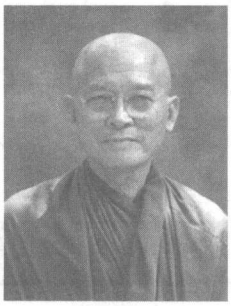
SEEDS OF PEACE

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Supporting a Buddhist Quest for Gross National Happiness



SEEDS OF

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4 Editorial Notes

Country Reports

5 HAITI: Aristide's Statement to the World — *Jean Bertrand Aristide*
6 HAITI: Spinning Haiti — *S.J.*
8 US ELECTIONS: If John Kerry Is the Answer — *William Blum*
9 TIBET: Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama — *Dalai Lama*
11 SIAM: Facing the Demon Within — *Chaiwat Satha-Anand*

INEB

15 Letter from INEB — *Lapapan Supamanta*
16 Pilgrimage to Tibetan Buddhist Sacred Sites — *Lapapan Supamanta*
17 Cultivating Seeds of "Bodhisattva" at INEB training — *Lapapan Supamanta*
18 On Exposure in Thailand and Cambodia — *Sandra Lepojewitsch*
20 The Rewards of Giving — *Karnjariya Sukrung*
22 Operationalising Gross National Happiness — *Hans van Willenswaard*
23 A Declaration by Participants in the Seminar on Gross National Happiness
25 INEB Upcoming Activities

SEM

26 Enduring Dhamma — *Vasana Chinvarakorn*
27 Progress or Peril? — *Vasana Chinvarakorn*
30 A Spiritual Walk in the Himalayas with Buddha Smiles — *Mike Levian*
32 Going Natural — *Vasana Chinvarakorn*

Sulak Sivaraksa

34 The Interfaith Movement for Peace — *Sulak Sivaraksa*
40 Understanding Social Structures and Structural Violence — *Sulak Sivaraksa*
44 Learing the Lessons of Life — *Vasana Chinvarakornn*
46 Buddhist extols virtues of 'bad' — *Mary kaye Ritz*

Obituaries

47 Sirichai Narumit-Rekagarn — *Sulak Sivaraksa*

48 Personality
50 Letters
52 Book Reviews
56 Recommended Readings

* Samana Bodhiraksa, perhaps the most successful spiritual leader for applying Dhammic socialism in Siam.

PEACE

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The goals of INEB are to:

1. Promote understanding and co-operation among Buddhist countries, different Buddhist sects, and socially conscious Buddhist groups.
2. Facilitate and carry out solutions to the many problems facing our communities, societies, and world.
3. Articulate the perspective of Engaged Buddhism regarding these problems and train Buddhist activists accordingly.
4. Serve as a clearing house of information on existing Engaged Buddhist groups.
5. Cooperate with activists from other spiritual traditions.

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Junta to release Suu Kyi

Opposition leader to be freed before the start of charter talks on May 17

The Burmese Junta will free opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi before the beginning of a constitution-drafting convention that starts on May 17 and invite her National League for Democracy to take part in the charter talks, Burmese Foreign Minister Win Aung said yesterday.

Win Aung made the announcement in an interview with Japan's NHK television network and Thailand's iTV after arriving in Bangkok for talks with Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai on a "road map" for peace.

Asked if Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, would be released before the event, Win Aung said: "Yes, May 17." Asked to give an exact date for her release, he said: "It is too early to say."

"Original members who attended [the previous National Convention], including NLD members, will be invited," Win Aung said.

But he did not indicate whether Suu Kyi herself would be allowed to participate in the constitution talks.

The Burmese junta has said that representatives from all levels of society would be invited to the National Convention, including the NLD.

It has already been reported that up to 17 ethnic minorities will be invited to attend the meeting.

Suu Kyi and other senior NLD members have been held in detention since a bloody clash in May 2003 between a pro-junta mob and her supporters in northern Burma. She is currently under house arrest.

Burmese sources said that the NLD was not yet willing to take part in the National Convention as it wanted four leaders, including Suu Kyi and NLD deputy leader Tin Oo, to be released first.

Meanwhile Foreign Ministry spokesman Sihasak Phuangketkeow said that 18 countries invited to participate in a second roadmap forum would discuss conditions for the resumption of financial aid to Burma. Surakiart had earlier said that foreign countries first expected to see Suu Kyi released and a clear time frame for the implementation of the seven-point road map.

The forum to discuss the plan, dubbed the "Bangkok Process", is scheduled to be held on April 29-30.

The National Convention is the first step of the plan that Burmese Prime Minister Khin Nyunt announced in August, which aims to establish an elected government after decades of military rule.

The junta has come under severe international criticism by the US, the European Union and Japan for detaining Suu Kyi.

