreme Patriarch said.

He added that some visions are real, but that is rare. His Majesty also asked about how to concentrate the mind.

His Holiness said it is necessary to be in a single state of mind. Concentration is necessary for any task. In practice, we need concentration (as we go about life’s activities) but some people wrongly believe concentration can occur when one simply closes

one’s eyes.

His Majesty said he felt he needed to concentrate his mind when conducting royal duties.

Apart from spiritual topics, His Majesty and His Holiness also talked about general issues such as books on Buddhism.

Once, His Majesty said that most books on Buddhism are too difficult for children. They made children focus too much on memorising historical facts. His Holiness replied that it’s the Ministry of Education that prepared textbooks on Buddhism.

His Majesty added that these books taught the four noble truths to small children as if they could be expected to become enlightened. How could children understand them? Instead, dharma books have simpler teachings that are more relevant and practical for young minds such as teaching perseverance, His Majesty said.

He said the monastery should produce these teaching materials itself to be distributed free of charge or cheaply to the public.

His Holiness also recorded another discussion on the importance of mental will.

His Majesty said he once fell sick during a visit to the South. He could not ask for leave so he went ahead as scheduled. The King said he actually felt well after returning from the visit. He asked if this could be a case of mental will at work.

His Holiness said frequent training enhances mental will.

What is particularly noteworthy is a record on how His Majesty the King carried himself. His Majesty said it’s difficult for him to behave appropriately.

He had to do two things at once: carry himself with dignity while also maintaining a level of politeness so as not to appear arrogant.

His Majesty said he must carry himself in accordance with the democratic creed and get along with citizens. His Holiness replied he had only heard praise about His Majesty the King.

His Majesty said he still had to keep noticing and made corrections all the time. He said he once made a visit to the Northeast, and felt tired so his face was stern. It was only when the King returned to his residence that he realised some of the people he met might have had only one chance to see him. It would not be nice for them to see his stern face.

“After that, I try not to make a stern face even when I feel extremely tired. I have to appear joyful,” His Majesty said.

Although these conversations between His Majesty the King and His Holiness the late Supreme Patriarch must have been made decades ago, they remain practical, according to the article. They should still serve as guidance to Thais today.

Prayut frets over popularity

Prime Minister Gen Prayut Chan-ocha’s plan to make impromptu visits to the provinces to follow up on his policies could be an effort to boost his popularity after the Rajabhakti Park scandal, according to Siam Rath Weekly.

The PM announced his inspection tour after the cabinet meeting on Dec 15, said the article entitled “Big Tu on Tour”, referring to Gen Prayut by his nickname.

Government spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd said the PM will kick off his tour with a visit to the restive Deep South.

“PM Gen Prayut hopes to use the tour to boost his popularity which has suffered from a series of scandals ranging from the Bike for Mom event to the Rajabhakti Park project, both involving people in the military,” the article said.

The PM also instructed

every ministry to propose measures that will serve as a New Year present to the public.

“Do not forget the government is destined to face a difficult battle next year.

“First, it will have to see if the new charter draft will be accepted by the public. Second is the question of a public referendum,” the article said.

The government has no choice but to boost its public standing now in preparation for the tasks to come. PM Gen Prayut planned to use his visits as a chance to publicise what the government has done, both in terms of infrastructure projects and measures to tackle economic hardship, the article said.

The premier does not set high hopes — he only wants rural people not to stand up against him even though they may continue to dislike him.

The popularity booster is an uphill task. However, if the government is successful in the mission, it will have a smoother run during its remaining time in power, the story said.

Pichet accepts life in prison

The community radio host and leader of an independent red-shirt faction Pichet Thabutda accepted his sentence of life in prison without complaint.

Pichet, also known as DJ Toy, was the first defendant

in the case stemming from the arson attack on Ubon Ratchathani provincial hall in 2010. The case also involved 12 other red shirts who received a lesser penalty as the Supreme Court passed the judgement last week.

Upon learning the sentence, Pichet said he would not beg for anybody’s mercy, according to an article in *The Nation Weekly*. He also said everybody has his duty to carry out and he has no complaints about the prison term.

Pichet became well known after he had a chance to host a community radio show in his hometown of Ubon Ratchathani. Like many provincial community radio hosts of the time, he admired the Thai Rak Thai Party and its leader Thaksin Shinawatra.

After the 2006 coup, Pichet was inspired by a fellow DJ from Udon Thani, Kwanchai Praipana, to use his radio programme as a means to organise supporters.

In 2007, he managed to raise enough funds to set up two community radio stations. He also set up a “Raise the Flag of War” group comprising Thaksin supporters.

“What differentiated Pichet’s group from other Thaksin followers is he appealed to regionalism. His rallying point is that north-eastern people make up a majority in the country but

they have been suppressed and looked down upon,” the article said.

Pichet’s Raise the Flag of War group was known as a hardcore red shirt group, bent on confrontation and combative measures.

In front of the media, Pichet presented his group as an independent faction that does not report to the mainstream red-shirt United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD).

After the 2010 dispersal of red shirt protests at Ratchaprasong, Pichet admitted that hundreds of members of his group were arrested. Others went into hiding or went astray, the story said.

Pichet continued hosting his radio programme under the Yingluck government.

After the May 22 coup, he reported to the military regime and stopped airing the programme as ordered by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO).

Since Pichet is more bent on leftist philosophy and regionalism, he is one among few red shirts who dared to criticise Thaksin. He said although he loved the former PM, he is not his slave.

“If something is good, I say it is good. If it’s bad, I will say so. I will rebuke it. Thaksin is no god. Did I say anything wrong?” Pichet once said. He also said all red shirt members are not uniform. Many of them may be good but quite a few are lousy.

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UN :

The Problem with Saving the World

The UN’s new Sustainable Development Goals aim to save the world without transforming it.

Jason Hickel

The United Nations’ new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are about to replace the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are getting a lot of hate these days.

The Economist recently called the 169 proposed targets “sprawling and mis-

conceived,” “unfeasibly expensive” at \$2–3 trillion per year, and so unlikely to be realized that they amount to “worse than useless” — “a betrayal of the world’s poorest people.” An article in the *Humanosphere* reports that the SDGs were ridiculed as “No targets left behind”

during a high-profile meeting of Gates Foundation partners. One development expert I know likens the SDGs to “a high school wish-list for how to save the world.”

These critics accuse the SDGs of being vague and aspirational, and of trying to cover too much ground; they prefer the old MDGs, which were more focused on absolute poverty.

Defenders of the SDGs, on the other hand, point out that the goals have emerged from a genuinely inclusive process that made room for voices from developing countries, unlike the MDGs, which were handed down by technocrats from above. The goals are complex because they recognize that poverty is a complex, structural problem.

SDG drafters argue that eliminating poverty will require more than charity — it will require reducing inequality, combating climate change, strengthening labor rights, eliminating Western agricultural subsidies, and so on. They’re right. And it is likely the progressive, activist tenor of such goals that irks agencies like the *Economist* and the Gates Foundation.

This doesn’t mean that the SDGs aren’t flawed. They are, but not for the reasons that mainstream critics would have us believe.

The real problem is that the SDGs are profoundly

contradictory, to the point of being self-defeating. On the one hand, the Zero Draft, released last month, contains some truly excellent demands. The preamble affirms that “planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home” and underscores the necessity of achieving “harmony with nature.” It establishes a commitment to hold global warming below a 2° Celsius increase, and calls for “sustainable patterns of production and consumption.” The goals include the restoration of water-related ecosystems, a halt to the loss of biodiversity, and an end to overfishing, deforestation, and desertification.

All of this reflects an emerging awareness of the fact that something about our economic system has gone terribly awry — that the mandatory pursuit of endless industrial growth is chewing through our living planet, producing poverty at a rapid rate, and threatening the basis of our existence.

Yet despite this growing realization, the core of the SDG program for development and poverty reduction relies precisely on the old model of industrial growth — ever-increasing levels of extraction, production, and consumption. And not just a little bit of growth: they want at least 7 percent annual GDP growth in least developed countries and higher levels of economic



Land cleared for palm oil plantations in Tasmania.
Mattias Klum

productivity across the board. In fact, an entire goal, Goal 8, is devoted to growth, specifically export-oriented growth, in keeping with existing neoliberal models.

This is the mortal flaw at the heart of the SDGs. How can they be calling for both less and more at the same time? True, Goal 8 is peppered with progressive-sounding qualifications: the growth should be inclusive, should promote full employment and decent work, and we should endeavor to decouple growth from environmental degradation. But these qualifications are vague, and the real message that shines through is that GDP growth is all that ultimately matters.

Right now global production and consumption levels are overshooting our planet’s capacity by about 50 percent each year. This is a monumental crisis, and one that proceeds from the deep logic of capitalism. Yet

the SDGs’ proposed solution to this problem is superficial: reduce food waste, make resource use more efficient, and “encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices.” These proposals explicitly avoid the obvious solution — namely, reduced consumption by the world’s wealthy — and steer clear of actually regulating corporate extraction.

To be fair, the drafters of the SDGs probably sidestep the nub of the matter because they realize that capitalism depends on ever-increasing production and consumption to keep going. But that’s precisely what we need to change, if we are to have any chance of a fair, sustainable economy.

The SDGs’ contradictory relationship to growth extends to its approach to global poverty. The Zero Draft promotes growth as the main solution to poverty, but this relationship is

highly tenuous. Of all the income generated by global GDP growth between 1999 and 2008, the poorest 60 percent of humanity received only 5 percent of it. Given the existing ratio between GDP growth and the income growth of the poorest, it will take 207 years to eliminate poverty with this strategy, and to get there, we will have to grow the global economy by 175 times its present size.

This is terrifying to contemplate. Even if such immense growth were possible, it would drive climate change to catastrophic levels and, in the process, rapidly reverse any gains against poverty. Surely it makes more sense to transfer accumulated wealth from elites in the developed world to the global poor than to crank out more in the hope that some of it might trickle down.

The SDGs do, however, call for income growth for the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the overall average. This is good inasmuch as it will speed the process of poverty reduction and reduce inequality, but it doesn't address the bigger issue of the aggregate production and consumption levels that this approach requires.

For the sake of argument, let's say that poor countries manage to grow incredibly fast, and quickly catch up to the average

high-income country. According to data provided by the Global Footprint Network, we would need at least 3.4 Earths to sustain this level of production and consumption — and that's assuming that the already-high-income countries slow their present rates of growth to zero, which they show no sign of doing.

Basically, the SDGs want to reduce inequality by ratcheting the poor up, but while leaving the wealth and power of the global 1 percent intact. They want the best of both worlds. They fail to accept that mass impoverishment is the product of extreme wealth accumulation and overconsumption by a few, which entails processes of enclosure, extraction, and exploitation along the way. You can't solve the problem of poverty without challenging the pathologies of accumulation.

The SDGs refuse to confront this difficult political fact, and it shows throughout the Zero Draft, which studiously avoids addressing the deeper causes of poverty. For example, the structural adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the greatest single cause of poverty since colonialism, are never mentioned in the SDGs. A vague request to "respect each country's policy space" is made, but as the Greek

crisis has reminded us, the world's biggest creditors are not likely to care much for national sovereignty when their finances are at stake.

Then there's the unfair trade regime of the World Trade Organization, and the bilateral trade deals — like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and Trade in Services Agreement — that have caused such a furor over the past few years. Instead of tackling this crucial issue, the SDGs do the opposite: Goal 17.10 calls for more trade liberalization and more power for the World Trade Organization.

And instead of demanding an end to the financial speculation that has caused food prices to spike since 2007, pushing 150 million into hunger, the SDGs ask weakly that we "ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets." It's not clear what this is supposed to mean, but it can easily be interpreted as yet more liberalization, which is precisely what caused the food crisis in the first place.

The SDGs are also eerily silent on the need for greater regulation of financial markets and the imperative to shrink our too-big-to-fail banks. Goal 17.13 speaks vaguely of the need to "enhance global macroeconomic stability" through "policy coordination," with no specific targets. Tax evasion and tax avoidance,

which drain developing countries of \$1.7 trillion each year, are politely side-stepped. Then there's debt service, which drains another \$700 billion per year; instead of demanding cancellation, the SDGs call for "debt financing, debt relief, and debt restructuring, as appropriate," which specifically means that debts will not be cancelled.

But at least the SDGs recognize that some of these issues matter, unlike the MDGs, which ignored them altogether. The problem is that the SDGs are toothless, and undermined by their devotion to growth along present models.

How did this happen? How did the SDGs, supposedly the blueprint for saving the world, become so compromised? Part of it has to do with the strong role granted to corporations in the SDG process, which effectively precludes any direct challenge to business interests.

The Zero Draft calls for a global partnership between the UN and the corporate sector as a way of securing necessary investment to bridge the estimated \$2.5 trillion annual funding shortfall. This call echoes the Global Redesign Initiative proposed at Davos in 2012, which set out an agenda for transforming the UN into a big public-private partnership, with corporations enjoying formal input in global governance

right alongside states. The SDGs are the first step along this path; they open the way for corporations to gain a seat at the table and impact policy at the UN.

With corporations and private investors playing such a central role in the implementation of the SDGs, one might think that the Zero Draft would bind them to specific commitments, and lay out plenty of accountability mechanisms. But this is not the case. In a similar vein to the 2000 UN Global Compact, corporate participants get the benefit of “blue-washing” without having to worry about being sanctioned for failing to comply with a given set of principles. But at least the Global Compact has principles; the SDGs have none; corporations are simply “encouraged” to be nice (12.6).

Nowhere is the compromised nature of the SDGs more evident than in their headline goal: to eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, as measured at \$1.25/day. It's high time we got around to eradicating poverty, but a growing number of scholars are pointing out that \$1.25 is actually not adequate for human subsistence.

In India, for example, children living just above the \$1.25 line still have a 60 percent chance of being malnourished. A number of recent studies suggest that if people are to achieve normal

life expectancy and meet their basic needs as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which the SDGs claim to uphold), they need closer to \$5 per day.

The drafters of the SDGs know this fact. So why stick with the discredited \$1.25 measure? Because it's the only one that will allow them to get anywhere near their goal of eradicating poverty by 2030. If we measure poverty by the more accurate \$5/day line, the total poverty headcount rises to 4.3 billion people, more than 60 percent of humanity.

Eradicating poverty of this magnitude would require more than just weeding around the edges of the problem — it would require changing the rules of the global economy to make it fairer for the world's majority. The SDGs explicitly refuse this task, and are careful to eschew such deep, structural transformations.

The UN is presently rolling out the “world's largest advertising campaign” to whip up public support for the SDGs, with a star-studded cast including Beyoncé and One Direction. But so far it's not working very well, for the spirit of the SDGs is woefully out of step with our emerging collective consciousness about the deep evolution required.

As the world's governments prepare to finalize the SDGs in September, we

must be clear that they do not represent our ambitions. The SDGs are not just inadequate, they are dangerous; they will lock in the global development agenda for the next fifteen years around a failing economic model that requires urgent and deep structural changes.

What we need is to tackle the irrationality of endless growth head-on, pointing out that capitalist growth — as measured by GDP — is not the solution to poverty and ecological crisis, but the primary cause. And we

need a saner measure of human progress — one that gears us not toward more extraction and consumption by the world's elite, but more fairness, more equality, more wellbeing, more sharing, to the benefit of the vast majority of humanity.

