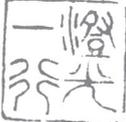


# SEEDS OF PEACE

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Call me by  
my true  
names

  
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*In Memory of Our Teacher Thich Nhat Hanh*

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## Editorial Note

### Dear Friends of INEB,

This is the first issue of the New Year – 2022, in which we celebrate the life and practice of our dear patron and teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh who passed away on January 22, 2022. We have learned so much from Thay over the years and honor him during this issue. Tributes written by our close friends and members about Thay are being shared in these pages. Also visit INEB’s website (<https://www.inebnetwork.org/thich-nhat-hahn-in-memoriam/>) to read all expressions of gratitude and appreciation about him.

You will be interested to read the country reports with diverse information about peacemaker’s dialogue in Bangladesh, monks teaching sexuality education in Bhutan, how dreams of higher education in Myanmar are being killed, the Dalai Lama’s message to COP26, and more. Also, see some news about INEB’s projects and the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM).

The Articles section offers pieces on diverse topics that begins with *What Is Sangha?* by Thich Nhat Hanh, essential

teaching to more deeply understanding our community of Kalyanamitra (“spiritual friendship”). Bobo Lwin shared his introspective article about developing a socially engaged spiritual response to the climate crisis. Within the international community of Buddhists, the nuns of Plum Village in France are experiencing a revolution with more than half of the monastic practitioners being women. In her article, bell hooks concludes that “it is only love that transforms our personal relationships and heals the wounds of oppression” as she traces her 30-year meditation on love, power, and Buddhism. Jonathan Watts shares perspectives about reconsidering the sustainable development goals in the light of grassroots socially engaged Buddhism. The Articles section ends with *A Metta Prayer* and a reflection by our advisor and Abbot of the Berkely Zen Center, Hozan Alan Senauke.

Congratulations to Father Michael Lapsley, SSM, of South Africa for receiving the 39th Niwano Peace Prize in recognition of his efforts against apartheid and social discrimination, as well as his support for South Africa’s liberation movement and other peacebuilding efforts. In February 2019, Father Michael gave the SEM Annual Lecture *Redeeming the Past – A Journey from a Freedom Fighter to Healer*, after which he traveled to Myanmar where he gave training to INEB’s partners on the healing of memories.

Please read the book reviews of *Silencing of a Laotian Son* by Ng Shui Meng which poignantly narrates the life and disappearance of Sombath Somphone, the author’s husband.

We also honor the passing of notable teachers and supporters, Saneh Chamarik, Sathianpong Wannapok, Paula Green who was a former member of INEB’s steering committee, Charles ‘Biff’ Keyes, and others.

Also, beginning in 2022, two editions of the *Seeds of Peace* will be published each year instead of three. Each edition will be available on INEB’s website and some content will also be shared in INEB’s monthly newsletter. If you are interested in receiving INEB’s monthly newsletter, please send an email to the INEB Coordinator, [coordinator@inebnetwork.org](mailto:coordinator@inebnetwork.org).

We are looking forward to seeing some of you at INEB’s 20th international conference scheduled for October 23 – 30, 2022, which is being hosted by the Jungto Society in South Korea. More information will be posted soon on INEB’s website, social media, and other media outlets.



## Bangladesh

# Peacemaker's Dialogue on Building a Peaceful and Inclusive Bangladesh

By Sanat Kumar Barua



A celebration of Bangladesh's 50 year and golden jubilee of Independence was held on December 31, 2021, at the Chattogram Press Club (Sultan Ahmed Auditorium). The Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust Bangladesh & Religious and Traditional Peacemakers-Bangladesh organized the round table dialogue on Building a Peaceful and Inclusive Bangladesh to commemorate the anniversary. A total of 55 local peacebuilders from the heroic freedom fighters, educationalists, political leaders, development activists, religious and traditional peacemakers participated in the dialogue.

The participants discussed the nation's progress toward building a peaceful and inclusive Bangladesh where every citizen would enjoy: constitutional and basic fundamental rights; feel valued; participate in decision making processes; meaningfully engage youth and women; ensure quality education; reduce discrimination, religious motivated tensions and violence; build trust; connectivity; encouraging

young learners in multi-religious literacy; promote national historic cultural values; engage in social innovations; have sustainable development; embrace mindful religious teachings in achieving well-being for humanity; and best practice of spiritual learning.

The speakers highlighted that although independence was the nation's highest achievement, we have a long way to go in order to build a peaceful and inclusive Bangladesh which was the core objective of independence. Developing a long term strategic plan is needed to establish a just society, where all men, women and children enjoy the basic fundamental needs, equality and justice, political, economic and social achievements in their respective way of life. This plan needs to clarify the role of the religious and traditional peacemakers in achieving collective goals from individuals, families and communities across the country. Approaches to implement the strategic plan need to represent the needs of local to state level institutions.

The speakers suggested submitting the findings and recommendations to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh to be added to and implemented with state level policies. The discussion among the various traditions of peacemakers was lively with commitments made to work jointly in meaningful ways reaching a diverse group of people that will work for a better Bangladesh. Professor Tushar Kanti Barua, Chairman, Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust Bangladesh presided over the dialogue session. Among the participants Professor. Dr. Mohammed Sakendhar Chowdhury, Professor. Ranjit Kumer Dey, Professor. Rita Dutta, Prof. Dr. Bikiran Prasad Barua, Rev Asai Tripura, Iqbal Bahar Sabery were the remarkable speakers of the dialogue. The keynote paper on Building a Peaceful and Inclusive Bangladesh that described- our achievements and expectations was submitted by Sanat Kumar Barua, General Secretary, Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust Bangladesh and national coordinator, Religious and Traditional Peacemakers- Bangladesh.

The following observations and recommendations were made regarding building a peaceful and inclusive Bangladesh:

1) *Observation:* Local peacemakers' efforts would be organized, meaningful and equipped for building a secular, democratic and peaceful Bangladesh embracing the state constitution in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice, political, economic and social rights are secured for all its citizens.

*Recommendation:* It needs more collaboration and networking with the government, local and international bodies.

2) *Observation:* In the last fifty years national achievements in social, economic, public health care, education, infrastructure, communication systems etc., have achieved more. However, sustainable policies, people's expectation and participation, moral and materialistic development are absent. In order to support national interest, sometimes religious or social values are not practiced to: reduce corruption, prevent exploiting the population, misuse national resources, wealth, state power which are against people's will and independence.

*Recommendation:* It is urgently needed to motivate the people to build a patriotic, value-based society and apply the best use of religious teachings rather than practicing religions as the tool of self-interest or for pursuing state power.

3) *Observation:* Changes to the primary level national education system urgently needed, because currently religious learning generates divisions; leads to religious motivated supremacy and, hate crimes; is discriminatory rather than generating love, empathy, respect and so on.

*Recommendation:* Designing an early childhood value-based education system and multi-religious literacy within Bangladesh's primary level education system. Also examine education policies in other South Asian countries.

4) *Observation:* Societal peace and sustainability are the main tools for national progress and development.

*Recommendation:* The participants emphasized developing a long-term strategic plan to equip and engage in social actions, sustainable development issues, positive change, innovative ways

that encourage youth and women to be included, and also to encourage the unlike minded people in respecting their constructing views through dialogue and motivation.

5) *Observation:* Radicalization, religiously motivated tension, intolerance, and violent conflict frequently occur now adays in Bangladesh.

*Recommendation:* An action plan is needed to identify the root causes and social actions to reduce conflict on a small scale.

6) *Observation:* The peacemakers prioritized practicing inclusivity in every stage of state levels. But it is regrettable that it is not customized in the present situation.

*Recommendation:* It should take proper steps within government and non-government levels to meet people's

expectations, respect their uniqueness, diversity and make them feel valued within a just and peaceful society.

7) *Observation:* The peacemakers argued that our expectation of independence is to build a just and peaceful Bangladesh where everybody enjoys dignified, equitable opportunities and no one is left behind.

*Recommendation:* It needs a long-term strategic plan and eagerly wishes to contribute individually and collectively along with the government to promote an Inclusive Bangladesh for the people.

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*Sanat Kumar Barua* is a member of INEB's Executive Committee and can be reached at sanat.ads@gmail.com.

Modified from the original.



Bhutan

## Sexuality Education is Among Teachings by Monks in Bhutan

23 August 2021

Source: **United Nations Population Fund**

<https://www.unfpa.org/news/sexuality-education-among-teachings-monks-bhutan>

**Thimphu, Bhutan** – For centuries, the tenth day of the month has been celebrated in temples and monasteries throughout the mainly Buddhist Himalayan kingdom with religious mask dances performed as part of tshechu (“day ten”) festivals. Today, these traditional dances include messages on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence –

topics once considered taboo.

“There has been a change in the mindset of monks, who now freely discuss and advocate on issues of sexual and gender-based violence, which in the past were perceived as a private matter,” explained Lopen Sherab Dorji of the Central Monastic Body, one of the first monks in Bhutan to participate in a life skills education training conducted by



UNFPA. (“Lopen” is a title of respect.)

The agency had already engaged with religious leaders as far back as 2011, beginning with the Bhutan Nuns Foundation. Over the last decade, more than 1,500 nuns from 26 nunneries have been sensitized on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues and gender-based violence prevention.

“Nuns have played a crucial role by imparting critical health knowledge to rural women on issues such as the importance of a pap smear, menstrual hygiene, contraceptives and family planning, and have thus gained the trust, respect and confidence of the community,” said Nun Lhamo.

Since 2014, when UNFPA expanded its work on life skills-based comprehensive sexuality education to include male monks, 350 heads of monastic institutions have been trained on imparting life skills education. The approach “has helped demystify the perception that monks should not talk about women’s health and related issues,” said Lopen Sherab Dorji. Almost 50 monks trained by UNFPA provide counselling services to students across Bhutan’s 20 districts.

Throughout Bhutan, monks (like here in Trashi Yangtse District are teaching young people sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence.

© UNFPA Bhutan/Tshering Penjor

### Driving change

Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Galyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, has driven this change. As a UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador and 2020 United Nations Population Award laureate, she has championed reproductive health and rights of women and girls for two decades, reaching out to every part of society – from religious groups to the military to schools and government agencies – to raise awareness on gender equality and issues that have come to include HIV/AIDS prevention and family planning. In the 1990s, His Holiness the Je Khenpo Trulku Jigme Choedra (Chief Abbot of Bhutan) pronounced contraception was not against Buddhist principles, in no small part to her advocacy.

The partnership with religious leaders has contributed to advancements in sexual and reproductive health services over time. Maternal mortality

UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Galyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, has advocated for reproductive health and rights of women and girls for more than 20 years.

Photo courtesy of Pema Tshering

has dropped from a high of 380 in 1994 to 89 per 100,000 live births in 2017. Contraceptive use rate rose from 30.7 per cent in 2000 to 65.6 per cent in 2018. And over 95 per cent of births are now delivered by skilled birth attendants, as opposed to 23 per cent in 2000.

Thousands of young people are now being taught how to improve interpersonal relationships and lead healthier lifestyles.

“I look forward to imparting the skills and knowledge I have learnt when community members come to my monastery to offer prayers,” said Lopen Karma from Dungmin village in Pemagatshel District. “I also intend to engage primary schoolchildren on menstrual hygiene, teenage pregnancy, and advocate on the need to support one other.”

S

# Military Coup Kills Higher Education Dreams in Myanmar

*With a deteriorating situation at home, many Myanmar youth are trying to study abroad, but face new hurdles in their way.*

By **Emily Fishbein and Nu Nu Lusan**

Published 3 November 2021

Source: *Al Jazeera* - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/3/military-coup-kills-higher-education-dreams-in-myanmar>

When the Myanmar military seized power on February 1, Deborah's plans to study abroad fell apart.

Last year, the 21-year-old won a conditional place at a university in the United States, pending submission of her transcripts. She requested them from the Ministry of Education in December and was informed they would be ready in early February. But within days of the coup, civil servants walked off the job, and Deborah is still

waiting for the paperwork.

"Because of the coup, [my transcripts] still aren't in my hands until now and my plan got cancelled," she said.

Deborah is not the only one whose dreams of studying overseas have been derailed.

The coup has left Myanmar's higher education system, already among the world's weakest, in shambles. As domestic opportunities to study

dwindle, the economy collapses, and killings, torture and arrests multiply, studying abroad has offered a ray of hope for many young people. But numerous obstacles lie in their way.

"When we talk about education, everything has been stuck in Myanmar," said Bawi Za, a student from Chin State who has been unable to travel to the US to attend the master's programme for which he received a scholarship. "It is kind of hopeless for Myanmar youth and Myanmar students."

*Al Jazeera* has used pseudonyms for the young people quoted in this article to protect them from possible reprisals.

## Shutdown

When the military first seized power in Myanmar in 1962, it dragged the country into a half-century of impoverishment and isolation, which had devastating effects on higher education.

The generals heavily censored access to information and tightly controlled the country's universities by imposing rote learning models and even shutting down institutions for extended periods.

The number of people from Myanmar trying to study in some foreign countries appears to be increasing according to data from foreign diplomatic missions.

[Stringer/Reuters]





An organisation of Myanmar students from India's Mizoram state, hold a candle vigil to pay tribute to people who died in Myanmar after the military coup.

[File: Anushree Fadnavis/Reuters]

In 1988, student-led protests which swept the country were not only met by deadly violence and mass arrests; universities in Yangon, the biggest city, were closed for 10 of the next 12 years.

Those years saw thousands of students head to the country's remote border areas to train as revolutionary fighters alongside ethnic armed organisations, and the February coup has led some down a similar path.

"Many educated people and professionals left their bright futures to serve [the revolution]," said Thomas, a violinist who had been preparing to apply to music colleges in the US when the military seized power. In February, he performed protest songs during mass

street demonstrations. Now he has traded his violin for a gun.

"[My education] plans have stopped now because of the military coup. For now, I am in the jungle," he said. "I am carrying an iron stick because I cannot do anything regarding my studies, plans or hopes. I am planning to study after this crisis is all over ... [but] I'm not sure whether I will still be young enough."

### More Hurdles

For those who have focused on pursuing higher education abroad, the coup has created new problems. In addition to the challenge of obtaining transcripts from a ministry where tens of thousands have gone on strike, students who want to study abroad must prepare and take English proficiency and other prerequisite exams in a volatile environment in which the military has repeatedly shut down the internet. Procuring a student visa can also be daunting, especially when students must visit a visa application centre in

person, but some centres in Myanmar have been closed for extended periods.

With entry into Thailand also barred for months due to COVID-19, many students have travelled to the South Caucasus or the Middle East to apply for onward visas, according to *Al Jazeera's* conversations with several students and a travel agent.

Student visa applicants must also show they have a certain level of funds in their bank accounts, but COVID-19 and the coup have depleted savings, and the value of Myanmar's currency, the kyat, has also plummeted.

On top of these challenges, applicants must demonstrate that they will leave the country to which they are applying once they complete their studies, but that has become harder to prove as professional prospects dim in Myanmar and the security situation deteriorates.

This factor appears to have cost Dillard the chance to study for a master's in business administration (MBA) despite being accepted by a university in Canada in late 2020.

As an ethnic Rohingya, Dillard had hoped to finally pursue further study free from discrimination – a chance that Myanmar has systematically denied to Rohingya people, along with their access to citizenship and freedom of movement.

Dillard, whose parents moved from Rakhine State to Yangon before she was born, had to hide her ethnic identity her entire life.

In 2017, she suffered silently as her classmates denied and even laughed at

the military's human rights atrocities against Rohingya in Rakhine State.

When she graduated from university in 2019, she was made to walk last at the ceremony because she lacked a National Registration Card.

### 'I broke down and cried'

It took Dillard almost a year from the time she graduated before she was able to obtain the card, and subsequently her passport and graduation certificate. Her documents describe her as Bengali, a designation that Myanmar has pushed on Rohingya people for decades and which denies their ethnic identity.

Once she got her offer from Canada in September 2020, Dillard began applying for her student visa.

Her final appointment was on February 1, but because of the coup, she could not complete the process until June. She received a response a month later.

"When I opened the email and saw the visa refusal, I broke down and cried," she said.

According to the immigration officer's notes, her application did not satisfactorily indicate that she would leave Canada at the end of her stay, that she intended to be a genuine student, or that her course of study was a "logical progression" of her academic and professional career.

The number of people from Myanmar trying to study abroad in some countries appears to be increasing.

VFS Global, an outsourcing agency that handles visas for seven countries, including the United



Kingdom and Canada, received 38 percent more student visa applications through its centres in Myanmar this year than last, despite months-long closures, a representative told *Al Jazeera*.

A travel agent in Yangon, who requested anonymity, estimates her agency has helped hundreds of people apply for student visas since the coup – more than twice as many as it received before.

For Canada, new student visa applications have more than doubled since last year, with 210 received from January to August, compared with 92 during the same months last year, according to data provided by a representative from the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Office.

But the number of new student visas approved for Myanmar nationals rose only slightly over the same period, from 46 to 61.

For the US, according to publicly available data, the number of student visas approved for Myanmar nationals increased more than tenfold from

Students hold up three-finger salutes during a protest against the military coup at Dagon University in Yangon following the February 1 coup. [File: Stringer/AFP]

February to July of this year compared with last, with 652 approved in 2021 and 64 in 2020. The US Embassy did not provide data to *Al Jazeera* on student visa applications received.

### Unexpected Wrenches

The coup has put other unexpected wrenches in students' plans, including for some scholarship recipients.

Nyein, a longtime public sector worker, beat hundreds of applicants in 2020 for a US government-funded master's level scholarship and had planned to start classes in August.

She told *Al Jazeera* that even though she joined the Civil Disobedience Movement on February 7 and left her job, her scholarship was rescinded in March because of her alleged support for the military regime.



Engineers and students march during a protest against the military coup in Dawei earlier this year.

[File: Dawei Watch via Reuters]

“I got refused not because of my shortcomings; I was refused because of political issues. It is really hard for me to understand,” said Nyein, who is now jobless and living in hiding due to fear of arrest. “When the coup happened, everything turned upside down in just a day.”

A US Embassy spokesperson told *Al Jazeera* in an emailed statement that US government-supported educational exchange programmes “continue unabated and are only available for those not affiliated with the regime.”

Bawi Za, also the recipient of a scholarship to study in the US, is stuck in India, which has made it impossible for him to attend his master’s level programme in person.

He had been active in supporting police to defect after the coup, and when police and soldiers raided his home in March, he escaped into the Indian state of Mizoram. Days later, the military issued an arrest warrant against him.

He has since secured a student

visa to the US, but India rejected his application for an exit permit because of his unauthorised entry.

“I have been stuck in India...I cannot get out of here,” he said.

His classes started in June, and he has spent the first half of his one-year programme studying online despite the nine and a half-hour time difference.

“Sometimes I feel like I am left behind...I have to struggle a lot,” he told *Al Jazeera*.

On top of the academic challenges, isolation, and disappointments of not meeting his classmates or living on campus, he faces the emotional strain of the crisis back home.

His close friend was recently shot dead and photos surfaced online of the mutilated body.

A significant military offensive is also under way across his native Chin State in Myanmar’s northwest.

“Sometimes, there is some information, like clashes in my hometown and people dying. When I

get that kind of information, I cannot even stay focused,” said Bawi Za. But he is resolved not to let the military kill his spirit.

“The motto that I keep currently is there is no way the [military] will withhold my dream education,” he said.

Deborah, who is also from Chin State, is now facing the prospect of violence while living at home with her parents.

Instead of attending lectures, she is cooking and selling food to raise money for the anti-coup resistance.

“If people ask me, ‘Do you feel safe? I just answer, ‘Yeah, I’m safe,’ but actually, I don’t feel safe,” she said.

“Every day we hear gunshots flying over our roof, and sometimes, it really looks like a battlefield. Who would feel secure in this situation?”

