Becoming a Buddhist Coach
By Juliana Klinkert

Gratitude, the Mindful Revolution, and Learning to Embrace Suffering
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Finding the Middle Way in Life
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Eight Verses on Training the Mind
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MINDFUL POLITICS
MA eLearning Program
offered by Than Hsiang Buddhist Research Centre, Penang
affiliated to International Buddhist College, Thailand

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由附属于泰国国际佛教大学的檀香佛学研究中心提供

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It is said that integrity is doing the right thing when no one is watching. But there is a critical component of integrity that goes beyond just doing the right thing when no one is looking. This is the adherence to a moral or ethical principle (sila) which forms the very foundation of Buddhism. But it is not just simple compliance to a rule; it implies a philosophical understanding of the reason ethics exist. Everyone makes mistakes, so being a person of integrity does not mean you haven’t committed a moral or ethical violation, ever. It means having the strength of character to learn from those ‘misbehaviors’, honest in admitting the mistake (ajjava), seek forgiveness, and continue with self-improvement. This is even more pertinent for the leader of a community or country. This is what is meant by being an authentic leader – one who is honest, kind, and not arrogant (maddava).

From a Buddhist perspective, a leader is authentic if he has integrity. He speaks the truth, displays humility, is consistent in all his actions, and shows compassion. The Buddha’s Noble Eight-fold Path, when followed, will create a truly authentic leader. Thus, each of the eight aspects of the Path starts with the word “right” (samma).

Right Understanding: Analyze an issue or situation – political, social or economic - as it really is, free from greed, hatred, envy, biasness, or delusion.

Right Thoughts: Develop a strong motivation to overcome all unethical acts including corruption and discrimination of all kinds, and cultivate thoughts of altruism (paricagga) for the people.

Right Speech: Cultivate wholesome speech that brings people together rather than separate them through lies, deceit, or slander.

Right Action: Respect the basic human right to dissent and differences in public opinion (avirodhana), show compassion, and promote peace and harmony in society.

Right Livelihood: Create wealth through righteous means and not through deceit, bribery, or corruption using one’s influence and power.

Right Effort: Practice mutual respect and tolerance and not discriminate against others who have differing political or socio-economic views. Refrain from negative and partisan speeches that will create conflict.

Right Mindfulness: Act with awareness of one’s actions through body, speech, and mind - and always remember that honesty is the best policy.

Right Concentration: Focus only on what is good for the people in the country irrespective of differences in their race, religion, or political preferences.

Though the Buddha’s advice may be ancient, yet his message still resonates with our modern world. And if leaders today were to listen to the wisdom of the Buddha, we can only expect well-being and happiness for the people everywhere, including our beloved country Malaysia.
LEAD ARTICLE
Forum: Mindful Politics
by Venerable Āyasmā Aggacitta, Ven. Wei Wu & Geshe Dadul Namgyal

FACE TO FACE
Becoming a Buddhist Coach
by Juliana Klinkert

Gratitude, The Mindful Revolution, And Learning To Embrace Suffering
by Dr Jack Kornfield

Finding the Middle Way in Life
by Dr Elijah Sacvan Ary

TEACHINGS
Ethics, merit and Buddhism
by Dr Paul Fuller

Eight Verses on Training the Mind
by HH The 14th Dalai Lama

Rich Generosity
by Master Sheng Yen

The Basis of Buddhist Faith: Lessons from “In the Buddha’s Words”
by Monica Sanford

The Fertile Soil of Sangha
by Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh

Bhikkhu Bodhi on climate change, social justice, and saving the world
by Raymond Lam

FEATURE
Go for Eco Personality
by Teh Soo Tyng

Buddhism and Violence: Roots of “religious” conflicts in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Southern Thailand
by Dennis Tan Chun Yee

PERSONAL REFLECTION
Has Vipassanā reached the end of the road?
by Christopher Titmuss
NEWS
Millionaire Becomes a Monk
by Sara Malm

Eliminating Crime with a Buddha Statue
by Tj Morey

China Turns to Buddhism to Find Inner Peace and Mental Wellness
by Benjie Batanes

BOOKS IN BRIEF
Wisdom Publications
Shambhala Publications

DHARMA AFTERMATH
What A Month It Has Been!
by Rasika Quek
FORUM: MINDFUL POLITICS

Buddhists have generally been described as politically passive compared to Christians or Muslims, or even Hindus, when it comes to voicing out their objections or concerns about issues of injustice, war, or human rights abuse affecting society. On the other end of the spectrum, we have recently read of extremist views espoused by Buddhist monastics, mainly in Burma and Sri Lanka, against non-Buddhists. Through the ages we know that different answers have been given to these questions within the different traditions of Buddhism. However, although the answers vary, certain themes come through in what is a Buddhist political and social philosophy.

Thus, when Buddhists make a contribution to political debates they inevitably look to solutions based on non-violence and dialogue rather than solutions based on violence and military force. The focus is placed on concern for “the others” (cherishing others) in all our thinking and practice, with happiness not being something we can keep to ourselves; it must be placed in all the contexts in which we live – family, workplace, school, community, state, nation, the world. Only then can we seek to find its true meaning in the application of the principles of love and compassion.

We would like to hear from our experts on their approach towards the following socio-political issues affecting society today.

In the Buddhist principle of dependent origination, there is a cosmology in which all human and natural phenomena come into existence within a matrix of interrelatedness. So how do we apply such views in a world of human fear, uncertainty, and evil?

Aggacitta: It is precisely because the world is beset with fear, uncertainty, evil and many other undesirable phenomena that the Buddha sought and attained liberation from it. There is no Utopia in this world or hereafter within saṁsāra. However, since we are already in this mess, we should regard all such negative and undesirable phenomena as nagging reminders for us to diligently and persistently walk the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation. And along the way we should, with wisdom and compassion, make the best of whatever we encounter.

Wei Wu: Monks are not experts in social-political issues. There is a Chinese saying that goes like this: Those who observe from the side may observe more objectively (旁观者清). It is my hope that we can offer you views from different angles. In a world where some people spread fear, hatred, and ignorant views, many can be confused and will help these ignorant people to spread negativities especially via the social media. We need to maintain mindfulness and remind our friends not to spread fear, hatred and evil.

Dumdul Namgyal: Not all fear is a curse. Sometimes fear is warranted and could alert us to a problem, that after assessing, we might address. Entry into Buddhism is ideally to be inspired by the realistic fear of unpleasant consequences of our harmful actions. This spurs us into seeking the precious Triple Gem for inspiration and guidance in overcoming the dissonant mental afflictions that serve as the source of harmful actions and their resultant sufferings. The principle of dependent origination can inspire more hope in us...
to find the particular conditions contributing to the precariousness of a given situation and replace them with their constructive counterparts. Uncertainty is the foundation of our unenlightened life, and we must deal with it for the time being. This situation of ours gives us some say as we attempt to make wise choices in our conduct. The very fact that the course of things are uncertain encourages us to take charge of our situation, moment by moment. Everything, including so-called evil, is a mere matrix of interrelatedness and nothing, whatsoever, is absolute. There is no absolute evil, fixed and unchangeable. Even the evils are relative and contextual, and are subject to change and to be changed and even transformed through our wise responses.

There will be times when love and compassion towards the enemy is not reciprocated. Instead they will be regarded as a sign of weakness, resulting in more injustice and abuse from the other side. So what do we do in such situations – how do we adopt a moral approach in an immoral world?

Aggacitta: Trying to be moral in an immoral world is part of the suffering of samsaric existence. The Buddha was uncompromising in expounding the natural laws of morality. He categorically stated that any unwholesome mental, verbal or bodily action (kamma) will definitely result in unpleasant consequences in this life or hereafter, just as wholesome actions result in the opposite consequences. As kamma is defined as intention (cetanā), no one can live without intentions. Compared to a renunciant, an ordinary householder already weaves a more intricate web of good and bad kamma—what more for one involved in politics. In such matters, it is even more important for one to exercise wisdom and compassion since one has to bear full kammic responsibility for one’s decisions. However, we should understand that the Buddha’s ideal of unconditional mettā and compassion is meant for spiritual practitioners especially renunciants who have successfully dissolved the distinction between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

This ideal would not be relevant for worldly conflicts because they are the products of tension between unfulfilled conditions pursued by opposing parties, classic examples of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Therefore in such circumstances, one can only apply mettā and compassion to maximize the benefits and minimise the harm for all parties, in the best interests of one’s community.

Wei Wu: I once met a Buddhist monk who kept asking me if I had visited a certain country in recent years and kept saying that the people there needed the Dharma and I should go there more often. I did not know why he was so earnestly holding my hand when he made the request repeatedly. Later I found out the reason from a younger monk who was with him during the period of political persecution in that country; this more senior monk was tortured and suffered a lot of hardship because of his higher position! Do you consider the action of this teacher as a sign of weakness?

We can adopt a moral approach in an immoral world by following Buddha’s example of separating the actor from the action, extending understanding and compassion for the actor while recognizing the harmfulness or helpfulness of their actions, attempt to right the wrongs and prevent reoccurrence. Doing this, we could have a fuller picture of the situation, unlike when driven by affliction, thus obscuring clarity. With compassion and altruism together with clear wisdom in tackling the problem, the process would be smoother and result in a more sustainable solution. One thing that should be clear is that love and compassion towards absolutely anyone, do not
and should not preempt a constructive response. They should infuse us with a moral responsibility to step up to the occasion, even at one’s own expense, but never giving in to the afflictions which propose no real solution except for short-sighted revenge and reciprocation.

*When we read about the likes of Wirathu (the firebrand monk from Burma) and what organizations like Bodu Bala Sena of Sri Lanka is doing against non-Buddhists, what should we as Buddhists who believe in mutual respect, compassion, and non-violence towards others, need to do or say? Aggacitta: We need to acknowledge that such actions are indeed deplorable and their proponents have misused the name of Buddhism and contravened its spirit in the interest of nationalism, racism and religious bigotry. At the same time, we must also understand that we are all victims of greed, hate and delusion. They don’t pick and choose one because of a particular religion one professes.*

When the mind is obsessed by them, it makes use of whatever is available to do their bidding. The Buddha didn’t teach Buddhism. He taught the Dhamma Vinaya based on the laws of nature. Whatever anyone does to misrepresent his Teachings cannot change the truth of natural laws and principles.

*Wei Wu: Many people are easily incited by ethnic or religious issues. We need to understand the consequences of actions incited by violence and fear. We can learn from the many ‘holy wars’ fought in the name of religions and see if anyone of them actually resulted in strengthening the respective religions.*

*Damdul Namgyal: It is understandable where the frustration of Wirathu and organizations like Bodu Bala Sena is coming from. However, we must remind ourselves of Buddha’s teachings that the dissonant mental afflictions are not only irrational and ineffective in the long run, but also contagious, and overreacting to them has a negative influence on everyone around. By resorting to violence grown out of animosity and hatred, Wirathu and Bodu Bala Sena have already lost more than they think they stand to gain from their actions. Their actions are not only against the teachings of the Buddha, but could also incite far greater and deeper damage to the Buddha Dharma they intended to defend. All issues can be approached and resolved through dialogue and other peaceful means. In Buddhism, to make real headway, mere good intention is not enough. It has to be matched by skillful means and wisdom (Upaya and prajña).*

*While there are no restrictions for lay Buddhists to be involved in politics, including becoming political leaders or holding positions in Government, how can they be mindfully engaged politically? Are there guidelines they should follow? Aggacitta: The Noble Eightfold Path is an excellent model that can be adapted for use. Although it is meant for the total cessation of suffering, its systematic and holistic methodology which includes mental orientation, mettā-compassion, ethics, mindfulness and wisdom can still be adapted for effective use in the political arena.*

*The most important thing is to have Right View (the right attitude): Be a true statesman, not a self-centred politician. A true statesman always has foremost in his mind the people’s best interests, unlike a self-centred politician who grabs hold of every opportunity to procure power and wealth for himself, his family and his cronies first, and then only considers how to serve his constituency.*
Right Thought should entail (1) renunciation from selfish worldly gains, (2) mettā and (3) compassion, within the parameters of the political arena. Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood are applicable as defined in the suttas while Right Effort may have to be adapted accordingly.

Right Mindfulness means continually remembering and reminding oneself of this Right View. It also means cultivating the habit of continually grounding the mind in the five senses, particularly bodily sensations and movements, instead of allowing it to be distracted by unproductive mental activity. With persistent practice, this brings about Right Samādhi, i.e. the mind becomes rightly composed and focused, without being thus distracted.

Then there can be clear awareness when the mind looks back at one’s feelings, perceptions and thoughts so that they can be properly processed and acted upon in accordance with Right View and the other Path factors. In this way, one can judiciously decide whether or not to pursue those feelings, perceptions and thoughts. One effective way of doing so is to apply the BARR test in a progressive manner by investigating: Is it (1) Beneficial? (2) If so, is it Appropriate? (3) If so, is it Relevant? (4) If so, is it Realistic (factual and/or feasible)? Thus political decisions can be made with mindfulness and clear awareness, which is a form of worldly wisdom.

Wei Wu: There is a Chinese Buddhist saying不忘初心—do not forget the original motive. It is often used to remind us that when we decide to become a Buddhist, or when we decide to enter the monastic order, we do so with very good motive, e.g Bodhicitta, aspiration to attain Perfect Buddhahood to help sentient beings. Many people get involved in politics with very good intention to serve the people and the country. It is important for them to constantly remind themselves of the original good intention. A Malaysian politician went to visit a famous Buddhist practitioner for blessing and advice. The practitioner just reminded him that politicians should serve the people and sent him off.

Damdul Namgyal: Even for ordained monks, there are no explicit restrictions in the vinaya disciplines and precepts for holding political positions. However, since during the very first step of monkhood/nunhood, one renounces one’s worldly abode to a state of homelessness, some may presumably conclude this. There exists a three-tier morality practice for the bodhisattva aspirant; the morality of restraint, of virtue, and of altruism. In the spirit of this third tier, one could imagine bodhisattva (or bodhisattva aspirant) monks and nuns serving in politics and administration. It would be a boon for the entire nation to have a Bodhisattva or Bodhisattvas (ordained or laity) as its influential leader/s. The main difficulty is for ordinary people to maintain a firm footing in the Dharma while engaged in political office. This is because such a position or situation is ordinarily infested with negative influences, and calls for a strong moral foundation.

The Tibetan canonical volumes have a whole range of materials under Parikatha or Lekha (sermons or letters) headings wherein instructions are provided to laymen on how to apply the Dharma in daily lives. Examples would be the Rajadesha sutras (spoken by Buddha to kings Bimbisara and Vatsaraja Udayana) from Kagyur collection and Rajaparikatha-ratnamala and Suhrlekha by Acharya Nagarjuna from Tengyur collection. Among Tibetan works are Mi-chos gnad-kyi phreng-wa by Dromtonpa, and Lugs-kyi bstan-bcos sa-gzhi skyong-wa’i rgyan by Mi-Pham, to mention a few.
scriptural references, that modern day Buddhists can consider as a good government – one where the political leadership is caring, and looks after the wellbeing and interests of all the people?

Aggacitta: The most well-known historical role model is of course King Asoka. Scriptural references include Mahāsudassana Sutta (DN 17) and Cakkavatti Sutta (DN 26) which give some principles of governance of a righteous Universal Monarch. In Mahāhamsa Jātaka (534), the famous ten qualities of a righteous ruler are listed.

Wei Wu: The earliest model was the governing of the monastic community. The Buddha is said to have modeled the organizational structure of the monastic order (sangha) on the government of Vrijji (Vajji in Pali), a republic formed from eight or nine confederated clans.

The Vrijjians were a very prosperous and happy community. The Buddha attributed this to the fact that they practiced the seven conditions of welfare taught to them by himself:

1. Holding regular meetings to discuss affairs of the clans collectively.
2. Carrying out the tasks of government in harmony.
3. Paying due heed to established practices and customs.
4. Respecting the elders.
5. Treating women fairly.
6. Following religious practices.
7. Supporting religious sages.

I have paraphrased the above seven conditions to fit into modern times and hope that they may be a useful reference for politicians. The original text can be found in the Chinese 中阿含雨勢經 with its Pali equivalent in Āṅguttara Nikāya, The Sevens to the Vajjis, The Brahmin Vassakara.