The SDGs fail us on this. They offer to tinker with the global economic system in a well-meaning bid to make it all seem a bit less violent. But this is not a time for tinkering.

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USA :

Socially Engaged Buddhism at the United Nations

Matteo Pistono

The outspoken socially engaged Buddhist, Sulak Sivaraksa, brought a message stressing individual responsibility, and a harsh critique of the worldwide capitalist system, to the United Nations on Wednesday during the annual week of meetings in New York City.

Sulak, along with Therese Mema Mapenzi from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Dr. Rahmawati Husein from Indonesian, were invited to speak on “Uniting Around the Principle of Humanity,” an event organized jointly at the U.N. by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the gov-

ernment of Kuwait.

Participants and attendees at the meeting included the Foreign Ministers from Switzerland and Kuwait, and over thirty different countries' envoys, U.N. agency heads, and ICRC and World Bank representatives. The objective of the high-level gathering was to raise awareness of the common commitment to humanity that exists across all cultures and to reinforce the principles of humanity as the fundamental goal of humanitarian action.

The meeting began with various government and U.N. representatives stating lofty goals and sweeping



Sulak Sivaraksa pauses at the knotted pistol sculpture entitled "Non-violence" by Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd in front of the United Nations. Photo by Matteo Pistono.

statements about the common good. Sulak immediately tried to steer away from the abstract and toward a discussion of personal responsibility, suggesting that greed, violence, and ignorance in society is inter-related to one's own personal suffering.

"I believe that personal greed manifests in society as the insatiable desire for accumulation—in other words, capitalism, consumerism, and natural resources extraction that ignores the limits of the environment," Sulak said.

"Seeds of hatred within us manifest in the world as militarism. And my harshest critique is reserved for those who peddle delusion—advertisers and the mainstream media—which promote useless and un-

healthy produces and unwholesome ideas which lead people away from a meaningful life of contentedness and a common humanity, and instead towards poverty and a sense of separation."

After the Kuwait Foreign Minister and a World Bank official spoke about, "the dignity and worth of the human person" as a central concern for world politics, other government officials spoke of the failure of the current systems to prevent or stop large scale war and violence, as witnessed in Syria and the plight of refugees, and the viciousness of the so-called Islamic State.

Ms. Mapenzi, who works with war trauma including child rape victims and child soldiers, commented, "How can there be so much suffering and inhumanity in the world? Only because there are some people in the world who become very rich, who profit from conflict."

"I am only 33 years old,

and I have four children. But in my life I have never seen peace. All the while I see so many religious people and humanitarian interventions around me. But where is peace? Where is real religion?"

Ms. Mapenzi suggested less time and money should be spent on organizing meetings and redirected to action on the ground. "To create laws, regulations, rules and principles is good. To organize summits, conference, and debates is very fine. But what is better is to tackle the real causes of these conflicts on the ground."

The U.N. meeting this morning demonstrated the frustration that is felt by those within the U.N. at the lack of progress in preventing suffering in its most violent manifestations. At the same time, Sulak, Ms. Mapenzi, and other representatives of civil society articulated an equally frustrated view from the grassroots level at how the global system is failing.

Sulak commented, "I was born more than 80 years ago and raised in traditional Siamese culture. I have seen in my lifetime how capitalism, mass media, and the global marketplace have replaced traditional morals and ethics. I disagree that the world today is at the highest mark of human development, because this often unspoken sentiment prevents the peo-

ples of the world from pursuing other aspirations and from thinking about alternative ways to improve or maintain their livelihood and traditions."

Despite the odds, Sulak stressed that we must not lose the drive to work on one's spiritual development at the same time as striving to alleviate suffering of others.

"If we are serious about getting rid of greed, anger and ignorance in ourselves, we must inquire how we actively or passively take part in perpetuating the three poisons in society. Once we see the interconnections, we can work simultaneously on our own spiritual development and to dismantle the structural violence in society."

"How should this be done?" Sulak was asked.

"We cannot rely only on intellectual input! We should learn how to breathe properly," Sulak said, in what was likely one of the only times at the U.N. this week that meditation instruction was suggested.

"This is how to transform yourself from within. Synchronize your head and your heart holistically. Then you can solve humanitarian problems."

"Profound," the U.N. Under Secretary replied before closing the meeting. "Very profound."

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GLOBAL BUDDHIST CLIMATE CHANGE COLLECTIVE (GBCCC)

Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders

October 29th, 2015

We, the undersigned Buddhist leaders, come together prior to the 21st Session of the Conference of Parties (COP21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris, in order to add our voices to the growing calls for world leaders to cooperate with compassion and wisdom and reach an ambitious and effective climate agreement.

We are at a crucial crossroads where our survival and that of other species is at stake as a result of our actions. There is still time to slow the pace of climate change and limit its impacts, but to do so, the Paris summit will need to put us on a path to phase out fossil fuels. We must ensure the protection of the most vulnerable, through visionary and comprehensive mitigation and adaptation measures.

Our concern is founded on the Buddha's realization of dependent co-arising, which views all things in the universe as

interconnected. Understanding this interconnected causality and the consequences of our actions are critical steps in reducing our environmental impact. Cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion, we will be able to act out of love, not fear, to protect our planet. Buddhist leaders have been speaking about this for decades. However, everyday life can easily lead us to forget that our lives are inextricably interwoven with the natural world through every breath we take, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Through our lack of insight, we are destroying the very life support systems that we and all other living beings depend on for survival.

We believe it imperative that the global Buddhist community recognize both our dependence on one another as well as on the natural world. Together, humanity must act on the root causes of this environmental crisis, which is driven by our use

of fossil fuels, unsustainable consumption patterns, lack of awareness, and lack of concern about the consequences of our actions.

We strongly support "The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change," which is endorsed by a diverse and global representation of Buddhist leaders and Buddhist sanghas. We also welcome and support the climate change statements of other religious traditions. These include Pope Francis's encyclical earlier this year, "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home," the "Islamic Declaration on Climate Change," as well as the upcoming "Hindu Declaration on Climate Change". We are united by our concern to phase out fossil fuels, to reduce our consumption patterns, and the ethical imperative to act against both the causes and the impacts of climate change, especially on the world's poorest.

To this end, we urge world leaders to generate the political

will to close the emissions gap left by country climate pledges and ensure that the global temperature increase remains below 1.5 degrees Celsius, relative to pre-industrial levels. We also ask for a common commitment to scale up climate finance, so as to help developing countries prepare for climate change and to help us all transition to a safe, low carbon future.

The good news is that there is a unique opportunity at the Paris climate negotiations to create a turning point. Scientists assure us that limiting the rise in the global average temperature to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius is technologically and economically feasible. Phasing out fossil fuels and moving toward 100 percent renewable and clean energy will not only spur a global, low-carbon transformation, it will also

help us to embark on a much-needed path of spiritual renewal. In addition to our spiritual progression, in line with UN recommendations, some of the most effective actions individuals can take are to protect our forests, move toward a plant-based diet, reduce consumption, recycle, switch to renewables, fly less, and take public transport. We can all make a difference.

We call on world leaders to recognize and address our universal responsibility to protect the web of life for the benefit of all, now and for the future.

For these reasons, we call on all Parties in Paris:

1. To be guided by the moral dimensions of climate change as indicated in Article 3 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

(UNFCCC).

2. To agree to phase out fossil fuels and move towards 100 percent renewables and clean energy.

3. To create the political will to close the emissions gap left by country climate pledges so as to ensure that the global temperature increase remains below 1.5 degrees Celsius, relative to pre-industrial levels.

4. To make a common commitment to increase financial contributions above the US\$100 billion agreed in Copenhagen in 2009, including through the Green Climate Fund (GCF), to help vulnerable developing countries prepare for climate change and transition towards a low-carbon economy.

The time to act is now.

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Mahatma Gandhi lecture on Sustainable development

Chulalongkorn University's Indian Studies presented the 4th "Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture on Sustainable Development" at Chaloem Rajakumari 60 Building on Wednesday from 8.30am-4pm, 2 December 2015

Held in collaboration with Suan Nguen Mee Ma, the morning session began with the topic of "Gandhian Vision for Democracy and Dialogical Society" delivered by Dr Ramin Jahanbegloo, chair of Noor-Tork in Islam Studies, York University (Toronto) and author of *The Gandhian Moment*.

As a philosopher and an activist, he presented Gandhi as an extraordinarily inventive political theorist who employed ideas from Indian tradition, as well as from some Western thinkers to challenge the concept of absolute sovereignty, and instead advocated the concept of shared sovereignty.

Ramin also argued that Gandhi's ideas and practices are not only relevant today as they have helped shape many political protests around the world, but also are relied upon by Muslims demanding change.

The afternoon session on "The Proximity of Southern Thailand Conflict... Together, We Will Learn and Find the Solution" was on Gandhian principles and practices in learning and finding the alternative to the conflict in the far south of Thailand.

The panellists were Prof Chaiwat Satha-Anand from Thammasat University, Assoc Prof Chantana Wangaeo from Chulalongkorn University, Romadon Panchor from Deep South Watch and Usman Waji from The Ummatee Group.

Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders

on the upcoming
United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21 in Paris
in December 2015

We raise our voices to the governments represented at COP21 in Paris to utilize the special momentum given on this highly significant occasion: COP21 provides a critical opportunity to benefit the whole of the human community. For the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations, a global and comprehensive agreement on climate justice and climate protection - supported from all the nations of the world - can be reached.

We as religious leaders: “stand together to express deep concern for the consequences of climate change on the earth and its people, all entrusted, as our faiths reveal, to our common care. Climate change is indeed a threat to life. Life is a precious gift we have received and that we need to care for”¹.

Together we confirm:

- Our religious convictions and cosmological narratives tell us that this earth and the whole universe are gifts that we have received from the spring of life, from God. It is our obligation to respect, protect and sustain these gifts by all means.

Therefore: **COP21 is the**

right moment to translate ecological stewardship into concrete climate action.

- Our religious convictions and traditions tell us of the ethical rule of reciprocity: to treat others as we would like them to treat us. This includes future generations. It is our duty to leave this earth behind to our children and grandchildren to ensure sustainable and acceptable living conditions in future for all.

Therefore: **COP21 is the right moment for showing inter-generational responsibility.**

- Our religious convictions, social codes and customs tell us about concern for the vulnerable: climate change is leading to unprecedented ecological degradation, affecting in particular the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable populations. It is an irrefutable moral duty for all governments to agree on concrete and measurable steps towards global climate justice and partnerships for climate resilience.

Therefore: **COP21 is the right time for ensuring climate justice.**

- Our religious convictions and ancestral sources tell us human life is open to the possibility

of change and renewal: we are convinced that human life is not doomed to self-destruction, but can exist in respect and harmony with nature. By forging good relationships with each other and with nature, we enhance our capacity for peace and transformation. Avoiding dangerous climate change is still possible if we accept the required fundamental shift away from a carbon-centered economy, unsustainable consumption and infinite economic growth and if we promote the phasing-out of fossil fuels by the middle of the century.

Therefore: **COP21 is the right time to initiate an unprecedented individual and structural transformation**

- Our religious convictions and traditions point to the relevance of theology for informing new models of development with social and ecological justice. Aware that governments and political agreements alone are not sufficient for the immense challenges ahead – our faith communities can provide solid grounding, moral support, ethical education and value-based sustainable development models which are needed for the global transformation process. As repre-

sentatives of the majority of the global population who live with religious affiliations and values, we will not only hold leaders to account, but will also support politicians working towards an ambitious global climate agreement in Paris and beyond.

Therefore: COP21 is the right moment for real and visionary leadership.

WE CALL FOR A FAIR, AMBITIOUS AND BINDING GLOBAL DEAL APPLICABLE TO ALL COUNTRIES:

- A long-term goal to phase out greenhouse gas emissions and phase in 100% renewable energy by the middle of the century in order to stay below 1.5/2°C of warming above pre-industrial levels.
- The firm commitment of all states to constantly improve their nationally determined climate action, in accordance with the Rio principles.
- A rules based system, applicable to all, ensuring transparency, accountability, and a strong review and scaling up of climate action at least every five years.
- A climate resilience goal to ensure adequate support to those countries and people being threatened by climate risks and losses. This would strengthen their resilience and adaptive

capacity to the impact of climate change (accompanying the extension and intensification of the work of the Warsaw International Mechanism).

- The provision of necessary financial support, technology transfer and capacity building, with a reliable pathway ensuring the mobilization of at least \$100 billion of international climate finance. This must be provided every year to developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable countries like small developing island states and least developed countries to support low carbon and climate resilient development.

WE CALL ON ALL GOVERNMENTS, AND IN PARTICULAR THE G20, ALL OECD MEMBERS, HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES AND OTHER MAJOR EMITTERS:

- to commit to nationally binding, ambitious short term emission reduction targets.
- to commit to national climate risk management measures.
- to commit to the provision of bold support to those countries and people who have less resources and capacity, starting with the most vulnerable.

CLIMATE ACTION MUST NOT BE LIMITED TO GOVERNMENTS ALONE. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL OF US TO SHARE THE

EFFORTS. WE AS FAITH AND SPIRITUAL LEADERS COMMIT TO:

- Follow the example set by faith based communities who are joining the global pilgrimage for climate justice² and those participating in regular acts of fasting for climate justice.³
- Be responsible for the Earth, our common home, in our lives as individuals and in our faith communities.
- Look at our consumption patterns and move towards sustainable practices and lifestyles, assessing the carbon footprints of our organizations and institutions as well as means to reduce them, explore and implement zero carbon strategies, and where appropriate, divest from fossil fuels.
- Assess climate risks affecting our communities, prepare for the prevention and reduction of these risks, encouraging the communities to set climate resilience targets by 2025 and take the actions needed to adapt to the impact of climate change.
- Undertake a constant effort to raise climate awareness within our communities, as an expression of our care for the Earth, deepening our understanding of the interconnectedness of human beings and nature, building capacity, and advocating for climate justice with our governments.

.....

¹ See Statement from the Interfaith Summit in New York, 21-22 September 2014, by the World Council of Churches Geneva and Religions for Peace, New York: <http://interfaithclimate.org/the-statement>

² https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/pilgrims-for-climate-justice-plan-to-impact-cop-21-in-paris?set_language=en

³ <http://fastfortheclimate.org/>



To celebrate

The 6th Auspicious Birth Cycle of Most Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammananda,

Abbess of Songdhammakalyani Monastery, Kingdom of Thailand

Rajbhat University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

in collaboration with

Network of Asian Theravada Bhikkhuni and Buddhasavika Foundation

Announces the

1st ASEAN Buddhist Conference (ABC-1)

September 22-23, 2016

Buddhism, emanating from the Holy Land of Jambudvipa that is India, extended its boundaries to several lands and seas in Asia. Its largest population is however in East Asia wherein the region falling under Southeast Asia which has nurtured Buddha-Dharma since the First Millennium AD. This very location now primarily known as ASEAN is now the most important area where Buddhism is the predominant cultural force. With several countries claiming their land to be the Suvarnabhumi/Suvarnavipa of ancient Sanskrit-Pali classical texts, it is beyond doubt that this Bhumi of Golden Land encompassed exactly today's ASEAN region!

Buddhism being the world's fourth largest religion with the Mahayana representing 500 million, the Theravada 130 million and Vajrayana about 20 million, the 10 countries of ASEAN hold about 150 million or 30% of the world's Buddhist population. However, this peace loving group of Buddhists in

ASEAN has many challenges confronting their daily activities.