This article was supported by a grant from ARTICLE 19 under Voices for Inclusion, a project funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



# 'A Coup on Campus,' Ouster of Student Government Leader Shows Conservatism Still Rules Thai Campuses

By **Caleb Quinley**

March 7, 2022

Source: *Thai Enquirer* - <https://www.thaienquirer.com/38252/a-coup-on-campus-ouster-of-student-government-leader-shows-conservatism-still-rules-thai-campuses/>

In moments of stress, Netiwit Chotiphathaisal sits on the floor, closes his eyes and focuses on his breath. With each exhale, he releases negative energy. Breathing in again, his chest rises, taking in a moment of peace.

The 25-year old is widely known for his attempts to reform Thailand's educational system. Meditation is one way he copes with the pressures that sometimes follow this line of activism.

He wears signature black glasses, white button up shirts, and often walks with an umbrella using it as a walking stick as he moves through his university campus in Bangkok, Thailand. Two weeks ago, he was the president of the student government of the prestigious Chulalongkorn University, more commonly known as Chula. But now the school wants him out.

"They have been looking for a reason to get rid of me for some time

now," Netiwit told Thai Enquirer. "In the Thai education system, they want you to behave correctly at all levels."

Netiwit speaks with a grin and carries with him a sense of calm everywhere he goes. People who meet him attest to his sense of composure and they say there is nothing hostile or confronting about him. Yet his university still sees him as a threat.

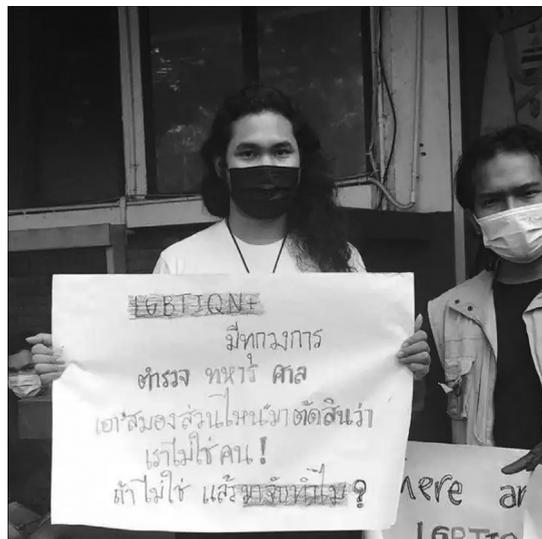
It's because he is one of the most outspoken students in modern Thailand. He's widely known as an intellectual, a maverick, and an advocate for Thai democracy. But to those who run the university, he challenges a longstanding element of student submission found in Thailand's universities.

In late February, Chula reprimanded him for inviting prominent protest leaders to a university conference on democracy. The activists, Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, Panusaya 'Rung' Sithijirawattanakul, and exiled academic Professor Pavin Chachaval-pongpun, all attended the event. The

Netiwit Chotiphathaisal



Siraphop Attoshi



presence of these contrarians made the school's administrators deeply uncomfortable.

Not long after the event, the school removed Netiwit as the president by reducing his 'points.' Chula, and many other universities score their students in a point system where each student is rated based on their behavior.

"They will use this point system to implement an authoritarian structure... This is part of broader Thai culture, you cannot walk the other way without consequences."

And he's right. The anti-government movement that made headlines a year ago has been widely diffused by the state. Peaceful protests were broken up by violent police crackdowns. Hundreds of people were arrested on a range of charges, most notably sedition and lese-majeste. And today, the threat of the country's royal defamation laws, known more ominously as "112," are as dangerous as ever.

Yet the protest movement continues to breathe. Only now, it is recalibrating behind closed doors.

## A new approach

As the movement's main leaders step out of prison and out of the government's line of fire, a new group of activists are hoping to change the country by dismantling "authoritarian structures" found within Thailand's educational system.

Netiwit's removal has prompted even more resistance from his comrades. Students across the university are angry that he's been pushed out, many are

calling his removal a "coup on campus." Yet they say they will take up the torch in calling for an end to oppressive customs found in schools. High on the list includes hazing rituals that "promote dynamics of the oppressor and the oppressed," prostration in front of portraits of the king, and hierarchical power dynamics between students and professors where faculty members can't be questioned.

"We have many conceptual weapons, so many ways to change society," says Siraphop Attohi, 23, known more commonly by their nickname, "Raptor." Raptor is also a close comrade of Netiwit, and plans to run as the president of Chula's student government in the next election cycle in May. Raptor feels that Thailand's democracy movement needs to adapt and change away from street protests in order to survive.

"Yes, street protests are one of these weapons, but it's not our only option," Raptor said. Raptor has come up against considerable legal trouble for helping organize protests over the last two years and still faces multiple charges, including violating COVID-19 assembly laws, and minor civil infractions.

The oppression students face on campus goes deeper than the classroom, Raptor said. Raptor believes that Thailand's education system is stacked with tenets of authoritarianism. And to effectively change Thai society, citizens need to dismantle traditional power structures and replace them with new systems that support democracy.

"We have to talk about Thai culture

first," Raptor said. "There are elements within Thai culture, particularly royal preferred aspects that promote authoritarianism. So there are some activities in universities that promote these kinds of values too, a dynamic of the oppressor and the oppressed," Raptor said.

Yet students are becoming more courageous, Raptor added. "But the oppression is in our blood, our veins, our bones. We know what's right, but we often don't have the courage to face it."

If elected as president of the student government, Raptor hopes to bring students physically back to campus where they can once again learn face to face and also hopes to combat rising depression rates at the school, warning that a "mental health crisis" looms as countless students are in a deep depression. Over the last two years, at least eight people have attempted suicide at Chulalongkorn, but the number is likely higher, Raptor said.

"I think it's time to face the truth that there's a long way to go, and still so many things that we have to change, because we are fighting something that is so much bigger than us."

## 'Change Chula, change the country'

For years, Netiwit has advocated for fundamental shifts in Thailand's education system. Years ago, he campaigned for mandated haircuts to be removed from schools, claiming that the haircuts were an example of Thailand's inclination towards authoritarianism.

More recently, Netiwit has protested the removal of a select range of Bangkok's cultural buildings, including Siam's oldest movie theater, Scala. He says preserving Bangkok's old districts is crucial, and their buildings should be protected instead of being replaced by shopping malls.

"But it's all sort of ridiculous," Netiwit said of his forced removal. "Because the new president will be one of my friends, a democracy activist that could be even more radical than me."

Sugreeya 'Mindmint' Wannayuwat, 23, is one the friends he was referring to.

She plans to step up in his place in the coming weeks. Over the last two years, she helped organize protests behind the scenes and still works closely with pro-democracy organizations in Bangkok.

"I think I will be more aggressive than Netiwit," Mindmint said. "And I think it will be ridiculous if they get rid of me too. Either way, I want to provoke the Salim professors."

She said that some faculty members view Netiwit as the "number one enemy of Chula." But she shrugs off their opinions with ease, laughing as she described her friend.

"He's like Nostradamus, he's always predicting something important," Mindmint said, describing him as an "old man in a teenagers body."

Some joke on campus that Netiwit is "the reincarnation of Chit Phumisak," the renowned Thai Marxist historian and activist from the 1950s and 60s. The jokes continue in other areas too. Mindmint's new student party is titled, Chula United Front Against

Authoritarian Culture. The party has embraced the amusing acronym, 'Chula UFAAC,' intentionally to be read as 'Chula you f...k.'

Mindmint estimates that only around 2-5 percent of students on campus are deeply conservative. It's a massive political shift as Chula is widely known to be Thailand's most conservative university.

"I always say, if you can change Chula, you can change the country," Mindmint said.

Faculty members have not been open to compromise or implementing changes that are more in line with modern practices, Mindmint continued. She described a landscape where professors and leading faculty members do not have the will to compromise.

"Some of them don't have enough moral courage," Mindmint said. "Everything Netiwit did is perfectly within the rules. If you don't have moral courage, then you can't change the system."

But despite significant push back from administrators, the student activists feel confident that it's just a matter of time until the country shifts.

"One day Chula will change. Not this year, not next year, but it will change, and so will this country – and no one can stop it," Mindmint said with emotion in her voice.

As Netiwit continues to support his friends from behind the scenes, it's unlikely that his removal as president will keep him from continuing his work. In fact, a few days ago, he was named an advisor at the university's



Sugreeya Wannayuwat

student union, a move that many view as a strong retort to those running the university.

Although he feels confident about the future, Netiwit fears that the government's Ministry of Education is becoming more afraid of student unions like his. He said they are considering enacting new laws that would censor student unions all across the country

"What happened to me reflects the authoritarianism in this country," Netiwit said. "So if they get rid of me, that's fine, the next could be even more progressive."



Find out more about INEB's Digital Bodhisattva Initiative by scanning the QR Code.



# His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Message to COP26

31 October 2021

I am pleased to know that the United Nations Climate Change Conference - COP26 - to address the climate emergency we are facing today will be taking place in Glasgow, Scotland.

Global warming is an urgent reality. None of us is able to change the past. But we are all in a position to contribute to a better future. Indeed, we have a responsibility to ourselves and to the more than seven billion human beings alive today to ensure that all of us can continue to live in peace and safety. With hope and determination, we must take care of both our own lives and those of all our neighbours.

Our ancestors viewed the earth as rich and bountiful, which it is, but

what's more it is our only home. We must protect it not only for ourselves, but also for future generations, and for the countless species with which we share the planet.

The Tibetan plateau, the largest reservoir of snow and ice outside the North and the South Poles, has often been called "the Third Pole." Tibet is the source of some of the world's major rivers, among them the Brahmaputra, the Ganges, the Indus, the Mekong, the Salween, the Yellow River and the Yangtze. These rivers are the source of life because they provide drinking water, irrigation for agriculture, and hydropower, for nearly two billion people across Asia. The melting of Tibet's numerous glaciers, the damming and diversion of rivers, and widespread deforestation, exemplify how ecological neglect in one area can have consequences almost everywhere.

Today, we need to address the future not with prayers prompted by fear, but by taking realistic action founded on scientific understanding. The inhabitants of our planet are interdependent as never before. Everything we do affects our human companions, as well as innumerable animal and plant species.

We human beings are the only creatures with the power to destroy the earth, but we are also the species with

the greatest capacity to protect it. We must confront issues of climate change on a cooperative global level for everyone's benefit. But we must also do what we can on a personal level. Even small daily actions, such as how we use water and how we dispose of what we don't need, have consequences. We must make taking care of our natural environment a part of our daily life, and learn what science has to teach us.

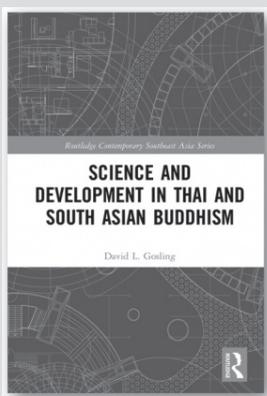
I am encouraged to see that our younger generations are demanding concrete action on climate change. This gives some hope for the future. The efforts of young activists such as Greta Thunberg to raise awareness of the need to listen to the science and act accordingly is crucial. Since their stance is realistic, we must encourage them.

I regularly emphasise the importance of maintaining a sense of the oneness of humanity, the idea that every human being is a part of us. The threat of global warming and climate change is not limited by national boundaries; it affects us all.

As we face this crisis together, it is imperative that we act in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation in order to limit its consequences. I hope and pray that our leaders will gather the strength to take collective action to address this emergency, and set a timetable for change. We have to act to make this a safer, greener, happier world.

With my prayers and good wishes,  
**Dalai Lama**

## Recommended Reading

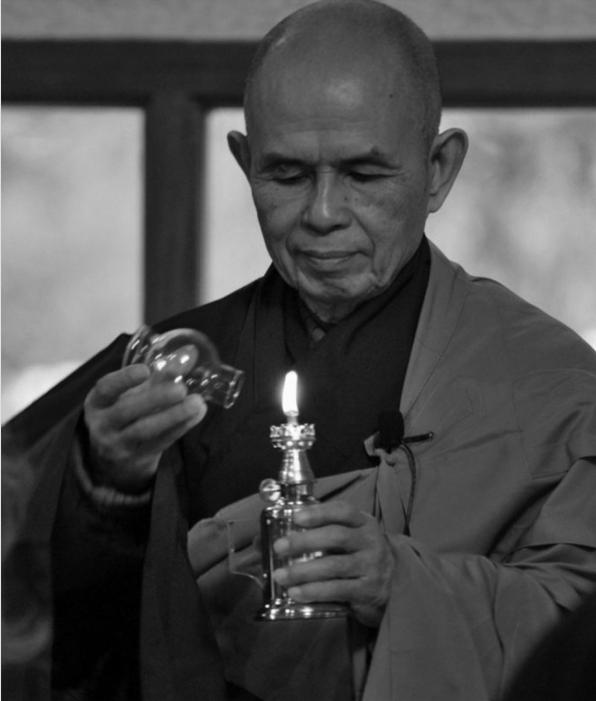


## Science and Development in Thai and South Asian Buddhism

Author: David L Gosling  
Publisher: Routledge, December 2019

# Thich Nhat Hanh

11.10.1926 - 22.01.2022



renewer of Buddhism, never diluting and always digging deep into the roots of Buddhism to bring out its authentic radiance.

Thay has opened up a beautiful path of Engaged and Applied Buddhism for all of us: the path of the Five Mindfulness Trainings and the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing. As Thay would say, “Because we have seen the path, we have nothing more to fear.” We know our direction in life, we know what to do, and what not to do to relieve suffering in ourselves, in others, and in the world; and we know the art of stopping, looking deeply, and generating true joy and happiness.

Now is a moment to come back to our mindful breathing and walking, to generate the energy of peace, compassion, and gratitude to offer our beloved Teacher. It is a moment to take refuge in our spiritual friends, our local sanghas and community, and each other.

We invite you to join our global community online, as we commemorate Thay’s life and legacy with five days of practice and ceremonies broadcast LIVE from Hue, Vietnam and Plum Village, France, starting on Saturday January 22nd.

There will also be in-person and live ceremonies hosted by Deer Park Monastery, California, and other practice centers in our tradition, as well as recitations of the Five and Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings.

Please reach out to your local practice center or sangha for more information:

- Deer Park Monastery (California)
- Magnolia Grove Monastery (Mississippi)
- Blue Cliff Monastery (New York)
- EIAB (Germany)
- Maison de l’Inspir’ and Healing Spring (Paris)
- Thai Plum Village (Thailand)
- Australia: Nhap Luu (near Melbourne) and Mountain Spring Monastery (near Sydney)
- AIAB at Lotus Pond Temple (Hong Kong)

Let us each resolve to do our best over the coming

This morning, the 22 of January 2022 Thay, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, has passed away peacefully at Tù Hiếu Temple in Huế, Vietnam, at the age of 95.

## Dear Beloved Community,

With a deep mindful breath, we announce the passing of our beloved teacher, Thay Nhat Hanh, at 01:30hrs on January 22, 2022 at Tù Hiếu Temple in Huế, Vietnam, at the age of 95.

Thay has been the most extraordinary teacher, whose peace, tender compassion, and bright wisdom has touched the lives of millions. Whether we have encountered him on retreats, at public talks, or through his books and online teachings—or simply through the story of his incredible life—we can see that Thay has been a true bodhisattva, an immense force for peace and healing in the world. Thay has been a revolutionary, a



JUNGTO

## Upon Hearing the News of Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh's Passing

22 January 2022

Today, in the early morning of January 22, 2022, I heard of Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh's passing. May he rest in peace.

May he come to eternal rest from samsara and reach nirvana!

As one who has always had great respect for Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, I am deeply saddened by the news of his passing. I would have liked him to stay with us a little longer for those who are suffering in this world.

Born in Vietnam during the French colonial rule, he experienced the Vietnam War and witnessed the atrocities of mass killing and destruction, which led to a refugee crisis in Vietnam.

Despite all the adversity and danger, he did not hesitate to sacrifice himself in realizing social justice based on the spirit of peace and reconciliation. Furthermore, he spread his philosophy of peace and reconciliation beyond Vietnam to the entire world.

He led a peace movement based on nonviolence and compassion.

We, the practitioners around the world, regardless of nationality, ideology, and religion, vow to continue the nonviolent peace movement you have led. Please entrust us with the task.

May you rest in eternal peace!

I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

**Bhikkhu Pomnyun from South Korea**

Founder and Master Dhamma Teacher, Jungto Society  
Honorary Advisor, International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)

days to generate the energy of mindfulness, peace, and compassion, to send to our beloved Teacher.

Over the coming hours on the Plum Village website, we will publish some inspirational chants, texts, and mindfulness practice resources, to support you to come together with your local sangha to generate a collective energy of mindfulness and compassion, and create your own ceremony or session in tribute to our Teacher. As Thay has always taught, nothing is more important than brotherhood and sisterhood, and we all know the power of collective energy.

To join us in this time of collective practice over the coming days, please sign up to our international email list for more updates: <https://bit.ly/3fx7pd>

**With love, trust, and togetherness,  
The Monks and Nuns of Plum Village, France**

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THE DALAI LAMA

### Condolence Message

I am saddened to learn that my friend and spiritual brother Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh has died. I offer my condolences to his followers in Vietnam and around the world.

In his peaceful opposition to the Vietnam war, his support for Martin Luther King and most of all his dedication to sharing with others not only how mindfulness and compassion contribute to inner peace, but also how individuals cultivating peace of mind contributes to genuine world peace, the Venerable lived a truly meaningful life.

I have no doubt the best way we can pay tribute to him is to continue his work to promote peace in the world.

January 22, 2022

# Thich Nhat Hanh

## My Friend and My Teacher

by **Sulak Sivaraksa**

January 24, 2022

Source: **Buddhist Door** - <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/sulak-sivaraksa-thich-nhat-hanh-my-friend-and-my-teacher/>

*The prominent socially engaged Buddhist activist and social critic Sulak Sivaraksa, founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), was a spiritual friend and student of Thich Nhat Hanh for more than 40 years, drawing inspiration from the Zen master's teachings and lived example of engaged Buddhism. Here Sulak offers a touching tribute to his friend and fellow engaged Buddhist.*

*Sulak, 88, is a renowned scholar, author, and humanitarian. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994, and became a recipient of Sweden's Right Livelihood Award (also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize) in 1995, the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization) Award in 1998, the Indian Millennium Gandhi Award in 2001, and the 2011 Niwano Peace Prize Right Livelihood Award.*

*In 1989, Sulak co-founded INEB with a group of Buddhist and non-Buddhist thinkers and social activists. Connecting engaged Buddhists around the world, INEB works promote understanding, cooperation, and networking among inter-Buddhist and inter-religious groups, and to actively address urgent global issues such as human rights, conflict resolution, and environmental crises.*

*INEB's members include monks, nuns, social workers, and academics from more than 25 countries in Asia, Australasia, Europe, and North America, working together under the umbrella of kalyana-mittata (Pali. spiritual friendship). While founded in and motivated by the Buddhadharma, INEB nevertheless welcomes members from all spiritual traditions and recognizes the importance of interfaith activities, stating: "INEB's philosophy and practice is based on compassion, social justice, non-violence, and co-existence as put forth by Gautama the Buddha. The network's core mission is to confront and end suffering using analysis and action guided by the Four Noble Truths." (INEB)*

The Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat



Hanh—my friend and my teacher—died on January 22, 2022. Thay (meaning “teacher”) lived an extraordinary life of socially engaged Buddhism. The Dalai Lama recently wrote that the best way we can pay tribute to Thay is to continue his work to promote peace in the world. I agree, and thought that I would take this opportunity to reflect on the Thay's life.