Rungrawee C Pinyorat
The Nation,
April 4, 2004

Editorial Notes

From Baghdad to Port-au-Prince looms the specter of American hyper-militarism and unilateralism, heralding what some call "a time of terror" thus in no small part dictating the fate of human survival. It is not only a time of terrorism and counter-terrorism-with the lines dividing the two increasingly blurred; in Iraq American soldiers targeted power stations and fired at ambulances while local suicide bombers attacked indiscriminately. According to Vice President Dick Cheney, the war on terrorism-and thus the vicious cycle of violence-could last generations. It is also a time of nihilism due to the ethical and ideological poverty of both the American empire and fundamentalist terrorist groups. It is high time for spirituality-based social movements-Buddhist or otherwise-to cultivate seeds of peace and hope in the world using the way of compassion and nonviolence. We have to show that we are not merely audiences in a world of media spectacles and manufacturing of consent.

In previous issues we dealt with the American occupation of Iraq and war on terrorism. In this issue, we explore the hidden hands of the US in the overthrow of Jean Bertrand Aristide, the president of Haiti. We also examine the violence raging in the South of Thailand. In the INEB, SEM, and Sulak Sivaraksa sections we continue to confront alternative visions of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. They offer a breath of fresh air in the maelstrom engulfing the world.

Deep Gratitude to our Supporters

Mr. Jonathan Rose Donation

We would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Jonathan Rose for donation of US$500 for Seeds of Peace and INEB and US$500 to Ajan Sulak Sivaraksa's activities. Mr. Rose is a Chairman of Garrison Institute that initiates Asian Buddhist Network

Donation to commemorate Mrs. Lee Story Cable

Mr. Prasong and Mrs. Chaba Jaturabun, Mr. Thomas Brown and his wife, Mr. Vira Jadjang, Ms. Sirin and Mr. Yothin Jitjaturan and Mr. Sombat are very kind to make donation of US$500 to INEB as a remembrance to their dear friend Mrs. Lee Story Cable in addition to the scholarship under her name to SEM.

Friends of Thailand EducationSociety Scholarship to SEM

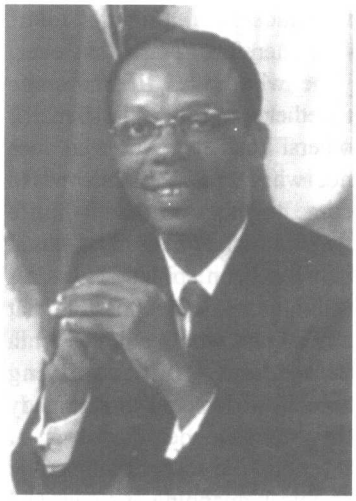
Our deepest thanks go to a group of Thai people in Canada - Friends of Thailand Education Society – for their donation of CAN$1,000 to support monks, nuns and novices who wish to attend the grass-root leadership empowerment courses at SEM (Spirit in Education Movement) University

HAITI
Aristide's Statement to the World

"In overthrowing me, they have uprooted the trunk of the liberty. It will grow back because its roots are many and deep." In the shadow of Toussaint L' Ouverture, the genius of the race. I declare in overthrowing me they have uprooted the trunk of the tree of peace, but it will grow back because the roots are L' Ouverturian.

Dear compatriots, it is with these first words that I am saluting our brothers and sisters from Africa, while I am standing on the soil of the Central African Republic. Allow me to salute you by repeating that same declaration that is, "In overthrowing me, they have uprooted the trunk of the tree of peace." During the night of the 28th of February 2004, there was a coup d'etat. One could say that it was a geo-political kidnapping. I can clearly say that it was terrorism disguised as diplomacy. To conclude, this coup d'etat and this kidnapping are like two quarters and 50 cents side by side.

I have always denounced the coming of this coup d'etat, but until the 27th of February, the day before, I didn't see that the crime was going to be accompanied by kidnapping as well. The 28th of February, at night, suddenly, American military personnel who were already all over Port-au-Prince descended on my house in Tabarre to tell me first that all the American security agents who have contracts with the Haitian government only have two options. Either they leave immediately to go to the United States, or they fight to die.



Secondly, they told me the remaining 25 of the American security agents hired by the Haitian government who were to come in on the 29th of February as reinforcements were under interdiction, prevented from coming. Thirdly, they told me the foreigners and Haitian terrorists alike, loaded with heavy weapons, were already in position to open fire on Port-au-Prince. And right then, the Americans precisely stated that they will kill thousands of people and it will be a bloodbath. That the attack is ready to start, and when the first bullet is fired nothing will stop them and nothing will make them wait until they take over, therefore the mission is to take me dead or alive.

At that time I told the Americans that my first preoccupation was to save the lives of those thousands of people tonight. As far as my own life is concerned, whether I am alive or whether I am dead, that is not what's important. As much as I was trying to use diplomacy, the more the pressure was being intensified for the Americans to start the attack. In spite of that, I took the risk of slowing down the death machine to verify the degree of danger, the degree of bluff or the degree of intimidation.

It was more serious than a bluff. The National Palace was surrounded by white men armed up to their teeth. The Tabarre area — the residence — was surrounded by foreigners armed to their teeth. The airport of Port-au-Prince was already under the control of these men. After a last evaluation I made during a meeting with the person in charge of Haitian security in Port-au-Prince, and the person in charge of American security, the truth was clear. There was going to be a bloodbath because we were already under an illegal foreign occupation which was ready to drop bodies on the ground, to spill blood, and then kidnap me dead or alive.