The First ABC (ASEAN Buddhist Conference) aims at addressing these issues which are very central to Buddhism, its relevance in the contemporary world scenario while at the same time, safeguarding its basics.

Paper proposals are being invited with serious scholarship from researchers, teachers and independent thinkers on a significant topic related to the ASEAN region and Buddhism. A paper's acceptance would depend on the evaluation by an expert team. Though we would have a section of papers highlighting the parallel situation of Buddhism in non-ASEAN regions, the main focus would be on papers related to ASEAN Buddhism.

The following sub-themes are planned as a guide to your planned paper presentation:



Buddhism and Women: Current Scenario

The future of Buddhism depends a lot on women. A mother's primary role is to nurture the young toddlers with the first awareness of Buddha, and thus raising children to be rightful Buddhist. In the Theravadin part of ASEAN, the plight of Bhikkhunis is different. Their socio-religious mobility, acceptance and accommodation in the psyche of the Sangha leaders is a big issue yet to be sorted out. The sub-theme would invite papers on such relevant topics.

Educating Ourselves: Challenges in ASEAN Buddhism

ASEAN Buddhism is suffering from the absence of proper education. The goal of education is not only imparting human values but also to give the understanding of coexistence with malice towards none. The panel explores the measures required to move education in the right direction not only for the laity but also for the ecclesiastical order.

Mental Reorganisation through Buddhism

Siddhartha's journey from a prince to "Buddha" was accompanied by a

lot of obstacles. One of the biggest challenges was to overcome one's instincts and have a stable and sound mind. This is also a challenge in today's chaotic world. Buddhism seemed to have a foresight and therefore one of its key aspects addresses the very core of suffering-the distorted mind. Buddhism hence involves re organisation of the psyche, movement from the distorted to the clear mind. Papers highlighting Buddhism and its effects on the human mind are most welcome.

ASEAN Society through the Buddhist Lens

Every philosophy or doctrine has its unique ways to look at the interlinks of the social cobweb. The Buddhist paradigm highlights a compassionate, order of the world. Under this sub-theme Buddhist views of social construction can be discussed, and also how it projects a role model for a society which may be applicable to all geographical locations, countries, etc.

Addressing Nature and Environment the Buddhist Way

Individualism literally suggests separateness but one cannot truly

exist without one's environment. Buddhism understands the importance of this harmonious, holistic existence and thus holds a compassionate world view of fellow beings, plants and animals. It highlights the inter-dependence of nature and people as synchronous to the relationship of a mother to her child.

Buddhist Heritage as Reflected in Art Forms in the ASEAN Region

Across the world, Buddhism has encouraged creative forces as manifested in the variety of art forms that we see today. Each creation like stupa, caitya or the anthropomorphic forms of Buddha tell of rich stories and heritage. Participants are invited to dig out insights hidden in such art forms in the ASEAN as they require care, scientific treatment and understanding of the essence of religiosity behind them. The safeguarding of such tangible heritage would further solidify the position of Buddhism not only in the ASEAN region but also for the globe.

Here, it may be noted that papers on topics beyond the ASEAN region are also welcome.

Deadlines:

Abstract	May 15, 2016
Full Paper	June 30, 2016
Early Registration Fee for Local scholars	Baht 2000(late fee May 15, 2016): Baht 2500
Early Registration Fee for Developing Countries	US\$ 150 (late fee May 15, 2016): US\$ 200
Early Registration Fee for Developed Countries	US\$ 250 (late fee May 15, 2016): US\$ 300

ABC-2016 Secretariat

Address of WatSongdhammaKalyani, Email: abc.2016conf@gmail.com

Conference on Social Engagement and Liberation

Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Conversion to Buddhism

11th - 14th October 2016.
Nagaloka, Nagpur, India,



INEB and Nagaloka, in partnership with Deer Park and the Karuna Trust, UK, are organising a conference to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar's momentous conversion to Buddhism.

Born a so-called Untouchable in 1891, Dr. Ambedkar dedicated his life to bringing about a society in which there was no scope for discrimination of any kind, a society permeated by the values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. These values, he said, he had learnt not from the French Revolution but from his Master, the Buddha. His life of ceaseless struggle culminated in his

conversion to Buddhism along with 500,000 others, in October 1956, on the anniversary of King Ashoka's conversion. He initiated a peaceful Dhamma revolution, the wheels of which are turning faster and faster every day. Even though he died just a few weeks after his conversion in 1956, millions have followed him into Buddhism, paving the way for a caste free true democracy in India.

His importance in Indian political and social life can be gauged from the fact that all political parties have co-opted him, and are investing enormous energy into celebrating his 125th birth anniversary, which also falls in 2016. Let

us hope that the more they look at him, the more they will begin to appreciate the significance of his conversion to Buddhism and its social implications.

The aims of this conference are to bring the significance of Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism more to the attention of the wider Buddhist world, and at the same time provide opportunities for his Indian followers to interact with Buddhists from outside India.

Overall Programme.

- 11th Ashok Vijaya Dashmi, the anniversary of the conversions
10.30 - 13.00 our annual programme at Nagaloka involving some of our main guests.
19.00 to Diksha Bhumi to pay our respects at the stupa and join all those gathering for the occasion.
- 12th, 13th, 14th
Conference: Social Engagement and Liberation: Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's Conversion to Buddhism
- 15th INEB Advisory and Executive meeting.



Arrangements will be made to take those who want to go to Chandrapur, where Dr. Ambedkar led a conversion ceremony on 16th October, 1956.

In this conference we will be inviting experienced Dhamma practitioners from traditional Buddhist, Western Buddhist, and Indian Buddhist backgrounds to explore three themes central to Dr. Ambedkar's approach to the Dhamma: Dhamma as Empowerment, Breaking Down Barriers Between People, and Dhamma and Governance. There will also be cultural events and visits to social projects.

We have accommodation for about 200 people, maybe even more. There will be no charge for those from abroad as they will have to pay their fares, but they will be welcome to make a donation if they wish to.

.....

"Dr. Ambedkar the greatest non-violent revolutionary of the (20th) Century." - Urgyen Sangharakshita

.....

Registration forms will be available within three months. In the meantime please contact us at:

60Liberation@gmail.com

Website: www.nagaloka.org
and www.inebnetwork.org



The **MA in Socially Engaged Buddhism** is a multi-site program in Asia that seeks to integrate spiritual and social transformation, grounded in Buddhist traditions. Students learn from monastics, community activists, meditation teachers, professional academic scholars, group facilitators and each other. They learn through observation, reflection, textual study, lectures, interviews, group challenges, exposure trips, personal practice, and joint work on social action projects. The medium of instruction is English.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROGRAM

- Learn from a qualified, international panel of academics and practitioners.
- Meet and work with spiritual leaders, thinkers, organizers, activists, and educators representing different Buddhist traditions.
- Gain a student-centered, accredited qualification with a high academic standard.
- Study a comprehensive curriculum that captures the complexity of contemporary social issues and offers mainstream and alternative approaches to understanding these.
- Study at different locations and learn from the history, culture, and people at each location.
- Study with a small, dynamic group of future leaders who are equally committed to personal, spiritual, and societal transformation.

CURRICULUM

Core Courses

All students take 5 core courses to establish a commonground of knowledge & experience. (21 credits)

- Socially Engaged Buddhism - Histories, Practices, & the Work of Integration (6 credits)
- Personal & Interpersonal Disciplines for Healing, Transformation, & Well-Being (6 credits)
- Ways of Knowing & Interpreting - Science, Religion, Philosophy, & Shifting Paradigms (3 credits)
- Global Political Economy & Structural Violence (3 credits)
- Climate, Ecology, & Human Relationships with Nature (3 credits)

Elective Courses

Students choose at least 4 courses amounting to a total of at least 10 credits. Elective courses will be offered in one of two formats: 1) as regular term-length courses, or 2) as focused workshops. Electives will reflect important thematic areas and the special resources and opportunities available at each of the four sites - Tea Ceremonies & Contemplation in Taiwan, for example. Students will help to choose the electives to be offered each term. (Each course 1-3 credits)

- Topics in Buddhist History, Philosophy, & Practice
- Environment, Food, Farming, & Well-Being
- Technology & Design for Social Change
- Histories of Social Movements, Nonviolence, & Peacebuilding

- Transformation & Peacebuilding through the Arts
- Practicum in Advocacy, Organizing, Social Entrepreneurship, & Contemplative Action
- Transformative Learning & Teaching
- Understanding & Empowerment - Gender, Race, Ethnicity, & Class.
- Language Study

Students joining our program in August 2016 will also have a special opportunity to receive elective credit in the MA program for successfully completing either or both of the following courses:

- Chulalongkorn University Right Livelihood Summer School (CURLS 2016) (First two weeks of August, 2016)
- Pre-Summer School Field Study Program in Bhutan (Last two weeks of July, 2016)



For more information on these two courses, please contact:
<https://wellbeingsummer.wordpress.com/>
 Kittikhun Pookhongkha at kittikhb@gmail.com

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- **Meditation Retreat:** All students complete a meditation retreat of at least 7 days duration. In most cases the entire group will undergo a retreat together.
- **Internship or Thesis:** During the summer semester, students complete an internship or a thesis under the guidance of a faculty advisor. The internships will generally be nine to ten weeks in duration. (12 credits)
- **Summer Seminar:** The summer seminar gives students the opportunity to present the work they have completed over the summer. Students give a detailed oral presentation and submit a written report about their internship or thesis. (2 credits)

CALENDAR

Term 1: 15 August - 21 December, 2016

Term 2: 16 January - 17 May, 2017

Term 3: 22 May - 10 August, 2017 (Thesis, Internship, & Seminar)

CAMPUSES

Sites planned for academic year 2016-2017 reflect the diversity of Buddhist traditions:

- Arsom Silp Institute of the Arts in Bangkok as well as training institutes, temples, and alternative communities in Chiang Mai, Nakhon Nayok, Chaiyaphum, and elsewhere in Thailand, in late August, September, and December of 2016; January, February, and May of 2017; and finally in early August 2017 for completion of the program. (Theravada Buddhism).
- Nagaloka and the Nagarjuna Institute in Nagpur and the Manuski Institute in Pune, India, in October of 2016 (Ambedkarite Buddhism).
- The Deer Park Institute in Bir, Himachal Pradesh, India, in November of 2016 (Vajrayana/ Tibetan Buddhism).
- Buddhist temples or university campuses in Hsinchu City, Hualien City, and/or Taipei, Taiwan, in March and April of 2017 (Mahayana Buddhism).

WHO SHOULD APPLY

We especially welcome your application if:

- You are committed to developing a work practice that integrates spiritual and social transformation.
- You have engaged in social work or volunteer service.
- You are resilient, love travelling, and are passionate about intellectual and inner inquiry.
- You enjoy living, working, and learning together with a small, diverse group of students.



HOW TO APPLY

Application deadline is 13 April 2016, or, passing that, until all places are filled.



Download the application form from www.inebinstitute.org/ma-app2016.



Email softcopies of the completed application to registrar@inebinstitute.org with the subject line 'MA Application_2016_YOURNAME'. If unable to submit a softcopy, post a hardcopy of the completed application to the INEB address listed on the last page of the brochure.

Spirit in Education Movement (SEM)

The 22nd SEM's Annual Public Lecture

February 5, 2016, 16.00-19.00

At SNF Office, Klongsan, Bangkok

Adventure in Empowerment Education: Our Reflections

By Pracha Hutanuwatr and Jane Rasbash



Pracha Hutanuwatr and Jane Rasbash have been on an adventure with empowerment education for more than 20 years. They co-founded the Grassroots Leadership Training and Training of Trainers in 1996 and in more recent years supported many Ecovillage Design Education and Eco-leadership courses in South East Asia, China and beyond. This has supported the emergence of a generation of leaders with inner and outer resources to face up to many challenges particularly in Myanmar where

participants are now working with numerous aspects of sustainable development, social activism and transition to resilient communities. This talk will focus on how using a participatory approach hand in hand with cultivating inner wisdom and good friends is the basis for empowerment education. Thus relationship is education, self cultivation is education and ultimately speaking about education is self education.

For More information,

please contact: sem@sem-edu.org
www.sem-edu.org

Some Inspirations

Peter Swan

General Secretary of Lisu Baptist Convention, Myanmar
(1997 GLT, 2004 EVT, 2006 EDE)



I was so encouraged when I studied at the Findhorn Community in Scotland especially by Jane Rasbash and May East and other friends I met there in 2004. It was a big turning point in my life and gave me inspiration to do social service in Myanmar. The Findhorn Community is a real spiritual community for all faiths to learn how to live together, happily and meaningfully. I really appreciated and was inspired by people I met in the Ecovillage community, friends, youth and kids. So much wisdom of living, simple living, spirituality, friendship, smiles and songs are still alive in my mind and encourage my work. Now I am serving as General Secretary at the Lisu Baptist Convention and I work with deep passion in sharing my life to serve the grassroots community in Myanmar. I have been working with rural communities as a volunteer in the social change movement in Myanmar for more than 18 years. While I was involved

in the social change movement, I got a chance to practice organic farming with my colleagues near the Lisu Seminary in Pwin Oo Lin at a demonstration farm not only for the Lisu community but for many others interested in Myanmar. I believe that organic farming is at the heart of transformation. I organised a training with my teams called “Sustainable Living Training (SLT)” for the grassroots people in Myanmar. This training aimed for all kinds of participants from different faiths, denominations and beliefs, ages, class, academic backgrounds, and genders. I got the chance to train Church Pastors, Buddhist monks and nuns, Buddhist monastic school teachers, leaders, farmers, students, NGO staff members and individuals. I have been working with different ethnic minority groups in Myanmar such as Shan, Pao, Inthar, Lahu, Akhar, Mon, Kachin-Zewar, Kachin-Rawan, Kachin-Jinhaw, Bhama, Mara Chin,

Kachin-Lisu, Karen and kaya. I also served with the Lisu Church community, organizations, seminaries, and NGOs in Myanmar to share my passion. All these things I did were inspired by Grassroots Leadership training, Ecovillage Training and Ecovillage Design Education courses.

Life Struggles and Challenges Current Issues in Globalisation

Myanmar is entering a period of democratic governance. People are influenced by foreign investment and modern culture. Myanmar is widening her network with developed countries in many ways like education, health, culture and politics. Many people are testing new cultural practices such as new information technology, media, politics, laws and modernization from the west. Ordinary people, educated citizens and Christian ministers are preparing to move to the cities, the United States of America, or other rich countries.

While the majority are trying to appreciate the impacts of modernization, I have been sharing the real impacts, and challenges of globalization. So I have had many debates and misunderstandings from those who appreciate modernisation. In the trainings I share the idea of localization which is opposed to globalization and share how globalization cannot give us true happiness and security.

Livelihood “We cannot get infinite growth in this finite planet” so we must practice and know about simplicity and ‘how much is enough’. When some people heard this message, they could not understand and accept me and this wisdom, because many people are supporting unlimited growth.

Schooling and education I noticed in the local community that mainstream schooling is destroying our traditional way of life and that it is promoting urban consumer culture. Some people who do not know about the true meaning of education were angry as they are investing their money and time in school education only. Now the private modern boarding schools are very famous and lucrative in my community.