Thay was born Nguyen Xuan Bao in Hue on Oct. 11, 1926. He joined a Zen monastery as a novice monk at 16. Upon his full ordination in 1949, he assumed the Dharma name Thich Nhat Hanh. Thich is an honorary family name used by Vietnamese monks and nuns. Thay's study of the Buddha's teachings coincided with political upheaval in Vietnam and eventually war that started in 1955.

Thay went to the United States in 1961 to study at Princeton and soon was appointed a lecturer in Buddhism at Columbia University. In 1963, he returned to Vietnam and continued to organize monks and laypeople in nonviolent peace efforts. He established schools for activists, including the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon; founded the La Boi Publishing House; and wrote essays, books, and poems in several languages, inspiring a generation of peace advocates.

In 1964, Thay wrote published a poem called “Condemnation” in a Buddhist weekly, that in part read:

*Whoever is listening, be my witness:  
I cannot accept this war.  
I never could I never will.*

*I must say this a thousand times before I am killed. I am like  
the bird who dies for the sake of its mate, dripping blood  
from its broken beak and crying out: “Beware! Turn around  
and face your real enemies — ambition, violence hatred and  
greed.”*

Thay was labeled an “antiwar poet,” and he was denounced as a pro-Communist propagandist.

As Thay traveled in the US and Europe in 1966 with a mission to call for the end to hostilities in Vietnam, he met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who the following year nominated Thay for the Nobel Peace Prize, saying, “Thich Nhat Hanh’s ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity.” Thomas Merton, after meeting Thay at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky in 1966, described him as “my brother” because of their common views.

Thay published in 1967 a highly personal book about the war, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, which narrates his journey of transforming his religious beliefs into social action and his commitment to nonviolent conflict resolution. It was in this book that he articulated “engaged Buddhism,” a notion that greatly influenced Buddhist thinkers in Asia, including myself, and inspired spiritually inclined activists in the West.

An accomplished Buddhist scholar, Thay was fluent in Vietnamese, French, English, and Mandarin. He wrote in a way that transcends religious dogma and attracts readers of all faiths. In his work he places great importance on being “aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance” and is determined not to be “idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones.”

“Our own life must be our message,” he often says.

While still in America in 1967, Thay received messages from Buddhist leaders in Vietnam telling him not to return lest he be imprisoned or assassinated. Thay then began a life in exile that would last thirty- nine years.

I first met Thay in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1974, at an interfaith dialogue that the World Council of Churches had organized for Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim social activists. The group took an excursion to pay

respects to a famous relic of the Buddha in Kandy, and were received at the temple by Sri Lanka’s highest Buddhist dignitary, the Sangha Maha Nayaka. Thay had brought along a statement he had drafted in opposition to the Vietnam War, hoping to collect signatures in support of it. Because of the long history of close relationship between Thai and Sri Lankan Buddhists, Thay asked me to present the statement to the Sangha Maha Nayaka and request his endorsement. But the elderly

Sinhalese monk told us, “No, I won’t sign this. I don’t want to be like the Dalai Lama and lose my country. Monks shouldn’t be involved in politics.”

Despite this disappointment, the occasion caused a mutual respect and camaraderie to arise between me and Thay. Our friendship continued as we both increased our social activism—my own in Southeast Asia, and Thay working the halls of power in the US and France to promote peace in Vietnam.

In 1975, I invited Thay to a three-week seminar I was organizing in northern Thailand, supported by the Quakers. Young people from various Southeast Asian countries came together in Chiang Mai to study nonviolence, to explore the power of the written word, to meditate and pray, and to spend time with senior activists like myself, Thay, and Swami Agnivesh from India. While the seeds of our friendship had been sown in Sri Lanka, it was on a mountain above Chiang Mai that our kalyana-mitta, spiritual friendship, blossomed. I watched Thay teach the young activists through his eloquent poetry and his gentle presence. Thay shared some of his writings—a manual for young meditators—that had been collected into a draft entitled “The Miracle of Being Awake.” I witnessed the powerful effect Thay’s writing had on everyone, including myself, and I decided to publish it for the first time in English in Thailand. The title was later changed to “The Miracle of Mindfulness,” which went on to become a worldwide best-seller, translated into more than thirty languages.

Thay’s articulation of Buddhist activism arose in the context of war. He coined the English phrase “engaged Buddhism,” which emerged from his writings in Vietnamese that stressed “renewing Buddhism” and “a Buddhism updated” (the translated title of Thay’s 1965 book *Dao Phat Hien Dai Hoa*), concepts that he combined with the French phrase le bouddhisme engagé. While many academics and activists have since tried to define what engaged Buddhism is, Thay is clear that what the Buddha taught more than

2,500 years ago was an ideal of acting within society, not withdrawing from it. The Buddhist path is by definition engaged with people because it deals with the suffering we encounter in ourselves and in others, right here and right now. I tend to use the term “socially engaged Buddhism,” a phrase that was spread widely by Parallax Press’s publications in the 1980s and ’90s and by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship newsletter in America (which today has evolved into Turning Wheel Media).

After the end of the Vietnam War, Thay could still not return to his country. He was not welcomed in Vietnam by the U.S.-backed government in the 1960s and early 1970s and then not by the Communists, who ruled the country ever since – both were afraid of Thay’s activism and anti-war stance. From his home in exile in Paris, Thay worked tirelessly to help his people. We assisted him in raising money through Bread for the World, the Asian Cultural Forum on Development, and other organizations, to ship rice into Vietnam in the mid-1970s, to help the fleeing boat people, and to facilitate adoptions of Vietnamese orphans.

In October 1976, I too was exiled from my home country during the bloody coup in Bangkok. I took the opportunity to stay with Thay in a small apartment in Paris and we also visited a small farm outside the city that he named the Sweet Potato Community. The community later moved to southwestern France and established Plum Village, one of the West’s largest Buddhist monasteries, with hundreds of resident monks and nuns, and where thousands of people from all over come annually to study Thay’s teachings on mindfulness and meditation. He later established monastic communities in Germany, Hong Kong, Thailand, and the United States, as well as meditation centers around the world, gaining an ever-growing global following.

I have fond memories of staying with Thay in his one-room apartment in France. When I would awake in the morning, Thay was already seated upright in meditation, well before dawn. Thay was showing me, by way of example the disciplined life of a meditator. After I roused myself, Thay taught me mindfulness of breathing and other meditation techniques. Although I had learned meditation as a novice monk, I had not cultivated the practice afterward. Such quiet periods, and long sessions of drinking tea with minimal conversation, were uncommon in my life of constant action. These weeks of meditation with Thay were joyful. When I experience strong emotions like anger, I always practice what Thay taught me so many years ago.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Thay rose to worldwide prominence as a poet, author, and meditation teacher, with many meditation centers to manage. Sometimes when we would meet during these years, in the spirit of kalyana-mitta, I expressed concern that Thay’s organization was getting too large and losing the spirit of socially engaged Buddhism. Thay always listened to my concerns. Matteo Pistono’s book *Roar: Sulak Sivaraksa and the Path of Socially Engaged Buddhism* delves deeply into my spiritual friendship with Thay.

In 2005 and 2007, Thay was allowed to return to Vietnam to teach and publish books, tour the country, and meet with members of his Buddhist order. His highly publicized visits created controversy among some Vietnamese Buddhist activists who criticized Thay for failing to speak out against the current governments alleged human rights abuses and poor record on religious freedom.

In 2013, Thay came to Thailand to visit a newly established Thai Plum Village International Practice Center outside Bangkok. We reminisced about our forty-year friendship, drank tea, and meditated. Thay gifted me an ink calligraphy that he painted of a Zen circle (enso) around the phrase “You are, therefore, I am.” I meditate upon this bodhisattva-inspired phrase regularly.

That was the last time I saw Thay as he suffered a severe stroke in November of 2014. He was unable to speak after the stroke but could communicate through gestures. Thay received expert medical care and support from Plum Village and eventually returned to his home in the Tu Hieu Temple in Hue, Vietnam, and that is where he passed away at the age of 95.

Thay wrote and taught often about death and dying, and in his book, *No Death, No Fear*, he concludes,

*“This body is not me; I am not caught in this body, I am life without boundaries, I have never been born and I have never died. Over there the wide ocean and the sky with many galaxies All manifests from the basis of consciousness. Since beginningless time I have always been free. Birth and death are only a door through which we go in and out. Birth and death are only a game of hide-and-peek. So smile to me and take my hand and wave good-bye. Tomorrow we shall meet again or even before. We shall always be meeting again at the true source, always meeting again on the myriad paths of life.”*

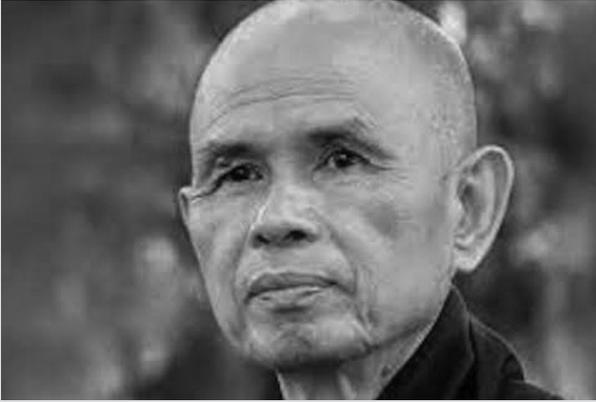


# Thich Nhat Hanh(1926-2022)

## Buddhist Revolutionary

by Alan Senauke

Source: **Clear View Project** - [https://www.clear-view-project.org/2022/01/thich-nhat-hanh1926-2022-buddhist-revolutionary/?fbclid=Iw-AR2WZEPigPFn-v5v\\_UN-PG3Nhb\\_jR65EncNS3LpzjpZIBvPe-S3JTILGysToP4](https://www.clear-view-project.org/2022/01/thich-nhat-hanh1926-2022-buddhist-revolutionary/?fbclid=Iw-AR2WZEPigPFn-v5v_UN-PG3Nhb_jR65EncNS3LpzjpZIBvPe-S3JTILGysToP4)



January 22, 2022 — Yesterday Thich Nhat Hanh died, after a long illness. Two years ago I was asked to write this piece for “Lion’s Roar,” as part of a celebration of Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings and life. It seems relevant today.

Thich Nhat Hanh always wore the simple brown robes of a monk. He walked and spoke mindfully as a Zen teacher, poet, and bridge between the world’s faiths. But the strength of steel lay just below his placid surface. It made him a kind of Buddhist revolutionary.

I recall Zen teacher Richard Baker’s description of Thich Nhat Hanh as “a cross between a cloud, a snail, and piece of heavy machinery—a true religious presence.” Now at the age of ninety-five, he has left this earthly plane and his frail body. But his wisdom and influence are strong, completely alive and essential.

When I started working at the Buddhist Peace Fellowship in the early 1990s, there was a broadside hanging over my desk with an excerpt from Thich Nhat Hanh’s book *Peace Is Every Step*. In part it read:

*Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what is the use of seeing? We must be aware of the real problems of the world. Then, with mindfulness, we will know what to do and*

*what not to do to be of help. ... Are you planting seeds of joy and peace? I try to do that with every step. Peace is every step. Shall we continue the journey?*

The disarmingly straightforward wisdom of Thich Nhat Hanh—more familiarly known to his students as Thay, meaning master or teacher—was tempered in Vietnam’s anti-colonial struggle against the French and the devastation of the U.S. war that followed. In the face of these conflicts, Thich Nhat Hanh brought a nonviolent movement to the Buddhist monasteries and created the School of Youth for Social Service, a cohort of Buddhist peace workers working in rural villages of Vietnam. “So many of our villages were being bombed,” Thich Nhat Hanh said:

*Along with my monastic brothers and sisters, I had to decide what to do. Should we continue to practice in our monasteries, or should we leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering under the bombs?*

*After careful reflection, we decided to do both—to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We called it ‘Engaged Buddhism.’*

In the late 1960s Thich Nhat Hanh was exiled from Vietnam—an exile that continued until 2005. Mistrusted by both the communists and nationalists in his own country, he steered a middle way of Buddhist-based nonviolence. In the U.S. he found like-minded comrades in Martin Luther King, Jr., Thomas Merton, the radical Catholic Berrigan brothers, western Buddhist teachers and students, and activists within the nonviolent circle of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

I began reading Thay’s books in the 1980s, starting with *The Miracle of Mindfulness* and then *Being Peace*, the first Parallax Press book. After *Being Peace*, the stream of published words by Thay became a wide river, with brilliant commentaries on classic Theravada and Mahayana sutras, radical reinterpretations of the bodhisattva precepts, and Buddhist social commentary on our troubled modern world. As they rolled off the presses, his books were eagerly read by so many of us in the Buddhist community.

At the heart of his teachings Thich Nhat Hanh has driven home the centrality of mindfulness as the core of Buddhist practice. It’s fair to say that the flowering of our pervasive contemporary mindfulness “movement” has grown from the words of Thich Nhat Hanh.

As director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship through the 1990s, I was asked by Thay and his growing community to organize biennial talks at the Berkeley Community Theater, which accommodated four thousand people. The first talk I organized was in April of 1991 in the immediate aftermath of Desert Storm, the first U.S. war against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait, and the police beating of African-American Rodney King in Los Angeles.

I was struck by Thay’s comments that night. He spoke of his deep anger over the war in Kuwait and the beating of King, both of which seemed to trigger for him painful memories of the war in Vietnam and the brutal ignorance of U.S. oppression. He said he had considered cancelling his tour, with all its retreats and dharma events.

His words revealed to me that he wasn’t an unreachable saint, but a man with raw feelings. Then he shared that he’d meditated on his own reactivity and realized that he had to continue his tour as planned, because these oppressors and victims—the police, Rodney King, U.S. soldiers, Iraqis, and all their government leaders—were neither different from nor distant from himself.

That same week, in a Los Angeles Time op-ed, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote:

*Looking more deeply, I was able to see that the policemen who were beating Rodney King were also myself. Why were they doing that? Because our society is full of hatred and violence. Everything is like a bomb ready to explode, and we are part of that bomb. We are co-responsible for that bomb. That is why I saw myself as the policemen beating the driver. We all are these policemen.*

This insight about interdependence is what I have learned from Thich Nhat Hanh. It has infused how he has taught and walked in the world, but it is not a special vision of his own. Such insight appears to Buddhist and spiritual teachers of all lands and ages. It comes from poets and seers. Walt Whitman wrote: “I am large, I contain multitudes.”

Let us strive to be like Thay, that is, let us strive to be truly human, our true selves.





SANGHA FOR PEACE

## Sangha for Peace Update

By **Surin Onprom**

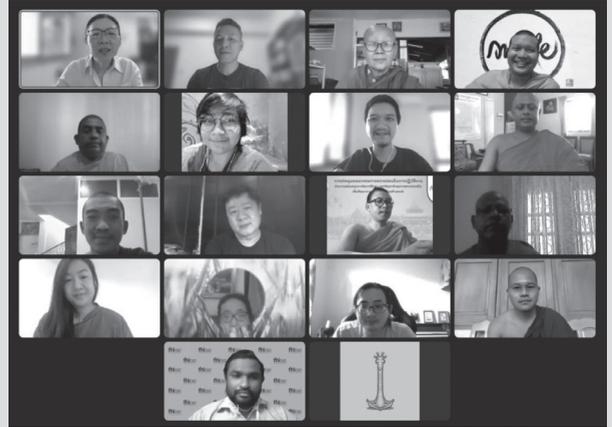


Photo of workshop's participants

The Regional Network for Peacebuilders Project (Sangha for Peace) recently hosted “The Inauguration of the Network and GESI Analysis Presentation” via an online platform on Monday March 7, 2022. The main objectives of the meeting were to promote engagement among the network’s members and to present the results of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) analysis. Twenty participants that attended the zoom event consisted of project members from Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand; representatives from FHI360 and USAID; and INEB staff. The meeting was successfully organized and the goals were accomplished.

After the welcoming speech by INEB’s Executive Secretary, participants introduced themselves and briefly discussed their current involvements relevant to peacebuilding in their own contexts. We have observed that even though participants’ projects were diverse, the stories they shared were all really inspiring. We have also learned that everyone has encountered uncertainty and challenges due to the COVID-19 situation and the unrest generated by political situations. In these difficult circumstances, many peacebuilding activities implemented on the ground have been postponed.

After the self-introductions, the Sangha for Peace Project Coordinator presented updates on program accomplishments and future plans. Between March and December 2021, the project achieved several goals and conducted key activities. The key activities delivered by the project included an online inception meeting with 11 country partners, the participant nomination process, holding online interviews with 10 participants, developing the training curriculum, and GESI analysis. The draft training curriculum consists of 5 substantive modules including: 1) Buddhism, peace and violence, 2) Buddhist Literacy, 3) Gender Awareness and Social Inclusion, 4) Intra

and interfaith Dialogue for Peaceful Co-existence, and 5) Sustainable Ecological Governance and Community Engagement. Project implementation plans included sharing the schedule for three country learning missions with participants. The first country learning mission will be held in Thailand and is scheduled from 29 May to 6 June 2022. The second learning mission will be in Sri Lanka in December 2022, and the last learning activity will be organized in February 2023 in Myanmar.

During the GESI analysis report, participants learned about what Gender Equality and Social Inclusion means and why it is significant to employ and integrate the concept into peacebuilding work. The presentation was constructively organized into 5 key topics including 1) barriers that limit inclusion, 2) factors that facilitate inclusion, 3) how marginalized groups prefer to engage, 4) potential effects of INEB intervention, and 5) risk migration and strategies for staff and participants. The full GESI report will be shared with all participants.

The next virtual network meeting is scheduled for April 7, 2022. INEB plans to present a draft curriculum to participants, who will provide feedback for improvement. It is expected that the final training curriculum will be presented during the first country learning mission to Thailand in early June 2022.

## Female Sangha Initiative For Social Transformation in Southeast Asia

By **Opor Srisuwan**, INEB Project Coordinator



*The Female Sangha Initiative for Social Transformation in Southeast Asia*, that was made possible with funding from the Join Together Society (JTS) Korea, ended in December 2021. The key concept was to empower Buddhist women through participating in social, cultural and environmental activities. The seven projects directly benefited 2,929 people and indirectly benefitted 104,704 in four countries - Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Each approved proposal received 5,000 USD in funds for implementing their local projects. The seven

projects were diverse in nature, intersecting areas of development, and women's empowerment, that, involved capacity building, interfaith training initiatives, and one produced a training and resource manual.

This was a great first initiative which supported the women's sangha in the Southeast Asia region, plus Bangladesh, that addressed local needs identified by the projects. This project was especially impactful and relevant during the COVID 19 pandemic, and following the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the projects carried out their initiatives under difficult circumstances. We look forward to expanding these types of initiatives in 2022 by increasing the visibility and roles of women peacebuilders throughout the region.

The full report for this project can be found at : <https://www.inebnetwork.org/female-sangha-initiative-for-social-transformation-in-southeast-asia-2021/>



## INEB's 20th International Conference in South Korea Buddhism in a Divided World

Peace : Planet : Pandemic

October 24 - 30, 2022

### 국제 참여불교 네트워크 (INEB) 대회



Join us during a 2-day meditation retreat in MoonKyung, on a temple tour, engaging in contemporary issues, enjoying traditional Korean cultural events and being with Venerable Pomnyun Sunim.



International Network  
of Engaged Buddhists

Hosted by the Jungto Society of South Korea in collaboration with INEB

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# Hi, I am Elli. The intern of SEM.

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**Elisabeth Strasser**

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Here I am. Back in my home country. It is cold. It is grey. It is kind of weird. An indescribable feeling surrounds me and makes me feel uneasy. Looking out of the window, I see a misty landscape covered in a firm layer of frost. Doing the same just a few days ago would make me see green trees, blooming plants and my landlords turtle relaxing in the sun.