That meeting took place at 3 a.m. Faced with this tragedy, I decided to ask, "What guarantee do I have that there will not be a bloodbath if I decided to leave?"

In reality, all this diplomatic gymnastics did not mean anything because these military men responsible for the kidnapping operation had already assumed the success of their mission. What was said was done. This diplomacy, plus the forced signing of the letter of resignation, was not able to cover the face of the kidnapping.

From my house to the airport, everywhere there were American military men armed with heavy weapons of death.

The military plane that came to get me landed while the convoy of vehicles that had come to get me was near the tarmac at the airport. When we were airborne, nobody knew where we were going. When we landed at one place nobody knew where we were. Among us on the plane was a baby of one of my American security agents who has a Haitian wife. They could not get out. We spent four hours without knowing where we were. When we got back in the air again, nobody knew where we were going.

It was not until 20 minutes before we landed in the Central African Republic that I was given the official word that this is where we would be landing. We landed at a French Air Force base but fortunately there were 5 ministers from the government who came to welcome us on behalf of the President there.

We know there are people back home who are suffering, who are being killed, who are in hiding. But we also know that back home there are people who understand the game, but will not give up because if they give up, instead of finding peace, we will find death.

Therefore, I ask that everyone who loves life to come together to protect the lives of others. I ask everyone who does not want to see bloodshed to come together so that it is life that flourishes instead of blood that has been spilled, or bodies falling. I know it's possible that all Haitians who live in the tenth department [Haitians living abroad] understand what tragedy lies hidden under the cover of this coup d'etat, under the cover of this kidnapping. I know and they know if we stand in solidarity we will stop the spread of death and we will help life flourish. The same thing that happened to a President who was democratically elected can happen at any time, in any other country too. That's why the solidarity is indispensable to protect a democracy that works together with life.

The constitution is the source of this life. It's the guarantee of the life. Let's stand together under the constitution in solidarity so that it is life that unfolds, and that it is peace that flourishes and not death as we are seeing it. Courage, courage, courage! From where I am with the First Lady, we have not forgotten what Toussaint L' Ouverture has said, and that's why we saluted all of Africa with his words, and we are saluting all Haitians everywhere with the conviction that the roots of the tree of peace, with the spirit of Toussaint L'Ouverture inside, are alive. They can cut the tree as they have done with the machete of the coup d'etat, but they cannot cut the roots of peace. It will sprout again because it has the spirit of Toussaint L'Ouverture inside.

Jean Bertrand Aristide

HAITI
Spinning Haiti

What's going on in Haiti? The international news agencies and media pundits have painted a disarmingly simplistic and even Orientalist account of the situation on this Caribbean island. Through rigged elections in 2000, the story line goes, Jean Bertrand Aristide and the Lavalas party were voted into their 2nd term. But this once populist president turned megalomaniac and murderous, unleashing bands of thugs on his own people. More-over, his administrative ineptitude proved incorrigible. Small wonder that the economy of his impoverished island is on the verge of collapse. Aristide's illegitimacy, incompetence and brutality contributed to the rebellion, and he duly fled the country to the Central African Republic. He was solely responsible for the sorry state of affairs in Haiti. Consequently, the US has the obligation to save the Haitians from their own insanity. Thus American troops are deployed to return democracy to and begin a program of nation-building in this failed state.

However, it does not take a talent to detect the thin strand of chewing gum that is holding the story line together, and to realize how easily this narrative falls apart. One, the International Coalition of Independent Observers has reported that "fair and peaceful elections were held" in Haiti in 2000. And as Peter Hallward acerbically notes in the *Guardian*, "by the standard of the presidential elections held in

the US that same year they were positively exemplary."

The Lavalas won 16 out of the 17 much-coveted Senate seats. The US and the OAS depicted the elections as "flawed" and illegitimate, questioning the methodology used in counting the voting percentages. With its close connection with the incoming Bush administration, the opposition (e.g., Group 184) soon called for re-elections. The Bush administration supported that political maneuver, threatening Aristide with an economic embargo and the freezing of $500 million worth of humanitarian aid if re-elections weren't held. Aristide acquiesced to the demand, but the opposition rejected the offer, citing instability on the island.

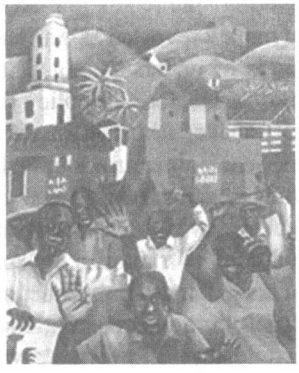
As Jeffrey Sachs points out in the *Financial Times*, "Whatever the pretext, the US maintained its aid freeze and the opposition maintained a veto over international aid. Cut off from bilateral and multilateral financing, Haiti's economy went into a tailspin." In other words, the Bush team did much to make the Haitian economy scream and to turn the population against Aristide. This is of course a time-honored practice that previous American administrations had used against Allende's Chile in 1973 and Sandinista's Nicaragua in the 1980s. Moreover, the impacts of the withheld aid can only be socio-economically destructive given the draconian structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF on Haiti since the 1980s.