Being a farmer I used to share about farming and gardening in my training courses. I said that being a farmer is important and meaningful. Most parents don’t like this idea and most students in Myanmar are the children of farmers. They believe having a certificate and degree is the only way to get a job and have success. Most of them want to get a job in a factory. They think that being a fac-

tory worker is more advanced than doing farming work. I practice farming and gardening faithfully to promote farming, especially organic, sustainable farming.

Economics I also shared about Spiritual Economics taught by E.F Schumacher. When people heard this idea, some people didn’t like it because they like capitalist ideas which have been influencing their daily life for several decades now.

Sustainable agriculture I taught many people about GMO seeds and modern agriculture which is destroying our traditional way of farming. This modern agriculture uses many chemicals, pesticides and herbicides. I also talked about how modern agriculture cannot sustain our economy. When people heard these ideas they could not understand me because they use mainstream methods in their fields and garden. Modern agriculture opposes the traditional way of farming.

Interfaith dialogue or working with other faith Many church leaders in Myanmar are debating and discussing new topics like interfaith dialogue. They are very eager to have interfaith dialogue but they have no action plan for working together among different faiths. When I was doing training with Buddhist monks and nuns, they were shocked. They worried about me. Also some of them misunderstood my working with other faiths.

Life Changes In 2009, when I conducted the Sustainable Living Training (SLT) at the Lisu Theological Seminary with my team, we just

gave concepts and ideas in a two week course. Gradually, there were more demands for the course from communities and local NGOs. The training concepts are relevant to the local community. At that time, I did self-evaluation on my training. Then I realized that I needed to practice what I had been teaching. Finally I decided to start an organic garden for my family to experience. Every year, many local people, pastors, Buddhist monks and nuns, school teachers and friends came to me. I am trying to practice on my farm for social transformation, as a sharing and learning centre for all. When I graduated from the seminary I planned to get more degrees. In 1997, my first experience come from the GLT-Grassroots Leadership Training conducted by SEM-Spirit in Education Movement, with Pracha Hutanuwatr and other friends at Wongsanit Ashram in Thailand. I got the confidence to live with and serve the community. At that time, my friends who studied abroad didn’t come back when they finished their studies. They didn’t have the confidence to come back; they were not ready to come back; they stayed where they studied abroad. So I realised that is a brain-drain or wasting people for the community. So I decided not to stay abroad except for learning. Now I live in the small rural town called Pyinn Oo Lwin, Myanmar. Within 18 years of my experience there were no significant changes in the community. But most of my training participants gained inner confidence and vision. My wife, Na Na and children support the family farm confidently. Also local farmers feel confidence in their farms. The young people respect their farming parents. I got to work with the grassroots people. I

can live with optimistic views in different cultural and religious contexts. I see the beauty of diversity, so I try to change the community through networking. When I started gardening, my friends and neighbours didn't trust it. Most of the farmers in Pyin Oo Lwin have no confidence in farming without using chemical fertilisers. So I tried without any chemical fertilizer and pesticides in my garden for 6 years now. I took time to show my confidence by walking a deep commitment. At the same time, many friends and visitors came and learned from me. When the local people see my work and commitment, they admire and understand my concerns for the community. When I started gardening, I intended to sell my products for a good price. I

hoped that if I got a good price, I will save more money for my family. Then I will have a good life. At one seminar, there was a guest speaker (permaculturist) who talked about organic products. He said "The organic vegetables and products have become not for ordinary people but only for the rich people. It is not good for social transformation". So I changed my mind and now sell my product for a fair price for every level of people to enjoy.

Vision Now I feel very involved in the localization movement. Because of globalization, many, many families are broken. Church attendance is decreasing and local livelihoods have been destroyed by mainstream school education. People are losing

their confidence in their traditional knowledge. Many young generations are facing self-rejection and self-hatred because they live in a competitive society. I have been planning to increase practicing alternative farming and create a learning centre for all people. At this moment I have good relationships with my friends, Churches, NGOs, and local development organisations.

In my vision, I want to involve the socially engaged spirituality movement with the people to gain a more peaceful and just society. I want to encourage young people who love living with the grassroots people.

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Letters



Dear Mr Sivaraksa,

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and that of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for your participation in the High-Level Panel Debate entitled "Uniting Around the Principle of Humanity" held at United Nations Headquarters on 30 September 2015. I have no doubt that our collective commitment to this principle, as well as the success of the event, was reinforced by your excellent contribution.

It was particularly inspiring to hear how your faith has influenced your commitment to others and your own humanitarian contributions. It is my hope that we may embark on a continuing partnership in reaching those most in need, through our common belief in humanity.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Maurer



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Dear Ajarn Sulak,

What an honor and privilege to meet with you in Bangkok, and to be inspired by your thought-provoking discussion with the monks from Myanmar! Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and for your warm hospitality.

As you pointed out, Socially Engaged Buddhists and Quakers have much in common. We share a belief that our personal spiritual journeys and our outward social witness are fruits of the same tree. Inner change and outward social action go hand in hand. I am inspired by the depth of your insight, your fearless dedication, and the courage and clarity with which you speak truth to power.

We very much appreciate the long partnership between AFSC and the Spirit in Education Movement and wish you every success in your ongoing efforts. I hope that when your work takes you to the United States, we may be able to host you in Philadelphia. I especially hope you will be able to join us in celebrating our 100th anniversary in 2017.

Sincerely,
Shan Cretin
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

“Uniting Around the Principle of Humanity in the Mekong Region”

Buddhism in the Mekong Region
Conference – Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

To our discussions this week, I bring a Buddhist perspective—specifically, a socially engaged perspective. I want to speak directly to how an individual’s spiritual practice leads towards advancing our common humanity—and how active participation in society informs one’s personal, inner quest. In other words, each and everyone’s personal development is directly linked to our common humanity.

When one understands how the personal and societal are inter-related, I believe we become acutely aware how the current, mainstream, socio-economic paradigm—that is to say, the effect of globalization, capitalism, and trans-national corporations—can be accurately called “structural violence.” What is structural violence? It is the systematic ways that a society’s resources are distributed unequally and unfairly, preventing people from meeting their basic needs. We see this in every country.

To understand how structural violence perpetuates suffering, I begin with the fundamental Buddhist teaching that asserts every individual has accumulated within them, seeds for greed, hatred, and delusion—what we call, the three poisons. These three poisons are at the root of our own personal suffering. Through the practice of meditation and contemplation, the poisons can be rooted out completely and transformed into generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom. While this is the classic Buddhist presentation, I extend this teaching from the individual to the global socio-economic system, which is to say, the three poisons are the building blocks for structural violence worldwide. How is this so?

* First, I believe that personal greed manifests in society as the insatiable desire for accumulation, an ever-expanding “possessiveness” and “growth”—in

other words, capitalism, consumerism and natural resource extraction that ignores the limits of the environment.

* Secondly, I see individuals’ seeds of hatred manifest in the world as militarism.

* Thirdly, my harshest critique is reserved for those who peddle delusion—advertisers and the mainstream media—which promote useless and unhealthy products and unwholesome ideas which lead people away from a meaningful life of contentedness and a common humanity, and instead towards poverty and a sense of separation.

I was born more than 80 years ago and raised in traditional Siamese culture. I have seen in my lifetime how capitalism, mass media, and the global marketplace have replaced traditional morals and ethics. I disagree that the world today is at the highest mark of human development, because this often unspoken sentiment prevents the peoples of the world from pursuing other aspirations and from thinking about alternative ways to improve or maintain their livelihood and traditions.

If we return to the question of personal spiritual practice, restructuring political and economic institutions cannot, in themselves, bring about personal liberation. If we are serious about getting rid of greed, anger and ignorance in ourselves, we must inquire how we actively or passively take part in perpetuating the three poisons in society. Once we see the interconnections, we work simultaneously on our own spiritual development at the same time to dismantle structural violence. As Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Transformation of ourselves is the starting place. Peace can prevail in a society only when individuals in that society are at peace. When greed, hatred and ignorance govern our personal affairs, they will also be present in our society’s institutions, preventing lasting social change. Real security, therefore,

ultimately depends on working on ourselves simultaneously with our work in the world.

Mekong

This brings us to the Mekong region and to our community of Mekong river countries. The magnificent Mekong River begins in Tibet, homeland of Tibetan Buddhism, his Holiness the Dalai Lama and our Tibetan sisters and brothers. As the river winds its way down through Burma, Laos, Siam, Cambodia and finally Vietnam, it provides livelihoods for millions of people and sustains the lives of countless sentient beings. Just like a real mother, The Mother Mekong River, with the second highest level of biodiversity in the world, surpassed only by the Amazon region, is a literal life giver and should be thought of and treated with as much respect as we would treat our own mother – an attitude that can be extended to all beings.

Buddhist brothers and sisters, and the numerous masters their tradition has produced, we are taught that the union of wisdom and compassion leads to enlightenment. For those of us living in the community of the Mekong region, we must continue to cultivate enough wisdom and compassion so that we can come to view every sentient being with enough love and respect to see each one of them as a member of our own family. The Vajrayana teachings of Tibet remind us to always maintain an “unbounded” view of samsara – that is, to remember that every sentient being has had countless past lives, and that each one of us has had every kind of relationship with each other in the past. Within those past relationships, each one of us, has, at one time or another been each other’s mother. If we can maintain mindfulness of the kindness and compassion of our own mother and remember that each being in the world of samsara was once our own mother, our empathy and understanding of others will increase greatly.

With regards to the Mekong River region, we must cultivate enough insight to transcend the narrow view of each country’s borders and see the interconnectedness of the entire region. Interconnectedness is one of the most important teachings within the many Buddhist traditions and remains as relevant today as it was during the time of the Buddha. Despite minor differences in how the various groups and sects practice and interpret the teachings of the Buddha, we Buddhists have more in common than we often realize. We can learn from each other while maintaining our own long-standing

traditions, practices and customs. When we come together as a family of the Mekong, in solidarity with right understanding, we can work together towards positive environmental, social and political change for our entire region. These actions will help to foster sustainability, compassion, and peace.

The Buddha taught us that we must stabilize and balance our minds enough so that our insight practices can be effective and so that we can have enough mental suppleness and clarity to see through the illusion of our deluded minds and directly perceive the nature of samsara. We must also train and balance our minds so that we can see through the illusion of our separateness and see that we are all interconnected beings on a small, shared planet in a distant corner of the universe. The cultivation of calm, clear minds is also critical so that we can see through the constant barrage of propaganda from the corporate world that so often leads to distorted views and wrong action. For example, it is all too common these days to see insatiable lust for wealth at the expense of the environment and our own well-being. To counter these views, we should maintain a longer view of samsara and recognize that when we profit off the backs of other sentient beings, we too will suffer.

For us here today, family members in the Dhamma, we have to continue to cultivate the peace of mind and insight to see the forces of greed and narrow-mindedness in action and to respond skillfully with awareness, insight and compassion. In our current situation, for example, when our brothers and sisters in a nearby country build a dam, pollute, or otherwise disrupt the Mekong, countless beings downstream will be affected. These beings include more than 20,000 species of plants, thousands of mammals, birds, reptiles and fish – many of which have yet to be discovered. This issue is too important for us Buddhists to remain quiet – solidarity, mutual understanding and action in the face of potentially catastrophic decisions are necessary to prevent damage to the delicate biological balance of the Mekong River.

The level of solidarity and compassion required for a sustainable, peaceful and harmonious Mekong region for generations to come is a tall but necessary order. And one that can be achieved only when we see past the superficial differences and embrace our interconnectedness and fundamental, shared humanity.

This talk drafted by Matteo Pistono and Jordan Baskerville

Inequality, Violence and Climate Change through a Buddhist Lens

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Talk given to the International Conference of Youth (COY11),
Paris, France. November 27, 2015
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I am very honored to be here with you all here in Paris today. That so many young people have gathered here to learn about and discuss so many important issues such as climate change gives this troubled world a measure of needed hope. To our discussion today, I bring the perspective of a socially engaged Buddhist. Briefly, socially engaged Buddhism refers to a type of Buddhism that values and works toward both personal and societal change in order to mitigate the suffering of oneself and others.

This talk is divided into three parts: first I will say a few things about the Buddha and what he taught. Second, I will address the three gravest challenges facing us today: climate change, inequality and violence. Finally, I will conclude with some pos-

sible solutions to these problems from the perspective of engaged Buddhism.

The Buddha and his Teachings

I want to begin by talking about some 2500 year-old teachings of the Buddha that I think can help add to our discussion and analysis, and understanding of the important global issues being discussed at this conference.

Let me preface my talk today with a few clarifications about the Buddha and Buddhism. First of all, the Buddha, who is said to have lived in what is now the area of India and southern Nepal was a man, not a god – a wealthy, princely man initially – but still just an ordinary human like all of us here. In his early life, the Buddha had the privilege of experiencing most of the physical pleasures of the world:

the most delicious food, wonderful drink, beautiful women, lavish clothing, a palace and so on. At one point in his life he realized that each of these things were temporary, fleeting pleasures that did not bring any lasting satisfaction or happiness. They also did nothing to erase the reality that one day these ephemeral luxuries would be gone and that everyone near and dear to him would die – and so would he. This realization is said to have caused him great grief – so much grief in fact, that late one night, he fled his palace and the affluent life he led and went on a quest to find a solution to the inevitable suffering that comes with living a human life.

Over the next few years the Buddha tried many different methods of overcoming suffering that were popular at the time, including nearly starving himself to death as a means to accomplish his task. In his quest for genuine happiness, the Buddha tried the extremes of both sensual pleasure and of severe asceticism or deprivation – both of which failed to bring lasting happiness. After many years of testing various ways to eradicate suffering, through trial and error, the Buddha came to the conclusion that this could be accomplished by leading a simple, ethical life devoid of extremes. More specifically, he discovered that a life grounded in compassion for all beings coupled with heightened awareness and insight born out of the practice of meditation could lead to the eradication of suffering. This realization, is what has come to be known as the Buddha's enlightenment or awakening. Awakening in the Buddha's sense is not a fantasy or unbelievable legend, but I think is best understood as someone exploring and achieving the highest potential of the human mind.

When we say that the Buddha awakened, what did he awaken from? The Buddha, in his quest and subsequent enlightenment achieved remarkable states of heightened awareness and insight into the nature of the mind and of reality itself. He came to see that greed, hatred and delusion, known by Buddhists as the three poisons, lie at the heart of our individual and collective suffering and that by lead-

ing an ethical life, pursuing virtuous work that does no harm, and by cultivating compassion and wisdom, we can uproot the foundation of suffering. This is one of the great realizations of the Buddha – that the roots of our suffering exist in our own minds and manifest externally through deluded actions of body, speech and mind.

So in what ways can the wisdom of the Buddha help us here today? Our world is very different than Iron Age India – yet many things – such as the basics of the human condition – remain the same. Our contemporary world, like the world of the Buddha, continues to be awash in the three poisons: greed, hatred and delusion. Despite our remarkable technological achievements, suffering remains. And yet, in the face of our most serious challenges, we possess minds and hearts with remarkable potential for compassion, awareness, generosity and empathy. We must become aware of the potential that exists within ourselves that can be cultivated in ways that bring peace to our lives and peace to the world.