Thinking about leaving Thailand, I did expect to miss quite a few things. What I did not foresee is my extremely strong craving for an ice cold milk tea, wanting just one more homemade Som Tam or wishing for another movie night in the office. I even miss those crazy cats. And while I still have the smell of street food in my nose, I feel warmed by hot sunbeams on my skin.

As you may have noticed, I indulge in memories of my time in Thailand a lot these days. In this article, I would like to invite you to dive through them together with me. 'Cause sharing is caring, right?

First of all, let me give you some background information towards myself. My field of study is social work and pedagogy. I chose this profession because I feel a great sense of purpose by contributing my time and workforce to the well-being of others. It is my deepest believe that showing compassion to one another is a core principle of living a happy and fulfilled life. This is exactly the mindset, that I found in each and every staff member of SEM and INEB. The whole team is working restless in order to create a better world, a fairer world.

On my first day in the office I already realized how diverse, warm and compassionate the team is. They are all their own persona while sharing one unifying characteristic - their humorous mind. I heard a lot of great jokes and shared a lot of laughter during my time in the team. It was a very unique experience for me to have such an extremely productive work environment while at the same time being able to joke around and relax when needed.

Nevertheless, sometimes the challenging nature of work gave me a sense of compulsion behind some laughs. It made me think of the necessity of humor in such a demanding field of work. SEM's work towards a peaceful society can be stressful, painful and burdensome. But sharing laughter and

joyful moments create a balance between the heavy work content and each individual's personal well-being. After all, humor is a very strong coping mechanism.

As an intern at SEM, I was responsible for the creation of a psychosocial concept, counselling, general care taking of clients and assisting my supervisors. Being a student with limited experience in the practical field of social work, I was positively surprised how much trust was placed in me. It did not just spur me on to do my best but also gave me confidence. Moreover, I was able to freely express my ideas and thoughts at any time. My words were always taken seriously and the feedback I got was honest and helpful. My experience as an intern with Spirit in Education Movement was more than just satisfying and much more then I could have hoped for.

Something I found most impressive was the willingness of each and every team member to share very personal and intimate thoughts, hopes, fears and struggles. In the beginning, I wasn't sure how much I want to share about my very own life struggles and thoughts. Sharing your inner self with others makes you most vulnerable. So I hesitated. At the same time, it can set you free. So I did it. Ultimately, it feels empowering not just to share, but to stand up for who you are and what you are going through.

If you ever find yourself in a group of people who actively listen, care deeply and don't try to evaluate your words - you can truly count yourself to the lucky ones. Living in a world that is rapidly accelerating, it can be difficult to find people with both feet on the ground, but their heads high up in the sky. Just like realistic dreamers. It feels like I have found those special kind of people in the SEM and INEB team. This is why it felt difficult to leave.

The contrast I experience right now is quite extreme in many different ways. The culture, the time zone and the



climate has changed. But more significantly, I have changed. I feel much more determination and motivation to achieve my personal and professional goals and I see my path more clearly now. I learned about my strengths but also my weaknesses. Once again I was confronted strongly with my own privileges. As a result, I experienced a deep gratefulness towards the fact that I am free and I am safe. I also gained a better of picture of what I am capable of. Moreover, I got a better understanding for what I want to stand for in this world and who I want to become.

To be honest, it is difficult to be mentally present in Austria when I know what the team is working on and fighting for. It is a feeling of uselessness which is difficult to cope with. At the same time, it is a driving force in the pursuit of more education and knowledge so I can be a better ally or

even implement my own social projects one day. You can see, I try to reframe my frustration into inspiration. And this would also be the one word I use to describe my internship: Inspiring.

At the end of this short reflective journey, I want to take the chance to express my gratitude. This goes to both SEM and INEB members. Thank you for all your teachings - both professional and personal. Thank you for the insight into the mechanism of a social organization. Thank you for showing me how to create new social projects and how to get them funded. Thank you for the chance to use and train my skills as social worker. Finally, thank you for providing me this beautiful internship experience.

Vienna, 18.12.2021

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## Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa to celebrate his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday!



Ajahn Sulak with Maha Gosananda and the Dalai Lama

**Y**ou may know of Ajahn Sulak as the founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhism. Along with Ajahn Sulak, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Ven. Thich Nhat Hahn have guided this dynamic network supporting socially engaged Buddhist projects and initiatives all over the globe for decades.

For more than half a century, Ajahn Sulak has spoken truth to power, and inspired generations of socially engaged spirituality. His vision, non-violent activism, and spiritual commitments have been steadfast in a quest for justice and truth. It was a joy for me to write his biography, *ROAR: SULK SIVARAKSA AND THE PATH OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM*.

Ajahn Sulak always encourages us to deepen our spiritual friendships, or kalyanamitta. In the spirit of kalyanamitta, and in honor of Ajahn Sulak's 89th birthday, please join me in

donating to the International Network of Engaged Buddhists to support their humanitarian projects.

In return for your generosity of \$25, I'll send you a signed copy of *ROAR: SULK SIVARAKSA AND THE PATH OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM*.

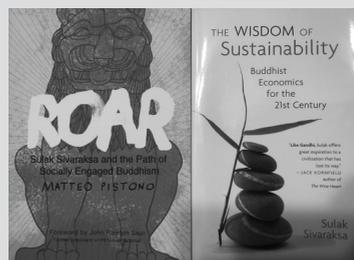
And for the first 50 individuals who donate more than \$25, in addition to *ROAR*, I'll also send you a copy of Ajahn Sulak's book, *THE WISDOM OF SUSTAINABILITY: BUDDHIST ECONOMICS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY*.

Here's where you can Venmo your donation, or if you prefer PayPal, or if you want to send a check, email me back and I'll send you the mailing address.

I'll mail the book(s) to you straightaway! Please include your mailing address. Also, please note, because international postage is so pricey, we are only sending books to North America.

If you want to send a birthday message to Ajahn Sulak for his 89th birthday, please include that with your donation and I'll be sure that they are given to him on his birthday at the end of March. Or, you can always reply to this email with your well wishes for Ajahn Sulak.

With kalyanamitta,  
Matteo



p.s. Please send your personal message and donation for the books by March 25th so that I can share it with Ajahn Sulak on his birthday!

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# What Is Sangha?

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By **Thich Nhat Hanh**

Source: Lion's Roar - <https://www.lionsroar.com/the-practice-of-sangha/>

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Photo by Paul Davis.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains that sangha is more than a community, it's a deep spiritual practice.

A sangha is a community of friends practicing the dharma together in order to bring about and to maintain awareness. The essence of a sangha is awareness, understanding, acceptance, harmony and love. When you do not see these in a community, it is not a true sangha, and you should have the courage to say so. But when you find these elements are present in a community, you know that you have the happiness and fortune of being in a real sangha.

In Matthew 5:13 in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, we find this statement: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt hath lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden underfoot of men." In this passage, Jesus describes his followers as salt. Food needs salt in order to be tasty. Life needs understanding, compassion and harmony in order to be livable. This is the most important contribution to life that the followers of Jesus can bring to the world. It means that the Kingdom of Heaven has to be realized here, not somewhere else, and that Christians need to practice in a way that they are the salt of life and a true community of Christians.

Salt is also an important image in the Buddhist canon, and this Christian teaching is equivalent to the Buddha's teaching about sangha. The Buddha said that the water in the four oceans has only one taste, the taste of salt, just as his teaching has only one taste, the taste of liberation. Therefore the elements of sangha are the taste of life, the taste of liberation, and we have to practice in order to become the salt. When we say, "I take refuge in the sangha," it is not a statement, it is a practice.

*The trees, water, air, birds, and so on can all be members of our sangha. A beautiful walking path may be part of our sangha. A good cushion can be also.*

In the Buddhist scriptures it is said that there are four communities: monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. But I also include elements that are not human in the sangha. The trees, water, air, birds, and so on can all be members of our sangha. A beautiful walking path may be part of our sangha. A good cushion can be also. We can make many things into supportive elements of our sangha. This idea is not entirely new; it can be found throughout the sutras and in the Abhidharma, too. A pebble, a leaf and a dahlia are mentioned in the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* in this respect. It is said in the *Pure Land Sutra* that if you are mindful, then when the wind blows through the trees, you will hear the teaching of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, the Eightfold Path, and so on. The whole cosmos is preaching the buddhadharma and practicing the buddhadharma. If you are attentive, you will get in touch with that sangha.

## Sangha as our roots

I don't think the Buddha wanted us to abandon our society, our culture or our roots in order to practice. The practice of Buddhism should help people go back to their families. It

should help people re-enter society in order to rediscover and accept the good things that are there in their culture and to rebuild those that are not.

Our modern society creates so many young people without roots. They are uprooted from their families and their society; they wander around, not quite human beings, because they do not have roots. Quite a number of them come from broken families and feel rejected by society. They live on the margins, looking for a home, for something to belong to. They are like trees without roots. For these people, it's very difficult to practice. A tree without roots cannot absorb anything; it cannot survive. Even if they practice intensively for ten years, it's very hard for them to be transformed if they remain an island, if they cannot establish a link with other people.

*The practice of Buddhism should help people re-enter society in order to rediscover and accept the good things that are there in their culture and to rebuild those that are not.*

A community of practice, a sangha, can provide a second chance to a young person who comes from a broken family or is alienated from his or her society. If the community of practice is organized as a family with a friendly, warm atmosphere, young people can succeed in their practice.

Suffering (dukkha) is one of the biggest problems of our times. First we have to recognize this suffering and acknowledge it. Then we need to look deeply into its nature in order to find a way out. If we look into the present situation in ourselves and our society, we can see much suffering. We need to call it by its true names—loneliness, the feeling of being cut off, alienation, division, the disintegration of the family, the disintegration of society.

Our civilization, our culture, has been characterized by individualism. The individual wants to be free from the society, from the family. The individual does not think he or she needs to take refuge in the family or in the society, and thinks that he or she can be happy without a sangha. That is why we do not have solidity, we do not have harmony, we do not have the communication that we so need.

The practice is, therefore, to grow some roots. The sangha is not a place to hide in order to avoid your responsibilities. The sangha is a place to practice for the

transformation and the healing of self and society. When you are strong, you can be there in order to help society. If your society is in trouble, if your family is broken, if your church is no longer capable of providing you with spiritual life, then you work to take refuge in the sangha so that you can restore your strength, your understanding, your compassion, your confidence. And then in turn you can use that strength, understanding and compassion to rebuild your family and society, to renew your church, to restore communication and harmony. This can only be done as a community—not as an individual, but as a sangha.

In order for us to develop some roots, we need the kind of environment that can help us become rooted. A sangha is not a community of practice in which each person is an island, unable to communicate with each other—this is not a true sangha. No healing or transformation will result from such a sangha. A true sangha should be like a family in which there is a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood.

*If we see a group of people living mindfully, capable of smiling, of loving, we gain confidence in our future.*

There is a lot of suffering, yes, and we have to embrace all this suffering. But to get strong, we also need to touch the positive elements, and when we are strong, we can embrace the suffering in us and all around us. If we see a group of people living mindfully, capable of smiling, of loving, we gain confidence in our future. When we practice mindful breathing, smiling, resting, walking and working, then we become a positive element in society, and we will inspire confidence all around us. This is the way to avoid letting despair overwhelm us. It is also the way to help the younger generation so they do not lose hope. It is very important that we live our daily life in such a way that demonstrates that a future is possible.

## **We need a sangha**

In my tradition we learn that as individuals we cannot do much. That is why taking refuge in the sangha, taking refuge in the community, is a very strong and important practice. When I say, "I take refuge in the sangha," it does not mean that I want to express my devotion. No. It's not a question of devotion; it's a question of practice. Without being in a sangha, without being supported by a group of friends who

are motivated by the same ideal and practice, we cannot go far.

If we do not have a supportive sangha, we may not be getting the kind of support we need for our practice, that we need to nourish our bodhichitta (the strong desire to cultivate love and understanding in ourselves). Sometimes we call it “beginner’s mind.” The mind of a beginner is always very beautiful, very strong. In a good and healthy sangha, there is encouragement for our beginner’s mind, for our bodhichitta. So the sangha is the soil and we are the seed. No matter how beautiful, how vigorous our seed is, if the soil does not provide us with vitality, our seed will die.

One of the brothers from Plum Village, Brother Phap Dung, went to Vietnam some years ago with a few members of the sangha. It was a very important experience for him. He had been in the West since he was a small child. Then when he went to northern Vietnam, he got in touch with some of the most ancient elements in Vietnamese culture and with the mountains and the rivers of northern Vietnam. He wrote to me and said, “Our land of Vietnam is so beautiful, it is as beautiful as a dream. I don’t dare take heavy steps on this earth of Vietnam.” By this he meant that he had right mindfulness when he walked. His right mindfulness was due to the practice and support he had in the sangha before he went to Vietnam. That is beginner’s mind, the mind you have in the beginning when you undertake the practice. It’s very beautiful and very precious, but that beginner’s mind can be broken, can be destroyed, can be lost if it is not nourished or supported by a sangha.

*To practice right mindfulness we need the right environment, and that environment is our sangha.*

Although he had his little sangha near him in Vietnam, the environment was very distracting, and he saw that if he stayed too long without the larger sangha, he would be swept away by that environment, by his forgetfulness—not only his own forgetfulness, but the forgetfulness of everybody around him. This is because right mindfulness for someone who has only just started the practice is still weak, and the forgetfulness of the people around us is very great and capable of dragging us away in the direction of the five cravings.

To practice right mindfulness we need the right environment, and that environment is our sangha. Without

a sangha we are very weak. In a society where everyone is rushing, everyone is being carried away by their habit energies, practice is very difficult. That is why the sangha is our salvation. The sangha where everyone is practicing mindful walking, mindful speaking, mindful eating seems to be the only chance for us to succeed in ending the vicious cycle.

And what is the sangha? The sangha is a community of people who agree with each other that if we do not practice right mindfulness, we will lose all the beautiful things in our soul and all around us. People in the sangha standing near us, practicing with us, support us so that we are not pulled away from the present moment. Whenever we find ourselves in a difficult situation, two or three friends in the sangha who are there for us, understanding and helping us, will get us through it. Even in our silent practice we help each other.

In my tradition they say that when a tiger leaves the mountain and goes to the lowland, it will be caught by humans and killed. When practitioners leave their sangha, they will abandon their practice after a few months. In order to continue our practice of transformation and healing, we need a sangha. With a sangha it’s much easier to practice, and that is why I always take refuge in my sangha.

## How a sangha helps us

The presence of a sangha is a wonderful opportunity to allow the collective energy of the sangha to penetrate into our body and consciousness. We profit a lot from that collective energy. We can entrust ourselves to the sangha because the sangha is practicing, and the collective energy of mindfulness is strong. Although we can rely on the energy of mindfulness that is generated by our personal practice, sometimes it is not enough. But if you know how to use that energy of mindfulness in order to receive the collective energy of the sangha, you will have a powerful source of energy for your transformation and healing.

Your body, your consciousness, and your environment are like a garden. There may be a few trees and bushes that are dying, and you may feel overwhelmed by anguish and suffering at the sight of that. You may be unaware that there are still many trees in your garden that are solid, vigorous and beautiful. When members of your sangha come into your garden, they can help you see that you still have a lot of beautiful trees and that you can enjoy the things that have not gone wrong within your landscape. That is the role that

the sangha can play. Many people in the sangha are capable of enjoying a beautiful sunset or a cup of tea. They dwell firmly in the present moment, not allowing worries or regrets to spoil the present moment. Sitting close to these people, walking close to these people, you can profit from their energy and restore your balance. When their energy of mindfulness is combined with yours, you will be able to touch beauty and happiness.

Nothing is more important than your peace and happiness in the here and now. One day you will lie like a dead body and no longer be able to touch the beauty of a flower. Make good use of your time; practice touching the positive aspects of life in you and around you.

Don't lock yourself behind your door and fight alone. If you think that by yourself you cannot go back to embrace strong feelings, you can ask one, two or three friends to sit next to you and to help you with their support. They can give you mindfulness energy so that you can go back home with strength. They can say, "My brother, I know that the pain in you is very deep, and I am here for you."

Taking refuge in the sangha is a very important practice. Abandoned, alone, you get lost, you get carried away. So taking refuge in the sangha is a very deep practice, especially for those of us who feel vulnerable, shaky, agitated and unstable. That is why you come to a practice center, to take refuge in the sangha. You allow the sangha to transport you like a boat so that you can cross the ocean of sorrow.

*When you allow yourself to be in a sangha the way a drop of water allows itself to be in a river, the energy of the sangha can penetrate into you, and transformation and healing will become possible.*

When we throw a rock into a river the rock will sink. But if we have a boat, the boat can carry hundreds of pounds of rocks and it will not sink. The same thing is true with our sorrow and pain. If we have a boat, we can carry our pain and sorrow, and we will not sink into the river of suffering. And what is that boat? That boat is, first of all, the energy of mindfulness that you generate by your practice. That boat is also the sangha—the community of practice consisting of brothers and sisters in the dharma.

We don't have to bring just joy when we come to the sangha; we can also bring our suffering with us. But we have to walk on the path of joy with our suffering, we have to

share joy with our brothers and sisters. Then we will be in touch with the seeds of happiness in ourselves, and the suffering will grow weaker and be transformed. Allow yourself to be supported, to be held by the sangha. When you allow yourself to be in a sangha the way a drop of water allows itself to be in a river, the energy of the sangha can penetrate into you, and transformation and healing will become possible.

## Practice is easier with a sangha

The only way to support the Buddha, to support our sangha, to support the earth, to support our children and future generations, is to really be here for them. "Darling, I am here for you" is a statement of love. You need to be here. If you are not here, how can you love? That is why the practice of meditation is the practice of being here for the ones we love.

To be present sounds like an easy thing to do. For many of us, it is easy because we have made it a habit. We are in the habit of dwelling in the present moment, of touching the morning sunshine deeply, of drinking our morning tea deeply, of sitting and being present with the person we love. But for some of us it may not be so easy, because we have not cultivated the habit of being in the here and the now. We are always running, and it is hard for us to stop and be here in the present moment, to encounter life. For those of us who have not learned to be present, we need to be supported in that kind of learning. It's not difficult when you are supported by the sangha. With sangha you will be able to learn the art of stopping.

The sangha is a wonderful home. Every time you go back to the sangha, you feel that you can breathe more easily, you can walk more mindfully, you can better enjoy the blue sky, the white clouds and the cypress tree in your yard. Why? Because the sangha members practice going home many times a day—through walking, breathing, cooking and doing their daily activities mindfully. Everyone in the sangha is practicing in the same way, walking mindfully, sitting mindfully, eating mindfully, smiling, enjoying each moment of life.

*We are always running, and it is hard for us to stop and be here in the present moment, to encounter life. With sangha you will be able to learn the art of stopping.*

When I practice walking I make mindful and beautiful steps. I do that not only for myself but also for all of my friends who are here; because everyone who sees me taking a step like that has confidence and is reminded to do the same. And when they make a step in the present moment, smiling and making peace with themselves, they inspire all of us. You breathe for me, I walk for you, we do things together, and this is practicing as a sangha. You don't need to make much effort; your practice is easy, because you feel that you are supported by the sangha.

When we sit together as a sangha, we enjoy the collective energy of mindfulness, and each of us allows the mindful energy of the sangha to penetrate us. Even if you don't do anything, if you just stop thinking and allow yourself to absorb the collective energy of the sangha, it's very healing. Don't struggle, don't try to do something, just allow yourself to be with the sangha. Allow yourself to rest, and the energy of the sangha will help you, will carry and support you. The sangha is there to make the training easy. When we are surrounded by brothers and sisters doing exactly the same thing, it is easy to flow in the stream of the sangha.