Two, who are the rebels? Of course, they are not ordinary men. Many of the paramilitary leaders are men who were involved in the 1990 CIA-sponsored coup launched by *Raoul Cedras against Aristide* and in the campaign of terror during 1991-94. Some of the notable—or better put, notorious—figures include Louis Jodel Chamblain, the former leader of the Front for the Advancement of Progress in Haiti [sic!] death squad. Chamblain was also a member of the Tonton Macoute, the death squad of the blood-thirsty Duvalier family that ruled Haiti from 1957 to 1986. Another is Guy Philippe, a former police chief and member of the Haitian Armed Forces. Philippe has been trained by the US Special Forces in Ecuador during the coup years. The Bush team seems suspiciously complacent about handing the future of Haiti to these blood-soaked hands. So much for regime change! So much for democracy!

Three, it is likely that Aristide did not flee the country. Rather he was overthrown by the American-backed rebels. The US has habitually intervened in Haiti, the first black and second oldest republic in the Western Hemisphere, since the late 1880s. Ira Kurzban, an American lawyer who has served as the General Counsel to the Haitian government since 1991, states "I believe that the United States clearly knew about it before, and that given the fact of the history of these people, [Washington is] probably very, very deeply involved, and I think Congress needs to seriously look at what the involvement of the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency has been in this operation. Because it is a military operation. It's not a rag-tag group of liberators, as has often been put in the press in the last week or two." Successfully toppling Aristide is a salve for the American failure to *overthrow Hugo Chavez in* Venezuela last April, and will likely revive interest in the potentials of covert operations in the Hemisphere and elsewhere. It is also a badly needed diversion from the mess in the occupation of Iraq, which has yet to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Lastly, the US is far from a disinterested "peace-broker." Its "peace plan" is clearly a misnomer, for it merely called for Aristide to step down, not to reach some sort of a compromise between the political groups. In fact, the US has been dissatisfied with Aristide since the Clinton years. True, Clinton dispatched troops to Haiti to restore Aristide back to power in 1994. But his return came with strings attached: he had to tone down his populist and leftist leanings and promise to accept the IMF's economic shock therapy, which as it turned out he did so only reservedly, refusing to privatize state resources for instance. Incidentally, an important wing of 'the opposition' is composed of financers and investors who had been hurt by Aristide's leftist populism. 'Regime change' will likely transform Haiti into a neoliberal paradise and a geostrategic platform to harass the two other bete noires in the American backyard, Cuba and Venezuela.

S.J.



US ELECTIONS
If John Kerry Is the Answer, What Is the Question?

Of all the issues that the presidential campaign will revolve around, none is more important to me than foreign policy. I say this not because that is my area of specialty, but because the bombings, invasions, coups d'état, depleted uranium, and other horrors that are built into United States foreign policy regularly bring to the people of the world much more suffering and despair than any American domestic policy does at home. I do not yearn for "anybody but Bush". I yearn for a president who will put an end to Washington's interminable indecent interventions against humanity. This is, moreover, the only way to end the decades-long hatred that has spawned so many anti-American terrorists.

So desperate am I to have the chance to vote for someone like that, that a few days ago I allowed myself to feel a bit buoyed when John Kerry, in response to a question about the situation in Haiti, said that the Bush administration "has a theological and ideological hatred for Aristide" which has led to the administration "empowering" the rebels.{1} To me that remark revealed a significant nuance of understanding of the world of US foreign policy that rarely makes it to the lips of an American politician. Could it be, I wondered, that Kerry is actually a cut or two above prevailing wisdom and rhetoric on such matters? (I must point out that, holding little expectation, I seldom closely follow who's who amongst establishment politicians, so until very recently I knew almost nothing specific about Kerry; in fact, I only just learned to distinguish him from Bob Kerrey, former senator from Nebraska.) As it happens, the next day Kerry delivered a talk entirely about his views on foreign policy, particularly about the war on terrorism.{2} And my heart lost its buoyancy.

He called for an increase of "40,000 active-duty Army troops" — not exactly the kind of relief our shell-shocked world hungers for. "But nothing else will matter unless we win the war of ideas," Kerry said. "We need a major initiative in public diplomacy to bridge the divide between Islam and the rest of the world. For the education of the next generation of Islamic youth, we need an international effort to compete with radical Madrassas." This is the stuff of public relations, improving "image", ignoring the reasons for anti-Americanism. The problem, however, ain't a misunderstanding and it ain't due to poverty. It's the interventions, stupid; it's the harm we do to those people.{3}

"We have seen what happens when Palestinian youth have been fed a diet of anti-Israel propaganda," Kerry added. Again, no weight given to anything Israel has done to the Palestinians; it's all just a matter of propaganda; Palestinians are becoming suicide bombers because of something someone said, not because of the Israeli devastation of their lives.