Another good model is the way Emperor Asoka embraced the Buddha’s teachings in governing his kingdom.

Damdul Namgyal: Indian King Ashoka, after he converted to Buddhism, and King Kanishka of the Kusana Dynasty, after he adopted Buddhism, are both inspiring role models from Buddhist history where the political leadership is caring, and looks after the wellbeing and interests of its citizens irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in leading the Tibetan people through their struggle for freedom and preservation of culture and religion amidst such a trying situation should be an inspiration to all aspirants of a meaningful political career. Despite the unprecedented challenges he is faced with, he stood unwaveringly firm on his Buddhist principles and integrity, and yet delivered immensely for the good of his own people and that of the world at large.

Venerable Āyasmā Aggacitta is a Malaysian Buddhist monk who received higher ordination from Bhaddanta Mahasi Sayadaw in Rangoon in 1979. He trained under various teachers, notably Sayadaw U Paṇḍita, Sayadaw U Tissara (Yankin Forest Monastery), Sayadaw U Āciṇṇa (Pa Auk Forest Monastery) and Sayadaw U Tejaniya (Shwe Oo Min Dhammasukha Forest Centre).
Besides practicing meditation, he studied advanced Pāli grammar under Sayadaw U Dhammananda at Wat Tamaoh, Lampang, Thailand, and the Pāli Tipiṭaka in Myanmar, researching on its interpretation and practice until his return to Malaysia at the end of 1994. After a four-year solitary meditation retreat in Sarawak, he returned to West Malaysia at the end of 1998 and since then has spent considerable time investigating popular interpretations and practices of Buddhism in the light of the Pāli scriptures, real life experiences and contemporary research findings. The titles of his published Dhamma resources can be viewed at http://www.sasanarakkha.org/. In 2000, he founded Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) nestled among secluded valleys and brooks near Taiping, Perak, Malaysia.

Ven. Wei Wu graduated from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand in Electrical Engineering in 1973. He was awarded an honorary Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from the Mahamakut Buddhist University, Thailand in 2013. He worked with Hewlett Packard as a Quality Manager before starting his own consultant company in 1987 to serve many multi-national companies including Procter and Gamble, Philips, Fiat and Astec in Asia, Europe and America.

He was ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1992 and established the Than Hsiang Foundation in Malaysia and Thailand and the International Buddhist College in Thailand.

Ven Wei Wu is currently the Abbot of the Than Hsiang Temple, Malaysia and the Council Chairman of the International Buddhist College, Thailand, Board Chairman of the four Bodhi schools, Malaysia, and Hon. Secretary of the Malaysian Buddhist Sangha Association.

Ven. Wei Wu

Geshe Dadul Namgyal earned the Geshe Lharampa degree from Drepung Loseling Monastery in 1992. He also holds a master’s degree in English literature from Panjab University, Chandigarh, India. Since early 2010, he has been senior resident teacher at Drepung Loseling Monastery in Atlanta, Georgia, and also Interpreter/Translator for Emory-Tibet Science Initiative at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia since December, 2012.

Geshe Dadul Namgyal will like to thank Martha Leslie Baker for editing his contribution to this article in Eastern Horizon. EH
Becoming a Buddhist Coach

By Juliana Klinkert

Benny: Not many people in Asia are aware that there are Buddhist centers in Colombia. So how did you as a Colombian come into contact with Buddhism?

Juliana: If I answer from the Buddhist point of view I will say that I had already planted the seed in the past and because of causes and conditions, I got in touch with Buddhism in Colombia; but if I explain this from the relative point of view I will thank my mother for having a huge library at home and for pushing me to decide what to study in University.

As a 16-year old girl, I had to make the “big” decision in life: how to build my working career. The best place that I could think of to search for help was my mother’s library where I found a novel about the experiences of a Tibetan monk during meditation, and how to develop loving kindness and compassion. That book inspired me to search where to study Buddhist Philosophy, and also connected me with an inner voice that was telling me: this is the right path. It took me 10 years more before I could properly study Buddhist Philosophy.

All the members of my family were shocked when I tried to explain that I wanted to go to India to study Buddhist Philosophy, being 16 years old only then. Nobody knew what Buddhism was about and it was not easy for them to understand what made me think of that as an option in life. So we agreed that I would study something “proper” for the west, and if, after finishing my university degree, and working for a while, I still wanted to study Buddhist philosophy, then I could do it. I started with a BA in Publicity and one of my sisters decided to find out what Buddhism was about. She found a person who leads a Diamond Way center and gathers a group for meditation once a week. So I went there and after 6 months I was doing my first phowa with Lama Ole. Time passed and I graduated from Publicity, worked for 5 years in that industry and finally found that Shangpa Rinpoche was running a course for foreigners in his monastery in Kirtipur in Nepal. It was time for me to go. The agreement with
Juliana Klinkert is a Colombian life coach and Buddhist practitioner currently living in Thailand. She holds a degree in Publicity and spent five years working in advertising, before fully immersing herself into Buddhism. In 2007, she moved to Nepal to enroll at the Kagyu Institute for Buddhist studies. After her return to Colombia in 2009, she received her Certificate in Life Coaching and began incorporating Buddhist principles and practices into her coaching technique. Juliana was a speaker at the Asean Economic Community Buddhist Conference at Than Hsiang Temple in Penang on July 26. Benny Liow interviewed Juliana about her role as a life coach and a Dharma practitioner, how she integrates both, and how she first came to know Buddhism.

How did Buddhism first come to Colombia and what form of Buddhism is most popular in your country today?

I may not be the proper person to answer the first part of this question as I do not have direct experience with the story. Buddhism arrived in Colombia (before?) I was born. Sangha friends told me and I had read that around 1980 Khenpo Kartar Rinpoche visited Colombia and established KTC from HH 17TH Gyalwa Karmapa Orgyen Trinley Thaye Dorje. Later on, a FPMT organization under Lama Zopa Rinpoche was established and even invited and received H.H Dalai Lama in Colombia in May 2006. Since 2013, this last center has a resident Geshe from Tibet.

This story may show us that the most popular Buddhism in Colombia is the one derived by the Tibetan Buddhism lineages of Karma Kagyu and Gelug.

What inspiration had you gained from the Buddha’s teachings?

https://www.facebook.com/KTCColombia/info?tab=page_info
http://www.buddhanet.net/masters/kapleau.htm
http://www.budismocolombia.co
http://centroyamantaka.org/quienes-somos/
I can think of Gampopa’s *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* to describe what I call inspiration. Thanks to my teachers at Kibs, I had the opportunity to read this book and learn that “the Buddha nature is the primary cause or “seed” for one to attain Buddhahood. Without that cause, no matter how much effort one makes, there would not be any progress. For example, on a farm, if there is no seed, no matter how much one cultivates and fertilizes, nothing will grow. But if there is a seed, the primary cause, then the seed will sprout when it meets the right contributory causes and eventually it will bear fruit.” Extracted from Page 18

In the West, I was trained to have a linear thinking. When I first met with Buddhism, my way of thinking turned from linear to spiral: situations were not to be seen in a straight line but in an interdependent way. Understanding and trying the best I can to plant virtuous seeds and develop generosity have been one of the infinite treasures that my teachers kindly shared and taught me.

*What brings you to Bangkok, the center of Theravada Buddhism, rather than Tibetan Buddhism?*

As a practitioner of the Buddha's teachings, I still have a lot to learn and enough afflicting emotions to dissipate. I believe that each vehicle was derived from the wisdom gained by the realization of the different teachers. As I am still an ordinary being trying to realize the true nature of the mind and to be mindful and aware of the confused projections of this cyclic existence, I will be happy to keep on planting virtuous seeds and practicing in countries where Buddhism has already flourished. I can keep on meeting the right teachers at the right time and also inspiring people to plant virtuous seeds.

*You are a Buddhist coach – can you tell us what this entails?*

I am still trying to decide what will be the right title that describes my job. I will explain what I do and maybe you can label it.

I moved to Bangkok in 2014. I was living in Colombia working as an executive and life coach during the day and during the nights I helped in the meditation center, translating, cleaning, setting up the altar, answering emails or whatever was necessary for the teachings to be received by the students or curious people.

Since I moved to Bangkok, I decided that I was not going to have a day and night job. I merge my two passions and start accompanying people to face situations of change in their life through Buddhism and coaching. Normally my client and I meet once a week for two hours to study different aspects of Buddhist Philosophy and reflect on how the present situation can be taken for them to have a better understanding on the reality of this life.

*Is your coaching style and techniques any different from the typical Western-type coach?*

In coaching, we are trained to find our own charm, our own essence. I will say that Buddhism is not separate from me. The Buddha’s teachings are the foundation...
for my decisions and actions. Every time a person finds an opportunity to work with me, it is because both of us are ready to learn together about how to overcome suffering and achieve perfect Buddhahood.

At the beginning of the different programs that my clients and I co-create, we talk through what I call pure coaching. As in the West, we create the sessions by the coach making questions purely to focus on what he or she wants to achieve from the process. As the program advances and as we gain new knowledge on different aspects of Buddhist ethics or Philosophy, the questions start to have specific words that point to what the Buddha taught. Meditation is always present as a tool to gain mindfulness and awareness.

**What types of coaching do you do? For instance, does it include leadership coaching?**

I focus my coaching on two different aspects: one is training for people in organizations that want to get some coaching skills to have a better understanding of their people, and the other is life coaching dedicated to working with people who are ready to make changes in life (changing work, starting the trip of their lives, moving to a new country, finishing PhD) and find their own state of equanimity through meditation and reflection.

**Could you tell us the typical coaching process when you first meet someone who’s interested in being coached?**

First we have an informal conversation, normally through the internet, my main tool for communicating with people around the world. We talk about our experiences in life and work, then if the person decides to work with me, we schedule a 2-hour meeting every week or every 2 weeks. In the first session, we create the map of the process. We understand what is important for the person to achieve or to reflect during our program that can last for 3 or 6 months, then we exchange coaching and class. The subjects change according to the client, until the conversation emerges naturally.

**What aspects of Buddhist teachings do you find most helpful in your work as a coach?**

The main teachings that I found helpful to share with my clients are 3 roots of suffering (attachment, rejection and ignorance), 6 paramitas, loving kindness, compassion, precious human life, and impermanence.

**How do you relate mindfulness practice into your coaching process?**

Mindfulness is one of the main tools that I find helpful for my coaching practice and that I also teach the most to the executives when training them in coaching skills. When you are a coach and you are mindful, you will be able to connect and listen behind the words and the story that the person is bringing to the conversation. You are able as a coach to help your client to uncover the truth behind the words without pushing or imposing your own story. EH
GRATITUDE, THE MINDFUL REVOLUTION, AND LEARNING TO EMBRACE SUFFERING

By Dr Jack Kornfield

Trained in the monasteries of India, Thailand and Burma, Kornfield has studied and taught meditation for over 40 years, and has pioneered transmitting ancient Buddhist spiritual teachings to a modern Western audience. After working in the Peace Corps and earning a doctorate in clinical psychology, Kornfield founded the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, MA, and later, Spirit Rock Meditation center in Marin County, California. He’s also authored a number of books on mindfulness, compassion and Buddhist psychology, notably his 1993 bestseller A Path With Heart.

Carolyn Gregoire of Huffington post interviews Jack Kornfield on a range of issues.

In some Buddhist traditions, there’s a prayer in which one makes a rather unusual request of the universe: Bring me challenges and obstacles.

“In certain temples that I’ve been to, there’s actually a prayer that you make asking for difficulties,” Western Buddhist master Jack Kornfield told the Huffington Post. “May I be given the appropriate difficulties so that my heart can truly open with compassion. Imagine asking for that.”
“You can pick all the flowers, but you can’t stop the spring.”
Life keeps recreating itself and presenting us with miracles every day.

Being grateful for not only life’s blessing but also its suffering is a key component of living a spiritual life -- and more broadly, to a fulfilling and meaningful life -- according to Kornfield, who will speak about cultivating an appreciation for all that life has to offer at the Gratitude Summit hosted by UC Berkeley’s Greater Good Science Center in June 2014.

So what’s one of Kornfield’s secrets to abundant gratitude? Don’t take life so seriously, or get so wrapped up in your own everyday dramas that you forgot to see the beauty that is constantly surrounding you.

“This life is a test -- it is only a test,” Kornfield wrote in A Path With Heart. “If it had been an actual life, you would have received further instructions on where to go and what to do. Remember, this life is only a test.”

Carolyn Gregoire of HuffPost Health Living spoke to Kornfield about the importance of being grateful (even for the bad things), the “mindful revolution,” and the importance of giving back.

Why is gratitude an essential component of a spiritual life?

Kornfield: If we see the world as sacred, which is an expression of the spiritual life, then gratitude follows immediately and naturally. We’ve been given the extraordinary privilege of incarnating as human beings -- and of course the human incarnation entails the 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows, as it says in the Tao Te Ching -- but with it we have the privilege of the lavender color at sunset, the taste of a tangerine in our mouth, and the almost unbearable beauty of life around us, along with its troubles. It keeps recreating itself. We can either be lost in a smaller state of consciousness -- what in Buddhist psychology is called the “body of fear,” which brings suffering to us and to others -- or we can bring the quality of love and appreciation, which I would call gratitude, to life. With it comes a kind of trust. The poet Pablo Neruda writes, “You can pick all the flowers, but you can’t stop the spring.” Life keeps recreating itself and presenting us with miracles every day.

It’s easier for us to feel grateful for things that make us happy and that make life easy for us. But how do we learn to be grateful for life’s “10,000 sorrows”?

I remember my meditation master in the jungles of Thailand who would ask at times, Where have you learned more compassion? Where have you learned more? Where has your heart grown wiser -- in just having good times, or going through difficulties? There’s a Buddhist-oriented therapy in Japan called Naikan Therapy, and one part of that training is to review your life and begin to remember all the things you have gratitude towards, even the things that were difficult and taught you lessons. Or even the people that were difficult, sometimes in your own family -- [remembering] the gratitude you have for family, that they’re even there.

And speaking of gratitude, in a group that I taught recently, there was a man who spoke up whose son and daughter-in-law had become meth addicts. They were both addicts to the point where this fellow and his wife as grandparents had to take the children and raise their grandchildren. After a moment of great despair, he began to do a gratitude practice to see what he could be grateful for. He was grateful to have the grandchildren in that way, he was grateful that his
Cultivating an opening to gratitude also helps us to become more mindful of the life around us and what circumstance we’re in.

We live a culture defined by consumerism, materialism and addictions -- so often we feel we’re not enough, and we’re constantly trying to fill a void with more “stuff.” Why is American society in particular so in need of gratitude, and how can we cultivate this sense of appreciation and abundance when we’re socialized to live with a sense of lack?

What is the connection between gratitude and mindfulness? Is it that when we’re more mindful, it’s easier for us to experience gratitude because we’re more aware of the good things?

To become mindful -- which Zen master Suzuki Roshi also called “beginner’s mind” -- is to see the world afresh without being lost in our reactions and judgments, and in seeing it afresh with a clarity, we begin to be able to respond to the world rather than react to it. (I like to translate mindfulness as loving awareness -- an awareness that knows what’s present, and also brings a quality of compassion and lovingkindness to that.)

The cultivation of mindfulness -- which modern neuroscience has now shown in 3,000 papers and studies in the last two decades to help bring emotional regulation, steady attention and physical healing -- really allows us to become present for our own body, for the person in front of us, for the life we’ve been given. Out of that grows quite naturally the spirit of gratitude. Now it turns out, like all good things, they feed one another. Cultivating an opening to gratitude also helps us to become more mindful of the life around us and what circumstance we’re in.

One very articulate writer on this subject, Anne Wilson Schaef [author of When Society Becomes An Addict], has described ours as an addicted society. Whether it’s consumerism or addictive substances or just keeping ourselves busy or being online or working 80 hours a week, we have things that keep us busy because, in some ways, the culture wants us to keep engaged and not to look around much... not to see the struggles of people, the continuing injustice, the economic disparities, the people who are hungry, climate change. What becomes clear is that there’s no outer fix or satisfaction -- no amount of computers, no amount of nanotechnology or biotechnology and all the great things that we’ve developed that will stop us from continuing warfare, racism and environment destruction.