As individuals we have problems, and we also have problems in our families, our societies and our nations. Meditation in the twenty-first century should become a collective practice; without a sangha we cannot achieve much. When we begin to focus our attention on the suffering on a larger scale, we begin to connect with and to relate to other people, who are also ourselves, and the little problems that we have within our individual circle will vanish. In this way our loneliness or our feeling of being cut off will no longer be there, and we will be able to do things together.

If we work on our problems alone, it becomes more difficult. When you have a strong emotion come up, you may feel that you cannot stand it. You may have a breakdown or want to die. But if you have someone, a good friend sitting with you, you feel much better. You feel supported and you have more strength in order to deal with your strong emotion. If you are taking something into your body that is toxic, even realizing that it will make you sick, you may not be able to change your habit. But if you are surrounded by people who do not have the same problem, it becomes easier to change. That is why it is very important

to practice in the context of a sangha.

Because you feel supported there, the sangha is the most appropriate setting and environment for the practice of looking deeply. If you have a sangha of two, three, maybe even fifty people who are practicing correctly—getting joy, peace and happiness from the practice—then you are the luckiest person on earth.

*We don't have to force ourselves to practice. We can give up all the struggle and allow ourselves to be, to rest. For this, however, we need a little bit of training, and the sangha is there to make the training easy.*

So practice in the setting of the sangha is much easier. We don't have to practice so intensely. Our practice becomes the practice of "non-practice." That means a lot. We don't have to force ourselves to practice. We can give up all the struggle and allow ourselves to be, to rest. For this, however, we need a little bit of training, and the sangha is there to make the training easy. Being aware that we are in a sangha where people are happy with being mindful, where people are living deeply the moments of their days, that is enough. I always feel happy in the presence of a happy sangha. If you put yourself in such an environment, then transformation will happen without much effort. This is my experience.

## Practicing in the sangha

If you are a beginner in the practice, you should not worry about what is the correct thing to do. When surrounded by many people, we might be caught by the idea, "I don't know what is the right thing to do." That idea may make us very uncomfortable. We may think, "I feel embarrassed that I'm not doing the right thing. There are people who are bowing, and I am not bowing. People are walking slowly, and I am walking a little bit too fast." So the idea that we may not be doing the right thing can embarrass us.

I would like to tell you what is really the right thing. The right thing is to do whatever you are doing in mindfulness. Mindfulness is keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality. To bow may not be the right thing to do if you don't bow in mindfulness. If you don't bow but are mindful, not bowing is the right thing. Even if people are walking slowly and you run, you are doing the right thing if you run mindfully. The wrong thing is

whatever you do without mindfulness. If we understand this, we will not be embarrassed anymore. Everything we do is right provided we do it in mindfulness. To bow or not to bow, that is not the question. The question is whether to bow in mindfulness or not, or not to bow in mindfulness or not.

If you take a step and you feel peaceful and happy, you know that is the correct practice. You are the only one who knows whether you are doing it correctly or not. No one else can judge. When you practice breathing in and out, if you feel peaceful, if you enjoy your in-breath and out-breath, you know you are doing it correctly. You are the best one to know. Have confidence in yourself. Wherever you find yourself, if you feel you are at ease and peaceful, that you are not under pressure, then you know you are doing it right.

The function of the bell in a sangha is to bring us back to ourselves. When we hear the bell we come back to ourselves and breathe, and at that point we improve the quality of the sangha energy. We know that our brother and our sister, wherever they are, will be stopping, breathing, and coming back to themselves. They will be generating the energy of right mindfulness, the sangha energy. When we look at each other, we feel confident, because everyone is practicing together in the same way and contributing to the quality of the sangha. So we are friends on the path of practice.

*You don't sit for yourself alone, you sit for the whole sangha—not only the sangha, but also for the people in your city, because when one person in the city is less angry, is smiling more, the whole city profits.*

The sangha is made out of the work of individuals, so we have the duty to help create the energy of the sangha. Our presence, when it is a mindful presence, contributes to that energy. When we are absent during the activities of the sangha, we are not contributing to sangha energy. If we don't go to a sitting meditation, we are not feeding our sangha. We are also letting ourselves go hungry, because we are not benefiting from the sangha.

We don't profit from the sangha, and the sangha doesn't profit from us. Don't think that we sit for ourselves. You don't sit for yourself alone, you sit for the whole sangha—not only the sangha, but also for the people in your city,

because when one person in the city is less angry, is smiling more, the whole city profits. If we practice looking deeply, our understanding of interbeing will grow, and we will see that every smile, every step, every breath is for everybody. It is for our country, for the future, for our ancestors.

The best thing we can do is to transform ourselves into a positive element of the sangha. If members of the sangha see us practicing well, they will have confidence and do better. If there are two, three, four, five, six, seven of you like that in the sangha, I'm sure the sangha will be a happy sangha and will be the refuge of many people in the world.

## The sangha isn't perfect

Our transformation and healing depend on the quality of the sangha. If there are enough people smiling and happy in the sangha, the sangha has more power to heal and transform. So you have to invest in your sangha. Every member of the sangha has his or her weaknesses and strengths, and you have to recognize them in order to make good use of the positive elements for the sake of the whole sangha. You also have to recognize the negative elements so that you and the whole sangha can help embrace them. You don't leave that negative element to the person alone, because he may not be able to hold and transform it by himself.

You don't need a perfect sangha—a family or a community doesn't have to be perfect in order to be helpful. In fact, the sangha at the time of the Buddha was not perfect. But it was enough for people to take refuge in, because in the sangha there were people who had enough compassion, solidity and insight to embrace others who did not have as much compassion, solidity and insight. I also have some difficulties with my sangha, but I'm very happy because everyone tries to practice in my sangha.

If we lived in a sangha where everyone was perfect, everyone was a bodhisattva or a buddha, that would be very difficult for us. Weakness in the other person is very important, and weakness within yourself is also very important. Anger is in us, jealousy is in us, arrogance is in us. These kinds of things are very human. It is thanks to the presence of weakness in you and weakness in a brother or a sister that you learn how to practice. To practice is to have an opportunity to transform. So it is through our shortcomings that we learn to practice.

There are some people who think of leaving the sangha when they encounter difficulties with other sangha members. They cannot bear little injustices inflicted on them because their hearts are small. To help your heart grow bigger and bigger, understanding and love are necessary. Your heart can grow as big as the cosmos; the growth of your heart is infinite. If your heart is like a big river, you can receive any amount of dirt. It will not affect you, and you can transform the dirt very easily.

The Buddha used this image. If you put a little dirt in a pitcher of water, then that water has to be thrown away. People cannot drink it. But if you put the same amount of dirt into a huge river, people can continue to drink from the river, because the river is so immense. Overnight that dirt will be transformed within the heart of the river. So if your heart is as big as a river, you can receive any amount of injustice and still live with happiness. You can transform overnight the injustices inflicted on you. If you still suffer, your heart is still not large enough. That is the teaching of forbearance and inclusiveness in Buddhism. You don't practice to suppress your suffering; you practice in order for your heart to expand as big as a river.

One time the Buddha said to his disciples: "There are people among us who do not have the same capacity as we do. They do not have the capacity to act rightly or to speak rightly. But if we look deeply, we see in their hearts that there are good seeds, and therefore we have to treat those people in such a way that those good seeds will not be lost." [1] Among us there are people who we may think do not have the capacity to practice as well as we do. But we should know that those people also have good seeds, and we have to cultivate those good seeds in such a way that these good seeds have a chance to be watered and to sprout.

*We don't need to be perfect. I myself am not perfect, and you don't need to be perfect either.*

The Buddha saw all his disciples as his children, and I think of mine in the same way. Any disciple of mine is my child that I have given birth to. In my heart I feel at ease, I feel light and happy, even though that child may still have a problem. You can use that method, too. If there is a person in the sangha who troubles you, don't give up hope. Remember, "My teacher has given birth to that child. How

can I practice in order to see that person as my sister? Then my heart will feel more at ease and I will be able to accept her. That person is still my sister, whether I want her to be or not." That feeling and those words can help dissolve the irritation that you are having with that person.

If we have harmony in the sangha, we can give confidence to many people. We don't need to be perfect. I myself am not perfect, and you don't need to be perfect either. But if in your own way you can express your harmony in the sangha, this is your gift.

In the sangha there must be difficult people. These difficult people are a good thing for you—they will test your capacity of sangha-building and practicing. One day when that person says something that is not very nice to you, you'll be able to smile and it won't make you suffer at all. Your compassion will have been born and you will be capable of embracing him or her within your compassion and your understanding. Then you will know that your practice has grown. You should be delighted that such an act does not make you angry or sad anymore, that you have enough compassion and understanding to embrace it. That is why you should not be tempted to eliminate the elements that you think are difficult in your sangha.

I am speaking to you out of my experience. I now have a lot more patience and compassion, and because I have more patience and compassion, my happiness has grown much greater. You suffer because your understanding and compassion are not yet large enough to embrace difficult people, but with the practice you will grow, your heart will grow, your understanding and compassion will grow, and you won't suffer anymore. And thanks to the sangha practicing together, thanks to your model of practice, those people will transform. That is a great success, much greater than in the case of people who are easy to get along with.

## **I take refuge in the sangha**

The reason we take refuge in anything is because we need protection. But very often we take refuge in people or things that are not at all solid. We may feel that we are not strong enough to be on our own, so we are tempted to look for someone to take refuge in. We are inclined to think that if we have someone who is strong and can be our refuge, then our life will be easier. We need to be very careful, because if we take refuge in a person who has no stability at all, then

the little bit of solidity we have ourselves will be entirely lost. Many people have done that and they have lost the little solidity and freedom they once had.

When a situation is dangerous, you need to escape, you need to take refuge in a place that is safe, that is solid. Earth is something we can take refuge in because it is solid. We can build houses on earth, but we cannot build on sand. The sangha is the same. Mindfulness, concentration and insight have built up sanghas and individuals that are solid, so when you take refuge in the sangha, you take refuge in the most solid elements.

When you are angry, if you know how to go back to your mindful breathing and take refuge in your mindfulness, you become strong. You can dwell peacefully in that moment and you are capable of dealing with the situation in a much more lucid way. You know that within you there are the elements of mindfulness, concentration and insight. Those seeds are always there. If you have a friend, a teacher, a sangha that can help you to touch those seeds and help them to grow, then you have the best kind of protection.

This is the role sangha plays in supporting, protecting and nourishing us. In the sangha there is stability and joy. The sangha is devoted to the practice of mindfulness, concentration and insight, and while everyone in the sangha profits from his or her own mindfulness, they can also take refuge in the collective energy of mindfulness, concentration and insight of the sangha. That is why there is a sense of solidity and security in the sangha. We are not afraid because the sangha is there to protect us.

It is like the flocks of wild geese that travel together from the north to the south in huge numbers. If one bird goes off on its own, it will be easily caught, but if they stay together, they are much safer. Near Plum Village there are hunters who use a bird cry to lure the geese down. If a wild goose leaves the flock and comes down alone, he will easily be shot by the hunters.

It's the same with the sangha. If we think we can live alone, apart from the sangha, we don't know our own strength or our own weakness. Thanks to the sangha we do not enter paths of darkness and suffering. Even when the sangha doesn't seem to be doing anything at all, in fact it is doing a lot, because in the sangha there is protection.

Without the sangha we easily fall into the traps of the five cravings. Once in those traps, we will be burnt by the

flames of the afflictions and suffering. Keeping the mindfulness trainings and taking refuge in the sangha's protection is a very good way to avoid being caught in the traps of the five cravings. We keep the mindfulness trainings so that they protect us. The rest of the sangha will also be keeping the same mindfulness trainings and helping us.

Some people have told me that they have never felt secure before coming to a retreat. Then after sitting, eating and walking mindfully with the sangha, for the first time they get a feeling of security. Even small creatures living nearby feel safer, because we are mindful and do our best not to harm them. That feeling of security can lead to joy. We can practice like this:

*Breathing in, I see that I am part of a sangha, and I am being protected by my sangha. Breathing out, I feel joy.*

The dharma can protect you—dharma not in the sense of a dharma talk or a book—but dharma as the practice embodied by people like yourself. When you practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful listening to the bell, you bring into yourself the elements of peace and stability, and you are protected during that time. You begin to radiate the energy of stability and peace all around you. This will help to protect your children and your loved ones. Although you may not give a dharma talk with your words, you are giving a dharma talk with your body, with your in-breath, with your out-breath, with your life. That is the living dharma. We need that very much, just as we need the living sangha.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sutra on the Five Ways to Put an End to Anger Anguttara Nikaya*, Vol. III, Sutta No. 186).

# A Socially Engaged Spiritual Response to the Climate Crisis

By **Bobo Lwin**

10 January 2022

Source: *The Open University, OpenLearn* - <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/nature-environment/socially-engaged-spiritual-response-the-climate-crisis>

How personal awakening can help societal transformation.

I recently contributed to a Buddhist dialogue at one of the fringe activities in COP26 in Glasgow, I want to explain why I did so, based on my personal experiences, in particular working with young people in Myanmar and why I am doing a PhD with The Open University. In doing so, I would like to highlight why personal transformation is an important step towards societal change or global transformation from my personal life and experience. Indeed, I believe that societal change is made more possible through numerous, sustained small changes.

## My own transformation started with awareness.

I became interested in environmental science when I had to study Biology at high school. The first book that made me aware of Climate Change was *Global Warming* written by Chit San Win (in Myanmar). Reading an article about the deterioration of Inle Lake in my country, with its unique ecological features, and learning about the environmental movement in the US inspired by Rachel Carlson's work on *Silent Spring* further raised my awareness of the ecological crisis and climate issues in our world. But as a teenager, I had no idea how to respond or what to do at first, but then became more engaged at university.

During my undergraduate study in agricultural science, I began to look at the development process and its role in food security, food safety and sustainability because there was aggressive marketing of pesticides and herbicides in Myanmar at this time. Again, I did not have



An eco-friendly conference of Engaged Buddhist Youth in a forest.

any solution to respond to this situation. I later studied Natural Resources Management for my Master's degree (at the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok) in 2005–2006 to further develop my knowledge and skills to engage in sustainability. But I also got an opportunity to learn about alternative education and sustainable development at the Grassroot Leadership Training (GLT) from the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), a Thai based NGO, where I could deeply connect with nature and realised how I could work with my people on promoting environmental awareness and behaviour change through Deep Ecology and Socially Engaged Buddhism.

I believe that societal change is made more possible through numerous, sustained small changes.

I studied about the awareness and behaviour of farmers in Inle lake area for my Master's research, which also supported my future work. This is the way I transformed through academic research, spiritual practice, knowledge and awareness of environmental



A young volunteer preparing creative recycle bins. (Green Youth Organization, Kayin State, Myanmar)



Installation art in an environmental exhibition. (Green House effect and Climate Change by Our Lovely World, Taunggyi)

issues, the quest for sustainable future and my trust in people's participation. One of the core values in socially engaged Buddhist concept is 'Kalyana mitta' (Good friends who can provoke your thoughts).

We first need to see the reality of injustice or structural violence in our socio-economic or political systems ('suffering' in Buddhism) and then we will seek our desirable future (Nirvana), by using Kalyana Mitta to help sort out the root causes (Samudaya) of the climate crisis by looking at the whole complex system. Finally, we apply eight-fold paths (right thinking, mindfulness, etc.) as our guiding principles (Meggin), steering us to maintain a middle way.

### Compassion and Wisdom

However, Buddha does not exactly mention the benchmark or scale to use to identify the middle way. It depends on the context and it is crucial to look at the holistic picture. In a nutshell, compassion and wisdom are the core practices that I have used for deepening life-long learning and fostering collaboration (as Kalayna Mitta) in my work. After completing my Master's degree, I went back to Myanmar and initiated a small youth leadership project in 2008. That project gradually developed and transformed into a local NGO – the Kalyana Mitta Development Foundation for which I invested over 12 years working as a founder and director. This Foundation has facilitated awareness raising and capacity development programmes for over 5,000 youth,

many of whom became very active community leaders.

They established their own local community-based organizations for the environmental and sustainable development movement through environmental exhibitions, music, theatre performance, Eco-youth camps, seminars, eco-farming, anti-plastic and fish seeding campaign in religious festivals, green and clean campus movement, story-telling approach for environmental education at primary and secondary schools, and special talks at universities. They did it even though it was not safe to do such simple environmental conservation activities under the military regime. Sadly, much of this work has stopped, following the military coup in February 2021.

Eighteen months before the coup I had taken another step in my own transformation by starting my doctoral studies on how education for sustainable development can be embedded in Myanmar's universities, based on the Myanmar context and citizens' expectations. Despite the current challenges in my country, I am still confident that personal transformations can potentially lead to the societal changes which can surely contribute to climate justice. Which is why I was in Glasgow to share my experiences with others.

(edited: photo captions are added on 11/01/2022)

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# Female Buddhas: A Revolution for Nuns in the Plum Village Tradition

8 March 2022

Source: *Plum Village* - <https://plumvillage.org/articles/female-buddhas-a-revolution-for-nuns-in-the-plum-village-tradition/>

*Women, including nuns, have long played an important role in supporting and affirming Thich Nhat Hanh's (Thay's) vision for a renewed, engaged form of Buddhism.*



Group in India after Sr. Chan Khong, Sr. Chan Duc and Sr. Chan Vi's ordination, 1988

Much of what Thay accomplished as a Zen teacher, social activist, and emissary to the West was possible because he had the support and trust of people like Sister Chan Khong, who was at his side nearly from the beginning of his public teaching life. In fact, the first three disciples ordained by Thay were nuns: Sister Chan Khong, Sister Chan Duc and Sister Chan Vi. Today, more than half of all International Plum Village monastic practitioners are women.

This mutual respect and deep understanding of the nature of interbeing led, in 2005, to a remarkable (by traditional standards) gesture by Thay that set a new standard for equity within his monastic community.

That year, Thay, Sister Chan Khong, and a large delegation of monastics and lay practitioners traveled to Vietnam for the first time following Thay's thirty-nine years in exile. During the Lunar New Year celebration, Thay stood up in the first row with many venerable monks, while the nuns sat still with joined palms. One monk read aloud a text recognizing the presence of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, in every nun, and declaring the vow to practice their precepts properly to protect themselves and the nuns.

To the great surprise of Venerable monks at Thay's

side, Thay then prostrated three times in front of the nuns. It would never have occurred to these monks to show such a sign of reverence to nuns, but they followed Thay's example. Although this was standard practice in International Plum Village monasteries, prostrating before nuns was an incredibly powerful, humbling, and transformational moment for the monastic tradition in Vietnam.

Before his passing earlier this year, Thay, Sister Chan Khong, and many other International Plum

Village monastics made many other revolutionary changes for nuns in the International Plum Village Tradition, granting them status, voice, and influence equal to that of monks. Some of these major changes include:

- While in many Buddhist communities nuns cannot be fully ordained, International Plum Village nuns are ordained to the same level as their monastic brothers.
- All responsibilities are shared by International Plum Village monks and nuns, both within and outside the monasteries. Monks and nuns are equally responsible for teaching, planning, cooking, cleaning, finances, etc.
- In monastery decision-making, nuns' and monks' views



Nuns at Plum Village Monastery receiving their Bhikshuni precepts

are equally valued through a democratic Sanghakarman procedure.