In fact, the US has done remarkably well in "the war of ideas". In June, 2003 the Pew Research Center released the results of polling in 20 Muslim countries and the Palestinian territories which revealed that while people interviewed had much more "confidence" in Osama bin Laden than in George W. Bush, "the survey suggested little correlation between support for bin Laden and hostility to American ideas and cultural products. People who expressed a favorable opinion of bin Laden were just as likely to appreciate American technology and cultural products as people opposed to bin Laden. Pro- and anti-bin Laden respondents also differed little in their views on the workability of Western-style democracy in the Arab world."{4}

Kerry actually refers to this poll in his talk, but he mentions only the support of bin Laden, not the apparent contradictions found in the rest of the results.

"I will strengthen the capacity of intelligence and law enforcement at home and forge stronger international coalitions to provide better information and the best chance to target and capture terrorists even before they act." As if the United States was not already wiring, tapping, bugging and surveilling every institution in the known world and every creature that moves across the earth, and summarily imprisoning them by the thousands. It sounds like a remark Kerry threw in, as with many of his other remarks, hop-

ing to demonstrate a nonexistent difference between his foreign-policy views and those of the Bush administration.

"I will not hesitate to order direct military action when needed to capture and destroy terrorist groups and their leaders." As The Washington Post observed, "Kerry appeared to outline his own preemptive doctrine in the speech."{5}

Kerry faulted Bush for providing insufficient funding for the National Endowment for Democracy. He probably thought he was on safe ground; the word "democracy" always sells well. But this is his most depressing comment of all. He's calling for more money for an organization that was set up to be a front for the CIA, literally, and that for 20 years has been destabilizing governments, progressive movements, labor unions, and anyone else on Washington's hit list.{6} Which would be a worse mark against Kerry, that he doesn't know this about NED, or that he does know it? It sounds like another throwaway to imply a divide between he and George W.

So, what do we have here? Not a single word about the tens of thousands killed by US military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq; not a word about anything the United States has ever done anywhere in the world that could conceivably lead to anyone ever harboring justified resentment against the United States and seeking retaliation.

Not a word about ending, or even lessening, interventions.

It does not require total cynicism to point out that at most, at best, John Kerry's beef with the Bush administration over foreign policy — to the extent that he really has any — is a very minor difference of opinion between technocrats, Kerry offering a few tiny adjustments, a tweaking here or there. Most of his policy suggestions concerned things already being done by the Bush administration.

In sum total, nothing at all threatening, or even challenging, to business as usual for American foreign policy. What relief from the bully's outrages can the world expect from a John Kerry administration? What relief from the outrages done in our name can we Americans expect? I think I can go back to ignoring establishment politicians.

William Blum <bblum6@aol.com> is the author of: *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, and *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*. Visit his website at www.killinghope.org

NOTES

{1} Newsday (New York), February 27, 2004

{2} Talk at UCLA, February 27, 2004; full text at: http://international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=8320

{3} For a discussion of this thesis, see the author's essay, "Myth and Denial in the War Against Terrorism" at: http://members.aol.com/bblum6/myth.htm

{4} Ibid.

{5} Washington Post, February 28, 2004

{6} See the author's essay on NED at: http://members.aol.com/superogue/ned.htm

TIBET

Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Forty-Fifth Anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising Day

Today we commemorate the 45th anniversary of the Tibetan People's Uprising of 1959. I pay tribute to the many brave Tibetan men and women who have sacrificed their lives for the cause of Tibetan freedom. They will always be remembered.

This year marks 50 years since my visit to mainland China in 1954 to meet with the then Chinese leaders, especially Mao Tse-tung. I remember very well that I embarked on the journey with deep concerns about the future of Tibet. I was assured by all the leaders I met that the Chinese presence in Tibet was to work for the welfare of the Tibetans and "to help develop" Tibet. While in China I also learned about internationalism and socialism which deeply impressed me. So I returned

to Tibet with optimism and confidence that a peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence could be worked out. Unfortunately, soon after my return China was embroiled in political unrest unleashed by radical political campaigns. These developments impacted the Chinese policy on Tibet resulting in more repression and rigidity leading finally to the Tibetan People's Uprising in March 1959.

My hope is that this year may see a significant breakthrough in our relations with the Chinese Government. As in 1954, so also today, I am determined to leave no stone unturned for seeking a mutually beneficial solution that will address both Chinese concerns as well as achieve for the Tibetan people a life in freedom, peace and dignity. Despite the decades of separation the Tibetan people continue to place tremendous trust and hope in me. I feel a great sense of responsibility to act as their free spokesman. In this regard, the fact that President Hu Jintao has personal knowledge about the situation and problems in Tibet can be a positive factor in resolving the Tibetan issue. I am therefore willing to meet with today's leaders of the People's Republic of China in the effort to secure a mutually acceptable solution to the Tibetan issue.

My envoys have established direct contact with the Chinese government on two trips to China in September 2002 and in May/June 2003. This is a positive and welcome development, which was initiated during the Presidency of Jiang Zemin. The issue of Tibet is complex and of crucial importance to Tibetan as well as Chinese peoples. Consequently, it requires careful considerations and serious deliberations on both sides before taking any decisions. It will take time, patience and determination to lead this process to a successful conclusion. However, I consider it of highest importance to maintain the momentum and to intensify and deepen this process through regular face-to-face meetings and substantive discussions. This is the only way to dispel existing distrust and misconception and to build trust and confidence.