Inequality, Violence and Climate Change

This brings me to the second part of my talk – what I believe are the three greatest challenges we as a species face today: global climate change, shocking levels of inequality, and violence. All three issues are interconnected and, according to the teachings of the Buddha, all three are rooted in individual and collective greed, hatred and delusion.

Inequality

To start off, I would like to address the issue of the staggering levels of growing global inequality. It is true that modern corporate capitalism has brought many people in certain parts of the world out of poverty and made others rich. Yet, for all of its purported benefits, capitalism, in its current form has led to extreme levels of wealth concentrated in the hands of a tiny fraction of the global population. Let's now examine a few of the obscene statistics about this disturbing problem: According to a recent study, the richest 85 people in the world have as

much wealth as the bottom 3.5 billion people – about half the global population. And another fact: About half of the world's wealth is owned by 1 per cent of the population.

We know that when small groups of people control huge portions of wealth, all kinds of problems arise. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett have written a remarkable book on this topic that I recommend you read called *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. In it the authors detail how wealth inequality in a society is closely tied to health problems, violence, drug abuse, obesity, and lack of social mobility among other things.

We also see major damage to the democratic process when a few powerful individuals own most of the wealth. The U.S. is a classic example of this phenomenon – rich corporations have the ability to hire hundreds of lobbyists that influence lawmakers to pass laws in their favors. The ultra-rich also fund political campaigns with the understanding that favors will be returned in the form of deregulation, tax cuts, and the passing of other pro-corporate laws designed to benefit the wealthy few.

From a Buddhist standpoint, obscene levels of inequality such as those that exist today can be traced back to the deluded, greed-saturated minds of individuals. When senseless greed remains unchecked, no amount of money can satisfy it. Will ultra-wealthy individuals in the top one percent ever be satisfied with a certain amount of money? Not likely. Instead they do what they can to increase their earnings – such as re-write laws in their favor, break unions, lower wages, cut worker benefits and lay-off as many employees as possible. These actions – done presumably to make the ultra-rich happier – eventually lead to suffering. Although the rich may get some temporary satisfaction from such deluded actions, such superficial happiness does not last long.

Seeing the issue of inequality from a broad-

er perspective, we can see that it is directly related to climate change. Some of the largest corporations in the world with the richest board members, shareholders and CEOs also happen to be some of the largest contributors to global climate change. These companies make fortunes polluting the planet and selling things such as oil, gas, weaponry, meat and other animal products. They in turn use their disproportionate financial influence to change laws so that they can make even more money at others expense by working to cut taxes and reduce the amount of public money spent on things such as health care, education and social security.

Violence

This leads us to the next interconnected problem, global violence. Hatred, one of the three poisons I referred to earlier, manifests outwardly as militarism. Many countries profit greatly from the selling of weapons. War profiteering and the outsourcing of military duties to private, for-profit contractors at the taxpayer's expense is routine. Violence has certainly increased today in part because the mainstream media thrives on the reporting and sensationalizing of violence.

Blockbuster movies glorify war and extoll the virtues of settling disputes through violent means. Military propaganda grounded in nationalist rhetoric is common in many countries and is used as a means of distracting citizens from troubling realities such as poverty, social ills and corruption.

When the media pushes nationalist narratives and divides the world into easily digestible, black and white fantasies of good versus evil, hatred is easily sewn amongst the masses. The connection is clear, once people are sold on violence and believe it is the way to solve problems, it is easy to start wars and sell arms – both huge industries – without much resistance. Seen from a Buddhist perspective, recent and continuing wars are the result of greed, hatred

and delusion. A dark lust for other country's natural resources and thirst for power coupled with extreme delusion about the supposed benefits of these wars combine to produce the unbelievable number of violent conflicts in the past few decades.

The Buddha, in one of his oldest teachings remarked that "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal." Gandhi expressed the same idea when he said, "an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

This is not to say we should not defend ourselves when necessary, but the Buddha saw that violence leads to more violence, and violence leads to suffering – both on the part of the victim and the perpetrator. The spirit of nonviolence (not absolute pacifism) is a cornerstone of the teachings of the Buddha. In one sense we can see that global warming is violence on a large scale. Violence towards the planet earth and its inhabitants that will, if left unchecked, lead to suffering and death on a massive scale.

Global Warming

This leads us to the third and potentially most devastating problem we have ever faced – global warming. The issue of global warming, like inequality, and violence can again be linked back to the three poisons present in our minds: greed, hatred and delusion. Unsurprisingly, we humans have gotten so used to the benefits of fossil fuels that, in spite of the clear evidence that their overuse is causing disastrous effects, we have made woefully insufficient efforts to shift our societies away from carbon-based systems. Our collective denial, delusion and inaction on this issue is leading us off a cliff, and to avoid falling off that cliff – or at least reducing the size of the cliff – we have to dramatically change the way we humans interact with and live in the world.

Sadly, there are still large numbers of people unwilling to face the reality of climate change. Do-

ing so would mean having to acknowledge the difficult truth that our current way of life on earth is unsustainable and that we will all eventually have to significantly simplify our way of living.

Why are so many people still in denial about the reality of climate change? A large part of the answer falls at the feet of the media – those who peddle delusion – advertisers and the main-stream media, which promote useless, wasteful products and unwholesome ideas. Products and ideas that, in turn, lead people away from a meaningful life of contentedness and a common humanity, and instead towards feelings of insufficiency and a sense of separation from others and from our natural world. Why are the media so culpable for so many negative things in the world? As many of you know, much of the media exists to make a profit. They are often branches of larger corporate conglomerates that have one goal in mind: making more money – often at the expense of truth or any larger humanitarian concerns. Take for example any one of Rupert Murdoch's ludicrous channels – watching five minutes of Fox News would give you the impression that the people working to save this planet, the courageous ones like yourselves are the problem. According to the views of Fox, global climate change is a liberal hoax. As Noam Chomsky recently reminded us, the debate is not about whether or not global warming is a human-caused reality or not. The debate is between those climate scientists who see the effects of climate change as being simply disastrous and those that see it as being extraordinarily catastrophic. When watching these channels, people become easily hypnotized by the flashy graphics and the simple yet highly deluded worldview these media organizations peddle. One of your tasks as active, educated, engaged citizens is to become immune to the constant barrage of propaganda coming from the main-stream media, governments and the world of advertising – a topic I will return to at the conclusion of my talk.

We can see the links between global warming and the issues of violence and inequality. Global warming is and will continue to hit the poorest areas of the earth the hardest as they do not have the resources and infrastructure to face and deflect the deadly effects of rising sea levels, huge droughts, desertification and monstrous storms. Such changes in the climate will lead to scarcer resources and huge numbers of climate change refugees searching for livable environments. The many disastrous effects of hotter global temperatures will, in turn, likely lead to further hatred and violence in the form of wars for basic resources.

In my country Siam, which many of you know as Thailand, huge swathes of the northeastern region – the poorest region – have been hit with sweeping droughts. In addition, our wealthy capital, Bangkok, is not immune to the ravaging effects of climate change. For the past few years, we have had increasingly serious flooding. Bangkok is located in a low lying river delta, and is only a few miles from the ocean. Credible sources have predicted that in a few decades we may have to move the entire city to higher ground as the ocean levels will inundate us and make life in the area uninhabitable. Since this conference has a focus on climate change, I won't continue here with the ever-growing list of potential climate-change related disasters but instead turn to some possible solutions that the 2500 year-old teachings of the Buddha can offer to our global dialogue.

Buddhist Solutions

I return to the fundamental Buddhist teaching that asserts every individual has within them, seeds for greed, hatred, and delusion — the three poisons. These three poisons are at the root of our own personal suffering. Yet we also possess, within each of us, the capacity to uproot these poisons. Through the practice of meditation and the rest of the Buddha's Eight-fold Path, the poisons can be rooted out

completely and transformed into generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom. Our minds and hearts have remarkable capacity for change, growth and tremendous empathy and compassion for the world, ourselves, and for others.

The Euro-American world has demonstrated remarkable genius and ingenuity studying the external world - the oceans, the earth's surface, animal and plant life and space. Asia, on the other hand has contributed significantly to exploring the world of the mind. Contemplative traditions within Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and other paths have spent the past few thousand years devoted to inner exploration. These traditions have many detailed written accounts of mental training, remarkable mental states, and unprecedented accounts of mental flourishing that have been experienced by contemplative practitioners – the Buddha being one of the most famous of these. In Tibet for example, there have been many thousands of individuals who have taken on a life of inner exploration and have spent years, sometimes decades, in retreat devoted to full-time meditation practice. Many of these extraordinary individuals are not well known in the Western world, yet they offer spectacular insights into the nature of the human mind and of reality. These insights are a gift to the world as precious and valuable as any findings from external exploration.

One of the most well-known examples of these insights come to us from the Buddha who taught that instead of focusing solely on external factors for happiness, we need to cultivate our minds in positive ways – we can and should work to achieve exceptional mental well-being, including balance, focus and so on – so that we can achieve a measure of happiness within ourselves. The peace and clarity that results from a sustained meditation practice, grounded in an ethical way of life, can then be extended outward to our work in the world.

Let me be clear – this is not a call for any of you to become Buddhists. What I am recommend-

ing however is the importance of a regular contemplative practice – that is, taking time each day for some silent reflection. From time to time, disconnect from your electronic devices and reconnect with your minds and with nature. Every great religious tradition has a connection and history with contemplative practices. If you happen to come from a religious background, I recommend you look into the history of people from your traditions that lived and practiced silent contemplation – take them as a guide. For those atheist, agnostic and otherwise secular brothers and sisters here today, I invite you as well to regularly step back from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and seek out silence and solitude – to try to understand and cultivate your mind. Such simple yet profound steps can have hugely powerful impacts on our lives and can affect every single thing we do in positive ways – no beliefs or religion required.

Spending sustained time in nature is a crucial step towards healing our world and toward healing the imagined divide we have with it. Calming our distracted minds, we can more easily realize how we are not separate from the natural world, from the universe. We could not exist without the sun, the planet, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. The world sustains us – and we are not separate from it. If we destroy the world, the ecosystem, the air – we are destroying ourselves.

When our minds are clearer, calmer, and more focused, we can more easily see through the bombardment of lies and deceit coming from the media and centers of power, wealth and influence. Powers that are all too often self-serving, deluded, greedy institutions that have no qualms manipulating others in order to continue their search for never-ending power and profit. To become immune to their lies means to sharpen our critical thinking skills, to educate ourselves through alternative channels, and to constantly question authority and reali-

ty. We must also work to reform our institutions so that they better serve the public good. We must take responsibility both individually and collectively. The Dalai Lama, someone I consider a spiritual friend, recently argued that:

“We need a systematic approach to foster humanistic values, of oneness and harmony. If we start doing it now, there is hope that this century will be different from the previous one. It is in everybody’s interest. So let us work for peace within our families and society, and not expect help from God, Buddha or the governments.”

For us here today, we have to continue to cultivate the peace of mind and insight to recognize the forces of greed and narrow-mindedness and to respond skillfully with awareness, insight and compassion. The level of solidarity and compassion required for a sustainable, peaceful and harmonious planet for generations to come is a tall but necessary order. One that can be achieved only when we see past superficial differences, gain clarity and peace of mind and embrace the fundamental reality of the interconnectedness that is our planet earth.

Thank you.

This talk drafted by Jordan Baskerville

A New Growth Paradigm ?

Ranil Senanayake

Any discussion on 'Economic Development' as a national goal, must demonstrate a perspective strongly rooted in modern science. It must take into consideration the reality of the current global crises. It must also understand the history of the crises. In doing so, we might find a way out of the current impasse between economic growth and planetary stability

Life on Earth learnt how to maintain gas and material flows, optimum for the evolution and sustainability of biodiversity. Carbon Dioxide, although essential to the process of life, was often introduced into the atmosphere by volcanic processes at disruptive levels, throughout geologic history. But the gas has not concentrated in the atmosphere, because it was sequestered by living things and put away out of circulation from the biosphere of living carbon, so that the environment was stable for life. This store of carbon was fossilized and has been slowly accumulating over the last few hundred million years and has acted as the storage of excess carbon.

In our rush to create a petroleum and coal driven economy, this very simple and fundamental fact has been ignored. Carbon that cycles through living systems represents a fixed proportion of the planetary carbon, one part solid, like the carbohydrates in trees and one part gas, as in atmospheric Carbon Dioxide gas. If excess Carbon Dioxide enters the atmosphere through tectonic processes such as volcanism, photosynthetic activity removes this excess carbon dioxide from the biosphere and that excess is deposited as fossils to enter the lithosphere (rocks), never to interact with the biosphere again. This deposition is translated into vast quantities of fossilized carbon that has been removed from the biotic/atmospheric cycles. Unlike the biotic cycles of Carbon that stay deposited for tens of thousands of years, the fossil pools have deposition lifetimes of tens or hundreds of millions of years.

There have been fluctuations of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere in the past but equilibrium was gained and balance was restored. All this was long before humans.

The first human driven change that affected the local and regional climates was the massive loss of the

global forest stock with the advent of colonization. This loss represents a debt to every nation that lost its forests as well as a debt to planetary atmospheric equilibrium. This debt can be settled by re-establishing the sequestered stocks of carbon that were lost by reforestation. But once this debt is settled there will be no more room on this planet to plant more trees to sequester the fossil carbon that is currently being released so irresponsibly.

Fossil carbon is the principal driver of climate change. As a substance that is at least twenty million or more years older than the timber of the forests that were lost, it represents a material with a far higher carbon cost than a forest. It is also a fact that the levels of Carbon Dioxide, a major atmospheric gas, are increasing in the atmosphere. This increase is linked to the destabilization of the climate, the burning of the fossil stock of Carbon being the principal driver of change. It is now very clear that the stability of planetary climate cycles are in jeopardy and a very large contributory factor to this crisis is the profligate activities of modern human society. It is the same activity that fuels the current vision of 'Economic Development' in Sri Lanka. The entire infrastructural investment, be it stadiums, complexes or towers, require enormous amounts of energy for their operation. As our sustainable energy production is abysmally low, we will have to provide fossil energy to maintain this infrastructure, an activity patently destructive to the global climate equilibrium.

Another area of concern is the system of agriculture that our farmers have been lured into. Through this type of agriculture they have been made addicts to fossil fuel energy. Not only do we lose vast sums of money and add to a decline in health, both human and environmental; we also have this nation adding yet another burden to the planets climate stability. In short we are 'bankrupt' as an independent, agricultural nation, also very cynical if we ever claim to be 'green' on any international stage.

In the wider picture, it is common knowledge that there is a value difference between fossil derived Carbon Dioxide and biologically cycling Carbon Dioxide,

but this fact has been ignored by scientists who run the IPCC. Any high school child will know this fact, but it is ignored by the 'climate scientists' who claim to know best. Whatever their motives, the value differential of these cycles, biotic and fossil, must be recognized. Biotic carbon operates on time frames of tens or hundreds of thousands of years and fossil carbon in tens or hundreds of millions years. Further, fossil carbon never interacts with the living or biotic cycle. Fossil carbon entering the biotic cycle is the fundamental reason as to why there is an accelerating climate change effect. However, the growing of trees to compensate for fossil carbon and paying the same price for biotic carbon is unfair and tantamount to 'carbon laundering'. There is no way to equate the carbon from oil and coal with the carbon from a forest. One has a space in the biotic cycle the other does not. Carbon that cycles through living systems represents a fixed proportion of the planetary carbon thus there is no space in the atmosphere for fossil derived Carbon Dioxide.