Those outer developments have to be matched by a transformation of human consciousness to realize that we are interdependent and we depend on the air we breathe, and on people in other nations as they depend on us. We are woven, as Dr. Martin Luther King said, into a single garment of destiny. When we see this, we begin to realize that the values of consumerism and getting more and more -- which start to become emptier and emptier -- don’t satisfy the heart. When we look at what’s satisfied us in the past week or
month or decade, it’s been the connections, the love and the openness of our lives to the places we’ve traveled and the people we’ve met. This really is the basis for gratitude. Then we start to sense that it is possible to live with a quieter mind and an open heart, and with a sense of satisfaction within ourselves -- it’s the satisfaction of well-being.

We are beginning to witness the seeds of this shift taking place, with the recent explosion of interest in meditation. (Recently, for example, TIME declared a “Mindful Revolution” underway in American culture). You’ve been a key player in bringing Buddhist practices to the West for more than 40 years now. How have you seen attitudes towards mindfulness shift in that time?

Mindfulness, in the beginning, was associated mistakenly with a religious practice, when in fact Buddhist teachings, at their essence, are a science of mind which simply offer us these universal trainings that can steady and balance our attention, and give us a deeper connection to ourselves and one another. Fortunately, with all those 3,000 research studies that I mentioned and the great neuroscience that’s been done, it becomes clear with the understanding of neuroplasticity that we can train our mind and our heart through attention. It helps schoolchildren, it helps in healing and clinics, and it helps attention, whether you’re writing computer program or a business plan or making love or creating a piece of art -- the ability to steady the attention to be fully present is an enormous gift. I’ve seen mindfulness as a training and as an opportunity for the growth of presence and wisdom to be spreading in all these areas. I’m really happy for the benefit that it’s bringing.

Some critics of mindfulness have argued that the practice is too focused on the individual, at the expense of fostering a spirit of collectivity and positive social change. Do you think this is true? How do giving back and service figure into a spiritual practice?

It’s very simple. There’s a saying, “There are only two things to do: Sit, and sweep the garden.” This is like breathing in and breathing out. You quiet the mind and the heart so that you’re connected to yourself and listen to what really matters. Then you get up from that stillness, and if people are hungry, you offer food. If there’s injustice, you offer yourself for the healing of that injustice.

In fact, it allows us to become agents of change because we are actually attentive and present for what is without being overwhelmed by it and without distracting ourselves. In that way, mindfulness is actually one of the necessary components of making a real transformation in whatever field or dimension of society we would choose. It supports it, and it leads towards it, and it allows people to do it without burnout. If you work for good causes but you do it out of anger and frustration and guilt -- and all of those other motivations I’ve seen among activists I’ve worked with -- you will burn out. But if that same compassion and care comes instead from the power of love and steadiness and a deep devotion to what is just and right, it has equal if not greater power.

Mahatma Gandhi took one day a week in silence, even in the midst of marches of thousands and the ending of the British colonial empire. When everything was in the middle of this huge transformation, he would say, “I’m sorry, this is my day of silence.” And he would
sit and quiet himself and try to listen to what was the most compassionate and skillful and powerful response he could make, coming from that deep center of wisdom. So rather than removing us from the world, it allows us to affect the world in a different and in many cases more profound way.

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**Finding the Middle Way in Life**

*By Dr Elijah Sacvan Ary*

**Benny:** You spent your teenage years as a monk in a Tibetan monastery in India. Can you tell us how those years as a monastic shaped your thinking today as a Western Buddhist practitioner and scholar?

**Tenzin:** Those years were immensely influential. When I was a child, my parents ran a Dharma center in Montreal. We used to have teachers come to give teachings and there were somewhat regular practice sessions, even a “kid’s meditation” on Sundays. But in a dharma center context, people are generally practicing a religion that is not as much part of the local culture. This makes it a place where a few likeminded people come get together on occasion to share and practice a set of common rituals, etc. At the end of the rituals, people go back to their lives in a society that is not traditionally Buddhist. The monastery, however, is a much larger community. In fact, there were 1,500 monks when I arrived, making it the size of a village. Today, Sera boasts over 6,000 denizens and is nicknamed “Sera City” by locals. Moreover, though located in India, it is situated near other Tibetan refugee camps. In such a context, Buddhism is a truly live tradition. Over the centuries, Buddhism has become an almost inalienable part of Tibetan culture. So everything you do on a daily basis, the people you see, the things you eat, the whole rhythm of life in the monastery, is highly influenced by Buddhism and Buddhist culture. And that doesn’t really stop unless you leave. So in this way you could almost say that it was the opposite of living in a dharma center in North America. How I practice today, how I see Buddhism as an integral part of my life, my identity, is therefore highly influenced by my time at Sera.

As a scholar, Sera was influential in that it forced me to study up to eighteen hours a day at times. Prior to this, I was a difficult and very reluctant student. I never had good grades in elementary school and never wanted to study. Sera transformed me in that. I began to truly love learning such profound things, and learned what my personal limits were to the number of hours I could study without burning out.
Elijah Sacvan Ary was born in Vancouver, Canada. In 1979, at age seven, he was recognized as the reincarnation, or *tulku*, of a Tibetan scholar and spent his teenage years as a monk at Sera Monastery in South India. He went on to study at the University of Quebec in Montreal and the National Institute for Eastern Languages and Civilizations (Inalco) in Paris, and he earned his PhD in the Study of Religion from Harvard University. His writings have appeared in the books *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions*, *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Buddhism*, *Contemporary Visions in Tibetan Studies*, and *Blue Jean Buddha: Voices of Young Buddhists*. Also known as Tenzin Tulku, he lives in Paris with his wife and teaches Buddhism and Tibetan religious history at several institutions. His latest publication is *Authorized Lives: Biography and the Formation of Early Geluk Identity (2015).* Benny Liow did an online interview with Tenzin on his life as a reincarnated Tulku for *Eastern Horizon*.

**Why did you decide to disrobe? Did your teachers take it badly as they would have had expectations that you would remain a monastic and continue the lineage of the previous incarnations?**

I disrobed because I felt that my being a monk in a North American context during the early 1990’s was putting too much distance between others and myself. As I really wanted to be of service, of benefit to other beings, this seemed to be counterproductive to achieving that goal.

In all honesty, I'm not sure how my teachers felt. When I returned to Sera eight years after leaving, the only teachers that were still alive seemed to be rather okay with it. One, Khensur (ex-abbot) Ngawang Lekden, said that it had no importance whatsoever that I was no longer a monk, but that it was very important that I maintain a good relationship with my wife. It was an extremely touching moment for me to hear my old teacher say this.

**How do you continue to have contacts and receive regular teachings from your gurus, many of whom are living in India while you are based in the West?**

I am still in contact with some of them, mainly through telephone and sometimes Skype or social media, but I also have another teacher in France, Lama Tempa, whom I consider one of my main Lamas. He was the retreat master for the first Westerners who completed three-year retreats in the Kagyu tradition, and is one of the most profound and wise beings I know. I have enormous respect for him. He has taught me much about meditation and practice, and is at once an incredibly wise teacher, with a very simple and unassuming demeanor. He is also a close friend. We like to share stories of our lives in our respective monasteries and often have a good laugh.

I also travel to India on occasion to receive teachings from other masters who do not travel outside India much. I would like to be able to do it more, but this is not always easy, given my own academic teaching schedule.
Do you think you can better practice Buddhism or promote it as a layperson rather than as a monastic?

I don’t really have a definite opinion on the matter. I think that it depends on the people one is interacting with. Everyone is different, and everyone has different needs. Some people feel it’s easier to feel a profound connection with a master who is a monk. It’s easier for them to feel devotion when the teacher is a monk. And after all, devotion is a very important ingredient in spiritual practice. For others, however, it can be easier to have confidence in someone with whom they feel a strong personal connection, someone who is like them, or someone who is trying to live the teachings in the same cultural and social setting as them. Indeed, many people seem moved by the fact that I am not a monk, yet I can still have a profoundly spiritual life, a life infused with the teachings of the Buddha. For me, this balance is capital. We must learn to find and practice the Buddha’s middle way in all aspects of our lives, be it as monastics or as lay practitioners. Sometimes it can be more challenging in lay societies, especially nowadays, with all the temptations and extremes and new things to become attached to. We are often sheltered from these things in a monastic setting. But life in a monastery has its challenges too. I think that the fact that I am teaching lay people in a lay society and as a lay person who once lived as a monk seems to help others relate better to the dharma. It seems to reassure them to see that it is possible to be a lay practitioner; to apply the Buddha’s teachings in one’s life, even in a modern Western society.

There are a few non-Tibetans now identified as tulkus in the West. Are there regular interactions or thoughts on how these Western-born Tulkus are best able to continue this tradition outside Tibet, while adapting to a modern, secular cultural environment?

Unfortunately, not many of us have spoken all that much. This really struck me when I was writing a chapter on the Western Tulkus phenomenon for Vanessa Sasson’s book Little Buddhas. It became evident to me that it would probably be very
beneficial if we were to get together and talk about our experience and of our future. But so far, nothing has come about. There was a conference about the Tulku institution at the University of San Francisco a few years back, but I think I was the only officially recognized tulku there. It was interesting to hear the papers, but it also felt odd to be the only representative of the topic of discussion.

I think that for the most part, Western Tulkus remain in a sort of no-man’s-land, in between tradition and innovation, between Tibetan and Western cultures, monkhood and laity. Few of the Westerners recognized as reincarnations have spent any time at a monastery and none have remained monks. I have heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that he sees no point in recognizing any more Westerners as Tulkus. But this doesn’t mean we’re not still focused on working for the benefit of others. I think in our own ways, we are naturally drawn to this. My good friend Trinlay Tulku, from France has chosen to travel the world teaching Buddhism in more traditional venues than myself (dharma centers and so on), but has also given talks at universities and in other settings. Gesar Mukpo, son of Chögyam Trungpa, sees his duty as a reincarnation, a filmmaker (he made the documentary film “Tulku”), and a human being as working to elevate the general consciousness of mankind. And, of course, Osel Hita Torres, the reincarnation of Lama Yeshe, is also trying to find new ways of doing his part as a tulku by guiding others and helping the tradition and teachings adapt to changing times (he is quite involved in the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, for example). And this, I think, is part of what it means to be a tulku. We are innovators, but also the custodians of tradition. We are expected to have the capacity to understand how best we can help other beings, and if that means adapting the traditional discourse to changing times, then we must do so, all the while maintaining the authenticity of the teachings. This is not necessarily an easy task, as it requires an understanding of both the times in which we live as well as the tradition itself. This latter part is important, and is why, in my opinion, Tulkus are usually sent, or at least asked to go to study in a traditional monastic setting.

I think that being Westerners puts us in a particularly privileged place. We understand intimately the culture into which we are born, and can therefore better understand the people that are part of it. This gives us an advantage for teaching. But once again, in order to teach, and to do so in accordance with the teachings, we must first study and develop our own intellectual and intuitive capacities. Otherwise, it’s like wanting to feed the world when you have none, or only a few, to share.

Among the many forms of Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism is perhaps the most popular today in the US and Europe. Can you explain what are the reasons for the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism among Westerners?

I think a lot of it has to do with timing. Many Tibetan Buddhist teachers came to the West close to the time when the hippie movement was in full swing there.
People were looking for something new, something different from what their parents believed in. The first Tibetans to arrive in the West probably also had in mind the spread of the Buddha’s teachings and, faced with the enthusiasm for these new and profound teachings, decided that the terrain was fertile and ripe to receive them. Karma or coincidence? Whatever the case, teachers like Kalu Rinpoche and Chögyam Trungpa set up dharma centers all over so that the new Buddhists would have a place to come together as a group to pray and practice and to receive teachings when a teacher was there. Many of these centers continue to thrive today.

Another element to take into consideration is the popularity of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness has really become the face of Tibetan Buddhism today. His books are widely read best sellers that have been translated into many languages, and his teachings and public talks can sell out stadiums and draw crowds by the thousands. His humble demeanor and profound wisdom, not to mention his heart-warming smile and contagious laugh, are definitely a large part of the equation.

Is it correct to say that much of Tibetan Buddhism is couched in traditional Tibetan culture and belief system, like believing in oracles and divination? So how do we differentiate between what is Tibetan culture and beliefs, and Buddha Dharma as taught by Sakyamuni Buddha?

At the risk of upsetting some of the readers, I have to be a true scholar and remind you that we actually know little, if anything at all, about what Sakyamuni Buddha actually taught. The earliest texts we have date to about the 1st century CE, some 300-400 years after the Buddha’s passing. So all we have, historically speaking, are accounts of his teachings by the followers of his followers’ followers, which are also colored by (local) cultures. This isn’t to say that the teachings we practice aren’t the words of the Buddha; I’m just pointing out that when we try to distinguish between teachings, beliefs and practices and culture, we must take into consideration the fact that these teachings come to us over time and from a particular socio-historical context. There are thus distinct historical developments that have become important parts of those teachings.

That being said, there are certainly some aspects of Tibetan Buddhism that are developments from within this particular culture and therefore perhaps not necessary for the practice of Buddhism in an entirely different context. But these cultural aspects are also what make Tibetan Buddhism unique; what set it apart from other forms of Buddhism. But the same is true of all types of Buddhism, when you really look at them. I agree that one shouldn’t have to mimic the Tibetans or even become one of them in order to practice Tibetan Buddhism. I don’t think it’s an “all or nothing” deal. One needn’t subscribe to the totality of beliefs and customs that have become associated over time with Tibetan Buddhism. There are of course some things that we can set aside. After all, Tibetan Buddhism is another form of Buddhism. If you practice it, then you are practicing Buddhism. If it helps you to become a better human being, and makes both you and other
beings happy and compassionate, then I see no need to start dressing like a Tibetan in order to practice.

I personally feel that by studying and understanding the tradition’s history, and by calling into question those elements that don’t seem to fit or that stand out one acquires a better understanding of what is “purely Tibetan” and what is not, and of why one decides to practice this form of Buddhism. “Knowledge is power,” as the saying goes. Knowledge about the tradition we practice, about its historical and cultural developments, can really help to nuance and strengthen our faith and engagement with a tradition.

Would you say that Buddhism has taken roots in Western culture? If not, how and when can Buddhism become embedded in Western culture?

It definitely has, especially in North America. One of the clear signs of this, I think, is when you see Western “Lamas” teaching other Westerners. Another clear sign would be when specific forms of Buddhism emerge that incorporate elements from North American culture. This is in the nascent stages right now, but I’m confident that soon we will see this happen more clearly.

What is your personal goal and mission as a recognized tulku in terms of ensuring the growth of Buddhism in the 21st century?

For starters, to be a good human being. To be kind to others and help them in any way that is conducive to their long term betterment and well being. His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said that the meaning of life is happiness. So I think that my goal in this life, and any of them really, is to help as many beings as I can to achieve happiness. Not the temporary happiness that you feel when you get something you really wanted; the kind of happiness that is lasting and only comes from meaningful and profound inner transformation. This has become my life goal. But I must add that this is not a purely selfless act, as I too gain quite a bit from helping others. You could say that my happiness comes largely from helping others to help themselves achieve true happiness. **EH**
By Dr Paul Fuller

A key feature of Buddhist practice is generating merit. Merit is primarily cultivated through the performance of ethical actions and is largely based upon metaphysical assumptions grounded in Buddhist philosophy. Most Buddhists do not aspire to awakening in this life but aim to generate enough merit so that in a future life they might be born with the necessary conditions available for them to renounce the world and join the Sangha.

The idea of “merit” (punna/pon) implies an auspicious or fortunate act. A “wholesome” (kusala/kutho) action – one based upon generosity, compassion and wisdom – is described as one that generates merit. These are actions that purify the mind and lead to good fortune. This good fortune could occur in this life or the next.

Acts based upon greed, hatred and delusion are considered “unwholesome” (akusala/akutho). They are described as inauspicious and lacking in merit. These actions do not create merit, and have negative outcomes. As we might expect, Buddhists are keen to perform auspicious actions that produce merit, such as through generosity or giving, known as dana, and ethical conduct, or virtue, known as sila.