Consequently, I have instructed my envoys to visit China at the earliest date to continue the process. I hope that they will be able to make this trip without much delay. This will help in building trust and confidence in the present process among Tibetans as well as among our friends and supporters around the world – many of whom remain strongly skeptical about the willingness of Beijing to engage in a genuine process of rapprochement and dialogue.

The current situation in Tibet benefits neither the Tibetans nor the government of the People's Republic of China. The development projects that the Chinese Government has launched in Tibet – purportedly to benefit the Tibetan people – are however, having negative effects on the Tibetan people's distinct cultural, religious and linguistic identity. More Chinese settlers are coming to Tibet resulting in the economic marginalization of the Tibetan people and the sinicization of their culture. Tibetans need to see an improvement in the quality of their life, the restoration of Tibet's pristine environment and the freedom to decide an appropriate model of development.

I welcome the release of Ani Phuntsok Nyidrol, even as we recognize the injustice of her sentence and continue to urge for the release of all political prisoners in Tibet. The human rights situation in Tibet has not seen any marked improvement. Human rights violations in Tibet have a distinct character of preventing Tibetans as a people from asserting their own identity and culture. The violations are a result of policies of racial and cultural discrimination and religious intolerance.

Against this background we are encouraged and grateful that many individuals, governments and parliaments around the world have been urging the People's Republic of China to resolve the question of Tibet through peaceful negotiations. Led by the European Union and the United States there is growing realization in the international community that the issue of Tibet is not one of human rights violations alone but of deeper political nature which needs to be resolved through negotiations.

I am also encouraged by the recent improvements in the relationship between India and China. It has always been my belief that better understanding and relations between India and China, the two most populous nations of the world is of vital importance for peace and stability in Asia in particular and in the world in general. I believe that improved relations between India and China will create a more conducive political environment for the peaceful resolution of the Tibetan issue. I also strongly believe India can and should play a constructive and influential role in resolving the Tibetan

problem peacefully. My 'Middle-Way-Approach' should be an acceptable policy on Tibet for India as it addresses the Tibetan issue within the framework of the People's Republic of China. A solution to the Tibetan issue through this approach would help India to resolve many of her disputes with China, too.

It is 54 years since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. During Mao Zedong's period much emphasis was put on ideology, while Deng Xiaoping concentrated primarily on economic development. His successor Jiang Zemin broadened the base of the Communist Party by enabling wealthy people to become part of the Communist Party under his theory of "The Three Represents". In recent times Hu Jintao and his colleagues were able to achieve a smooth transition of leadership. During the past decades China has been able to make much progress. But there have also been shortcomings and failures in various fields, including in the economy. One of the main causes of the shortcomings and failures seems to be the inability to deal with and act according to the true and real situation. In order to know the real and true situation it is essential that there be free information.

China is undergoing a process of deep change. In order to affect this change smoothly and without chaos and violence I believe it is essential that there be more openness and greater freedom of information and proper awareness among the general public. We should seek truth from facts – facts that are not falsified. Without this China cannot hope to achieve genuine stability. How can there be stability if things must be hidden and people are not able to speak out their true feelings?

I am hopeful that China will become more open and eventually more democratic. I have for many years advocated that the change and transformation of China should take place smoothly and without major upheavals. This is in the interest of not only the Chinese people but also the world community. China's emergence as a regional and global power is also accompanied by concerns, suspicion and fears about her power. Hosting the Olympic Games and World Exposition will not help to dispel these concerns. Unless Beijing addresses the lack of basic civil and political rights and freedoms of its citizens, especially with regard to minorities, China will continue to face difficulties in reassuring the world that she is a peaceful, responsible, constructive and forward-looking power.

The Tibetan issue represents both a challenge and an opportunity for a maturing China to act as an emerging global player with vision and values of openness, freedom, justice and truth. A constructive and flexible approach to the issue of Tibet will go a long way in creating a political climate of trust, confidence and openness, both domestically and internationally. A peaceful resolution of the Tibetan issue will have wide-ranging positive impacts on China's transition and transformation onto a modern, open and free society. There is now a window of opportunity for the Chinese leadership to act with courage and farsightedness in resolving the Tibetan issue once and for all.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and gratitude for this consistent support that we have been receiving throughout the world. I would also like to express once again on behalf of the Tibetans our appreciation and immense gratitude to the people and the Government of India for their unwavering and unmatched generosity and support.

With my prayers for the well-being of all sentient beings.

The Dalai Lama
March 10, 200

SIAM
Facing the Demon Within

On Jan 22, two men on a motorcycle used a long knife to slit the throat of a 64-year-old Buddhist monk. The monk had just returned from his early morning alms round. Then, on Jan 24, three more monks were attacked, leaving two dead. A young novice aged only 13 died in hospital after being struck about the head by a youth on a motorcycle wielding a machete, while a 65-year-old monk was killed in the same manner. A third machete attack put another

25-year-old monk in hospital with serious injuries.