- In traditional Buddhist communities, the oldest nun is positioned behind the youngest monk in sitting and walking meditation, in ceremonies and in processions. At International Plum Village monasteries, nuns and monks sit, walk, and touch the earth (prostrate) side by side.
- In traditional Buddhist communities, only monks gave Dharma talks, and they very rarely addressed nuns or women. At International Plum Village monasteries, nuns and monks alternate giving Dharma talks, and all talks are addressed to the whole community. When monastics do not yet have enough experience to teach alone, they teach in groups with equal numbers of nuns and monks.
- Thay's teachings are inclusive. His teachings and practices for monastics are intended equally for monks and nuns, just as his Dharma talks, books and practices offered to lay people are for everyone. Thay was also mindful to interchangeably use "he," "she," and the neutral and non-binary "the person," and "they" in his speaking and writing.
- While most traditions do not have monks and nuns practice together, in International Plum Village monasteries monks and nuns regularly practice, learn, work, and play together. This arrangement encourages monastics to see one another as brothers and sisters of one same family, reduces fantasy and wrong perceptions that may be created through distance, and

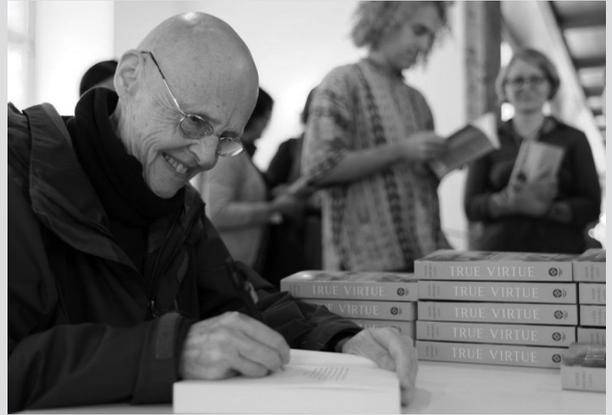
helps monastics deal with sexual energy directly rather than avoiding or suppressing it.

- In the practice of Touching the Earth, through which we pay respects to ancestors and elders, Thay incorporated several venerable female figures: Mahagotami, the first ordained bhikshuni, Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, and Mother Earth.
- Thay's teachings, ceremonies, and calligraphy center around Mother Earth, recognizing her as a bodhisattva and emphasizing the Buddha nature and teacher are contained within her.
- Thay created 8 "Gurudharmas" or "Practices of Respect" for monks, a parallel to a set of guidelines created by the Buddha on how nuns should interact with monks. [*The 8 Gurudharmas for monks can be accessed through the Mindfulness Bell here (page 19).*]
- For the first time since the time of the Buddha, Thay helped to revise the Pratimoksha, the monastic codes of conduct for fully ordained monks and nuns.
- Traditionally, nuns and lay friends are not allowed to read the Bhikshu precepts of the fully ordained monks. In International Plum Village monasteries, Thay made the Bhikshu and Bhikshuni precepts available to the public.
- According to the traditional Pratimoksha (monastic precepts), a monk may disrobe seven times.

If a fully ordained nun disrobes, she can only return as a novice and cannot again receive full ordination. In the International Plum Village tradition, Thay has

allowed nuns to re-ordain as Bhikshunis.

Finally, a growing number of Dharma books being published by Parallax Press are written or co-written by nuns in the Plum Village community, including Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet, written by Thay and coauthored by Sister Chan Khong and Sister True Dedication; Learning True Love: Practicing Buddhism in a Time of War and Beginning Anew: Four Steps to Restoring Communication, by Sister Chan Khong; Flowers in the Dark: Reclaiming Your Power to Heal Trauma through Mindfulness, Mindfulness as Medicine: A Story of Healing Body and Spirit, and Healing: A Woman's Journey from



Sister Annabel signing copies of her book, "True Virtue"

Doctor to Nun, by Sister Dang Nghiem; and Mindfulness: Walking with Jesus and Buddha and True Virtue: The Journey of an English Buddhist Nun by Sister Annabel Laity.

Thay and Sister Chan Khong have emphasized that members of our sangha should be valued and respected because of our practice, not because of our gender. This revolutionary position has attracted many women to ordain in the community. International Plum Village practices and ways of life have empowered young sisters in their practice and have shifted how they view themselves. These practices will continue to influence the way future disciples are trained, offering more space, trust and voice to women.



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## South Africa: Father Michael Lapsley, SSM to Receive the Niwano Peace Prize

**Niwano Peace Foundation**

25 February 2022

Source: *AllAfrica* - <https://allafrica.com/stories/202202250659.html#:~:text=The%2039%20th%20Niwano%20Peace,other%20par ts%20of%20the%20world.>

The 39th Niwano Peace Prize will be awarded to Father Michael Lapsley, SSM of South Africa in recognition of his relentless struggle against apartheid and social discriminations, his support for the liberation movement in South Africa and various peacebuilding activities in other parts of the world. Father Lapsley's non-violent, multi-faith peacebuilding efforts and activities of healing based on restorative justice approach, dialogue, and reconciliation are continuing to contribute to the healing of South Africans as well as many others all over the world. He has contributed immensely to the cause of peace and inter-religious cooperation, which is in congruence with the mission of the Niwano Peace Prize.

The presentation ceremony will take place in Tokyo, Japan, on Tuesday, June 14, 2022. In addition to an award certificate, Father Michael Lapsley, SSM will receive a medal and twenty million yen. To avoid undue emphasis on any particular religion or region, every year the Peace Foundation solicits nominations from people of recognized intellectual and religious stature around the world. In the nomination process, some 600 people and organizations, representing 125



countries and many religions, are asked to propose candidates. Nominations are rigorously screened by the Niwano Peace Prize Committee, which was set up in May of 2003 on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Niwano Peace Prize. The Committee presently consists of nine religious leaders from various parts of the world, all of whom are involved in movements for peace and inter-religious cooperation. Here are some comments by members of the Committee on the selection of Father Michael Lapsley, SSM for this year's award:

- [He] lost both hands and one eye. He did not become bitter. Rather he not only carried on his struggle, he set about working on healing and reconciliation. His work focuses on healing across all sorts of divides. He saw in justice and he fought it. He saw damage and he has strived to heal it. (Mrs. Sarah Joseph OBE)

- Father Michael Lapsley is very deserving of the Niwano Peace Prize. Father Lapsley has fought apartheid, which is one of the most striking forms of a hateful and painful phenomenon such as racial or ethnic discrimination. By doing so he has earned the esteem and respect of black South Africans of all religions. This commitment ... was the cause of a very serious attempt on his life ... gravely injured him, he lost both hands, the sight of one eye, and was severely burned. But a few years later, this attack also provoked a real transformation in him, a conversion, from ... freedom fighter to healer and reconciler. This shows that in addition to exercising the virtue of fortress, thanks to which he has endured the very serious consequences of the attack suffered, Father Lapsley also exercises the 1 virtue of humility. In his commitment he has met and collaborated with people of different religious beliefs to lead them to peace of heart. (Dr. Flaminia Giovanelli)
- After experiencing some gruesome torturing from those favoring racism, discrimination and inequalities; Father Lapsley was not scared to challenge the evils imposed by his own people over the disadvantaged. Even after liberation of South Africa from apartheid, Father Lapsley did not stop his mission of being a social justice activist for all. He realized that something more needs to be done to the victims of racism and apartheid for their holistic healing. As a global activist, Father Lapsley after recognizing that racism had not been confined to South Africa alone, he did not end his campaign for healing of memories of those within his country, he also moved globally. (Dr. Nokuzola Mndende)
- Forgiveness and hope are essential as learned from his life experiences in order for healing to take place across societies around the world. His contribution to this long-term work emphasizes and supports trauma healing and peaceful coexistence. He has reached many persons through dialogue processes

at the grassroots to the top of political and religious hierarchies. His influence on healing of memories has helped many persons all over the world. (Mr. Somboon Chungprampree)

- Despite of the attack and losing his both arms, he courageously promotes healing of memory. He does not only preach it but practices it in his institution for healing memories. A victim of violence but an example of forgiveness. I still believe that Father Lapsley deserves to be recognized in such a ruthless world, where violence and power crush the victims. He paid a high price but still speaks about healing of memory. As there are many persecuted victims in our world, this is a sign of an empowered victim who speaks about forgiveness and healing. People of power need to see that we recognize victims of power. (Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan)

### The Niwano Peace Prize

The Niwano Peace Foundation established the Niwano Peace Prize to honor and encourage individuals and organizations that have contributed significantly to inter-religious cooperation, thereby furthering the cause of world peace, and to make their achievements known as widely as possible. The Foundation hopes in this way both to enhance inter-religious understanding and cooperation and to encourage the emergence of still more persons devoted to working for world peace. The Prize is named in honor of the founder and first president of the lay Buddhist organization Rissho Kosei-kai, Nikkyo Niwano. For Niwano, peace was not merely an absence of conflict among nations, but a dynamic harmony in the inner lives of people as well as in our communities, nations and the world. Seeing peace as the goal of Buddhism, Niwano devoted much of the latter half of his life to promoting world peace, especially through inter-religious discussion and cooperation.



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# Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love

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by **bell hooks**

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Source: *Lion's Roar* - <https://www.lionsroar.com/toward-a-worldwide-culture-of-love/>

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The practice of love, says bell hooks, is the most powerful antidote to the politics of domination. She traces her thirty-year meditation on love, power, and Buddhism, and concludes it is only love that transforms our personal relationships and heals the wounds of oppression.

At a conference on women and Buddhism that took place in spring last year, I was upset because most of the speakers were giving their talks in this serene, beautiful chapel, a place evoking a sense of the divine, a sacred place for the word to be spoken and heard, yet my talk was to take place on a Friday night in an unappealing, cavernous auditorium. Lamenting my exclusion from the realm of the sacred, I complained that I was exiled because I was not seen as a “real” Buddhist—no long time with a teacher, no journey to India or Tibet, never present at important retreats—definitely someone engaged in buddhadharma without credentials. The two companions who had joined me at the conference listened with compassion to my whining. Why did I have to speak in a huge auditorium? Why did I have to speak on a Friday night? Yes, I told them, lots of people might want to hear bell hooks speak on feminist theory and cultural criticism, but that’s not the same as a talk about Buddhism.

Yet when the time came the seats were filled. And it was all about Buddhism. It was a truly awesome night. Sacred presence was there, a spirit of love and compassion like spring mist covered us, and loving-kindness embraced me and my words. This is always the measure of mindful



bell hooks. Photo by Liza Matthews.

practice—whether we can create the conditions for love and peace in circumstances that are difficult, whether we can stop resisting and surrender, working with what we have, where we are.

Fundamentally, the practice of love begins with acceptance—the recognition that wherever we are is the appropriate place to practice, that the present moment is the appropriate time. But for so many of us our longing to love and be loved has always been about a time to come, a space in the future when it will just happen, when our hungry hearts will finally be fed, when we will find love.

More than thirty years ago, when I first began to think about Buddhism, there was little or no talk about Buddhism and love. Being a Buddhist was akin to being a leftist; it was all about the intellect, the philosophical mind. It was faith for the thinking “man” and love was nowhere to be found in the popular Buddhist literature at that time. D. T. Suzuki’s collection on Buddhism published in the late forties and throughout the fifties had nothing to say about love. Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* was the Buddhist manifesto of the early seventies, and it did not

speak to us of love.

Even though Christmas Humphreys would tell readers in his fifties publication *Buddhism: An Introduction and Guide* that “Buddhism is as much a religion of love as any on earth,” Westerners looking to Buddhism in those days were not looking for love. In fact, Humphreys was talking back to folks who had designated Buddhism a “cold religion.” To prove that love was important to Buddhists, he quoted from the *Itivuttaka*: “All the means that can be used as bases for right action are not worth the sixteenth part of the emancipation of the heart through love. This takes all others up into itself, outshining them in glory.” Yet twenty years after this publication, there was still little talk of Buddhism and love. In circles where an individual would dare to speak of love, they would be told that Buddhists were more concerned with the issue of compassion. It was as though love was just not a relevant, serious subject for Buddhists.

*The practice of love begins with acceptance—the recognition that wherever we are is the appropriate place to practice, that the present moment is the appropriate time.*

During the turbulent sixties and seventies, the topic of love made its way to the political forefront. Peace activists were telling us to “make love not war.” And the great preacher Martin Luther King, Jr., elevated the call to love from the hidden longing of the solitary heart to a public cry. He proclaimed love to be the only effective way to end injustice and bring peace, declaring that “Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace. ... If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.”

There could not have been a more perfect historical dharma moment for spiritual leaders to speak out on the issue of love. No doubt divine providence was at work in the universe when Martin Luther King, Jr., and a little-known Vietnamese Buddhist monk named Thich Nhat Hanh found themselves walking the same path—walking

toward one another—engaged in a practice of love. Young men whose hearts were awakening, they created in mystical moments of sacred encounter a symbolic sangha.

They affirmed one another’s work. In the loneliness of the midnight hour, King would fall on his knees and ask himself the question, “How can I say I worship a god of love and support war?” Thich Nhat Hanh, knowing by heart all the bonds of human connection that war severs, challenged the world to think peace, declaring in the wake of the Vietnam war that he “thought it was quite plain that if you have to choose between Buddhism and peace, then you must choose peace.” Linking Buddhism with social engagement, Thich Nhat Hanh’s work attracted Westerners (myself included) precisely because he offered a spiritual vision of the universe that promoted working for peace and justice.

In *Essential Buddhism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs and Practices*, Jack Maguire sees Buddhism’s emphasis on nonviolence as one of the central features that attracts Westerners. He writes: “Already large numbers of people concerned about such violence have been drawn to Buddhism as a spiritual path that addresses the problem directly. Besides offering them a means of committing themselves more actively to the cause of universal peace, it gives them a context for becoming more intimate with others who are like-minded. It therefore helps restore their hope that people can live together in harmony.”

Significantly, Buddhism began to attract many more Western followers because it linked the struggle for world peace with the desire of each individual to be engaged in meaningful spiritual practice. Coming out of a time when it had been cool for smart people to be agnostic or atheist, people wanted permission to seek spiritual connection.

Introducing the collection of essays entitled *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, editor Christopher Queen calls attention to the fact that socially engaged Buddhism “has emerged in the context of a global conversation on human rights, distributive justice, and social progress.... As a style of ethical practice engaged Buddhism may be seen as a new paradigm of Buddhist liberation.” In the late eighties and nineties Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings on engaged Buddhist practice spoke directly to concerned citizens in the United States who had been working on behalf of

peace and justice, especially for an end to domination based on racial, gender, and sexual practice, but who had begun to feel hopelessness and despair. The assassination of visionary leaders, the inability to end racism and create a just society, the failure of contemporary feminism, which, rather than healing the split between men and women, actually led to further gender warfare—all of this engendered a collective feeling of hopelessness. Buddhist teachers addressed this suffering directly.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche was one of the first Buddhist teachers in the West offering the insight that this profound hopelessness could be the groundwork for spiritual practice. Certainly, I came to Buddhism searching for a way out of suffering and despair. Thich Nhat Hanh spoke to my struggle to connect spiritual practice with social engagement. Yet at the time, his Buddhism often seemed rigid, and like many other seekers I turned to the teachings of Trungpa Rinpoche to confront the longings of my heart and find a way to embrace a passionate life. For many Western seekers, the feeling that we had failed to create a culture of peace and justice led us back to an introspective search of our intimate relations, which more often than not were messy and full of strife, suffering, and pain. How could any of us truly believe that we could create world peace when we could not make peace in our intimate relationships with family, partners, friends, and neighbors?

Responding to this collective anguish of spirit, visionary teachers (like King, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, Sharon Salzberg) were moved by spiritual necessity to speak more directly about the practice of love. Proclaiming transformation in his consciousness engendered by a focus on love, Thich Nhat Hanh declared in the poem “The Fruit of Awareness Is Ripe”: *when I knew how to love the doors of my heart opened wide before the wind. / Reality was calling out for revolution. That spirit of revolution*, that call to practice transformative love captured my critical imagination and merged with my longing to find a loving partner.

When lecturing on ending domination around the world, listening to the despair and hopelessness, I asked individuals who were hopeful to talk about what force in their life pushed them to make a profound transformation,

moving them from a will to dominate toward a will to be compassionate. The stories I heard were all about love. That sense of love as a transformative power was also present in the narratives of individuals working to create loving personal relationships.

Writing about metta, “love” or “loving-kindness,” as the first of the brahmaviharas, the heavenly abodes, Sharon Salzberg reminds us in her insightful book *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* that “In cultivating love, we remember one of the most powerful truths the Buddha taught ... that the forces in the mind that bring suffering are able to temporarily hold down the positive forces such as love or wisdom, but they can never destroy them. ... Love can uproot fear or anger or guilt, because it is a greater power. Love can go anywhere. Nothing can obstruct it.” Clearly, at the end of the nineties an awakening of heart was taking place in our nation, our concern with the issue of love evident in the growing body of literature on the subject.

*Right now there is such a profound collective cultural awareness that we need to practice love if we are to heal ourselves and the planet.*

Because of the awareness that love and domination cannot coexist, there is a collective call for everyone to place learning how to love on their emotional and/or spiritual agenda. We have witnessed the way in which movements for justice that denounce dominator culture, yet have an underlying commitment to corrupt uses of power, do not really create fundamental changes in our societal structure. When radical activists have not made a core break with dominator thinking (imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy), there is no union of theory and practice, and real change is not sustained. That’s why cultivating the mind of love is so crucial. When love is the ground of our being, a love ethic shapes our participation in politics.

To work for peace and justice we begin with the individual practice of love, because it is there that we can experience firsthand love’s transformative power. Attending to the damaging impact of abuse in many of our

childhoods helps us cultivate the mind of love. Abuse is always about lovelessness, and if we grow into our adult years without knowing how to love, how then can we create social movements that will end domination, exploitation, and oppression?

John Welwood shares the insight in *Perfect Love, Imperfect Relationships* that many of us carry a “wound of the heart” that emerged in childhood conditioning, creating “a disconnection from the loving openness that is our nature.” He explains: “This universal wound shows up in the body as emptiness, anxiety, trauma, or depression, and in relationships as the mood of unlove. ... On the collective level, this deep wound in the human psyche leads to a world wracked by struggle, stress, and dissension.... The greatest ills on the planet—war, poverty, economic injustice, ecological degradation—all stem from our inability to trust one another, honor differences, engage in respectful dialogue, and reach mutual understanding.” Welwood links individual failure to learn how to love in childhood with larger social ills; however, even those who are fortunate to love and be loved in childhood grow to maturity in a culture of domination that devalues love.

Being loving can actually lead one to be more at odds with mainstream culture. Even though, as Riane Eisler explains in *The Power of Partnership*, our “first lessons about human relations are not learned in workplaces, businesses, or even schools, but in parent–child and other relations,” those habits of being are not formed in isolation. The larger culture in our nation shapes how we relate. Any child born in a hospital first experiences life in a place where private and public merge. The interplay of these two realities will be constant in our lives. It is precisely because the dictates of dominator culture structure our lives that it is so difficult for love to prevail.

When I began, years ago now, to focus on the power of love as a healing force, no one really disagreed with me. Yet what they continue to accept in their daily life is lovelessness, because doing the work of love requires resisting the status quo. In Thich Nhat Hanh’s most recent treatise on the subject, *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart*, he reminds us that “to love, in the context of Buddhism, is above all to be there.” He then raises the

question of whether or not we have time for love. Right now there is such a profound collective cultural awareness that we need to practice love if we are to heal ourselves and the planet. The task awaiting us is to move from awareness to action. The practice of love requires that we make time, that we embrace change.

Fundamentally, to begin the practice of love we must slow down and be still enough to bear witness in the present moment. If we accept that love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we can then be guided by this understanding. We can use these skillful means as a map in our daily life to determine right action. When we cultivate the mind of love, we are, as Sharon Salzberg says, “cultivating the good,” and that means “recovering the incandescent power of love that is present as a potential in all of us” and using “the tools of spiritual practice to sustain our real, moment-to-moment experience of that vision.” To be transformed by the practice of love is to be born again, to experience spiritual renewal. What I witness daily is the longing for that renewal and the fear that our lives will be changed utterly if we choose love. That fear paralyzes. It leaves us stuck in the place of suffering.