The most meritorious act is that of giving, primarily by making offerings to Buddhist monks. The Burmese term for a monk is pongyi, one who has great merit. The Burmese term pon is derived from the punna. The Buddhist Sangha, the monastic community, are a great “field of merit” (punna-khetta). By making offerings to Buddhist monks one generates great merit. It is more meritorious to give to a monk than to an ordinary person. This is due in part to the assumed ethical behaviour of the monastic, and their status in terms of the generation of merit. The Buddhist monastic community is required to make itself available every day to receive food from the lay community. By receiving food and other offerings by the lay community, a monk is a “field of merit”. The presence of a monk at a wedding or funeral serves the same function. These occasions become opportunities for the generation of merit.

In the wider context of Buddhist thought, and in a slightly more philosophically sophisticated understanding, the act of giving may be understood as a practice that lessens attachment, particularly attachment to the notion of a permanent and enduring “self”, or atta/atman. The texts of the Pali canon in general talk of the great fruit and profit that arises from an act of
giving. They also warn that the way in which one makes an offering has an effect on the merit it produces. If the gift is given with the thought of a reward, the fruit and result of that act of given will be much less than one who gives without selfish motivations (Anguttara-nikaya, IV 60-63). In fact, the mind of the person who gives the gift is of some considerable importance, and those who make even a small offering with a pure mind get considerable merit. Even if someone has nothing to give, a person can still rejoice in another’s act of giving, and this itself will generate merit.

In some cases the idea of merit is used in a political context. The turning-over of the alms bowl (pattam nikkujjeyya/tha beit hmaut) is an act whereby a monk might show displeasure with a lay person by refusing his or her offering. There is also a more controversial act whereby a monk refuses offerings from someone he disagrees with politically and therefore prohibits the acquisition of merit to an individual or group. Of course, the state itself is often involved in the generation of merit through supporting the Sangha and by constructing Buddhist monuments. These acts would also legitimate power in a Buddhist society.

Merit can also be generated through ethical conduct. Primarily this entails the adoption of five precepts, or five virtues (pancasila) by the Buddhist. These five are to refrain from harming living creatures, to refrain from taking what is not given, to refrain from sexual misconduct, to refrain from false speech and to refrain from intoxicants that cause heedlessness.

The first precept involves refraining from harming any sentient being. This includes animals and insects, but not plants. In the description of this precept in the Pali canon it is important to note that “intention” (cetana) is heavily emphasized. Buddhism understands the notion of intention as being central to the generation of “actions that have consequences” (karma/kamma). The first precept does not mean that most Buddhists are vegetarian, and there is some evidence that the Buddha accepted meat in his alms bowl. If one does not intend to kill the animal for food, then there is no harm, in karmic terms, in eating it. In the Buddhist texts we find it said that food is blameless if a monk has not seen, heard or suspected that the creature has been specifically killed for him (Majjhima-nikaya, II 368-71). A monk is intended to live on alms placed in his alms bowl and acts as a field of merit by accepting such food. He should therefore accept whatever is offered.

If one does not intend to kill a living being, there are no negative consequences. It is for this reason that vegetarianism is not common in Buddhist Asia, and that the eating of meat does not contravene the first precept, or hinder the generation of merit.

An important point to note then in Buddhist ethics is that responsibility for ones actions are based in what one intends to do. The first precept raises certain other issues. In general in Asian Buddhist culture abortion is seen as breaking this precept. On the one hand rebirth as a human is seen as great opportunity to achieve awakening and traditionally a Buddhist would not favour abortion. Added to this is the ancient idea that the living being is considered present in the womb soon after conception. The other precepts can be analysed in a similar way.

The point in this description is that by adhering to the precepts one generates merit. By making offerings to the Sangha, one generates merit. But it is enshrined in the Pali canon that only by giving and performing ethical actions with a mind based in metta can the benefits of the activities – namely, the generation of merit – be acquired.

The generation of merit rests upon the logic of Indian karmic theory, in which actions have a metaphysical basis. Indian philosophers came to the conclusion that all actions have consequences. In most Indian religions, including Buddhism, this is an immutable law. Therefore, through performing activities in which the generation of merit is central, a Buddhist is participating in this same understanding.

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EIGHT VERSES ON TRAINING THE MIND

By HH The 14th Dalai Lama

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the spiritual leader of Tibet. He was born on 6 July 1935, to a farming family, in a small hamlet located in Taktser, Amdo, northeastern Tibet. At the age of two the child, who was named Lhamo Dhondup at that time was recognized as the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso. The Dalai Lamas are believed to be manifestations of Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and patron saint of Tibet. Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who have postponed their own nirvana and chosen to take rebirth in order to serve humanity. In May 2012, His holiness was awarded the distinguished Templeton Prize. This was awarded for His commitment to interfaith relations and in 1989 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent struggle for the liberation of Tibet. He has consistently advocated policies of non-violence, even in the face of extreme aggression. He also became the first Nobel Laureate to be recognized for his concern for global environmental problems.

The first seven verses of the Eight Verses for Training the Mind by Geshe Langri Tangpa (1054-1123) deal with the practices associated with cultivating the method aspect of the path such as compassion, altruism, aspiration to attain buddhahood, and so on. The eighth verse deals with the practices that are directed toward cultivating the wisdom aspect of the path.

The first three verses from the Eight Verses of Training the Mind along with the commentary by His Holiness the Dalai Lama were given on 8 November 1998 in Washington D.C. The remaining five verses are extracted from the book Transforming the Mind by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Verse 1

With a determination to achieve the highest aim
For the benefit of all sentient beings
Which surpasses even the wish-fulfilling gem,
May I hold them dear at all times.
These four lines are about cultivating a sense of holding dear all other sentient beings. The main point this verse emphasizes is to develop an attitude that enables you to regard other sentient beings as precious, much in the manner of precious jewels. The question could be raised, “Why do we need to cultivate the thought that other sentient beings are precious and valuable?”

In one sense, we can say that other sentient beings are really the principal source of all our experiences of joy, happiness, and prosperity, and not only in terms of our day-to-day dealings with people. We can see that all the desirable experiences that we cherish or aspire to attain are dependent upon cooperation and interaction with other sentient beings. It is an obvious fact. Similarly, from the point of view of a practitioner on the path, many of the high levels of realization that you gain and the progress you make on your spiritual journey are dependent upon cooperation and interaction with other sentient beings. Furthermore, at the resultant state of buddhahood, the truly compassionate activities of a buddha can come about spontaneously without any effort only in relation to sentient beings, because they are the recipients and beneficiaries of those enlightened activities. So one can see that other sentient beings are, in a sense, the true source of our joy, prosperity, and happiness. Basic joys and comforts of life such as food, shelter, clothing, and companionship are all dependent upon other sentient beings, as is fame and renown. Our feelings of comfort and sense of security are dependent upon other people’s perceptions of us and their affection for us. It is almost as if human affection is the very basis of our existence.

Our life cannot start without affection, and our sustenance, proper growth, and so on all depend on it. In order to achieve a calm mind, the more you have a sense of caring for others, the deeper your satisfaction will be. I think that the very moment you develop a sense of caring, others appear more positive. This is because of your own attitude. On the other hand, if you reject others, they will appear to you in a negative way.

Another thing that is quite clear to me is that the moment you think only of yourself, the focus of your whole mind narrows, and because of this narrow focus uncomfortable things can appear huge and bring you fear and discomfort and a sense of feeling overwhelmed by misery. The moment you think of others with a sense of caring, however, your mind widens. Within that wider angle, your own problems appear to be of no significance, and this makes a big difference. If you have a sense of caring for others, you will manifest a kind of inner strength in spite of your own difficult situations and problems. With this strength, your problems will seem less significant and bothersome. By going beyond your own problems and taking care of others, you gain inner strength, self-confidence, courage, and a greater sense of calm. This is a clear example of how one’s way of thinking can really make a difference.
The Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara) says that there is a phenomenological difference between the pain that you experience when you take someone else’s pain upon yourself and the pain that comes directly from your own pain and suffering. In the former, there is an element of discomfort because you are sharing the other’s pain; however, as Shantideva points out, there is also a certain amount of stability because, in a sense, you are voluntarily accepting that pain. In the voluntary participation in other’s suffering there is strength and a sense of confidence. But in the latter case, when you are undergoing your own pain and suffering, there is an element of involuntariness, and because of the lack of control on your part, you feel weak and completely overwhelmed. In the Buddhist teachings on altruism and compassion, certain expressions are used such as “One should disregard one’s own well-being and cherish other’s well-being.” It is important to understand these statements regarding the practice of voluntarily sharing someone else’s pain and suffering in their proper context. The fundamental point is that if you do not have the capacity to love yourself, then there is simply no basis on which to build a sense of caring toward others. Love for yourself does not mean that you are indebted to yourself. Rather, the capacity to love oneself or be kind to oneself should be based on a very fundamental fact of human existence: that we all have a natural tendency to desire happiness and avoid suffering. Once this basis exists in relation to oneself, one can extend it to other sentient beings.

Therefore, when we find statements in the teachings such as “Disregard your own well-being and cherish the well-being of others,” we should understand them in the context of training yourself according to the ideal of compassion. This is important if we are not to indulge in self-centered ways of thinking that disregard the impact of our actions on other sentient beings. As I said earlier, we can develop an attitude of considering other sentient beings as precious in the recognition of the part their kindness plays in our own experience of joy, happiness, and success. This is the first consideration. The second consideration is as follows: through analysis and contemplation you will come to see that much of our misery, suffering, and pain really result from a self-centered attitude that cherishes one’s own well-being at the expense of others, whereas much of the joy, happiness, and sense of security in our lives arise from thoughts and emotions that cherish the well-being of other sentient beings. Contrasting these two forms of thought and emotion convinces us of the need to regard other’s well-being as precious.

There is another fact concerning the cultivation of thoughts and emotions that cherish the well-being of others: one’s own self-interest and wishes are fulfilled as a by-product of actually working for other sentient beings. As Je Tsong Khapa points out in his Great Exposition of the Path to Enlightenment (Lamrim Chenmo), “the more the practitioner engages in activities and thoughts that are focused and directed toward the fulfillment of others’ well-
being, the fulfillment or realization of his or her own aspiration will come as a by-product without having to make a separate effort.” Some of you may have actually heard the remark, which I make quite often, that in some sense the bodhisattvas, the compassionate practitioners of the Buddhist path, are wisely selfish people, whereas people like ourselves are the foolishly selfish. We think of ourselves and disregard others, and the result is that we always remain unhappy and have a miserable time. The time has come to think more wisely, hasn’t it? This is my belief. At some point the question comes up, “Can we really change our attitude?”

My answer on the basis of my little experience is, without hesitation, “Yes!” This is quite clear to me. The thing that we call “mind” is quite peculiar. Sometimes it is very stubborn and very difficult to change. But with continuous effort and with conviction based on reason, our minds are sometimes quite honest. When we really feel that there is some need to change, then our minds can change. Wishing and praying alone will not transform your mind, but with conviction and reason, reason based ultimately on your own experience, you can transform your mind. Time is quite an important factor here, and with time our mental attitudes can certainly change. One point I should make here is that some people, especially those who see themselves as very realistic and practical, are too realistic and obsessed with practicality. They may think, “This idea of wishing for the happiness of all sentient beings and this idea of cultivating thoughts of cherishing the well-being of all sentient beings are unrealistic and too idealistic. They don’t contribute in any way to the transformation of one’s mind or to attaining some kind of mental discipline because they are completely unachievable.” Some people may think in these terms and feel that perhaps a more effective approach would be to begin with a close circle of people with whom one has direct interaction. They think that later one can expand and increase the parameters. They feel there is simply no point in thinking about all sentient beings since there is an infinite number of them. They may conceivably feel some kind of connection with their fellow human beings on this planet, but they feel that the infinite sentient beings in the multiple world systems and universes have nothing to do with their own experience as an individual. They may ask, “What point is there in trying to cultivate the mind that tries to include within its sphere every living being?” In a way that may be a valid objection, but what is important here is to understand the impact of cultivating such altruistic sentiments.

The point is to try to develop the scope of one’s empathy in such a way that it can extend to any form of life that has the capacity to feel pain and experience happiness. It is a matter of defining a living organism as a sentient being. This kind of sentiment is very powerful, and there is no need to be able to identify, in specific terms, with every single living being in order for it to be effective. Take, for example, the universal nature of impermanence. When
we cultivate the thought that things and events are impermanent, we do not need to consider every single thing that exists in the universe in order for us to be convinced of impermanence. That is not how the mind works. So it is important to appreciate this point.

In the first verse, there is an explicit reference to the agent “I”: “May I always consider others precious.” Perhaps a brief discussion on the Buddhist understanding of what this “I” is referring to might be helpful at this stage. Generally speaking, no one disputes that people—you, me, and others—exist. We do not question the existence of someone who undergoes the experience of pain. We say, “I see such-and-such” and “I hear such-and-such,” and we constantly use the first-person pronoun in our speech. There is no disputing the existence of the conventional level of “self” that we all experience in our day-to-day life. Questions arise, however, when we try to understand what that “self” or “I” really is. In probing these questions we may try to extend the analysis a bit beyond day-to-day life—we may, for example, recollect ourselves in our youth. When you have a recollection of something from your youth, you have a close sense of identification with the state of the body and your sense of “self” at that age. When you were young, there was a “self.” When you get older there is a “self.” There is also a “self” that pervades both stages.

An individual can recollect his or her experiences of youth. An individual can think about his or her experiences of old age, and so on. We can see a close identification with our bodily states and sense of “self,” our “I” consciousness. Many philosophers and, particularly, religious thinkers have sought to understand the nature of the individual, that “self” or “I,” which maintains its continuity across time. This has been especially important within the Indian tradition. The non-Buddhist Indian schools talk about atman, which is roughly translated as “self” or “soul”; and in other non-Indian religious traditions we hear discussion about the “soul” of the being and so on. In the Indian context, atman has the distinct meaning of an agent that is independent of the empirical facts of the individual.

In the Hindu tradition, for example, there is a belief in reincarnation, which has inspired a lot of debate. I have also found references to certain forms of mystical practice in which a consciousness or soul assumes the body of a newly dead person. If we are to make sense of reincarnation, if we are to make sense of a soul assuming another body, then some kind of independent agent that is independent of the empirical facts of the individual must be posited. On the whole, non-Buddhist Indian schools have more or less come to the conclusion that the “self” really refers to this independent agent or atman. It refers to what is independent of our body and mind. Buddhist traditions on the whole have rejected the temptation to posit a “self,” an atman, or a soul that is independent of our body and mind. Among Buddhist schools there is consensus on the point that “self” or “I” must be understood in terms of
the aggregation of body and mind. But as to what, exactly, we are referring when we say "I" or "self," there has been divergence of opinion even among Buddhist thinkers. Many Buddhist schools maintain that in the final analysis we must identify the "self" with the consciousness of the person. Through analysis, we can show how our body is a kind of contingent fact and that what continues across time is really a being's consciousness.

Of course, other Buddhist thinkers have rejected the move to identify "self" with consciousness. Buddhist thinkers such as Buddhapalita and Chandrakirti have rejected the urge to seek some kind of eternal, abiding, or enduring "self." They have argued that following that kind of reasoning is, in a sense, succumbing to the ingrained need to grasp at something. An analysis of the nature of "self" along these lines will yield nothing because the quest involved here is metaphysical; it is a quest for a metaphysical self in which, Buddhapalita and Chandrakirti argue, we are going beyond the domain of the understanding of everyday language and everyday experience.

Therefore "self," person, and agent must be understood purely in terms of how we experience our sense of "self." We should not go beyond the level of the conventional understanding of "self" and person. We should develop an understanding of our existence in terms of our bodily and mental existence so that "self" and person are in some sense understood as designations dependent upon mind and body. Chandrakirti used the example of a chariot in his Guide to the Middle Way (Madhyamakavatara). When you subject the concept of chariot to analysis, you are never going to find some kind of metaphysically or substantially real chariot that is independent of the parts that constitute the chariot. But this does not mean the chariot does not exist. Similarly, when we subject "self," the nature of "self," to such analysis, we cannot find a "self" independent of the mind and body that constitutes the existence of the individual or the being. This understanding of the "self" as a dependently originated being must also be extended to our understanding of other sentient beings. Other sentient beings are, once again, designations that are dependent upon bodily and mental existence. Bodily and mental existence is based on the aggregates, which are the psychophysical constituents of beings. EH
“The Dharma is so good, yet so few people know about it and so many people mis-understand it.” It was based on this simple belief that Venerable Master Sheng Yen founded Dharma Drum Mountain.