Carbon Dioxide is extracted from the atmosphere by plants and converted into a solid form. This process has been hailed as a tool by which the problem of increasing gaseous Carbon can be addressed. 'Plant trees which soak up the carbon dioxide' the reasoning goes 'and you can contribute to reducing the atmospheric burden of that gas'. Living woody biomass has been the first and logical candidate to be used as a potential tool in sequestering atmospheric carbon and has been featured largely in 'Carbon capture' projects. Although the volume of living biomass has now been measured on most global models of carbon cycling and this measure is being used in the evaluation of carbon stocks, there is an urgent need to address the fundamental differences between the components of living biomass, photosynthetic biomass and respiring biomass.

Photosynthetic biomass performs the act of primary production, the initial step in the manifestation of life. The biomass so termed has the ability to increase in mass through the absorption of solar or other electromagnetic radiation while releasing oxygen and water vapour into the atmosphere. Respiring biomass is that component of living biomass that uses the output of photosynthesis to make the complicated biological patterns of life; it consumes oxygen to power its functions, and does not have photosynthetic functions itself. This distinction would seem to be fundamentally important when assessing the value of biomass that is being addressed. It is only this photosynthetic biomass which powers carbon sequestration,

carbohydrate production, oxygen generation and water transformation, i.e. all actions essential for the sustainability of the life support system of the planet.

Yet currently, it is only one product of this photosynthetic biomass, as sequestered carbon, usually represented by wood/timber, that is recognized as having commercial value in the carbon market for mitigating climate change. The ephemeral part, the leaves, are generally ignored, yet the photosynthetic biomass in terrestrial ecosystems are largely composed of leaves; this component needs a value placed on it for its 'environmental services'

It is not difficult to place value on photosynthetic biomass today. Initial computations based on the current values of the carbon market are currently in excess of 125 billion dollars. Assuming that the global market would pay at least a similar amount to maintain our life support system, the 93.1 billion tons of photosynthetic Carbon currently in stock would be roughly worth about 1.35 dollars per kilogram.

It is this biomass that has to grow in order to sequester the lost biotic Carbon. With such growth we will see more Oxygen, Carbon sequestering and water cleansing throughout the planet. Much of the biomass to be gained is in degraded ecosystems around the planet. These areas are also home to the world's rural poor, but what these degraded ecosystems do have, is great growth potential for generating photosynthetic biomass. If the restoration of these degraded ecosystems to achieve optimal photosynthetic biomass loads becomes a global goal, the amazing magic of photosynthesis could indeed help change our current dire course, create a new paradigm of growth and make the planet more livable for our children.

Instead of flogging the dead horse of fossil energy based growth as 'Economic Development', will we have the commonsense to appreciate the value of photosynthetic biomass and become the first country in the world to propose setting such a value? The realization of this will enrich not only our rural population but rural people the world over ! These ideas are offered free to those bureaucrats who are attending international conventions and conferences or to those politicians stating that they will work towards a sustainable future.

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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*.

SORRY, YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE: PROBLEMS VERSUS QUANDARIES

Richard L. Clinton

According to my dictionary, the origin of the word “quandary” is unknown. That seems fitting, but I always thought that “quandary” shared a root with “quarry”, in which case a quandary would be a deep pit gouged in the side of a conundrum from which massive enigmas are mined and jagged predicaments are crushed to produce sundry gravels of paradoxes, perplexities, mysteries, and dilemmas. Well, it sounds better than “origin unknown”.

In my day job, I’m a simple, country professor of political science with a focus on environmental politics and international relations. In practice, though, I suppose you could say my field is quandaries. I didn’t start out to become a quandary specialist, but it seemed like almost any line of inquiry I followed eventually led me to a quandary. After a while, I sort of came to think of myself as a quandaryist.

Let me show you what I mean. For starters, take the American political system. We began as a republic, a representative democracy, a government by the people and for the people. But somewhere along the line we became an empire with a government by the corporations and for the corporations. You’d think people would get upset by the way our government has been captured by corporations – through campaign contributions, hoards of lobbyists, and the prospect of cushy jobs beyond the revolving door. It ought to be infuriating

to people that the government we support with our taxes is made to prioritize, subsidize, and protect corporations rather than provide for the general welfare, but somehow most of us are just too busy and can’t find the time to give it much thought.

That’s another mystery: why the huge gains in the productivity of the American worker over the years, what with technological improvements and such, have never translated into a shorter work day and work week the way Keynes predicted would happen in that famous essay he wrote about how little his grandchildren would have to work. When you think about it, it really is puzzling how hard we Americans work, considering that our European cousins manage to have such a high quality of life while enjoying a minimum of five weeks of vacation every year, plus some months of paid maternity – and sometimes paternity! – leave.

Which brings to mind the fact that most Europeans also have universal health care from the womb to the tomb and free public education all the way through the university level. Oh, and highly efficient public transportation systems, too.

Well, we have the most powerful military the world has ever seen, with the most advanced aircraft, missiles, tanks, and ships. Of course, we spend more on our military than the combined total of the next fifteen countries with the highest military budgets. In fact, we’re spending more now for defense

and national security than we did when we were locked in that perpetual arms race that finally bankrupted the Soviet Union, which, come to think of it, seems passing strange since the Soviet Union ceased to exist more than two decades ago.

Actually, in light of all that military spending and the fact that it's made us, for the moment, the undisputed superpower of the planet, it's downright incomprehensible that, in the first few years of our shiny new century, we've had the two longest and most expensive wars in our history and with countries that are, in one case, poor and underdeveloped, and, in the other, oil-rich but at best moderately developed. Of course, it doesn't quite compute either that the President, the Vice President, the Defense Secretary, and the National Security Advisor all repeatedly lied to get us into one of these wars and yet have never really been called out for what they did by our much-vaunted free press or held to account by our hallowed judicial system.

But, then, none of the big bankers who wheeled and dealt us into the worst financial collapse since 1929 have gone to jail either, so at least there's some consistency in there somewhere.

On the other hand, the Private First Class and the low-level private contractor who revealed atrocities being committed by the military and Constitutional breaches by the National Security Agency have been labelled traitors and criminals and, in the former case, sentenced to a long prison term.

Speaking of prisons, who'd have thought that the United States, "the land of the free", would have the highest prison population of any country in the world? It's also puzzling that in a country where blacks make up around eleven percent of the population, forty-five percent of those behind bars are black. Didn't we win the last battle against institutionalized racism with the Voting Rights Act of 1965? The Supreme Court certainly thinks so, having recently struck down the key provisions of that Act on the grounds they're no longer needed. There are still, however, many states where convicted

felons – most of whom are black – are not permitted to vote even after they've paid their debt to society and been released.

While we're on the subject of prisons, some say that the severe overcrowding that exists in many of them amounts to "cruel and unusual punishment". That's not really a quandary, though, since it's being solved in many places by just releasing prisoners before their sentence is up. Pretty straightforward. Cost effective, too, since, if you can believe it, our states spend around twice as much every year on each prisoner as they do on each student.

That brings us to another of the Big Kahunas of American paradoxes, namely, the deterioration of public education in a country that identifies itself by its technological innovation and entrepreneurial creativity. Not to mention democracy's imperative for an educated citizenry.

Well, it's not that American parents don't care about their children's education. It's just that they care about so many other things, too. First off, making a living when wages haven't budged for the past thirty years. That has meant that both parents usually have to work outside the home, often at two or more jobs, which cuts in to "quality time" with the kids. Then there's the national fixation on professional sports, which requires an early start playing baseball, basketball, and football – who knows whether little Brandon will become a big league star or be drafted by the NBA or NFL? Or maybe little Caitlin will make it to the Olympics in gymnastics or swimming or to the pros in tennis or golf? Those astronomical salaries and all those lucrative product endorsement contracts are mighty tempting, especially compared to the pitiful salaries paid for any kind of useful work. Then there's the understandable concern that the children have an active social life. The trouble there is that the "cool quotient" necessary for that depends on being up on all the latest styles, fads, slang, celebrities, and electronic gadgetry, which, like, you know, totally takes time, you know.

Besides, for some time now, education in America hasn't really been to create better citizens;

it's been to get a job in order to become a better consumer. And aspiring consumers don't only consume stuff; they're avid TV viewers, sports fans, and celebrity watchers. As dumbed-down adults, then, they can be easily distracted and entertained by violent, sexy TV soap operas and blockbuster, special-effects movies based on comic book characters, adorable animated animals, vampires, zombies, and magical fantasies. No wonder there's just not enough time for homework – or to keep up with politics and major world events.

Well, as our recent history has shown, things can go on like this for quite a while. “Life’s a cabaret, old chum” can be pretty nice as long as it’s possible to make ends meet and nothing interferes with Monday night football. But two untoward trends have been gradually building over the last several decades that will soon bring us to see the folly of our corporate-induced preference for consumerism over citizenship. These two trends are the gaping and ever-growing disparity in incomes and wealth and the emerging consequences of human-caused climate change – two, I think you’ll agree, dandy quandaries.

So why is the ever-widening gap between the top one percent and everybody else a quandary? Surely, you say, a more progressive income tax, higher inheritance taxes, and measures such as removing the cap on how much income gets taxed for Social Security would quickly put a dent in how concentrated wealth has become. Certainly these would help, especially if they were coupled with a few other needed policies, such as closing tax loopholes and prohibiting the sheltering of assets in Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, or places like that. But there’s the rub! Such legislation has no chance of being passed in our corporate-dominated Congress. The corporations and the wealthy, after all, are two sides of the same coin, with the wealthy investing in the corporations, and corporate management an integral part of the wealthy.

Not so fast, you say. Aren’t there a whole lot more of “us” than there are of “them”? We can just

vote in Senators and Representatives who will defy the wealthy corporate dominators and put these taxes in place. The majority rules! Perhaps I haven’t made myself clear. The American electorate are the same folks we’ve been talking about – the ones who’ve been so carefully taught to be good consumers instead of good citizens, the ones glued to their computer or TV or smart phone screens, the ones working too hard to have time or energy left to devote to their kids or to keep up with political issues. Think about it. If American voters were well informed and critically thinking, they wouldn’t be so easily swayed by glitzy, Madison-Avenue-designed campaign ads. Yet the candidate who spends the most on such ads usually wins.

Well, you say, there’s still hope for grassroots organizing and local efforts to alert the people to what’s going on and, if necessary, get them out in the street to demand change. Yes, grassroots movements are surely to be applauded, but there are tens of thousands of local grassroots projects already afoot all across the country, and, while they’re doing many good things, they’re mostly preaching to the choir. They’re largely ignored or even looked down on by “ordinary folks”. Nearly every community has a few, sometimes quite a number of, full-fledged citizen activists who have a pretty good idea about what’s going on and are doing their best to counter it, but, in the larger picture, what difference are they making? As Mark Twain is said to have said, “Hell, if voting could change anything, it’d be illegal.” The same is true of grassroots organizing. When the Occupy protests looked like they might spread and begin to get people mobilized, our militarized police promptly and rather ruthlessly dispersed them.

So where does this leave us vis-à-vis anthropogenic climate change, the other Great Quandary of our time?

Same drill. Scientists warn us for decades that the problem is growing and that it’s our greenhouse gas emissions, mostly CO₂, that are propelling it. So fossil fuel corporations roll out “astro-turf” think tanks and foundations posing as grassroots

organizations, with innocuous names like The Heartland Institute, Energy in Depth, and Energy Citizens. These front groups for the fossil fuel and related industries go to work lobbying Congress and putting out specious reports to confuse the public about the whole issue. Their well-compensated mouthpieces in Congress, on talk radio, and on that foxy propaganda channel label climate change a “disputed hypothesis”, a “hoax”, and a “war on coal” and cry bloody murder about the job losses and the negative impact on GDP growth that sensible policies like “cap and trade”, a carbon tax, or labeling CO₂ a pollutant would supposedly cause. Remember, we’re still not really out of the Great Recession, six years down the road from the collapse of the housing bubble, so a lot of people are justifiably worried about getting or keeping a job, which gives these serious sounding warnings from apparently reputable sources real traction. The result, as with the legislation needed to fix the concentration of wealth quandary, is that no effective measures can be enacted.

These two trends – worsening concentration of wealth and increasingly disruptive climate change – have built up enormous momentum and, like the Juggernauts they are, will respond only very slowly to decisive moves against them, should we ever succeed in implementing any. The damage that concentrated wealth has done to our democracy is devastating and largely self-perpetuating, but at least it’s fairly obvious. Not so the ruinous repercussions of climate change, except for a couple of news cycles when New Orleans is nearly wiped off the map or the subway tunnels of lower Manhattan become underground rivers.

So what’s it going to take to escape these quandaries? Well, you’d think that some forty million people losing their homes might have aroused them to start thinking about what’s gone wrong, but, to the extent it did, much of their frustration and fury was channeled into the simplistic, anti-government Tea Party phenomenon, a stellar example of the dangerous synergies that exist between massive wealth and a, shall we say, underperforming citizenry.

The Koch brothers’ astro-turf organizations Americans for Prosperity and Freedom Works immediately poured millions into the start-up of the Tea Party at the crucial moment of its emergence, which contrasts tellingly with the ephemeral Occupy Movement. Let’s face it, pithy slogans like “When Taxes Rise, Freedom Dies!” , “Drill, Baby, Drill!”, and “Humans First!” hold great appeal for angry, frustrated people who haven’t pondered the complexities of fracking, climate change, or the die-off of bees and amphibians.

What we have to wrap our pragmatic, can-do, optimistic, American minds around is that there are no feasible solutions to these two quandaries. By our actions – or inactivity – we created them, but it is beyond our capacities to resolve them. This is not a message most people are willing to hear, much less accept. Hence the importance – the urgency, really – of clarifying the fundamental distinction between problems and quandaries: Problems can be solved; quandaries must be lived with.

Nearly half a century ago, a group of successful entrepreneurs and scientists came together to try to get a handle on what they called “the world problematique”, that is, “poverty in the midst of plenty; degradation of the environment; loss of faith in institutions; uncontrolled urban spread; insecurity of employment; alienation of youth; rejection of traditional values; and inflation and other monetary and economic disruptions.” (Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth*, 10) Forty-four years later, we are forced to recognize that not a single one of the component issues of “the world problematique” has been solved or even substantially ameliorated. Indeed, all have worsened, despite concerted and costly efforts to deal with them, both nationally and internationally.

Why have these efforts failed? One reason is that a powerful underlying problem, rapid population growth, has never received nearly the attention it deserves, so we’ve sort of been running in place instead of moving forward. The primary reason, however, is that we’ve focused our efforts on specific parts of “the problematique” and ignored its deeper

cause. It was so much easier that way. To address the root cause would involve questioning how we view the world, reexamining our most fundamental assumptions, and placing at risk accepted truths -- in short, a paradigm shift. To pull that off requires profound insight, uncommon courage, and a lucky juxtaposition of events.

So, then, the root of “the world problematique” and its accompanying quandaries is nothing less than the fatally flawed dominant paradigm or world view of modernity. Now, of course, it’s very hard to perceive the flaws in your own dominant paradigm and even harder to replace it with a new one, but the sobering truth is that’s the only way left open to us. Quandaries can play that kind of trick on you. The good news is that many original thinkers – Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Camus, Aldo Leopold, William Ophuls, and Herman Daly, just to mention a few who’ve had an impact on me – have provided us with most of the profound insights we need. The bad news is that the uncommon courage and the lucky juxtaposition of events have yet to manifest themselves.