The Jan 22 incident occurred in the Narathiwat district of Bacho, while those of Jan 24 took place in Yala and Pattani. Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat are among Thailand's southernmost provinces.

On Jan 24, there were other killings in Yala using knives or machetes. Two of the victims were non-Muslims, while the third was a Muslim policeman.

Rumours of all sorts have been spread, including whispers that there have been more attacks and some of the victims were just children.

In the context of the continuing violence against state authorities, mostly policemen, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra aptly described the visible absence of popular support for state authorities in the Muslim South as a symptom of "accumulated weakness" suffered by the Thai state. On the other hand, Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh remarked that cold-blooded attacks on Buddhist monks were too unusual to be the work of locally trained rebels.

While the prime minister's opinion reflects a keen understanding of failures of state machinery, the latter expressed a disbelief in local capabilities for such extreme and explosive violence, and thus relegated it to foreign influence.

I believe these recent incidents need to be construed critically by taking into account the cultural politics at work. The question I am interested in is not who committed these horrendous acts and why. The culprits' identity and their motivations, though important, are mainly of interest to the police. I am more interested in understanding the damage done to the body politic of Thai society and how the impending destructive effects can be mitigated.

To understand this extreme violence means, among other things, to be able to "read" the cultural meanings of these brutal attacks on the monks. To mitigate their destructive effects means finding an alternative, such as peace cultures, sufficiently comprehensive to ensure a sustainable peace and security understood as the creation of a political society which people with diverse cultural and historical backgrounds can proudly call their home.

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF MONK KILLINGS

The lexicon of killings as events in southern Thailand has changed. Two decades ago, there were incidents such as bus robberies in which Thai Buddhist passengers were separated from the Muslims and then shot. In 2003, the main targets of killings were policemen, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Then in the first week of 2004, soldiers became targets.

While violence in the South has recurred, what has transpired this month has been glaringly unusual, beginning with the well organised attack on an army camp in Narathiwat, where 100, if not more than 300, weapons were taken and four soldiers were killed. Obviously the work of at least a highly organised 40-50 men, the attack was carried out in a secrecy that seems to loudly echo the lack of trust which exists between the state and local people.

But the most dangerous development is the killing of Buddhist monks in provinces where Muslims make up the majority.

This weekend the Muslim world will celebrate Eid-ul Adha, the conclusion of the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca. In Pattani province there will also be an important local festival of the Chinese goddess Lim Kaw Niew, whose dominant mythical story intertwines with the unfinished Kru-ze mosque, which gave rise to a huge protest in the late 1980s. The festival is normally celebrated 14 days after the Chinese New Year.

The following facts about violence in the South need to be carefully registered. First, Buddhist monks have been killed and injured, the youngest being 13-years-old and the oldest 65 years. Second, these monks were killed while returning from or going about their daily alms round in the morning. Third, the weapons used by the attackers on motor-cycles were either knives or machetes.

Though shocking in the Thai context, it is not difficult to see that the attacks signify, in the eyes of the killers, that neither religious robes nor age can offer cultural protection to their victims, as might have been thought. In addition, the timing of the killings shows the attackers have no regard for the sacred duties the monks were performing.

The most culturally brutal aspect of these killings was the choice of weapons involved. In addition to their availability, the ease with which they can be concealed, and the silence which accompanies their use, knives and machetes reproduce another chilling quality: the proximity between the victims and the perpetrators.

When using knives or machetes, the killers/attackers have to be close to their victims. It

has been demonstrated that even in war, killing with a knife is extremely rare. Most knife killings appear to be of a com-mando nature, and killing from behind is less traumatic than killing from the front, since the face and all its messages and contortions cannot be seen by the killer. The use of modern wea-pons is dangerous precisely because they create a physical distance between the user and the victim such that the former can be shielded morally from the act of killing.

Seen from this perspective, the choice of knives and machetes indicates that the killers did not want to be morally shielded. This can therefore be seen as an amoral act or, much more dangerously, a moral act in a world torn asunder by cultural prejudice. Either way, the cultural significance of killing monks with knives or machetes lies in the situation that the killer can look right into the eyes of his victim, young or old, and see nothing that could deter his violence.

In his most fascinating account of war, genocide and modern identity, Mirrors of Destruction (Oxford University Press, 2000), Omer Bartov describes the chilling experience of a former Nazi concentration camp inmate, Elie Wiesel, looking into a mirror for the first time after he was liberated from the concentration camp. He could not reconcile the dead face that stared back at him with his self-awareness. Yehiel Dinur recounted the moment when he stared into the eyes of the SS man responsible for sending him to the gas chamber and realised that, had their roles been reversed, the universe would not have been any different.

This phenomenon could perhaps be called "the vampirisation of humanity". Like vampires in folktales who look into the mirror and see no reflection, "we are deprived of our humanity when it is no longer reflected in the eyes of the beholder".

If this is indeed the cultural connotation of such violence, the knives did more than kill Buddhist monks. They cut deep into the cultural ties that bind a community of differences together.