When we commit to love in our daily life, habits are shattered. We are necessarily working to end domination. Because we no longer are playing by the safe rules of the status quo, rules that if we obey guarantee us a specific outcome, love moves us to a new ground of being. This movement is what most people fear. If we are to galvanize the collective longing for spiritual well-being that is found in the practice of love, we must be more willing to identify the forms that longing will take in daily life. Folks need to know the ways we change and are changed when we love. It is only by bearing concrete witness to love’s transformative power in our daily lives that we can assure those who are fearful that commitment to love will be redemptive, a way to experience salvation.

Lots of people listen and affirm the words of visionary teachers who speak on the necessity of love. Yet they feel in their everyday lives that they simply do not know how to link theory and practice. When Thich Nhat Hanh tells in *Transformation and Healing* that “understanding is the very foundation of love and compassion,” that “if love and

compassion are in our hearts, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a miracle,” we are moved. We may even feel a powerful surge of awareness and possibility.

Then we go home and find ourselves uncertain about how to realize true love. I remember talking deeply with Thich Nhat Hanh about a love relationship in which I felt I was suffering. In his presence I was ashamed to confess the depths of my anguish and the intensity of my anger toward the man in my life.

Speaking with such tenderness he told me, “Hold on to your anger and use it as compost for your garden.” Listening to these wise words I felt as though a thousand rays of light were shining throughout my being. I was certain I could go home, let my light shine, and everything would be better; I would find the promised happy ending. The reality was that communication was still difficult. Finding ways to express true love required vigilance, patience, a will to let go, and the creative use of the imagination to invent new ways of relating. Thich Nhat Hanh had told me to see the practice of love in this tumultuous relationship as spiritual practice, to find in the mind of love a way to understanding, forgiveness, and peace. Of course, this was all work. Just as cultivating a garden requires turning over the ground, pulling weeds, planting, and watering, doing the work of love is all about taking action.

Whenever anyone asks me how they can begin the practice of love I tell them giving is the place to start. In *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen offers this testimony: “Every time I take a step in the direction of generosity I know that I am moving from fear to love.” Salzberg sees giving as a way to purify the mind: “Giving is an inward state, a generosity of the spirit that extends to ourselves as well as to others.” Through giving we develop the mind of gratitude. Giving enables us to experience the fullness of abundance—not only the abundance we have, but the abundance in sharing. In sharing all that we have we become more. We awaken the heart of love.

*Imagine all that would change for the better if every community in our nation had a sangha that would focus on the practice of love.*

Dominator thinking and practice relies for its maintenance on the constant production of a feeling of lack, of the need to grasp. Giving love offers us a way to end this suffering—loving ourselves, extending that love to everything beyond the self, we experience wholeness. We are healed. The Buddha taught that we can create a love so strong that, as Salzberg states, our “minds become like a pure, flowing river that cannot be burned.” Such love is the foundation of spiritual awakening.

If we are to create a worldwide culture of love then we need enlightened teachers to guide us. We need concrete strategies for practicing love in the midst of domination. Imagine all that would change for the better if every community in our nation had a center (a sangha) that would focus on the practice of love, of loving-kindness.

All the great religious traditions share the belief that love is our reason for being. This shared understanding of love helps connect Buddhist traditions with Christian practice. Those coming to Buddhism from Christian traditions appreciate the work that Thich Nhat Hanh has done to create a bridge connecting these spiritual paths. In *Living Buddha, Living Christ* he offers a vision of inclusiveness, reminding us that both Jesus and Buddha are doors we can walk through to find true love. He explains: “In Buddhism such a special door is deeply appreciated because that door allows us to enter the realm of mindfulness, loving-kindness, peace, and joy.” Sharing the truism that there are many doors of teaching he states: “Each of us, by our practice and our loving-kindness, is capable of opening new dharma doors.”

All of us who work toward creating a culture of love seek to share a real body of teaching that can reach everyone where we are. That was the lesson I learned at the conference last May—to be broad, to extend the circle of love beyond boundaries, bringing together people from different backgrounds and traditions, and feeling together the way love connects us.

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bell hooks passed away on December 15, 2021.



# Reconsidering the SDGs in Light of Grassroots Socially Engaged Buddhism

by **Jonathan S. Watts**

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[https://rk-world.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/DW2021\\_Autumn.pdf](https://rk-world.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/DW2021_Autumn.pdf)

The first step religious groups need to take is to clarify the conceptual problems and structural limitations for SDGs... Without doing so, they cannot promote an authentic civil-society movement that truly serves the people rather than state and corporate agendas.

## The Brave New World of Social Development Goals

Living here in Japan, I wonder if other nations in Asia and elsewhere have noticed a new flood of promotions around the United Nations' seventeen Social Development Goals officially adopted by UN member states in late 2015. These seventeen goals encompass a wide range of socioeconomic policy agendas that any reasonable and caring person would resonate with, such as eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving gender equality, developing affordable and clean energy, promoting responsible consumption and production, and supporting climate action, peace, and social justice. What person in good conscience would oppose these?

Japan, always sensitive to world trends and the perception of their society by the outside world, has wholeheartedly embraced these goals, with the Japanese government handing out awards to "companies, local governments, and NGOs/NPOs that are making outstanding efforts on sustainable development ([www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/sdgs/award/index.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/sdgs/award/index.html)). Their



On September 8, 2020, the Tokyu Railways Corporation, a private sector running a railway service linking the Tokyo area with Yokohama City, started to run the "SDGs Trains" to promote its corporate campaign of the Sustainable Development Goals.

campaign has even extended to painting and decorating entire commuter trains promoting the SDG movement in cities such as Yokohama.

The Japanese Buddhist world, as equally concerned about its public image, has also jumped on the bandwagon, with one Buddhist priest designing *kesas* (a scarf worn around the neck for ritual duties) creating a distinctively patterned SDG *kesa* for sale. The Japan Buddhist Federation, which acts as a formal representative body for the traditional Buddhist denominations of Japan on public matters, has also begun to search for ways to promote these goals within the Buddhist world. This time of climate crisis is a fitting moment to put the

well-being of the common person center stage in our new millennium and for Buddhism to become more deeply socially engaged for the well-being of all sentient beings.

For some Buddhists, however, something seems a little off in this promise of the brave new world of the SDGs. Since the modern era began in Asia with the full onslaught of Western colonialism in the mid-1800s, Buddhists, specifically socially engaged Buddhists, have been attempting to articulate and chart an alternative course of modernity for their once-traditional societies. Their visions have sought a more holistic and middle-way course between what they view as the destructive materialism of Western capitalism and socialism. This struggle became increasingly sophisticated and practical with the achievement of national independence by most Asian nations after World War II.

Perhaps the most highly systematized attempt at Buddhist development that continues today is the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement in Sri Lanka, founded by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne in the 1950s and rising to national prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. One of the pioneers in the microcredit and community banking movement, Sarvodaya articulated a people's participatory development. This movement has stood in contrast to state and market-driven development lorded over by a class of national and international elites often more interested in their own financial gain than the well-being of the people. At the beginning, Sarvodaya articulated a set of Ten Basic Needs for the community that are very similar to the Seventeen SDGs: (1) a clean and beautiful environment, (2) an adequate supply of safe water, (3) the minimum requirements of clothing, (4) a balanced diet, (5) simple housing, (6) basic health care, (7) communication facilities, (8) energy, (9) total education related to life and living, (10) cultural and spiritual needs.

In a recent interview with Harsha Navaratne—who spent years in the field building Sarvodaya under his uncle Dr. Ariyaratne and presently serves as the chairperson of the International Network of Engaged



Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, the president of the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement of Sri Lanka, gives a special lecture on the principle of the movement at Rishso Kosei-kai's Gakurin Seminary, Tokyo, on May 8, 1992.

Buddhists (INEB)—he notes that these Ten Basic Needs were actually taken from the traditional development concepts of every Sri Lankan village that ensured the wide-ranging sustainability of the people and their environment. Navaratne further notes that Sarvodaya had to revive them in their work, because they had been destroyed by the invasive and exploitative nature of British colonial capitalism, which views everything as means for economic productivity. After Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, the new government embarked on a period of more measured, socialistic development in which organizations like Sarvodaya could emerge and thrive. However, under the strain of increasing ethnic conflict, whose root causes had been sown by the

British, Sri Lanka embraced a policy of free-market, liberal capitalism in 1978. In this period, the United Nations and its new development policies became much more active in the country, first with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), established in 1965 to “end poverty, build democratic governance, rule of law, and inclusive institutions.” (<https://www.undp.org/about-us>) But Navaratne comments that for Sri Lanka these UN programs simply reintroduced the English model of liberal capitalism under the banner of development and poverty reduction. While taking into



The Treaty of Münster depicted here and the Treaty of Westphalia, both signed in October 1648, brought an end to the Wars of Religion and marked the start of today's nation-states.

account that sociopolitical conditions in Sri Lanka are incredibly complex and nuanced, these programs still never reached any of their aims. The nation subsequently descended into a forty-year ethnic war. Much of its economy became propped up by the migration of young women to the Middle East to work in the servant class. This all led to the deterioration of community life, so that Sri Lanka had the leading rate of suicide in Asia for decades.

## The Historical Roots of Neurotic State and Corporate-Led Development

Navaratne's response to the SDG movement is thus less than enthusiastic, not because of its ideals, but because of its methods. He sees it as a movement being initiated by the United Nations, a broken institution built around the deeply flawed paradigm of the modern nation-state system. As numerous authors have noted, such as David R. Loy in his *Buddhist History of the West*, the European nation-state system is a child of the traumatic failures of the Protestant Reformation to liberate Christianity from the Catholic Church and establish a unified and enlightened form of Christianity for the people. Within a short time, Europe began to tear itself apart in the Wars

of Religion, which concluded with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and also the establishment of the modern nation-state as the norm for political systems. These events led Europeans to give up on religion as a bonding agent for society, eventually replacing religious faith and morality with utilitarian logic and scientific reason. The naturally autonomous, property-owning individual living within a system of tribalized nation-states became the new basis for society as epitomized in the American idealism of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. While the West has heralded this as a transformative moment in human liberty, the legacy of this period must be questioned, with three hundred years of racist colonialism, two world wars, and the new economic colonialism of globalization all fueled by a neurotic overemphasis on material development.

Navaratne notes that under this ongoing paradigm of the nation-state systematized through the United Nations, real grassroots organizations that sit outside liberal and communist systems cannot access funds. Large amounts of government aid money are funneled through the UN, which in turn takes a huge percentage of it simply to maintain the institution. While much lip service is being paid to the SDGs, the reality is that the funding goals of the biggest donors, such as those on the UN Security Council, are pouring money into security issues that serve the nation-state: for example, USAID's focus on democracy and peace in Asia as a means to compete with China over regional influence. Navaratne notes that there is no actual balance in providing funds equally for the other SDGs. Further, funding for progressive goals, such as clean energy, is funneled through large corporate projects, and not through citizens organizations that help local people build up sustainable local economies. Indeed, these deeper liberal-capitalist agendas are found embedded in the language of the SDGs, which "recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth" (<https://www.sdgactioncampaign.org/17goals/>).

## Buddhist Visions and Practices for Sustainable Development

According to Somboon Chungprampree, the executive director of INEB in Bangkok, the first step religious groups need to take is to clarify the conceptual problems and structural limitations of SDGs as outlined above. Without doing so, they cannot promote an authentic civil-society movement that truly serves the people rather than state and corporate agendas. From a Buddhist stand- point, this involves the practice of the Buddha's First Noble Truth, which, in this context, is getting in touch with the real suffering of the people, and the Second Noble Truth, which is clarifying the root structural and cultural causes of this suffering that are neglected, unseen, and glossed over, for example by sparkly SDG campaigns and advertisements. The Third Noble Truth is developing a new vision for the ending of suffering, a vision of nirvana.

The Sarvodaya movement under Dr. Ariyaratne offers one such vision, which embraces cultural diversity and articulates itself for non-Buddhists and nonreligionists. There are also important Buddhist forerunners in the pre- war era that present-day Buddhists should become aware of. For example, the Japanese Nichiren-sect priest Rev. Giro Seno-o (妹尾義郎, 1889–1961) was one of the few Buddhists in Japan in the pre-war era to reject not only Western materialism but also the archaic idealism and imperialism of the Meiji Restoration. While maintaining that Buddhism “is nothing other than the truth of development and change,” he urged Japanese Buddhists to recapture the revolutionary spirit of “Buddhism for society” found in the formative period of the Kamakura era (James Mark Shields, *Against Harmony: Progressive and Radical Buddhism in Modern Japan* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2017], 220).

Chinese Master Taixu (太虛, 1890– 1947) was another pre-war pioneer of modern Buddhist praxis, mapping out a process that would transcend both the



The sculpture depicts the Mahad water movement, or referred to as the Mahad Satyagraha, led by B. R. Ambedkar on March 20, 1927 to allow Dalits to use water in a public tank in Mahad (currently in Raigad district), Maharashtra, India.

nation-state and religion itself. “Progress in the realm of government is from the authority of tribal chieftains to a monarchy, and from a monarchy to a republic, and from a republic to [the ideal of] no government at all. In religion, progress is from [the belief in] many gods to one god, from one god to sages and worthies, and from sages and worthies to no religion at all” (Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* [University of Hawai'i Press, 2001], 251–52).

In India, B. R. Ambedkar (1891– 1956) articulated a Buddhist path of modernity that would heal the schism of religious morality and secular reason in Western modernity with an engaged, nontheistic morality to guide the nation-state and its development path. While India continues to struggle with religious fundamentalism and the social injustices it gives birth to, Ambedkar's legacy in drafting the independence constitution of modern India continues to serve progressive Indians with a vision of a multicultural dharmic society.

In the postwar era, even more highly developed social critiques and visions have been articulated. The Vietnamese Buddhist movement developed a distinctly

nonaligned ideology of neutralism during the war in Vietnam and a nuanced understanding of nonviolent action. In the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, “The violence of the system is much more destructive, much more harmful, although it is well hidden and not so visible. We call it institutional violence. By calling ourselves non-violent, we are against all violence, but we are first against the institutional violence” (Sallie B. King, “Thich Nhat Hanh and the Unified Buddhist Church: Nondualism in Action,” in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, ed. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King [State University of New York Press, 1996], 345).

Finally, in Thailand we can see the reclamation of true socialism in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s Dhammic Socialism, which seeks a middle way between Western individualism and Asian collectivism through an ethical social system grounded in harmony with a duty toward the natural environment.

From these forerunners, Buddhists not only in Asia but all over the world have been developing a wide variety of social activities and movements to realize the ideals of the SDGs, but within the more authentic framework of grassroots communities. For Chungprampree, this is the important second agenda, that of showing actual alternative forms of development based on the people’s standpoint—an expression of the Buddha’s Fourth Noble Truth of the path toward realizing the vision of nirvana. In June 2020, as the COVID pandemic first overtook the world, INEB presented a response called “Enlightening Crisis: A Vision for a Post-COVID-19 World.” This document and accompanying video detailed a wide variety of grassroots initiatives by socially engaged Buddhists. Though such activities began well before the pandemic, they also offer a path to a world order that can be more resilient in the face of future such crises that will no doubt emerge from our growing environmental one. These initiatives have been organized under the following four wider themes: (1) Dharmic Economics, Right Livelihood, and Holistic Development; (2) Environmental and

Sustainable Interbeing; (3) Cultural Diversity and Co-Existence; and (4) Good Governance, Human Rights, and Peace.

Under the theme Dharmic Economics, Right Livelihood, and Holistic Development, we are seeing a whole new host of socially engaged Buddhist development activities flowing out of the historical precedents of Sarvodaya and the Thai development monk movements. These activities include the Sufficiency Economy and New Theory Agriculture (Kok Nong Na) movements led by Buddhists to rehabilitate the rural economy and community in Thailand; temple-based community banks and microcredit in Myanmar; Buddhist-run clean-energy systems for community development in Japan; and an international network of peoples-based social enterprises evolving out of Sri Lanka called the Good Market.

Under the Environmental and Sustainable Interbeing theme, the Eco-Temple Community Development Project has, in the past decade, evolved out of the Inter-Religious Climate and Ecology Network (ICE) to become a forum for activating Buddhist temples as leaders in responding to much more than the surface-level issues of the environmental crisis. Their sixpoint seed-planting scheme takes the work to a deeper level in developing a variety of models for building local sustainable economies based on clean energy, environment-friendly architecture, rehabilitation of the local and regional environment, and community education in development and spirituality.

Under Cultural Diversity and Co-Existence, the aforementioned ICE network based in South Korea has been creating a wide range of interfaith initiatives to bring faith communities together to work on climate change. Such interfaith work is also extending to the International Forum on Buddhist-Muslim relations founded in 2013 to address the specific issues and conflicts going on in southern Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

Under Good Governance, Human Rights, and



Muslim and Buddhist people clean the compound of a mosque as they prepare for it to be reopened, after it was temporarily shut as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, in Thailand's southern province of Narathiwat on June 13, 2021.

seek to remedy. How then, can we assume they will provide the leadership to solve them? In a world flowering with new visions of social inclusivity and diversity, we must continue to build the twenty-first century based on a people's articulation of and participation in authentic sustainable development.

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Jonathan S. Watts is a Research Fellow at the International Buddhist Exchange Center of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship in Yokohama, Japan. He coordinates the Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB) and serves on the Executive Committee of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. He also teaches Buddhism at Keio University and helps to train Buddhist chaplains at the Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism in Tokyo.

Peace, socially engaged Buddhists continue to navigate the political landmines that their forerunners did in the colonial era. This includes Buddhists in the United States becoming active in the social-justice and electoral campaigns of 2020 and participants in the Interfaith Forum for the Review of National Nuclear Policy in Japan speaking out against nuclear energy and its inevitable connections to militarism and war.

### Conclusion

There are numerous activities taking place at the grassroots level by socially engaged Buddhists and other like-minded religious groups. These are, in fact, the kind of peoples-based SDGs of which we should become more aware and which we should support with helping hands rather than trendy marketing campaigns. It was Einstein who once said, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." We should take this as a mantra when being unmindfully and uncritically swayed by governmental and corporate campaigns to alleviate poverty and save the environment. The modern nation-state and its twin siblings of corporate capitalism and command-economy socialism are the very systems that created poverty, environmental destruction, and many of the other problems the SDGs



**Mg Zero**  
19 hrs · 🌐

#Oneyearafter

some just walk by,  
some sometimes stop to look  
some stopped and asked if they knew anything  
some criticize, some asked for help  
some are consciously involved,  
some are still afraid  
some took up arms and revolted  
some say it does not belong to them yet  
some had to move to a faraway place because of  
circumstances  
some are still helping from a distance,  
most are still struggling inside  
some work together,  
some are alone in circumstances  
some are still having fun,  
some have lost their lives  
some say they think they can no longer win,  
some are still walking with confidence  
some still do not understand,  
some are explaining  
some ask if it is possible to negotiate,  
some are clear, they can not be negotiated, they have to win  
I know where I am, do you?  
မောင်သူည (ခေတ္တလူပြည်)

Poem

# A Metta Prayer

by **Hozan Alan Senauke**

11 March 2022

Source: **BuddhistDoor Global** -

<https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/a-metta-prayer/>

**M**etta is a Pali word often translated as loving-kindness. It has correspondences in other languages: *chesed* in Hebrew, *agape* in Greek, *caritas* in Latin. Metta has entered the common parlance of Buddhist practice and liturgy as the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* (Sn1.8), the *Discourse on Loving-Kindness*. The original text, frequently recited or chanted, identifies moral virtues and qualities, then describes the practice of lovingly radiating these virtues—extending them first to oneself, and then in widening circles to all beings. In Burma’s 2007 Saffron Revolution, thousands of monks, nuns, and laypeople filled the streets with the sound of these precious words as they protested against the military regime. That practice continues today under the weight of the present junta.