While we’re waiting, it’s important for us to see how we got saddled with this defective paradigm in the first place. Our dominant paradigm is the product of what we in the West call The Enlightenment, the 18th century culmination of the Renaissance. In broad terms, the Renaissance was the refocussing of Western society’s central concern from the City of God to the City of Man, that is, from the next life to the life at hand. The Enlightenment was, in a way, a second wave of the Renaissance that narrowed the focus further from humankind to human reason. Human reason, according to the Enlightenment, would inevitably produce useful knowledge and progress, that is, greater and greater domination of the natural world for human benefit. Which we’ve proceeded to do, especially here in the United States, the paragon of Enlightenment civilization, but, by diffusion, throughout the world. It’s that modern attitude – that we humans are somehow separate from and

superior to the natural world, and that it exists merely to supply our needs and wants – that has given rise to “the world problematique”.

Along with the Renaissance, Western society saw the emergence of another powerful set of ideas and attitudes that we refer to today as capitalism. This economic system focusing on profit intertwined with the radical individualism of the Reformation and coevolved with the Enlightenment’s emphasis on progress through reason and the domination of the natural world for human ends. What resulted were the unprecedented technological advances that, in turn, have opened the way to ever greater assaults on the natural world, both as we strip away its resources and as we shunt our wastes into its air and waters. Until our dominant paradigm shifts to one that properly places us within the web of life, not apart from it, we will continue this spoliation of the natural world, inviting its massive retaliation against us.

Perhaps the one faint glow on this bleak horizon is that what is a quandary within one paradigm may become a series of difficult but solvable problems within another. Which is why we must never abandon hope. The way I see it, we just never know enough to give up hope. Things happen. And sometimes things happen in such a way that they can open utterly new, entirely unforeseen opportunities. We can only take intelligent advantage of such opportunities if we are prepared to act, and we can only be prepared to act if we allow hope to sustain us as we continue to struggle against the quandaries confronting us.

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Ajarn Ben's Southeast Asian Analyses Still Enlighten

Philip Cunningham
Bangkok Post, 15 Dec 2015

When I studied with Benedict Anderson at Cornell University in 1974, he seemed the quintessential absent-minded professor; at once erudite and bookish, idealistic and dreamy-eyed. The fact that he had just been kicked out of Indonesia only added to his aura. Giving lectures about coups and counter-coups and revolutionary martyrs, he'd pace the front of the classroom in clunky boots and mismatched outfits, captivating class attention with his soft but mellifluous Irish-accented voice.

Ajarn Ben, as he is affectionately known here, was one of Cornell's most accomplished professors, and he was too self-effacing to play the role of academic rock star. Still, I think he had a good deal in common with John Lennon. He was a dreamer with prodigious powers of imagination. Like Lennon, he was at once outrageous and shy, artistic and political. Both were gadflies and contrarians, successful by conventional social standards, yet quick to attack the establishment and advocate for poor and dispossessed.

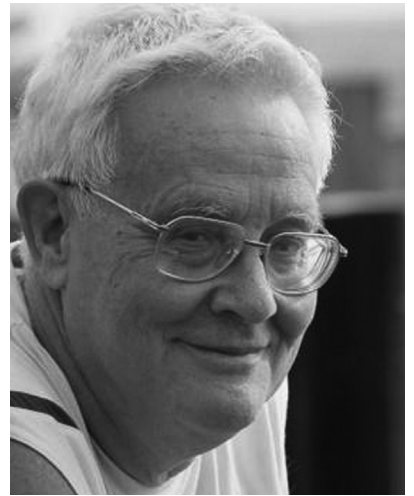
While Lennon dreamed of a world with no countries in *Imagine*, Ajarn Ben however couldn't imagine a world without countries. He was deeply fascinated by nationalism, despite it being corrosive of his own utopian beliefs. On the positive side, nationalism could transcend race,

and hold a disparate nation together, as he documents in his magisterial book: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*.

Ajarn Ben was openly leftist in his political views, but consistently curious about the way other people thought and deeply empathetic with underdogs regardless of ideology.

It came as no surprise that he should be pleased when the progressive Puey Ungphakorn, former rector of Thammasat University, came to Ithaca, New York after a narrow escape from Thailand in the aftermath of the Oct 6, 1976 military crackdown. What was more telling about Ajarn Ben's bandwidth as a scholar, however, was his equally gracious reception of a Thai government spokesman around the same time. He later told me he felt sorry for the tongue-tied spokesman, for it was a thankless job to defend the indefensible.

In a similar vein, Ajarn Ben would rail against the evils of the US government but would extend courteous welcome to spies and intelligence analysts. Even in the heyday of "CIA off-campus!" he was willing to share his insights with all takers. At a Southeast Asia Programme dinner party, he introduced me to a visitor, saying "I'd like you to meet my friend, she works for the CIA. I'm not joking."



It is also telling that at a time when Cornell University offered courses in "Peace Studies" taught by Pentagon-inspired number-crunchers and nuclear war strategists, the steadfastly anti-imperialist Ajarn Ben was alone in offering a course in "Military Dictatorships". When I asked him why he would want to dwell on something so negative, he answered, "Most countries in the world are run by the military, so if you want to understand the real world you have to understand that".

To the extent that the utopian and socialist leanings of his youth did not comport with the reality of a world where nationalism trumped ideology, and where his beloved Indonesia tore itself apart at the seams, he was intellectually courageous enough to challenge his own received knowledge.

Even as *Imagined Communities* became one of the most-referenced books in political science, Ajarn Ben wearied of academia, suggesting that "real genius resides elsewhere". If the repetitive cycles of politics and academic fashion bored him, he never lost his enthusiasm for art. He tackled the Thai language at

age forty and co-authored a book on Thai short stories with his Thai instructor, Ruchira Mendiones. Not one to rest on his laurels, he then tackled Spanish in order to read Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* in the original.

A good-humoured gentleman and an iconoclastic scholar, Ajarn Ben was a maverick and a searcher for truth in all kinds of wrapping, shapes and sizes. As his chosen field of political science drifted into an increasingly quantitative, theoretical direction, he pivoted to language and culture, looking for nuggets of truth in small places. He saw the up-turned bowl of a single Buddhist monk refusing alms from the military in Myanmar as radical rebuke on a par with socialist rebellion. He was endlessly fascinated with brilliant, lonely minds too far ahead of their time for their own good, be it Thailand's Jit Phumisak, or the Philippines' Jose Rizal. Both men were martyrs, targeted

for their ideas.

In more recent years he became an avid film watcher. He invited me to a screening of Pridi Banomyong's *King of the White Elephant* in Bangkok, and back in Ithaca, he extolled the quirky, quiet contemporary films of Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Films can capture a child's wide-eyed wonder at neglected aspects of the everyday world, a wide-eyed wonder I think he shared.

It gave me great pleasure to reconnect with my favourite professor over the years, sometimes in Bangkok, sometimes in Ithaca. When I was teaching at Chulalongkorn University, I was especially proud when he came to speak to my class. When I returned to Cornell as a visiting fellow, many years later, he invited me to his home and we socialised as colleagues, but I always felt a mere

student in his presence.

With the rise of divisive colour-coded politics in Thailand, I was not always in agreement with my old professor, and I think for this reason we tended to speak more about China when we met. China vexed him to no end, but Ajarn Ben's humour was the saving grace of many a conversation.

On Oct 27, 2015, Ajarn Ben gave what turned out to be his valedictory remarks at Cornell University after half a century of enriching the university community. During a lengthy introduction to the Filipina novelist Gina Apostol, he explored the relationship between art and truth, citing *Act of Killing* by Joshua Oppenheimer as an exemplary documentary examination of the brutal political violence in 1965 Indonesia.

The topic was close to Ajarn Ben's heart -- his own writing on the topic earned him persona non grata status in Indonesia until the end of the Suharto era. I think the tragicomedy of the deeply atmospheric, sometimes whimsical film, cut close to the professor's oft-expressed appreciation for humour and irony in a world full of tears.

Ajarn Ben died in Indonesia, the country that banished him for 26 years. He was visiting Java on a journey that was eventually to take him to his winter home in Taling Chan, Bangkok. Born in China, raised in Ireland, educated in England and tenured in America, Benedict Anderson gently bowed out from the world in Indonesia, the very place that sparked a passion for Southeast Asian studies.



A Buddhist Ceremony to dedicated merit for the late Ajaen Benedict Anderson at Wat thongnoppakun, Klongsan, Bangkok on December 23, 2015

Dear Moo,

Thanks for responding so quickly.

I would love to meet you in Bangkok between your Sri Lankan trips. I will be in Nan from the 4th until the 18th, but I could fly down for a day. Maybe I could also see Ajarn Sulak at that time as well.

I need to check with my friend in Nan (Samruay Phadphon) who is helping me with a program for six students. I have to be sure he is okay if I am not there for a day, but I think it will be fine. I do need to be in Nan on Jan 9 because Ruay's daughter is getting married that day. I have known her since she was one!

I would like to talk with you about my ideas for a new research project looking more comparatively at Buddhism and the environment. Most of the academic work done is somewhat superficial and makes general arguments about how Buddhism is interpreted and used. I would like to compare Mahayana in East Asia (probably South Korea, which is quite active), Vajrayana in the Himalayas (Bhutan would be good, but I also have connections with Tibetans, both in Kham and in India), with the Theravada approaches of Siam and maybe Cambodia. I'm curious about Burma as well, but I know the situation there is complicated in a different way.

I'm interested in whether, how, and to what degree Buddhism is being used to support or encourage environmental actions, and whether any of the Sangha are involved. I would need to compare the environmental and economic situations in each place as well, so it's a huge project. I will need to find collaborators who speak each language as well.

I know you have been working on environmental issues in several places, and I would appreciate getting your perspectives on this topic and how I might go about it.

Are there days when you are in Bangkok that would be better for you to meet?

Best,

Pi Sue

Sue Darlington

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School of Critical Social Inquiry Hampshire College,
893 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002 413-559-5600
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Dear Sulak,

It has been far too long since we have been in touch, but I do keep up with you through the magazine and through news from Alan and others. I am glad you are well and that aging has not stopped you from your important activities at home and abroad. Your life continues to be a model of engagement and commitment for future generations.

Jim and I are also doing well. I continue with my peacebuilding work as a consultant now, having turned the leadership of Karuna Center and my regular teaching role over to the next generation. Like you, we are also still blessed with the physical and mental capacity to be of service and are grateful for the years of good health and energy. I have worked in Sri Lanka and Nepal frequently, but have not been to your area in many years.

I am writing to you because I recommended your name to my colleague who is the Secretary General of Toda Foundation in Japan. Next February they are having a conference of Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish leaders to speak of the roots of pacifism and social engagement in their faiths. I thought you would be the best Buddhist to speak on this and they have sent you an invitation. I know you have your own strong connections in Japan, and thought that might add interest for you in being part of this Toda gathering. I will also be present and would very much enjoy spending time with you.

With deep appreciation for your work and life, and very best personal regards.

Warm regards,

Paula Green

Founder of Karuna Center for Peacebuilding &
Founder of the CONTACT Programs,
School for International Training

Dear Sulak Sivaraksa,

I was very nice to meet and talk to you at the Conference on Buddhism in the Mekong Region a couple of weeks ago in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. I enjoyed learning from your clear and precise statements. Thanks.

As a sociologist I appreciate your social approach to Buddhism. I coincide with your thinking Buddhism is eminently social and that as such its action dimension is paramount.

A brief note to mention that learning about INEB and its activities is letting me see more clearly the many possibilities for Buddhism as a global force contributing to better future societies.

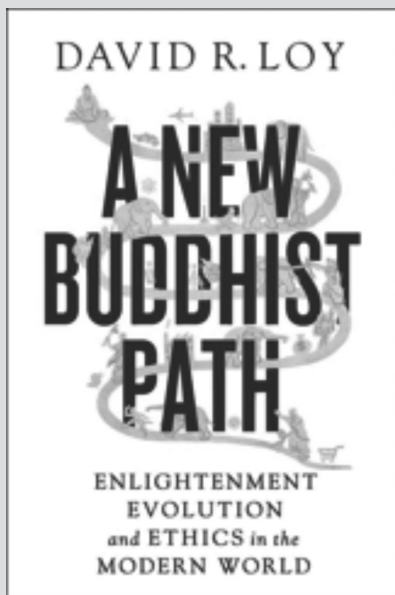
I look forward to learning more about INEB and its activities. I will be happy to collaborate.

I look forward to meeting you again in the near future. In the meantime I remain at your disposition if I can be of any help.

Sincerely yours. With Metta.

Jose Antonio Rodriguez Diaz, Dr., PhD

Professor of Sociology, University of Barcelona, Spain
jarodriguez@ub.edu



In Search of a Communist Bodhisattva

Soravis Jayanama

Book review: David Loy, *A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment Evolution and Ethics in the Modern World* (Boston: Wisdom Press, 2015)

Can there be a communist bodhisattva? What about a militant (in the original sense of the term as someone who runs the full-mile), revolutionary bodhisattva? If a bodhisattva isn't anti-capitalist, can s/he authentically be a bodhisattva? Does communism best articulate a bodhisattva's anti-capitalism? And what will the communist bodhisattva's version of Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach be? Will it be something like this: Buddhists have only practiced meditation so as to be fully awake in the capitalist world; the point however is to force a disrupting awakening and change the world?

Hasn't meditation transformed into a truly ideological and therefore safe practice? Isn't it a way to help one escape back into reality as it is? Isn't it a practice that is possible and achievable within capitalism? In an online article published by *Business Insider* entitled "14 Things Successful

People Do Before Breakfast," meditation is on the list. Here "successful people" means the world's richest folks, the plutocrats. The article claims, "Before they head out the door, many successful people devote themselves to a spiritual practice such as meditation or prayer to center themselves for the rush of the day."

These are some of the questions that troubled my mind while reading David Loy's *A New Buddhist Path*. Loy is neither a Marxist nor a communist. He's a Zen teacher. Above all, he probably doesn't want to be put into any ideological pigeon-hole. But there are good reasons for communists, leftists, radical thinkers, and progressives to appreciate his work.

Loy grapples with an old problem that has long bedeviled (secular) radical thinkers and revolutionaries: the equivocal status of religion in social change. Is religion a barrier to social change? Or can it

also serve as a ground for social emancipation?

For his part, Loy seeks to re-invent Buddhism for the 21st century. It must undertake changes to be able to cope with the multifaceted challenges of the modern world. It will be a Buddhism that is concerned equally about personal as well as social transformation, which must be seen as the two sides of the same coin. This is because we are inter-relational beings, which means that we cannot afford to "be indifferent to what is happening to others and the world generally" (7).

Put another way, it will be a Buddhism that fuses the best of the West with the best of the East. Loy writes, "The highest ideal of the modern Western tradition has been to restructure our societies so they become more socially just. The most important Buddhist goal is to awaken and (to use the Zen phrase) realize one's true nature" (7).