Calling himself “an itinerant monk pressing ahead through the wind and snow,” and named as one of the fifty most influential people in Taiwan during the past four hundred years, Venerable Master Sheng Yen has had a life full of miseries, deprivations, tests, and turning points.

The Master has had a weak physique and been prone to illness since childhood. After becoming a monk in the Wolf Hills in China, he went through years of having to perform deliverance rituals day and night for a living, then served in the military, and was finally re-ordained. Thereafter, whether on solitary retreat, studying in Japan, in America spreading the Dharma, or founding Dharma Drum Mountain, he has always been able to find a way forward when there seemed no way out. In his hardships his compassionate vows strengthen, and through his perseverance his wisdom shines. To him, life is a process of realizing the Buddha dharma.

To rise the status of Buddhism and the quality of monasticism in Taiwan, at the age of forty Master Sheng Yen resolutely went to study in Japan. After obtaining a doctorate, he began to propagate in both the United States and Taiwan, and, as a Dharma heir in both Linji and Caodong lineages, traveled around the world to teach Chan practice, ushering numerous people both Eastern and Western into the world of Chan. In order to spread the Dharma through language and concepts accessible to modern people, even with his tight schedule the Master still continues to write, and has published over one hundred books.
An erudite scholar, the Master has established the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies and Dharma Drum University to cultivate first-class researchers. In recent years, he has also engaged in public dialogues with leading figures in the fields of technology, art, and culture, and has even collaborated with other denominations and religions. His expansive mind and international outlook have earned him recognition from people in various fields both at home and abroad. Under his guidance, Dharma Drum Mountain has established its bases in Taiwan and its roots in Chinese Buddhism while steadily progressing toward greater internationalization and diversification.

When a candle is lit in a dark room, it illuminates the room to some extent, but its power is limited. But if you use the same candle to light another candle, the total brightness increases. If you continue to do this, you can fill the room with brilliant illumination. The idea of transferring merit to others is like this. If we keep our own light selfishly hidden, it will only provide a limited amount of illumination. But when we share our light with others, we do not diminish our own light. Rather, we increase the amount of light available to all. Therefore, when others light our candle, we issue forth light. When out of gratitude we use our candle to light other people's candles, the whole room gets brighter. This is why we transfer merit to others. This kind of light is continuous and inexhaustible.

When we achieve a mind of gratitude and dedicate ourselves to helping others, we can practice generosity. We can be generous with our wealth, with ourselves, and with the Dharma. In some ways, giving wealth is the easiest. If we consume less and live more frugally, we can give away what we save.

It is also useful to remember that the nature of giving is not necessarily dependent on the size or the value of the gift. Once, the Buddha was about to teach the Dharma to a congregation in the forest, but it got dark. Several people offered their lamps, but there was a homeless woman whose only possession was an alms bowl, which she offered to serve as an oil lamp. On realizing this, the Buddha exclaimed to his congregation that the old lady's virtue was the most excellent, as she had offered her total wealth, the begging bowl. By making her offering, do you think she lost anything?

So when out of gratitude we dedicate ourselves to benefit others, this is practicing generosity or giving. This is something we can learn. Some people think by giving everything away, you end up with nothing. But the Dharma is an inexhaustible well. However much you give of it, you can always go back for more, because in this well the more you take from it, the higher the water will rise. As long as you give the Dharma to nourish others, it will be there. As long as you are alive and are able to practice, this will be true. Being alive, you can learn more and more, and give more and more. Being alive, you can also take time to rest and recover, then go back to the source. This is how giving the Dharma works.

THE BASIS OF BUDDHIST FAITH: LESSONS FROM “IN THE BUDDHA’S WORDS”

By Monica Sanford

Monica Sanford is a doctoral candidate at Claremont School of Theology (California, USA) in the Practical Theology PhD program, specializing in Buddhist spiritual care and counseling. She also holds a Master of Divinity in Buddhist Chaplaincy from University of the West (California, USA), where she now works as Institutional Effectiveness and Planning Officer and Volunteer Campus Chaplain. She is an inveterate blogger and reflects on Buddhist practice from the perspective of a western convert at her blog, Dharma Cowgirl (dharmacowgirl.wordpress.com).

In the third chapter of his book, In the Buddha’s Words (Wisdom:Boston, USA, 2005), Bhikkhu Bodhi discusses how Buddhists should approach the Dhamma. Is it a universal doctrine applicable to all peoples in all times? Is it relative to its particular time and place? Can we pick and choose from among the teachings? Must we wholeheartedly believe the entire canon? What should we suspect or disbelieve? How do we know what questions are important and relevant? What goals are worth pursuing? How do you tell a swindler from a guru? What role does faith play in Buddhist practice?

It is this last question I’d like to address in particular. “Faith” is a loaded word in certain contexts, particularly for Americans raised in a Judeo-Christian culture. Among evangelical Protestants, who have a somewhat less nuanced presentation of faith and doubt than other religious groups, faith can seem like an absolute proposition. Belief is the primary vehicle through which humans achieve salvation – unwavering belief in God and Jesus Christ. Losing one’s faith can be a traumatic experience because it means, in many ways, stepping out of the culture and community in which we’ve been raised. The word itself becomes sour on our tongues.

I’ve written several times before, once recently, about my own approach to “faith.” At one time I would have said faith played no role in my life whatsoever, but I’ve come to understand that this is not precisely true. Mostly it is because my definition of faith has changed from my childish all-or-nothing understanding, to a more subtle adult reconciliation of faith with doubt,
experience, and belief. That being said, when I say “faith,” I do not mean it in the way your average theist does. My idea of faith is more akin to trust, and to quote Ronald Reagan for a moment, trust but verify. This, I believe, is the kind of faith with which Bhikkhu Bodhi advises us to approach the Dhamma.

The Buddha’s teaching has many sides, and thus, from certain angles, it can be directly evaluated against our concern for our present well-being and happiness. Once we see that the practice of the teaching does indeed bring peace, joy, and inner security in this very life, this will inspire our trust and confidence in the Dhamma as a whole, including those aspects that lie beyond our present capacity for personal verification. (p. 85)

Bhikkhu Bodhi includes among those aspects reincarnation, kamma (karma), and the nature of enlightenment. He does not claim we must accept these things on faith alone. Indeed, we can verify them for ourselves through direct experience, but he never claims that will be easy. He says, “This does not mean that an ordinary person can fully validate the Buddha’s doctrine by direct experience without special effort.” (p. 83, emphasis mine) He goes on,

“However, in sharp contrast to revealed religion [monotheism], the Buddha does not demand that we begin our spiritual quest by placing faith in doctrines that lie beyond the range of our immediate experience. (p. 83, emphasis original)

Instead, the Buddha presents many teachings that are relevant to our lives in this present moment. He provides as motivation for trust our own desire for happiness and to avoid suffering. In other words, believing in reincarnation right now probably won’t help us deal with the stress of today’s staff meeting or tonight’s crying baby. But equanimity and loving-kindness might. We can start by cultivating those through meditation, use our own experiences to judge their validity, and decide whether or not to continue trusting the Dhamma on other matters.

All the while, we should never stop using our discerning minds. In fact, the Buddha sets forth more criteria for doubt than he does for faith. When asked by the Kālāma people what to make of all these sages who came to their town declaring the one true way, the Buddha gave this teaching:

It is fitting for you to be perplexed, O Kālāmas, it is fitting for you to be in doubt. Doubt has arisen in you about a perplexing matter. Come, Kālāmas. Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of texts, by logic, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, ‘This ascetic is our teacher.’ But when you know for yourselves, ‘These things are unwholesome; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; these things if undertaken and practiced lead to harm and suffering,’ then you should abandon them. (p. 89, AN 3:65; I 188-93)

The Buddha continues, in the repetitive nature of the suttas, to use the same formula for discerning which things are wholesome, free from blame, praised by the wise, lead to happiness and peace, and should be undertaken. The person who can do this will become a “noble disciple,” her mind pervaded by loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity (the Four Brahma vihāra, or Sublime Abodes). Yet even this noble disciple may not fully know the truth of life and death, nor does she (or he, in the suttas) need to:

When, Kalamas, this noble disciple has thus made his mind free of enmity, free of ill will, uncorrupted and pure, he has won four assurances.

The first assurance he has won is this: ‘If there is another world, and if good and bad deeds bear fruit and yield results, it is possible that with the breakup of this body, after death, I shall arise in a good destination, in a heavenly world.’

The second assurance he has won is this: ‘If there is no other world, and if good and bad deeds do not bear fruit and yield results, still right here, in this very life, I live happily, free of enmity and ill will.’
The third assurance he has won is this: ‘Suppose evil befalls the evil-doer. Then, as I do not intend evil for anyone, how can suffering afflict me, one who does no evil deed?’

The fourth assurance he has won is this: ‘Suppose evil does not befall the evil-doer. Then right here I see myself purified in both respects.’ (p. 91, AN 3:65; I 188-93)

So even if the doctrines of reincarnation and kamma are nothing more than smoke and mirrors, we have not harmed ourselves or others through the practice of the Dhamma and have instead brought about present happiness for ourselves and others. For even if evil befalls us, the good person, we can meet it with equanimity and compassion, thereby not redoubling its effect for ourselves or others.

In some Buddhist traditions, the above teachings have been used to endorse an almost apophatic doctrine. That is, an almost complete rejections of views, beliefs, teachings, and suttas/sutras. However, in practice these Buddhist traditions remain surprisingly similar to their cataphatic cousins despite their negating rhetoric.

We must remember, however, that Bhikkhu Bodhi is writing from the Theravāda tradition and teaching about the Pāḷi Canon, which is perhaps the most strict or orthodox of all the Buddhist traditions. In many ways, I greatly admire the Theravāda teachings, although I cannot always endorse their practices (such as not ordaining women). Despite the growth and division of the Dhamma since the Buddha’s time, these teachings remain the foundation of all Buddhist traditions. The most hardcore Chan meditation master would recognize them as Dhamma, even if he spent his whole life in the meditation hall to the complete neglect of the library.

While Buddhist faith is not the faith of a monotheist, we do nonetheless place our faith or trust in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha to guide us and aid us in our practice. We simply do it while nourishing the seed of doubt which keeps our mind sharp and our feet firmly on the right path. EH

**THE FERTILE SOIL OF SANGHA**

By Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is a global spiritual leader, poet and peace activist, revered throughout the world for his powerful teachings and bestselling writings on mindfulness and peace.

His key teaching is that, through mindfulness, we can learn to live happily in the present moment—the only way to truly develop peace, both in one’s self and in the world.

Thich Nhat Hanh has published over 100 titles on meditation, mindfulness and Engaged Buddhism, as well as poems, children’s stories, and commentaries on ancient Buddhist texts. He has sold over three million books in America alone, some of the best-known include Being Peace, Peace Is Every Step, The Miracle of Mindfulness, The Art of Power, True Love and Anger.

Thich Nhat Hanh has been a pioneer in bringing Buddhism to the West, founding six monasteries and dozens of practice centers in America and Europe, as well as over 1,000 local mindfulness practice communities, known as ‘sanghas’. 
He has built a thriving community of over 600 monks and nuns worldwide, who, together with his tens of thousands of lay students, apply his teachings on mindfulness, peace-making and community-building in schools, workplaces, businesses – and even prisons – throughout the world.

Thich Nhat Hanh, now in his 88th year, is a gentle, humble monk – the man Martin Luther King called “An Apostle of peace and nonviolence.” The media has called him “The Father of Mindfulness,” “The Other Dalai Lama” and “The Zen Master Who Fills Stadiums.”

TWO THOUSAND five hundred years ago, Shakyamuni Buddha proclaimed that the next Buddha will be named Maitreya, the “Buddha of Love.” I think Maitreya Buddha may be a community and not just an individual. A good community is needed to help us resist the unwholesome ways of our time. Mindful living protects us and helps us go in the direction of peace. With the support of friends in the practice, peace has a chance.

If you have a supportive sangha, it’s easy to nourish your bodhicitta, the seeds of enlightenment. If you don’t have anyone who understands you, who encourages you in the practice of the living dharma, your desire to practice may wither. Your sangha—family, friends, and copractitioners—is the soil, and you are the seed. No matter how vigorous the seed is, if the soil does not provide nourishment, your seed will die. A good sangha is crucial for the practice. Please find a good sangha or help create one.

Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are three precious jewels in Buddhism, and the most important of these is Sangha. The Sangha contains the Buddha and the Dharma. A good teacher is important, but sisters and brothers in the practice are the main ingredient for success. You cannot achieve enlightenment by locking yourself in your room. Transformation is possible only when you are in touch. When you touch the ground, you can feel the stability of the earth and feel confident. When you observe the steadiness of the sunshine, the air, and the trees, you know that you can count on the sun to rise each day and the air and the trees to be there. When you build a house, you build it on solid ground. You need to choose friends in the practice who are stable, on whom you can rely.

Taking refuge in the sangha means putting your trust in a community of solid members who practice mindfulness together. You do not have to practice intensively—just being in a sangha where people are happy, living deeply the moments of their days, is enough. Each person’s way of sitting, walking, eating, working, and smiling is a source of inspiration; and transformation takes place without effort. If someone who is troubled is placed in a good sangha, just being there is enough to bring about a transformation.

I hope communities of practice in the West will organize themselves as families. In Asian sanghas, we address each other as Dharma Brother, Dharma Sister, Dharma Aunt, or Dharma Uncle, and we call our teacher Dharma Father or Dharma Mother. A practice community needs that kind of familial brotherhood to nourish practice.

If you have a sangha that is joyful, animated by the desire to practice and help, you will mature as a bodhisattva. I always tell the monks, nuns, and lay practitioners at Plum Village that if they want to succeed in the practice, they have to find ways to live in harmony with one another, even with those who are difficult. If they can’t succeed in the sangha, how can they succeed outside of it? Becoming a monk or a nun is not just between student and teacher. It involves everyone. Getting a “yes” from everyone in the sangha is a true dharma seal.

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Conscientious Compassion

BHIKKHU BODHI ON CLIMATE CHANGE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND SAVING THE WORLD

By Raymond Lam

American scholar and Theravada monk Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi might not receive the same high-profile press coverage as the Roman Catholic Church’s charismatic standard-bearer Pope Francis, but it is becoming evident to Buddhism watchers and commentators that his message is every bit as bold, eloquent, and sophisticated. The recent focus on Bhikkhu Bodhi and other courageous Buddhist leaders who are highlighting imminent threats such as climate change and global hunger might well be influenced by the popular resonance with the urgency with which Pope Francis speaks about the issues.

Whatever the reasons, Bhikkhu Bodhi’s actions speak loudly for themselves. As the founder and chair of the humanitarian organization Buddhist Global Relief (BGR), his activist work centers specifically on the issues of climate change (he is a spiritual ambassador for the interfaith climate change movement Our Voices) and hunger relief.

“When we started BGR, we initially set our mission to help those afflicted with poverty, disaster, and societal neglect,” he says.

But after a short time we realized that this was too vague and not practical. Even large, well-established humanitarian organizations like CARE and Oxfam have more precisely defined missions. As a tiny Buddhist organization, we could not tackle the whole range of human challenges on this planet without dissipating our energies.

I thus drew on my own experience in Sri Lanka and India, where I knew many people were suffering from malnutrition—though this problem is not as acute in Sri Lanka as it is in other countries. I also had read about the extent of global hunger, and it boggled my mind to realize that close to a billion people were suffering from food insecurity and that some six million a year died from hunger and hunger-related illnesses. I learned that it would take only about US$40 billion a year to eliminate global hunger. Yet worldwide, governments pour perhaps a few trillion dollars annually into military budgets, while millions die of hunger. This struck me as a tragedy and pulled at my heart. The Buddha, in the Dhammapada, had said: ‘There is no illness like hunger,’ and he often stressed the merits of providing food to the hungry. Thereby I saw a close fit between traditional Buddhist values and a more precise mission for BGR.