Dharma Sister Maylie Scott

This Metta Prayer I’m sharing with you was composed for an interfaith gathering in 1994 by my late Dharma sister Maylie Scott, a Zen priest dedicated to the path of active nonviolence. Inspired by the Metta Sutta, she leads this practice into the field of engaged Buddhism and social justice, where love is the necessary antidote to the anger that easily rises in the face of injustice and oppression.

## Metta Prayer

*May I be well, loving, and peaceful. May all beings be well, loving, and peaceful.*

*May I be at ease in my body, feeling the ground beneath my seat and feet, letting my back be long and straight, enjoying breath as it rises and falls and rises.*

*May I know and be intimate with body mind, whatever its feeling or mood, calm or agitated, tired or energetic, irritated or friendly.*

*Breathing in and out, in and out, aware, moment by moment, of the risings and passings.*

*May I be attentive and gentle towards my own discomfort and suffering.*

*May I be attentive and grateful for my own joy and well-being.*

*May I move towards others freely and with openness.*

*May I receive others with sympathy and understanding.*

*May I move towards the suffering of others with peaceful and attentive confidence.*

*May I recall the Bodhisattva of Compassion; her 1,000 hands, her instant readiness for action. Each hand with an eye in it, the instinctive knowing what to do.*

*May I continually cultivate the ground of peace for myself and others and persist, mindful and dedicated to this work, independent of results.*

*May I know that my peace and the world's peace are not separate; that our peace in the world is a result of our work for justice.*

*May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful.*

### Reflecting on the Metta Prayer

This is a prayer of virtue, mindfulness, and transformation of self and society. Let me highlight three short sections.

*“May I recall the Bodhisattva of Compassion; her 1,000 hands, her instant readiness for action. Each hand with an eye in it, the instinctive knowing what to do.”*

The Bodhisattva of Compassion—Avalokiteshvara, Guanyin, or Kannon—is known as “one who perceives the cries of the world.” She is often depicted with countless arms and hands, each holding a tool by

which she can help liberate sentient beings. It is as if she is holding a marvelous spiritual Swiss Army knife.

*“May I continually cultivate the ground of peace for myself and others and persist, mindful and dedicated to this work, independent of results.”*

In Buddhist practice, right action is based on wholesome intentions, rather than the immediacy of a desired outcome. The work of peace may not bear fruit until long in the future. In fact, we cannot know the many outcomes—favorable or unfavorable—unfolding from even a simple action. We can only be sure of our intention to connect rather than to divide, to do what promises to be wholesome. So, in this we depend on our faith in the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

*“May I know that my peace and the world's peace are not separate; that our peace in the world is a result of our work for justice.”*

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*Hozan Alan Senauke* is the Abbot of the Berkeley Zen Center, Berkeley, California, and a member of INEB's Advisory Committee.




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## School of English for Engaged Social Service (SENS) Announcement of 2023 Program in Thailand

The School of English for Engaged Social Service (SENS) is delighted to announce that the 7th season of our flagship 3-month in-person program will be held in Thailand from:

**January 22 - April 8, 2023**

This is an opportunity for a deep and transformational cross-cultural experience focused on English, leadership towards a peaceful and sustainable world, realizing one's life goals, and supporting others to do the same.

We will be accepting applications starting in May 2022. Some partial and full scholarships will be available.

SENS 2023 is sponsored by the Institute for Transformative Learning of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB Institute) and by our collaborating partners. Please check our website for updates and the application form: [www.inebinstitute.org](http://www.inebinstitute.org)

Thai (L) and Vietnamese (R) students at a workshop in SENS 2021



## Paula Green

16 December 1937 - 21 February 2022

Source: For the full obituary, please go to *The Recorder* - <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/recorder/name/paula-green-obituary?id=33289698>



Paula Green at her Leverett home. Staff File Photo

Leverett, MA — Acclaimed peacebuilder, educator, and trainer, Dr. Paula Green of Leverett, who crisscrossed the globe to foster conflict transformation across cultures, died February 21, surrounded by family and friends. She was 84.

In the 1980s, she worked as a psychologist in private practice, but her heart was

drawn to peacebuilding. Paula was among a group that organized the building in Leverett of the New England Peace Pagoda, affiliated with a Japanese Nichiren Buddhist group, the first such shrine to peace in the US. In her decades as a peace educator and mentor, she served on the national council of Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the steering committee of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists.

After living in Southeast Asia for a year, in 1994 she founded and directed the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding in Amherst, Massachusetts, an organization with international outreach dedicated to bridging deep divides, transforming violent conflict, and fostering reconciliation.

In 2012, Psychologists for Social Responsibility awarded Paula Green the Psychology of Peace and Justice Prize, and in 2015, she received the Outstanding Human Rights Activist Award from Kean University.

Paula Green leaves behind her loving husband and partner, Jim Perkins. She also leaves her son Daniel Bacher, his wife Claire and daughters Emily and Rachel of Monroe, New York, and son David Bacher, his wife Kirsten and daughter Sophie of San Ramon, California, as well as her brother, Rabbi Arthur Green of Newton, Massachusetts.

§

## Charles “Biff” Keyes

Portland, Oregon

3 October 1937 - 3 January 2022

Source: *Tribute Archive* - <https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/23551093/charles-f-keyes>



Charles “Biff” Keyes, professor emeritus of Anthropology and International Studies at the University of Washington, past president of the Association for Asian Studies, and a widely recognized scholar of Southeast Asia, especially Thailand, passed away in Portland, Oregon on January 3, after a

long struggle with ALS. He is survived by Jane, his wife of nearly 60 years, his son Nicholas (Nick) and Nick’s wife Uayporn (Mem) Satitpanyapan, his son Jonathan (Jon) and Jon’s wife Katherine Kirkham (Kate) and their daughters Isabel and Ava, and his sister Marilyn Keyes Gordon. He was 84.

Beginning in the early 1960’s and continuing to near the end of his life, he carried out extensive research in Thailand, usually with Jane as his co-researcher. They developed a very close relationship with villagers in a community in Mahasarakham province, Northeastern Thailand where they undertook their first fieldwork and to which they often returned. They also spent many years in northern Thailand, beginning with research in Mae Sariang, a district on the Thai-Burma border.

Although he has, as the Buddhist tradition of Thailand recognizes, reached the end of his karma in this life, he has left behind a positive legacy that is manifest in his family, his friends, his students, and his writings.

§

## Sathianpong Wannapok

1939 - 2022

Philosopher, Linguist Prof Sathianpong Wannapok Dies 7 April 2022

Source: **Bangkok Post** - <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2291662/philosopher-linguist-prof-sathianpong-wannapok-dies>



**P**rof Sathianphong Wannapok (specially appointed), a member of the Royal Institute in the field of theology and respected philosopher died on Wednesday at the age of 83.

Sathianphong was born on Feb 1, 1939, in Borabue district (in a tambon which is now part of Kut Rang district), Maha Sarakham province. He was a renowned expert on Buddhism and the Pali language and author of many books on religion and philosophy.

S

## Prof. Dr Kim Yong-Bock

1938 - 2022

**Rev. Prof. Dr Yong-bock Kim died on 7 April. He was a beloved pastor, scholar, and ecumenist.**

Source: World Council of Churches - <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/rev-prof-dr-yong-bock-kim-visionary-leader-dies-at-83>



**A**s an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, Kim shared his gifts with the church at large. He was one of the prominent minjung theologians, who pursued his vision of liberation of the oppressed through

his lifetime contribution to the ecumenical movement.

Kim greatly contributed to the ecumenical movement in Asia. He served as a member of Christian Conference of Asia's Commission on Theological Concern from 1976-81.

S

## Saneh Chamarik

1927 - 2022

Prominent Scholar Saneh Dies at 94 10 April 2022

Source: **Bangkok Post** - bangkok post <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2292834/prominent-scholar-saneh-dies-at-94>



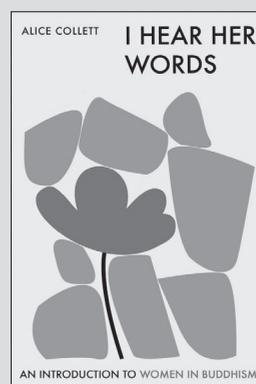
**R**enowned scholar and former chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Saneh Chamarik died aged 94 on Saturday. Funeral bathing rites will be held at Wat Thep Sirintharawat on Sunday.

He started his career as a lecturer at Thammasat University's faculty of political science in 1960 and continued teaching there until his retirement in 1987. He was a member of the National Legislative Assembly from 1973 to 1974 and he went on to co-found the Union for Civil Liberty in 1975. He was also appointed as vice-rector of Thammasat University in 1975.

Social critic Sulak Sivaraksa offered condolences on Facebook over the passing of Saneh, saying Saneh was a high-calibre scholar who was fully devoted to educating his students.

S

### Recommended Reading



I Hear Her Words:  
An Introduction to Women in Buddhism

**Author:** Alice Collett

**Publisher:** Windhorse Publications, June 15, 2021

## Edward Richard (Rick) Dowdall 1949 - 2021

Source: *Earth's Option* - <https://www.earthsoption.com/obituaries/obituary-listings?obId=23293711&source=EmSh>, The entire obituary can be found on Earth's Option.



**R**ick was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan on February 22, 1949, and passed away suddenly and unexpectedly in Victoria, BC on December 1, 2021. He was raised in his parents' hometown of Winnipeg, Manitoba. He was the second child of three.

Much of Rick's work was with First Nations; the nature of his responsibilities would currently fall within the Departments of Indigenous Services and Crown-Indigenous Relations. Later in his career, Rick worked directly for First Nations to support their need to manage their own health services. Rick's considerable skills, along with his respectful and unpretentious nature, left lasting impacts and helped lay the groundwork for some of the reconciliation efforts that are taking place today.

Rick was not a bureaucrat who sat in his office. He visited all the communities he worked with no matter how remote — up the coast of Labrador and out to the small villages in the Yukon— to see for himself and talk to people where they lived and worked.

Rick was happiest when he was travelling. He lived in the moment, continually amazed by the people he met and the places he visited. He travelled extensively in North America, Asia, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East, Africa and South America. But it was Asia, and particularly Myanmar, where they lived for months at a time, that captured his heart.

He acquired lifelong friends all over the world and kept in regular touch with them. He valued intellectual conversations, meeting new people, and was always quick to laugh at a difficult situation or at himself. He embraced life fully, and loved those in his life deeply. He had a thirst for new scenes, people, knowledge or perspectives that kept him exploring not only the physical world but also his own inner world through meditation and reading.

He leaves his wife Valerie Hedstrom, sister Patricia Dowdall, brother-in-law Lorne Seier, niece Andrea Parrish, nephews Daniel Lagacé and Michael Parrish, former wife Judith Tobin and many friends the world over.



## Former AIT President Prof. Jean-Louis Armand Passes Away

8 April 2022, *Asian Institute of Technology News*

Source: The full obituary can be found at AIT - <https://www.ait.ac.th/2022/04/former-ait-president-prof-jean-louis-armand-passes-away/>



Graduation Speech of Professor Jean-Louis Armand, AIT President, at the 95th Graduation Ceremony

### Dear AIT Family,

It is with great sadness that we announce the recent passing of former AIT President Prof. Jean-Louis Armand. He passed away on 25 March 2022, in Santa Barbara, California, at the age of 77. Prof. Armand is survived by his two sons Christopher Armand and Greg Armand.

Prof. Armand served as the 6th AIT President from 12 May, 1999 to 31 December, 2004.

Prof. Armand was born in Annecy, France, and graduated from École Polytechnique in Palaiseau, a suburb south of Paris. He obtained his MSc and Ph.D. in Aeronautics and Engineering from Stanford University, near Palo Alto California. Prior to his appointment as President of AIT, he was the founding President of Institut Méditerranéen de Technologie in Marseille, France. He also served as Senior Technology and Engineering Adviser to the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe.





in planning the World Day this year and look forward to collaborating with INEB in the years ahead.

Most respectfully yours,

**Keishi Miyamoto**

President, Arigatou International

**Mr. Somboon Chungprampree**

Executive Secretary,

International Network of Engaged Buddhists

**Dear Mr. Chungprampree,**

On behalf of Arigatou International, I wish to convey our deepest gratitude to you for the participation of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in the planning committee of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2021, which was launched at EXPO Dubai on November 19. We had the privilege to launch the World Day at this special venue thanks to the support of the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, UNICEF, World Vision, and others, and we appreciate the contributions to this year's World Day and the Wear My Shoes campaign by so many partners including INEB.

As you are aware, since the first World Day in 2008, we at Arigatou International have been reaching out to diverse religious leaders and faith communities and a wide range of other people around the world, including children, with the invitation to join our annual flagship advocacy event. The World Day aims to raise greater awareness about the situation of children and support for the rights of every child. It is our hope that by encouraging diverse faith communities to practice both prayer and action for children, it will inspire meaningful action that will improve the lives of children everywhere.

The urgent need for children to return to school, and to call for action to prioritize their social, emotional, and spiritual well-being was captured in the Joint Statement that was presented on the World Day. It represents the collaboration of over 20 organizations that came together this year to advocate for children's right to education, with so many children out of school due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Joint Statement can be found on our website, and it is our hope that our partners will take the time to widely disseminate it to many other faith communities, particularly those at the grassroots level.

We are, therefore, most grateful for your participation

**Dear Sulak,**

Thank you for your greetings which I have received from Mr. Moo. It is good to know that you have recovered from Covit, after being in hospital for ten days. So, after this serious days, hopefully, you feel happy again.

Until now, we are thankful, so far not being hit by the pandemic, although the inzidents are still very high. Hopefully, we ....

The Ukrainean war is very close and nobody knows what Mr. Putin has in his mind. We hope that NATO and EU do not interfere or get directly involved.

Cordial greetings and best wishes for full recovery and new strength,

yours,

**Wolfgang [Schmidt]**



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Book Review by Professor Tommy Koh  
from his Facebook page of January 11, 2022

## *Silencing of a Laotian Son*

By **Ng Shui Meng**

The author of this moving and sad book is a friend. Shui Meng used to work at our Institute of South East Asian Studies, aka the Yusof Ishak Institute. She gave up a promising career in Singapore to marry the man she loves and moved to Laos. Her husband, Sombath Somphone, was the oldest son of poor farmers in a village in Laos. His father was determined that Sombath should receive an education. For his 10th grade, Sombath had to move to a school in Savannakhet.

A U.S. Peace Corps teacher in his school encouraged him to apply for an AFS [American Field Service] scholarship to study for a year in America. The teacher bought him clothes and shoes for the trip. The year that Sombath spent with the Baddon family in a small town in Wisconsin would change him forever. He subsequently won a scholarship to study at the University of Hawaii, where the two met. He could have stayed in America, but Sombath wanted to go back to his country, especially the rural people.

He spent many years helping the farmers and improving the livelihood of rural people. He subsequently opened a school to work with young people, women and farmers. He did well and was recognized for his good

in community development and by winning the Magsaysay Award.

Everything went smoothly until Laos decided to host the Asia Europe Meeting in 2012. The country host must also host the Asia Europe People's Forum, a meeting of civil society organizations and people from the two continents. Sombath was elected as co-chair of the organization. However, he had no control over the international organizing committee.

The Laotian government was

unhappy about the People's Forum and took it out on Sombath. On the evening of 12 December 2012, he was abducted by government personnel and has disappeared. When the Singapore government asked the Laotian government for his whereabouts, the reply was that they did not know and are looking for him. They are obviously not telling us the truth.

Tommy Koh Tong Bee is a Singaporean lawyer, professor, diplomat, and author. He also served as the Permanent Representative to the United Nations for Singapore. The book review was posted on his Facebook page January 11, 2022.

S

## Book Review : **Picking up the Pieces of a Man's Disappearance**

By **Nirmal Ghosh Non-Fiction**

*The Straits Times*, 23 January 2022

Source: *The Straits Times* - <https://www.straitstimes.com/life/arts/book-review-picking-up-the-pieces-of-a-mans-disappearance-in-laos>

The image on the cover is the last-known one of the man, a grainy screen grab from a closed-circuit television camera from the evening of Dec 15, 2012, in front of a police post in Vientiane, Laos. Community development worker Sombath Somphone, who would be 70 this February, has not been seen since. Even his Jeep has not been found.

His Singaporean wife Ng Shui Meng, who moved to Laos to be with him in 1986, covers more than half a

century in the book, which is written in a simple, straightforward, and gentle manner.

Like the soft-spoken Sombath himself, it has no unnecessary flourishes.

The story of Sombath, who was from a traditional subsistence farming family, is a window into Laos – a still relatively opaque country traumatised by war, only superficially understood by those outside it.

It rarely figures in the global media, yet is part of the shared fabric

of mainland South-east Asia stitched together by the waters of the mighty Mekong River.

For Sombath, growing up in his ancestral village, “there was only the land, the river, and the spirits that people believed inhabited every tree, every rock, and every nook and corner. Keeping the spirits happy, or at the very least avoiding offending them, was just as important as making merit at the temple. Buddhism and animism existed in harmony”.

Life was not easy. As the eldest child, his responsibilities included fetching water from the Mekong in buckets balanced on a bamboo pole across his shoulders. But that upbringing instilled in him a respect for indigenous knowledge.

After studying in the United States, he returned to the land of his birth. His community and youth development work earned him widespread recognition as Laos’ leading development specialist. In 2005, he was given the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership. That makes his enforced disappearance all the more inexplicable.

Lao authorities have maintained that Sombath was kidnapped “perhaps because of a personal conflict or a conflict in business or some other reasons” and that no agent of the state was involved.

But those who know him suspect his disappearance was linked to his coordinating role in the ninth Asia-Europe People’s Forum, a biennial meeting between European and Asian non-government organisations (NGOs), in Vientiane in October 2012. It was

the largest civil society event held in Laos.

Government security agents were present throughout, intervening in discussions, taking pictures of participants and keeping a close eye on the materials provided. One Laotian woman was harangued and reduced to tears.

Soon after the forum, aid worker Anne-Sophie Gindroz, who had worked in Laos with Swiss NGO Helvetas, was abruptly expelled.

A week later, Sombath disappeared. Though his wife appealed to high levels of the government and the ruling Communist Party, she met dead ends everywhere.

“I finally realised that Sombath’s abduction was not because he had done anything wrong,” she writes. Rather, it was a “deliberate and cynical political act” timed to serve as a warning to the people of Laos.

“If someone as well-known and respected as Sombath could be ‘disappeared’, then anyone could suffer a similar fate.”

The book is dedicated to all victims of enforced disappearance. The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has documented at least 1,301 cases that remain unresolved in South-east Asia.

There is something evil about enforced disappearance. It leaves no closure. There is none of

the implacable finality of death, only a dreadful, prolonged uncertainty.

“For a long time, I was not emotionally and psychologically prepared to write about Sombath, his work, our lives together or about the abominable crime that has so decimated our lives. It was quite simply too painful,” writes Ng.

“I was also stopped by a fear that if I did write about him, it would actually become a memorial and a painful acknowledgement that he might never come back or worse, that he might no longer be alive.”

She refers to her husband in the present tense throughout. “Unless and until I know otherwise, I will regard him as alive and expect that he will one day come home.”

S



The Irrawaddy - English Edition

2 hrs

Dr. Cynthia Maung wins Gwangju Prize for Human Rights  
May 3, 2022

The May 18 Memorial Foundation of South Korea has awarded the 2022 Gwangju Prize for Human Rights to Dr. Cynthia Maung, founder of the Mae Tao Clinic which provides healthcare services for Myanmar refugees and migrant workers in Mae Sot on the Thai-Myanmar border. Known as the Nobel Prize of Asia, the Gwangju Prize recognizes “individuals, groups or institutions in Korea and abroad that have contributed in promoting and advancing human rights, democracy and peace through their work”. The prize commemorates the spirit of South Korea’s May 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement.

(Photo: CJ)

#WhatsHappeningInMyanmar





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