As such, it will be a Buddhism

that doesn't serve as "the opium of the people" (as Marx put it of religion), that doesn't help to stabilize or sugarcoat the unjust social order. Rather it will help to pave the way toward an alternative, oppositional, and possibly better order. As Loy provokingly asks, "Is Western Buddhism being commodified and co-opted into a self-help stress-reduction program that adapts to institutionalized *dukkha*, leaving practitioners atomized and powerless? Or is modern Buddhism opening up new perspectives and possibilities that challenge us to transform ourselves and our societies, so that they become more socially just and ecologically sustainable?" (129-30) Of course, he points to the necessity of the latter.

Loy's modern Buddhism fully recognizes the "need to understand and address [the] social causes" of suffering. Reading between the lines, central to the social causes of suffering is capitalism.

Back in the 1930s Max Horkheimer declared, "If you don't want to talk about capitalism, then you should keep silent about Fascism." Today, if Buddhists don't want to talk about the social causes of suffering—and especially if they don't want to talk about capitalism—then they should keep silent about ending suffering nonviolently. (Loy doesn't call a spade a spade, however: he calls capitalism, "the economic challenge.") In this sense, Buddhists should also talk about communism, since it is originally

an alternative to capitalism.

Anyone interested in non-violence must talk about capitalism too—particularly focusing on its "slow" and systemic violence. Todd May nicely defines nonviolence "as political, economic, or social activity that challenges or resists a current political, economic or social arrangement while respecting the dignity... of its participants, adversaries and others."¹

As an atheist with scant knowledge of Buddhism, I am not in the position to intelligently engage with Loy's reinterpretations of Buddhist concepts, teachings, and practices. But as someone who knows a bit about politics and political philosophy, I shall engage with his work at the point of intersection between religion and emancipatory politics.

Indeed, Loy shows that religion need not be the "opium of the people." Leftists who haven't become political turncoats or melancholics must never forget this valuable insight. At the very least because Marx, Engels, and Lenin, to name a few, had long ago recognized religion's ambivalent status, an argument to which we return below. Thus leftists must not write off religious-based groups and movements as possible allies in the struggle against alienation, capital's domination and climate change. This can be part of our common struggle.

Conversely, Buddhists who want to engender authentic social transformation must also learn to

see communists and unrepentant leftists as possible allies. Equally important, they may even want to be communist. Why? Perhaps because only communists and leftists still assert that an alternative to capitalism is possible and that it is possible to organize society on the basis of equality; that is, a society not (completely) dominated by the rich and powerful. Decades of anti-communist and neoliberal propaganda may make it difficult to appreciate this fact, however.

On the other hand, conservatives may talk about change, but what they really want is a change of no change—a change in which social inequality and hierarchy is maintained, if not reinforced.

Liberals may talk about change, but they are really looking for minor tinkering in the capitalist system, not systemic change. As Bill Livant once observed, "A liberal sees a beggar on the street and says the system is not working. A Marxist sees a beggar on the street and says it is."²

Capitalists talk about change all the time in order to hide the fact that capitalism is the only game in town. They may even speak of revolution, but it is really reduced to a new way of vacuuming the room or washing the car. Nicole Aschoff observes how the most vociferous critics of capitalism today aren't workers and precariats but the super-rich like Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. However, they aren't demanding an end to capitalism but simply "a different kind of capitalism."³

Fascist-populists talk of correcting the mess in society, but it is often explained away as resulting from a ‘foreign agent’ (the immigrant, the homosexual, the ethnic minority, etc.) who corrupted society rather than a flaw inherent to the system.

NGOs also want to change the world but many—if not most—of them have steered clear from class struggle or antagonizing capital. For instance, they are anti-poverty instead of anti-wealth, demand superficial gender equality instead of fighting against the enclosure of the commons, etc. As Arundhati Roy asserts, many NGOs are “turning potential revolutionaries into salaried activists, funding artists, intellectuals, and filmmakers, gently luring them from radical confrontation...”⁴

American neoconservatives and liberal imperialists also speak of world transformation if only to mean the entrenchment of US global dominance. And so on.

There are several specific points that I disagree with Loy, but I will not dwell at great length on them. Let me just point out a few.

Before fusing the best of the West with that of Buddhism, the lost cause of emancipation must first be defended. We are truly in dark times for emancipatory thoughts—where alternatives to capitalism are condemned as irresponsible, unnecessary and impossible. How will Buddhism defend this lost cause, struggle

against the post-political present at the so-called end of History?

“[A] politics based on love” (131) may send off a feel-good vibe, but isn’t it really meaningless? Why? For the basic reason that, as the philosopher Alain Badiou puts it, “there are people in politics one doesn’t love...That’s undeniable, nobody can expect us to love them.”⁵ The people whom one doesn’t and cannot be expected to love in politics are the real enemy. Badiou defines an enemy as “an individual you won’t tolerate taking decisions on anything that impacts on yourself.”⁶ Real politics always identifies the real enemy. (However, identification of the real enemy is not the same as a license to kill him or her.) Thus the injunction to love one’s enemy not only doesn’t make sense but is also un-political. Perhaps one is able to love an enemy because s/he isn’t the real enemy, because one has failed to identify the real enemy.

Can there be emancipatory dualisms or binaries? Instead of simply combatting dualism, don’t we also need to assert emancipatory ones? For instance, ultimately must we distinguish between real and fake changes, real and fake actions, real and false choices? And why not between real and fake enemies? If we don’t draw the line, will there ever be a turning point?

Wasn’t creating a new kind of human (i.e., personal transformation) already a fundamental part of every secular revolution? Also, revolutionaries always had to ‘steel’ themselves or develop moral cour-

age because rebellion is an act that is “lonely, frightening and hard. The crowd condemns you. The state brands you a traitor. You struggle with your own fears and doubts. The words you speak are often not understood. And you are never certain if your words and actions, in the end, will make any difference.”⁷

Isn’t there a risk of turning ethics into something ‘infinitely demanding’? For instance, won’t it give rise to a malicious ‘master’ or superego that declares you to be forever guilty, that makes demands that cannot be possibly met and taunts or demeans you for being unable to achieve them? Might one get off on always feeling guilty or impotent?

It is still unclear what kind of politics Loy’s modern Buddhism will translate into. Will it be up for grasp?

Nevertheless, his work is an important reminder that in terms of social emancipation, Buddhism or religion may serve as a platform, and not a barrier. As mentioned above, great revolutionaries and radical thinkers in the past as well as the present have pointed to religion’s ambivalent status. Perhaps a few snapshots will suffice.

Engels attended church and noticed that the priest’s sermon contained radical messages against the ruling class, especially if read between the lines. This led him to study the involvement of the radical preacher and theologian Thomas Munzer in the outbreak of the

“peasant war” in Germany in the 16th century.

While in London, Lenin and his wife regularly attended church, especially the ‘socialist’ ones frequented by workers. He enjoyed the worker-led discussions in church.

More importantly perhaps is Marx’s own phrase “the opium of the people.” It’s a popular phrase but most people may not know its actual context—e.g., what comes before and after this phrase. If we situate the phrase in its context, we may be better able to grasp Marx’s view on religion. (The same goes for the famous slogan by Mao: “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”)

So what did Marx say?

“Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”

Notice that Marx appreciated religion as the expression of as well as protest against real suffering. It can also serve as the heart and soul of our heartless and soulless world. So far, so good. What of “the opium of the people”?

I find Roland Boer’s close analysis of the central term “opium” convincing. He writes that it has “a profound multivalence in Marx’s usage. For opium was both a cheap curse of the poor and a vital medicine, a source of addiction and of inspiration for poets, writers, and artists, the basis of colonial exploitation (in the British empire) and of the economic conditions that allowed Marx and Engels to continue their work relatively unmolested; in short, it ranged all the way from blessed medicine to recreational curse.”⁸

Boer continues, “That Marx himself was a regular user of opium increases the complexity of the term in this text. Along with ‘medicines,’ such as arsenic and creosote, Marx imbibed opium to

deal with his carbuncles, liver problems, toothaches, eye pain, ear aches, bronchial coughs, and so on....”⁹ In sum, although not a panacea, opium may be something that is useful for the people.

Likewise, Lenin had called religion “a sort of spiritual booze.” Again, Boer nicely explains the implication of the term “spiritual booze”: “Relief for the weary, succor to the oppressed, inescapable social mediator, it is also a source of addiction, dulling of the senses, and dissipater of strength and resolve.”¹⁰

Or more recently Slavoj Žižek claims that “A truly logical materialism accepts the basic insight of religion, its premise that our commonsense reality is not the true one; what it rejects is the conclusion that, therefore, there must be another, ‘higher,’ suprasensible reality.”¹¹

In sum, there’s nothing fundamentally wrong with religion being “the opium of the people.” Put differently, ‘Religion or emancipation? Yes please!’

¹Todd May, *Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction* (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, USA: Polity Press, 2015), p. 59.

²Quoted in Bertell Ollman, *How to Take an Exam...and Remake the World* (Montreal, New York and London: Black Rose Books, 2001), p. 95.

³Nicole Aschoff, *The New Prophets of Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p. 9.

⁴Arundhati Roy, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), p. 34.

⁵Alain Badiou and Nicolas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2012), p. 57.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 58.

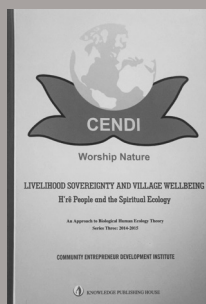
⁷Chris Hedges, *Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt* (New York: Nation Books, 2015), p. 215.

⁸Roland Boer, *Lenin, Religion, and Theology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 14.

⁹*Ibid.*

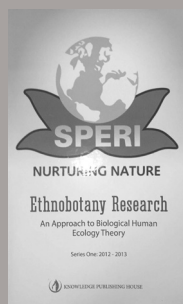
¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA, and London, England: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 240.



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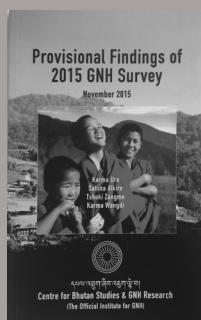
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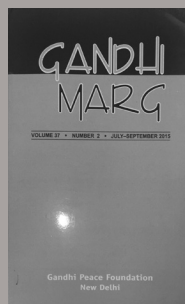
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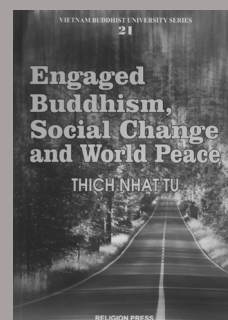
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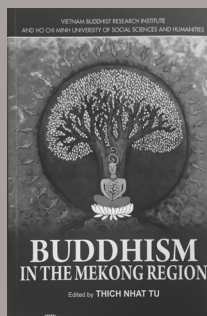
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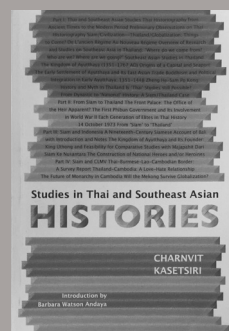
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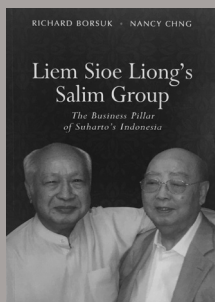
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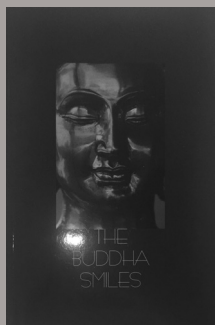
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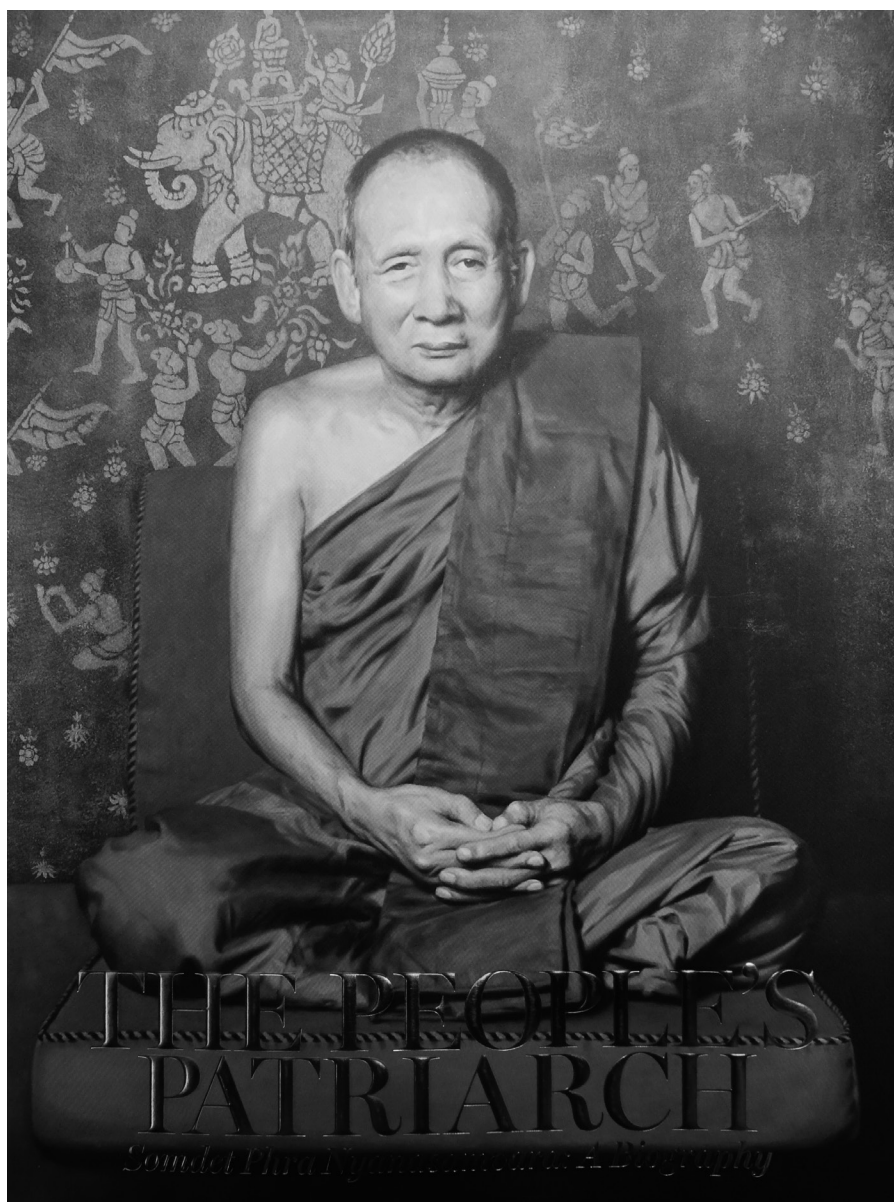
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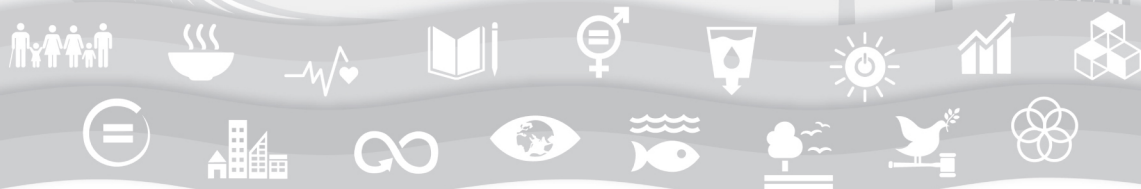


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