Bhikkhu Bodhi’s visibility in American public discourse over the past several years, especially as a representative of a “minority” religion in the US, is already impressive. In May 2015, he was at George Washington University and the White House to discuss Buddhist civic engagement and the types of policies that Buddhists would like to see implemented. From a long-term perspective, however, Bhikkhu Bodhi doesn’t
believe that the small number of Buddhists in the US as a discrete movement can have a significant impact on civic life.

We are just a few ripples on the surface of the lake. Rather, in my view, our best prospects for giving Buddhist values a role in public affairs would be to join hands with other faith-based organizations that share these values. Rooted in our respective faiths we can present a collective front, advocating for greater social justice, ecological responsibility, a more peaceful foreign policy, and an end to racism and police violence against people of color.

“This is especially necessary in the US,” he suggests, “since fundamentalist Christians have grabbed the moral high ground, advocating an agenda that seems driven more by bigotry and religious dogmatism than by true benevolence and care for the less fortunate.”

Many Buddhist leaders as well as voices from other faiths recognize that divided, the religions cannot form a united front on mitigating and transforming many of the selfish and destructive interests that are threatening to exhaust the planet’s resources.

“The major threat that I see today lies in the ascendency of a purely utilitarian worldview driven by a ruthless economic system that rates everything in terms of its monetary value and sees everything as nothing more than a source of financial profit,” he warns, echoing many similarly dire warnings from other religious public figures.

Under this mode of thinking, the environment turns into a pool of “natural resources” to be extracted and turned into profit-generating goods, and people are exploited for their labor and then disposed of when they are no longer of use.

To resist these trends, I believe, we as Buddhists can be most effective by networking with others who regard human dignity and the integrity of the natural world as more precious than monetary wealth. By joining together, a collective voice might emerge that could well set in motion the forces needed to articulate and embody a new paradigm rooted in the intrinsic dignity of the person and the interdependence of all life on Earth. Such collaboration could serve to promote the alternative values that offer sane alternatives to our free-market imperatives of corporatism, exploitation, extraction, consumerism, and toxic economic growth.

This will be no mean feat, and might be the greatest moral challenge posed to Buddhism and humanity as a whole in our time. To muster the energy to even begin building this united interfaith front, Bhikkhu Bodhi believes that Buddhists in the East and West alike need to nurture stronger humanitarian concern in their hearts.

Western Buddhists—and I think this is probably largely true among educated Buddhists in Asia—take to the dharma primarily as a path of inward development that bids us look away from the conditions of our societies. If this trend continues, Buddhism will serve as a comfortable home for the intellectual and cultural elite, but risks turning the quest for enlightenment into a private journey that offers only a resigned quietism in the face of the immense suffering which daily afflicts countless human lives.

He believes there are two primary moral principles involved in this effort. “One is love, which arises from empathy, the ability to feel the happiness and suffering of others as one’s own. When love is directed toward those afflicted with suffering, it manifests as compassion, the sharing of their suffering, coupled with a determination to remove their suffering,” he says.

The other principle that goes along with love is justice. Some of my Buddhist friends have objected to this, saying that justice is a concept foreign to Buddhism. I don’t agree. I think the word dhamma, in one of its many nuances, can be understood to signify justice, as when the “wheel-turning monarch” is described as dharmiko dhammaraja, which I would render “a righteous king of righteousness,” or “a just king of justice.” In my understanding, justice arises when we recognize that all people possess intrinsic value, that all are
endowed with inherent dignity, and therefore should be helped to realize this dignity.

Bhikkhu Bodhi finally joins the two concepts to form a distinct ethical ideal.

When compassion and justice are unified, we arrive at what I call conscientious compassion. This is compassion, not merely as a beautiful inward feeling of empathy with those suffering, but a compassion that gives birth to a fierce determination to uplift others, to tackle the causes of their suffering, and to establish the social, economic, and political conditions that will enable everyone to flourish and live in harmony.

He invokes the idea of dependent origination to explain the need to see the interdependence between states of mind (particularly those governed by greed and delusion) and an economic system built on the premise of unlimited growth on a finite planet. Bhikkhu Bodhi concludes that if humanity is to avoid a horrific fate, a double transformation is necessary. First, we must undergo an “inner conversion” away from the quest to satisfy proliferating desires and the constant stimulation of greed or craving. But change is also needed in our institutions and social systems. Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests people turn away from an economic order based on incessant production and consumption and move toward a steady-state economy managed by people themselves for the benefit of their communities, rather than by corporate executives bent on market dominance and expanding profits.

At its most radical level, the dhamma teaches that the highest happiness is to be realized through the complete renunciation of craving. But few are capable of such a degree of detachment. To make the message more palatable, we have to stress such values as contentment, simplicity, the appreciation of natural beauty, and fulfillment through meaningful relationships, and the effort to control and master the mind.

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Source: Buddhistdoor Global. EH
Time flies. As we grow older, we find more people around us who are around our age group getting married and having children. I am no different. At home, I have one niece (over 2 years old) and one nephew (over one year old). It is fun to watch the little ones grow up.

They are learning and learning fast. However, if they make a mistake or cannot do the right thing, they will respond differently. For example, when she spilled a drink while learning to stir, she smiled with embarrassment. When he fell while learning to walk, he cried. Reflecting back on working adults, most of them do not feel sorry for their mistakes; instead, they ignore or do not admit them. Some choose to blame others or speak louder to prove that they are right. Some will cover up their mistakes. Some are even worse, they will ask others in the same production line to jointly cover up their mistake so that the top management does not notice it.

I wonder whether some of these behaviors can be attributed to the education we received from our elders. For example, when a child falls down and cries, some adults will teach the child to blame the floor - it is the floor that caused the fall!

I am also very much into the study of green practices. I bought a book from Sri Lanka entitled “What would the Buddha Recycle?”. It is related to green living. We have to be more mindful and do the right action to reduce our carbon footprints. The karma resulting from the depletion of natural life resources is to go against the very source of life itself. There is also a chapter on raising enlightened children. The parent or elder ones have the opportunity to teach the children the value of their actions and their impact on Planet Earth. Children are more open minded and ready to experience new things without judgements, unlike adults.

It is important to teach the truth, to teach them to be responsible for their own actions. Even as a person, we need to be true to ourselves, to be more energy efficient, not to cheat others with different faces/personality for material/monetary purposes. Our society needs more good people to bring more positive impact to change/redirect the negative actions for the betterment of all.

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”
~ Rachel Carson

Note: While I thought I had a brilliant idea on eco personality, I found out that this is an area of study that is currently being pursued by social scientists. However, they are looking into different perspectives. EH
Introduction

On July 1, 2014, riots broke out in Mandalay, Myanmar’s second largest city, claiming the lives of two people as well as causing injuries to many others. The riot also led to the destruction of numerous Muslim houses and businesses. Many eyewitnesses reported that such violence was started by news of a Buddhist woman being raped by a Muslim man which later turned out to be false. The Western media such as Time magazine claimed that prominent monks such as U Wirathu are the sole reason for such violent outbreaks as they spread the hatred of Muslims through their sermons. They are not wrong though, as in one of his sermons he mentioned that there is a “Muslim conspiracy” to conquer Myanmar through economic exploitation and interfaith marriages.

Meanwhile in Southern Thailand, the ongoing conflict between the state and Muslim insurgents have led to the rapid militarization of Buddhism in the country. Manifestations for such militarization can be seen by the rise of a unit of “military monks” that conduct covert operations in the deep South. Furthermore, if one were to look at the past conflicts between the Tamil terrorist group, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the Sri Lankan government, there are stories of how mass sermons were conducted by monks for soldiers in the Sri Lankan army before they set out to the battlefield.

2. Ibid., 8.
4. Ibid., 17.
6. Ibid., 158.
These stories express a sharp contradiction between two opposing forces: Buddhism and violence. How could a religion that is well-known for its teachings to propagate peace and compassion towards others be associated with war and hatred? It is excusable for lay Buddhists to commit such acts of hatred given that they are still practising the path to enlightenment. But it is perplexing to hear stories of monks, being ordained with the duty to propagate the Dharma, associating themselves with violence as well.

In this essay, I attempt to resolve this puzzle by demonstrating that according to the Buddhist canonical scriptures, the Buddha, though did advocate self-defence in some circumstances, still viewed it as a necessary evil given that committing any act of violence is an obstacle to one’s path to liberation.7 Hence, Buddhism is not entirely responsible for these violent conflicts. I argue that the causes of conflicts are based on one’s economic grievances, ethnicity and national identities. In order to support such a view, cases from Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Southern Thailand will be used to provide a comprehensive picture over the topic.

**Buddhist canonical scriptures on violence**

There are accounts in the Suttas in which the Buddha mentions about the necessity of violence in the form of self-defence. The definition of self-defence essentially means to produce a counteroffensive act that defends one’s property, oneself and the well-being of another from physical danger. This would mean that there are some verses in the Buddhist canonical scriptures that support any actions that protects oneself or others from a potentially dangerous threat. For instance, in the Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta (The Lion’s Roar on the Turning of Wheel) of the long discourses of the Buddha, the Buddha actually allowed the king to retain an army in order to bring security for his people from internal and external threats.8 This can be seen in how the Buddha gave advice to the king named Dalhanemi that he “should establish guard, ward and protection according to Dhamma for (his) own household, (his) troops in the army... (and to) let no crime prevail in (his) kingdom.”9

However, the Buddha mentions that such acts of self-defence, which necessitates the use of violence, would not enable one to fulfil the Buddhist goal of liberation. Even if a nation were to engage in violence for a righteous cause it will still be an obstacle for its people to achieve the path to nibanna.10 It is inconceivable for humans to decide what is “right or wrong, just and unjust” while they are being shrouded in the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion.11 A Buddhist path to liberation requires one to be eliminated from these defilements. Thus, the psychology of violence is antithetical to the psychology of Buddhism.

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10. Ibid., 85.
11. Ibid., 82.
An apt story of a war between the righteous celestial beings, the devas and the unrighteous asuras highlights the Buddha’s view of righteous war or self-defence as a barrier to one’s path to liberation.12 When Sakka, the most devout Buddhist deity that led the battlefront against the evil asuras, was experiencing joy when he defeated the latter, the Buddha states that such “joy” is not conducive for one’s path to liberation. True joy only happens when it “leads to disenchantment with all worldly things and to the ultimate peace of nibbana.”13 Violence is a necessary evil that must be applied to certain contexts such as defending a city from external or internal threats; as well as, being used as a form of self-defence like killing a serial murderer. The Buddha, however, still insists that the use of peaceful means to settle disputes is of an utmost importance in times of crisis.14 For it is with such actions of peace that one could attain enlightenment.

The role of ethnicity
If the Buddha’s teachings states that self-defence is an obstacle for the path to enlightenment, it seems that the teachings of Buddhism is not entirely to blame for the conflicts for those three countries. Violence could also occur in these countries with escalating tensions between ethnic groups in a particular region. An ethnic conflict could result if minority groups have faced centuries of oppression under an ethnic majority. The souring of ethnic relations happen when minority groups have their cultural and language rights removed from them. Furthermore, the ethnic majority would support policies that discriminates these groups such as citizenship rights which in turn affects their chances of getting adequate healthcare benefits, housing and employment.

For instance, such forms of discrimination can be seen in Sri Lanka in which the ruling Sinhalese government established a policy known as “Sinhala only” in 1956, making Sinhala the sole official language for the country. 15 This is problematic as language is crucial for a person’s chance to gain employment. Since language is a medium of instruction, the Tamils will be at a disadvantage in gaining access to jobs in the public and private sector if the official language is based on the Sinhala majority.16 Thus, a major reason for the violence to erupt in the late 1950s stems from the issue with language and the pernicious economic consequences that affects the lives of millions of Tamils in the country.

Indologist Richard Gombrich mentions that those involved in the Sri Lankan civil conflict do not fight for religion at all. The LTTE do not identify themselves as Hindus but rather “appear to be largely secular.”17 Similarly, while Buddhism plays a crucial role in the lives of the Sinhalese majority, there is nearly no one in the ethnic group that had said that such conflict was fought for the sake of Buddhism, instead “it is being fought for the Sinhalese.”18

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12. Ibid., 83.  
13. Ibid., 83.  
14. Ibid., 84.  
17. Ibid., 27.  
18. Ibid., 27.
One could also say the same for the violent conflicts in the Rakhine state of Myanmar in which the ethnic tensions escalated between the Rohingya Muslim minority and the Burman Buddhist majority. Roots of these tensions could be traced to decades of repression on the Muslims by the Burman majority since the colonial period as they were viewed as foreign entities sharing no common history with the Burmans. Such xenophobic reaction led to the riots of 1938 which targeted largely Muslims. Things started to take a turn for the worse when the Burmese military took control of the central government in 1962 as “religious freedom for non-Buddhists was severely limited.” Christians and Muslims met with many difficulties when constructing buildings to carry out their religious activities and even worse, Muslims were excluded from the state military, effecting their chances of employment. Therefore, it is these elements of repression that sow the seeds of tensions and mistrust between the Rohingya Muslims and the Burman ethnic group in present-day Myanmar.

**Conflation between religion and state**

Apart from conflicts due to ethnic differences, violence between ethno-religious groups also erupt in countries when one’s religious and national identity overlaps. When religion and state conflates itself, the former becomes the sole marker of what it means for one to be a citizen in that particular country. This creates problems when religious minorities are present within the nation. They will be seen as foreign entities in the eyes of the majority deserving to be discriminated when they are viewed as a threat to the majority’s religious and economic interests. Hence, it is with such sentiments that lead to tensions between these ethno-religious groups.

Political scientists Matthew J. Walton and Susan Hayward mention that it is prevalent for political and religious elites in the Theravada Buddhist-influenced kingdoms to “cultivate a worldview in which the health of the religion and the strength of the polity were seen as interdependent.” To Theravada Buddhists, to ensure the teachings of the Buddha remain intact or “healthy” as a moral force in the country this requires them to “defend” the sasana. The sasana in Pali refers “broadly to the Buddhist religion” but it also extends its meaning to “the entire Buddhist community (of monks, nuns, laypeople) and the Buddha’s teachings themselves.” The health of the sasana is crucial for Buddhists, as without it, enlightenment would not be achievable.

To put this into the context of Myanmar, defending the nation does not only mean ensuring that the state remains well protected but it also calls for state leaders to “create an environment conducive to the well-being of the religion.” Hence, the conflation of

20. Ibid., 6.
22. Ibid., 6.
23. Ibid., 21.
24. Ibid., 21.
25. Ibid., 21.
26. Ibid., 21.
state and religion in Myanmar has some negative consequences for religious minorities such as the Rohingya Muslims. For instance, U Wirathu tries to justify the discrimination of the Rohingya Muslims as part of his need to defend the sasana. He, for example, preaches that Islam is slowly dominating the influence of Buddhism in the country given that “funds used to forcibly convert Buddhist women come from Saudi oil money.”\(^{27}\) Such sermons produced a narrative among the Burman majority that in order to be a loyal citizen, one has to defend the sasana which in turn necessitates the continuous discrimination of the Rohingya Muslims.

On a similar note, the conflation of state and religion is also manifested when monks are being incorporated into the state. Religious scholar Michael Jerryson points out that in Thailand the representation of the Sangha is being closely tied to Thailand’s national identity.\(^{28}\) Such intimate relationship between the order of monks and the state could be seen when monks are recruited by the state, more specifically by the order of Queen Sirikit, to sustain the propagation of the Dharma in those Southern provinces as a response to the rise of extremist Islamic sentiments over there.\(^{29}\)

However, violent consequences will happen when monks are symbolized or politicized as a sacred figure of Thai national identity. If those Thai monks are being attacked or targeted by any assailant (regardless if it is a Muslim or not), it will cause an outcry on a national scale, triggering many Thai Buddhists to defend the harsh policies against the Muslims in the South. For example, many Thai Buddhists ignored the localized context of the murder of monks in the district of Maikaen in 2004. Those monks were killed by local drug dealers for not paying for the drugs they had consumed.\(^{30}\) Instead it blew out of proportions with many accusing the Muslims for those killings, thus further fuelling the conflict in the Southern provinces.\(^{31}\)

**Class conflicts and economic inequality**

Another key source of conflict or violence could also rest on the economic grievances that are prevalent among individuals and communities within a country. One ethno-religious group might be perceived to have a disproportionate amount of wealth compared to the other. This leads to much resentment and jealousy for the latter as they do not have similar opportunities to amass their wealth compared to those “foreign entities”. This in turn would further worsen tensions between these ethno-religious groups if such grievances are left unchecked.

For example, in Myanmar, the Burman majority held a popular perception that the Muslims are wealthy and leading a privileged lifestyle as they are historically part of the mercantile class.\(^{32}\) This widely held belief is reinforced by many Muslims.

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\(^{27}\) Ibid., 21.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 66.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 74.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 74.
\(^{32}\) Matthew J. Walton and Susan Hayward “Contesting Buddhist Narratives,” 14.
holding professions such as businessmen, shopkeepers and money changers." Thus, resentment arises among the Burmans as they are jealous that do could not perform well economically compared to the Muslims.33

There are some instances, however, when violence or riots that erupt in cities cut across ethnic differences. For example in Colombo, Sri Lanka’s largest city, reports show that both Sinhalese and Tamil perpetrators were involved in looting and arson during the riots of July 1983.34 There were reports of how gangs stopped and destroyed many cars without enquiring whether the owner was a Tamil or a Sinhalese.35 The violent looting and arson could be a result of the huge poverty rate in Colombo as the city contains large areas of slums surrounding the rich communities. Years of anger and envy have been building up among the poor culminating to this period of violence when the opportunity arises. Therefore, it is over-simplistic to paint the riots in Sri Lanka as an ethno-religious conflict when factors such as economic grievances are not accounted for.

Conclusion

I have shown that it is simplistic to view the violent conflicts in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Southern Thailand as a battle over one’s religious identity. Though religion has a part to play in these conflicts, we have to look at other root causes for the escalation of tensions between these ethno-religious groups to get a complete understanding. I have also brought up the textual evidences from the Pali Buddhist texts to highlight that the act of any form of violence in Buddhism, regardless if such actions are righteous or not, will be an obstacle to the path of liberation. As such, it is ultimately problematic for Buddhists if they follow the sermons of monks who justify violence in defence of the sasana.

The rise of the new-atheist movement and Islamic terrorism in this day and age have painted religion in a bad light. It is then no surprise that Buddhism has been conflated with violence by the media when Time magazine labelled Wirathu, as a Buddhist terrorist.36 Though I am not denying that the prominent Buddhist monk is partly complicit in the rise of ethnic violence in Myanmar and the writer did not depict Buddhism as a violent religion, there is a fear that labelling him as the “face of Buddhist Terror” would perpetuate the misunderstanding that Buddhism is a cause of violence in the country. I hope that my essay would dispel such misconceptions for the situation is far more complex than any of us would think.

35. Ibid., 29.
HAS VIPASSANĀ REACHED THE END OF THE ROAD?

A PERSONAL REFLECTION AFTER 30 YEARS

By Christopher Titmuss

Christopher Titmuss, a senior Dharma teacher in the West, offers retreats, facilitates pilgrimages and leads Dharma Gatherings worldwide. His teachings focus on insight meditation (vipassanā), the expansive heart and enquiry into emptiness and liberation. Poet and social critic, he is the author of numerous books including Light on Enlightenment, An Awakened Life and Poems from the Edge. More than 100 of his talks are freely available on www.archive.org and other talks offered on his website. Christopher writes a weekly Dharma blog on a wide variety of global issues. A former Buddhist monk in Thailand and India, he is the founder of the online Mindfulness Training Course. He teaches in Australia, Israel, France and Germany every year. Christopher has been teaching annual retreats in India since 1975. He lives in Totnes, Devon, England.

I have had the privilege of teaching Vipassanā (Insight) Meditation for 30 years in the West, as well as for 32 years in Bodh Gaya and eight years in Sarnath, India. My first retreat in the West was in northern New South Wales, Australia, organized in the summer of 1976 by a 21 year-old woman named Sue from Northern Rivers who is now Subhana, a fellow Dharma teacher, much loved and respected in the Dharma world.

I’ve long since lost count of the number of Vipassanā retreats that I’ve offered, probably somewhere between 500 – 750 ranging from one month to one day. However it is many years since I have described myself as a Vipassanā teacher, preferring the much broader term, Dharma teacher. The word Vipassanā becomes too closely identified with certain methods and techniques, and is thus far removed from its original meaning, namely insight – bearing no connection whatsoever to the Buddha’s meditation technique. That doesn’t disqualify Vipassanā as a healthy and challenging practice. There is no telling how many individuals have entered a course or retreat, residential or non-residential, East or West, but the number certainly runs at least into hundreds of thousands or a million or two in the last three decades or so.

A Vipassanā retreat continues to be a powerful catalyst in people’s lives, a major stepping stone into the depths of meditation and a transformative experience. People have arrived for a weekend retreat on a Friday evening and left on Sunday afternoon with a different sense of themselves, of the here and now, of life, and of what matters. Vipassanā changes lives significantly and sometimes dramatically, and is a powerful resource to dissolve so-called personal problems, open the heart and find clarity of mind. A growing number with regular guidance from a teacher, has also entered into the discipline of a personal retreat with its emphasis on silence and solitude lasting from weeks to
But has Vipassanā reached the end of the road? Are the teachings and practices on an Insight Meditation retreat exploring the fulfillment of all profound aspirations?

The background to all Vipassanā practices relies heavily and appropriately on a discourse of the Buddha called the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Discourse on the Applications of Mindfulness, namely body, feelings, states of mind and the Dharma. It is the tenth discourse of the 152 in the Middle Length Discourses. Different Vipassanā methods are based on various interpretations of this discourse. Despite the claims to purity of technique, reliance on Theravada commentarial interpretation, or strict following of the breadth and depth of the discourse, every Vipassanā teacher has his or her own distinctive flavor even if that teacher has had the same teacher(s).

Teachers use the form of a retreat (or course) to enable dharma students to learn to use the powerful resource of Vipassanā to cultivate an authentic depth of calm (samatha) and insight (Vipassanā) into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and the impersonal characteristics of existence. The practice is powerful because it emphasizes moment to moment attention, that is direct observation of immediate experience.

There is a general principle in the Buddhist tradition of Vipassanā that such a Dharma training involves three primary areas of life:

1. Observing and upholding five precepts.
2. The practice of mindfulness and formal meditation, especially sitting and walking. Some teachers also include standing and reclining meditation.
3. Wisdom. In this context, it generally means seeing things clearly, free from projection and obsessive attitudes, with calm and insight into heart, mind and body.

Vipassanā meditation includes developing the capacity to sit still, stay steady with the breath, observe the arising and passing of pleasure and pain in the body with equanimity, let go of troublesome meditation states, dissolve the arising of any ego, develop the power of meditative concentration to go to subtle levels of the inner life and abide with a choiceless awareness with all phenomena.

While Vipassanā and mindfulness meditations are valuable practices in themselves, it is the task of teachers to show new practitioners outside of retreats as well as within them – without fear of being misunderstood – the breadth and depth of Dharma teachings, ethics and practices. Without this wider context, meditation may be applied with aims that are seriously in contradiction with the Dharma; for example some years ago a senior officer in the US army approached a Vipassanā teacher about teaching soldiers to handle pain when unable to move in a battle, and businesses want to use the practices so staff can develop single pointed concentration to improve efficiency and productivity, and Vipassanā practice was offered – without the breadth and depth of the Path - as the culmination of dynamic or movement meditations, such as the late Osho directed in Poona, India.

I remember Jon Kabat-Zinn, a seasoned meditator with various Vipassanā teachers and founder of the internationally respected MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program) coming to my room for a one to one interview in 1979 during a retreat with me at the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, USA. He reported his sudden flash of insight and vision on the retreat to bring mindfulness and insight meditation practices to the lives of people in pain. It was inspiring to listen to him and I could only offer Jon full encouragement. He returned home from that retreat determined to actualize the Dharma for the deep welfare of others without diluting the teachings. He still remains committed to that vision.

The teaching of mindfulness meditation, such as MBSR programs, to alleviate stress, ill-health and pain is an important application of the Dharma; however it would be a great pity if such mindfulness practice had the same fate as yoga which in the West has often
been reduced to a system of healthy physical exercises, extricated from its context as a profound spiritual discipline addressing the whole person.

It would be equally a great pity if Vipassanā meditation became another kind of psychotherapy. I remember several years ago writing to Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Marin County near San Francisco, where perhaps 30% or more are therapists on a retreat, to ask the center to add a brief footnote to the description of my retreat. I wrote for the footnote: “Please do not bring your inner child. There is no adult supervision on this retreat.” To its credit, Spirit Rock published the footnote.

Calm and insight (samatha and Vipassanā) are offered in the Buddha’s teachings as a feature of the Way to liberation, not as THE way. Some secular teachers treat mindfulness and daily meditation as an aid to living a well-adjusted life but a well-adjusted life is far from the end of the road. Again, such an attitude effectively takes Vipassanā meditation out of its wider vision of total liberation.

Certainly the Truth of things, the Dharma of life, is hard enough to comprehend as it is, as the Buddha said on frequent occasions. Teachers show no service to the Dharma by clinging to a narrow view about the supremacy of Vipassanā, nor by inflating the importance of mindfulness and daily meditation over the immensity of the challenge of the Way, as can be seen by reading and reflecting on all the subtle and deep communications from the Buddha on each link of the Noble Eightfold Path or 12 links of Dependent Arising.

These are teachings to ensure that we bring our life on this earth to complete fulfillment. Sitting on top of a cushion and walking slowly up and down to contemplate our existence is a fine and profound exploration into ‘self’ and ‘non-self’ but what is going on with the rest of our lives?

Diet, exercise, use of resources, moderation in living, livelihood, money, relationships, contact with nature, intentions, place of effort, solitude, Dharma reading, writing, contact with the sangha, contact with realized teachers, insights into truth, dependent arising, nonduality, emptiness and living an awakened life deserve our total attention and interest.

No teacher, no one tradition, no school, no satsang, no therapy can possibly address all these issues and many others. We live in times when it is important that the Dharma investigates daily realities, rather than putting so much effort into the preservation of the religious past or feeding identification with the doer or the non-doer.

I recall being grateful in 1982 that our trustees in South Devon, UK agreed to my suggestion to call our new center Gaia House (it means Living Earth, a metaphor for our inter-dependent existence) and is pronounced the same as (Bodh) Gaya, the area of the Buddha’s enlightenment. We also worked carefully on our vision statement as part of the process to become a charitable trust – a vision statement that excluded the promotion of Buddhism, in order to keep our Dharma center free from identification with the religion of Buddhism.

Vipassanā teachers need to take stock and beware of any watering down of teachings and the use of such meaningless terms as ‘Western Buddhism’. For example, I’ve heard it said by certain Vipassanā teachers that there is nothing wrong with desire, nothing wrong with being open to desire, as long as we are not attached to results. Such statements reject the Buddha’s teachings that:

- dependent on contact arises feelings,
- dependent on feelings arises desire,
- dependent on desire arises attachment
- dependent on attachment arises what becomes in the present and future, with all the ‘mass of suffering’ associated with this process.

There are many hard truths in the Buddha’s teachings that are uncomfortable for consumers who do not really want the Dharma to disturb their lifestyle. More and more Western Dharma centers have become middle class spiritual hotels with accompanying pressure to market Dharma centers as centers for Buddhism.
It would be lovely to report that the challenges in the Vipassanā world end here.

I would suggest that the Vipassanā world has other problems that need attention but get neglected. These include:

• a growing belief that Vipassanā is another kind of therapy
• a narrow view that morality is confined to the five precepts
• a view on ethics akin to institutional religion where blame, self-righteousness and moralizing ignore understanding of the human condition,
• belief in meditation, meditation, meditation
• belief in striving
• belief that the path of Vipassanā meditation leads to enlightenment without attention to the whole of life
• getting stuck in the same method and technique and going over the same old ground in the mind
• inability to cope with the wide variety of emotions
• need to explore openly the energies and place of sexuality in the Sangha
• rigidity of view and an inability to lighten up
• rigidity and dryness of the practice,
• students of one major Vipassanā tradition (U Ba Khin tradition) are not permitted to meditate with other Vipassanā teacher, other Vipassanā students or practices to preserve the ‘purity of the technique’.

Despite the above concerns, the Insight Meditation tradition continues to provide a depth of practice second to none. Vipassanā teacher meetings are not exactly a thrill a minute, with a collective hesitancy to say anything remotely politically incorrect. Believe me, this poor wallah is speaking from years of first-hand experience at such meetings.

After 30 years as a small servant of the Dharma, I find it a pity to write some aspects of this personal report to Dharma students. Please don’t imagine for a single moment that this response to the state of Vipassanā shows disillusionment with the practice. Far from it. Vipassanā is a tradition of seeing clearly. It is powerful. It is effective. It is transformative. There is no fluffing around for the dedicated Vipassanā meditator. While making allowances for generalized statements, we surely have the capacity to offer an honest reflection of the Dharma and the world of Vipassanā. Criticism is nothing to do with getting on the high throne and preaching; on the contrary, a sincere critique of that which is close to our hearts contributes to upholding what is of value and discerning questionable areas.

All of the above pales into insignificance when the question is asked: Has Vipassanā reached the end of the road? Yes, it is a double edged question.

• Can Vipassanā practice with its dependency on form and technique reveal the Emptiness of form and technique?
• Can the construction of the method reveal the Unconstructed?
• Can the perception that more sitting is the answer be an expression of the Buddha’s warning about grabbing the poisonous snake by the tail?
• Is there a sense, either conscious or unconscious, among dedicated Vipassanā students that there is something limited about their practice?
• Does Vipassanā meditation feed the notion of identification with the doer in the form of continual effort and striving?
• Does Vipassanā meditation feed the notion of the non-doer in the form of a suppressed state of mind masked as equanimity?
• Does Vipassanā meditation reinforce the notion there is a doer, something to be done and something to be gained for the doer?
• Does the Vipassanā meditator settle for a radiant awareness as the end of the road?
• Where is the resolution of the duality that faces all serious meditators, namely the experience of being in a silent retreat and going back into the so-called ‘real world’? A 30-minute talk on the closing morning of a retreat is clearly not resolving this duality.

Are these concerns being addressed? Some senior Vipassanā (Insight Meditation) teachers enter into other teachings and practices such as various forms of psychotherapy, Advaita, Dzogchen, Ridhwan or Zen for varying lengths of time. It would appear that these
teachers also find that Vipassanā is not completely fulfilling – something they share with a number of senior students. It is not that these other approaches are ultimately any more fulfilling. Yet something is amiss.

All these teachers and students share the same dualistic plight:

- those who feed the notion of the doer and those who feed the notion of the non-doer;
- those who feed the notion of the self (with a capital S or small self) and those who feed the notion of no-self;
- those who work on aspects of the personality and those who don’t;
- those who attach to form and those who attach to the formless

If Vipassanā has not reached the end of the road, that unshakable and fulfilling liberation, then where is the end of the path? It is vital that Vipassanā teachers speak much more about the end of the Way, as well as the Way. Such teachers need to draw on their experiences, their understanding and insights into freedom of being, liberation from “I” and “my” and the awakening that is close at hand. Students feel inspired to explore deeply when they know that their teachers have the confidence to talk about the Supreme Goal of practice.

Authentic glimpses, as much as profound realizations, are important to share. The Buddha said that the raindrop, the pond and the great lake all share the same taste – the taste of water. Although ordained Buddhist teachers must show great restraint about speaking from personal experience about the ultimate truth, non-ordained teachers can share their ‘personal’ realizations at the deepest level. At one Vipassanā teachers meeting, the great majority of teachers reported they had tasted ‘Nirvāṇa.’

The end of the road reveals the dissolution of the construction of the duality of the doer and non-doer, the story around the retreat and going back into daily life. The resolution is not about being in the now and not about not being in the now, nothing to do with the doer or the non-doer, the self or no-self. It’s that simple. The constructions of emotions, mind and personality are small waves in the Ocean.

MAY LIBERATION SHINE THROUGH ALL EVENTS

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Guangdong, China -- A Chinese millionaire has given up his fortune and all material possessions in order to become a Buddhist monk. Liu Jingchong, a businessman from Guangdong Province, moved into the mountains to live in total isolation after an epiphany in 2012 made him desire a 'minimalist life'.

Two years later, he met a monk and decided to join a temple in east China, and instead of making millions he now works in a communal kitchen.

Mr Liu, 39, swapped big city life - and millions in annual income - for a life without material possessions on Zhongnan Mountain in north-western Shaanxi Province in December 2012.

He said a sudden epiphany had made him realise that people will never stop pursuing bigger houses, better jobs, and more expensive cars if they continue to live in metropolises, failing to focus on their 'inner' life.

He spent two years in total isolation, living in a shed made of straw and spending most of his days meditating, reading, and practising calligraphy.

Mr Liu said of his time in the mountains: 'The living conditions were bad. My bed was made of bricks and there was no electricity during the snowy winter.'

He continued: 'But I didn’t feel cold there. Maybe it was because I liked the life there and focused just on what I liked.'

He grew his own vegetables in the mountains and only left his hermit lifestyle to buy rice, flour, and oil.

After meeting a monk, Mr Liu followed him to Baochan Temple in the county of Hanshan, in East China’s Anhui Province to take a tonsure - the shaving of a Buddhist monk's head.

He has been at the temple for three months now and, instead of managing millions, works as a cook in the communal kitchen.

Source: Buddhist Channel
It is common knowledge that a person’s surroundings play a vital role in sculpting the mind, ideologies, and thought process of an individual. A stunning example of this is found in the case of the Buddha statue of Oakland, California.

11th Avenue and East 19th Street was a rough part of town, riddled with an assortment of criminal activities ranging from garbage dumping and vandalization to drug dealing, robberies, prostitution and assaults. Sick of the dystopian environment of the area where he lived—particularly the trash—Dan Stevenson and his wife Lu purchased a stone Buddha statue from a hardware and placed it on the corner. The two hoped that the presence of the statue would bring a sense of serenity to the wretched neighbourhood, or at least that its panoptic gaze would dissuade the garbage dumpers. Little did they know that this miniscule gesture would bring about a ripple effect resulting in a complete transformation of the neighbourhood.

First, the dumping stopped, and citizens made an effort to clean up the junk that was present. Then
Peddlers stopped dealing drugs in the area and the prostitutes left; walls were no longer vandalized with graffiti. Eventually, Vietnamese immigrants living in the vicinity started flocking to the Buddha statue and offering fruits, garlands, and incense sticks. When the word got out that Stevenson was the man behind this beautiful gesture, offerings of fruit, candies, and a variety of Vietnamese specialty food appeared at his doorstep.

Since the statue was erected, the overall crime-rate in the area had dropped by 82%. Official 2012 police statistics as reported by SFGate explain that “robbery reports went from 14 to three, aggravated assaults from five to zero, burglaries from eight to four, narcotics from three to zero, and prostitution from three to zero.”

The Buddha has faced quite a few hurdles of its own. There have been two attempts to remove the statue, but neither were met with success. Soon after installation, a thief tried to steal the statue but failed miserably after realizing that the statue was reinforced with iron bar and a strong epoxy. Then in 2012, the local Public Works Department tried to remove it after a resident in the neighbourhood complained. The department received a zealous backlash for trying to have the statue removed, eventually resulting in the officials’ forfeiting.

As of today, the statue, now cradled amidst an elaborate and beautiful 10 foot tall shrine, sees a throng of Vietnamese immigrants flocking every day for ritualistic prayers and offerings. The shrine—which is primarily looked after by a short, middle-aged Vietnamese woman named Vina Vo—is adorned with two flags, one American and the other Buddhist, while chants are played on a tiny tape recorder. EH
An increasing number of China’s citizens are turning to Buddhism, and even psychiatry, to attain inner peace as reported by Guangzhou’s Southern Weekly. Now that China has become the second biggest economy on Earth, its people are now seeking to live a happy life.

During a psychology conference held in Guangzhou, Shanghai Mental Health Superintendent Xiao Zeping told his audience that “Chinese people do not live happily.”

Dr. Li Yan, head of a psychiatry department in Guangzhou reported that the number of patients that his department received climb up to 50,000 cases in 2014, in contrast to only 7,000 cases in 2005. Dr Yan also said that China currently has higher cases of anxiety disorders, depressions and even schizophrenia in comparison to other countries.

The sheer number of people suffering from a variety of mental issues has prompted the rise of self-help services in China. Xinlin001, established in 2011 as a psychology online site, currently has around 9.31 million subscribers.

According to Huang Yongming, a Wuhan University professor, people are confronted with problems related to food, population and safety as well as the urbanization in many parts of China. On the other hand, Mark Williams, an Oxford psychology professor claims that China’s populations are struggling to keep their inner peace while confronted with anxiety as their country experiences rapid economic growth.

Many Chinese are now turning to religion and most have found Buddhism appealing, due to its approach to meditation. Government statistics indicates the increasing venues for Buddhists followers, wherein as of 2013, there are already around 33,000 such venues. Many Buddhist temples are hosting annual meditations to its members.

Chinese leaders such as President Xi Jinping believes that spiritual beliefs give people hope and helps further the progress of the country. State Administrator for Religious Affairs Chief Wang Zuoan, has also encouraged the press increase its coverage on religious affairs.

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EXPAND YOUR MIND

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Eastern Horizon

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Authorized Lives is the first work devoted to early Geluk history and to the role of biographies in shifting established lineages. As the dominant tradition of Tibetan Buddhism that provides the intellectual backdrop for the Dalai Lamas’ teachings, the Geluk lineage traces its origins to the figure of Tsongkhapa Losang Drakpa (1357-1419). Gelukpas today believe Tsongkhapa is a manifestation of the bodhisattva Manjushri and revere him with his two heart disciples, Gyaltsap and Khedrup. But as Elijah Ary, a former Geluk monk and Harvard-trained scholar, points out, both of these conceptions of Tsongkhapa arose many decades after his death. Delving into the early Geluk biographical tradition, Ary follows the tracks of this evolution in the biographies of Tsongkhapa, Khedrup, and the influential early Geluk writer and reformer Jetsun Chokyi Gyaldup.

Ary’s book is not so much about philosophy but of biography and biographical rhetoric – an investigation that traces shifts in representations a generation back beyond Khedrup, encompassing also the earliest biographies of his master Tsongkhapa, then Khedrup, and finally Jetsun himself. Through this book, Ary hopes to provide a glimpse of the complex intersection of lives, the telling of lives, and the positioning of philosophy and doctrinal authority within those tellings. This work is therefore also an exercise in reading closely – reading rhetoric, and discerning the best ways to make use of the enormously rich resources that biography presents for deepening our understanding of Tibet’s complex religious culture.

Ary also explain that historically Western biographical works, unlike Tibetan works, convey truths about the subject’s life, education, and career, including the historical and social context in which he or she lived. But recent studies in Tibetan biography has shown that despite the adulatory language and fabulous stories, life-writing in Tibet nevertheless contains a plethora of historical information – information evident not only once the panegyrics are set aside but right amid the flowery language itself. Even the wondrous dreams and visions common to this genre are informative of not only who the author’s audience might have been but also of the author’s intentions in composing the work. Such elements can even shed light on the historical and political climate at the time of composition. As such, there is what Ary called outer biography – the more directly observable physical aspects of the hero’s life like his birth, family background, education, travels, teaching career, and death. Then there’s the inner biography which is the less visible and more personal interior aspects of his life, such as the meditative cycles the hero practiced, empowerments he received, and teachings imparted to him. EH

In *A New Buddhist Path,* David Loy uncovers points of convergence and renewal in the meeting between ancient religious teachings and modern science. He also offers fresh takes on enlightenment, nonattachment, and a new model of activism linking outer and inner practice. These are the pressing issues of Buddhist philosophy in our time. The questions include: What is the meaning of enlightenment—is it an escape from the world, or is it a form of psychological healing? How can one reconcile modern scientific theory with ancient religious teachings? What is our role in the universe? Loy shows us that neither Buddhism nor secular society by itself is sufficient to answer these questions. Instead, he investigates the unexpected intersections of the two. Through this exchange, he uncovers a new Buddhist way, one that is faithful to the important traditions of Buddhism but compatible with modernity. This way, we can see the world as it truly is, realize our indivisibility from it, and learn that the world’s problems are our problems. This is a new path for a new world.

Loy has undertaken the complex task which involves criticism of some Buddhist failings such as its treatment of women, its tendency toward inwardness at the expense of dealing with the messy social and justice issues of the day, and its continuing love/hate relationship with dualism.

In one of the best essays in the book, the author offers a critique of what he calls the “McMindfulness” movement where this Buddhist practice has shed its spiritual origin and intention for “a stripped-down, secularized approach” that can lead to a total capitulation to capitalism.

Loy brings his own purview as a social critic and philosopher to this examination of contemporary Buddhism. These viewpoints quoted in the book are reflective of where he’s coming from. EH
The term karma or Kamma (in Pali) is one of the most misunderstood terms in Buddhism. We have often heard people say, ‘It must have been his karma’ or ‘She had bad karma.’ But what is karma, really? Does karmic theory say that we are helpless victims of our past? Is all karma bad, or can there be good karma too? As karma is related to rebirth, then is reincarnation the same as the Buddhist theory of rebirth?

The Buddha’s teaching on karma (literally, “action”) is nothing other than his compassionate explanation of the way things are: our thoughts and actions determine our future, and therefore we ourselves are largely responsible for the way our lives unfold. Yet this supremely useful teaching is often ignored due to the misconceptions about it that abound in popular culture, especially oversimplifications that make it seem like something not to be taken seriously.

Karma is not simple, as Traleg Kyabgon shows, and it’s to be taken very seriously indeed. He cuts through the persistent illusions we cling to about karma to show what it really is—the mechanics of why we suffer and how we can make the suffering end. He explains how a realistic understanding of karma is indispensable to Buddhist practice, how it provides a foundation for a moral life, and how understanding it can have a transformative effect on the way we relate to our thoughts and feelings and to those around us.

In this short and eminently readable book, Traleg Kyabgon answers these questions and more by elucidating the Buddha’s teachings on karma and rebirth. He distinguishes the Buddhist view of karma and rebirth from related notions of karma and reincarnation found in the Hindu tradition, explains why the notion of karma is indispensable to the theory and practice of Buddhism, and demonstrates how karmic theory provides a foundation for morality that doesn’t require belief in God. Throughout he shows how to work with karma intelligently to bring about beneficial changes in the way we relate to our thoughts, feelings, and circumstances.  


When Bodhidharma, the legendary first ancestor of Zen, was asked about the main principle of his holy teaching, he’s said to have replied: “A vast emptiness—with nothing holy about it!” A millennium-and-a-half later, Tim Burkett finds that the answer still applies: you don’t need to go looking for something holy—buddha nature is right here in front of you. The concise summary of Zen teaching he presents in this book is expressed precisely in terms of what he found right in front of him: beginning with the delightful non-holiness he experienced in the presence of his original teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, and continuing through a lifetime of further teaching experiences.

Tim was only 20 years old and a student at Stanford in 1964 when he met his teacher, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. At that time there was only one small Zen center in northern California and the practice of meditation was considered “kind of odd.” Then the wildly successful Zen Mind Beginner’s Mind was published. Tim heard firsthand the talks that later appeared in that book, which has sold more than any other book on Zen Buddhism.

In Tim’s new book, he tells of the struggle to raise money for the now famous Tassajara Monastery, the first Zen monastery outside of Asia. He tells the story of when Suzuki took the stage after Janis Joplin at the Fillmore Auditorium during a fund-raiser. And he remembers Suzuki’s empathy for his long-suffering student, Trudy Dixon, and his tearful “lion’s roar” at her funeral.

Tim also talks about intimate moments with two other early Japanese teachers who came to America: Katagiri Roshi and Chino Roshi. And he talks about his own life after he moved to Northern Minnesota where he worked on the Nett Lake Ojibwe Reservation as a social worker. In his book, Zen’s core teachings unfold within the ordinary comedies and tragedies of everyday life. He uses poems, Zen art, parables, and koans to show how we realize our interconnected nature through the small things that we do. In his book, as in his life, Tim reveals how to live in the world with a deep joy that comes from embracing the work and play of this very moment. EH
What a month it has been, August 2015. The never ending political drama in Malaysia and the complete rout of the ringgit and Bursa Malaysia, after the recent devaluation of the yuan is enough to make any ordinary citizen cry in despair. Burdened by the high cost of living and the reduced purchasing power, there seems to be no end in sight to the constant barrage of negativity. Never before has the country once dubbed an economic tiger been dragged into a dark abyss of cynicism and hopelessness.

If we understand rise and fall and the cyclical nature of events in the universe, why is it difficult for us to accept that the universe does not favor anyone, even the “good guys” in this very life? The Laws of Nature operate in ways that do not necessarily favor our beliefs or sense of righteousness for now. Over time however, things will sort themselves out but in the meantime, be prepared for paradoxical outcomes. “Good” people may suffer abuse or even harm and the not so good ones may seem to have the upper hand. What we call the Law of Karma may even seem to be suspended in its workings. They say the wheels of justice move slowly and I believe this also applies to the Law of Karma too, no?

When things do not change at the pace we want, we feel disheartened and lose hope. When they do, we feel elated for a while and may even gloat. Then we will go on a witch-hunt and do those very things that our “oppressors” did to us. Is it a wonder why the universe is in no hurry to change things knowing full well that the victims can just as easily become perpetrators at the very next moment? Thus, the cycle of victim to perpetrator and then perpetrator to victim spins on and on as long as we continue to be blinded by the illusion of separateness.

When we identify our beingness with the physical form, there is separation and the idea that you are cruel and I am better, etc. makes it easy for us to attack one another when we perceive faults in another because of his separate physical form. If we remember that we are spiritual beings who happen to have human “bodies”, it is less likely that we will attack one another. It is the physical form or rather the attachment to the physical form that makes separation look “real”. I may believe that since you have a separate body, whatever I think, say or do to you will not bring any consequences for me since I perceive your body as separate from mine. But in truth both you and I are formless minds which have manifested our beingness through the physical forms. If we are essentially formless minds first and foremost, then separation exists only at the level of bodies which then makes attack possible. So the root cause of all conflicts is separation, brought about by the manifestation of forms.
So it stands to reason that the way to stop hating and attacking one another is to stop seeing one another as separate physical forms. Imagine the physical objects – people and things that we see, being immersed by a vast big space surrounding them. Now, instead of just a great big space surrounding them think of it as our vast infinite, formless mind which is immersing them. If we remember that we are the vast infinite, formless mind and not the physical objects which are the manifested contents, we are "seeing" correctly and be better able to assuage our anger and the need for attack.

If everything or person is immersed in our own mind or consciousness, then there cannot be any separation in reality for they "belong" to the same mind or consciousness. What we do to another, we also do to our self as both belong to the same mind or consciousness. If we take everything in the universe as part of our mind, there is nothing that is really separate from one and the other. It’s like taking a macro view of things rather than a nano view of things. At the macro level, we tend to see “oneness” but at the nano level, we tend to see “separation”. When we can look at things from the macro perspective, it is easy to practice “forgiveness” as we tend to take all things and people as being part of our self and therefore forgivable. When we look at things from the nano level, we tend to believe that we are individual bodies and therefore experience limitations, separation, fear and conflicts.

As long as we do not remember our original mind which is luminous, pure and limitless, we remain subject to the physical laws of the cosmos when we choose to identify with the physical form as “self”. Again and again we become entrapped in the samsaric drama of victim and perpetrator and vice versa, recycled all over again ad infinitum until true understanding arises. 

27 August 2015
YBAM 45TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION CUM INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF PUZHAO BUDDHIST VIHARA

Puzhao Buddhist Vihara, Kluang, Johor
July 11, 2015

YBAM President Goh Qing Song and Puzhao Buddhist Vihara Abbot handing over a souvenir to one of the VIPs during the opening ceremony.

The Melody of Truth and Beauty choir group presenting a lovely musical piece during the event.

Blood Donation and Organ Donation Campaign - 76 bags of blood were collected and 60 people registered to become organ donors.

Children enjoying a story-telling activity at the Cultural Room.

The Bazaar Carnival at Puzhao Buddhist Vihara which began from 8.30am till 7.00 pm.

The event ends with the “Night of Endless Light” at 9.00pm with each participant holding a light and expressing best wishes for the future of Puzhao Buddhist Vihara.
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