Conflicts in southern Thailand, at times violent, have mainly been vertical — between state authorities and the local people, both Muslim and non-Muslim. In communities, workplaces, markets and other public spaces, though prejudices among different peoples naturally exist, violent conflicts have been rare. This is perhaps due to the fact that Muslims and non-Muslims alike in the South possess a sufficiently high degree of cultural sensitivity necessary for living together in just such a context. But in times like this that sense of community is seriously tested.

This begs the question: In order to ensure peace and security in southern Thailand, how can this sense of community be strengthened?

RELYING ON PEACE CULTURES TO FIGHT THE DEMON WITHIN?

As an attempt to shatter a sense of community among different peoples, the most devastating consequences of violence against Buddhist monks is primarily cultural. Therefore, to respond with state violence, given the past history of injustice in the South, the present level of abject poverty and the tide of global Islamic resurgence in some forms, might contribute to furthering the existing cultural rift.

Peace cultures, on the other hand, could serve as an alternative that would be conducive to the restoration of a sense of community among the Muslims and non-Muslims in the South.

According to the eminent peace researcher Elise Boulding, culture is a mosaic, made up of varied ingredients which include historical memories of peaceful peoplehood, the teachings and practice of communities of faith on gentleness, compassion, forgiveness and the inward disciplines of reflection and prayer, and, most relevant here, forms of governance that ensure justice and means of dealing with conflicts, differences, strangers in problem solving and reconciling manners.

From a Muslim's perspective, strengthening peace cultures means finding religious injunctions that delegitimise such senseless violence. In Islamic tradition, the companion of the Prophet Muhammad and the first caliph, Abu Baker, laid down 10 rules as guidance in the battlefield. He said: "You must not mutilate dead bodies. Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy's flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services, leave them alone."

This would mean that, in Islam, the killing of those who are innocent, unrelated to the war, even trees and animals, and especially monks or priests or clergy is unacceptable.

But in the present situation in southern Thailand, delegitimising violence with peace cultures alone may not be sufficient. More innovative cultural actions are needed.

It is therefore important to underscore the cultural elements that foster and legitimise the working together of Muslims and non-Muslims in a collaborative effort to defend local cultures against violence, especially places of worship and all types of religious personnel, Buddhist monks as well as Islamic teachers, among others. The initiative and the action should be carried out from within the existing civil society since there is a world of difference between a Buddhist temple in Pattani protected by the guns of state authorities and the joining of hands of members of different communities of faith.

Once the cultural meaning of such killings is understood adequately, the use of violence as a solution to political problems is delegitimised culturally, and cultural elements conducive to the strengthening of civil society working together to defend local cultures is fostered, then perhaps the demon within that enables some of us to look into the eyes of our victims and see nothing can be exorcised and the devastating effects of violence in the South mitigated.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand is the director of the Peace Information Centre, Foundation for Democracy and Development Studies with the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University.

No to Religious Conflicts and Violence, Say Spiritual Leaders from Three Religions



The spiritual leaders from Buddhist, Christian and Muslim organizations called for harmony and peaceful resolution to conflicts in the south of Siam and denounced violence.

Murder of Buddhist monks in a Muslim dominant southern province of Siam drew The Ven. Kitisak Kittisobhano from Sekiyadhamma Group — our sister organization, Fr. Vichai Phokthavi SJ, from The Justice and Peace Commission of the Thai Bishops Conference and Mr. Somdet Muslae, The secretary-general of the Muslim Organisation of Thailand to jointly hold a press conference and seminar on January 28, 2004. They pleaded for thorough understanding of the situation, religious respect and peaceful resolution to the violence and demand a stop to any effort to turn the incident into religious conflicts

Letter from INEB

Dear Readers and INEB Members,

Amidst the adversity that we humankind encounter, it is fortunate that there still is such a person who firmly believes in peace and peaceful way toward peace as His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet. During an audience with Thai INEB members on the 21st March 2004, he encourages us, among other things, to practice Dharma sincerely, not artificially, as a way to counter all violence around us. It is actually a guideline provided by the Buddha long ago, but some of us might forget it from time to time due to our mindlessness in leading our lives.

Besides, INEB will put more effort on interfaith cooperation, restoration of and education for Bhikhuni and Buddhist women, and enhancement of understanding and cooperation among Buddhists regardless of schools or sects. All these should be a proper *pooja* (devotion) to His Holiness, our great patron and teacher.

During our visit to India, I have a chance to meet with some old friends of INEB in Tibet in exile and strengthen our network. I learnt also about several exciting activities planned to connect socially engaged Buddhists in India; Himalayan Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists and newly converted Buddhists. My dear brother Prashant Varma promises to keep us informed about these activities. I hope that INEB members in other countries would similarly be kind to share their stories and activities. *Seeds of Peace* always welcomes your news update.

In addition, in the upcoming months, INEB will co-host an interfaith regional consultation on gender justice in May and hopefully organize an socially engaged Buddhist leadership in July. The activities are exclusively for INEB members. Please be sure that your name remains in our membership list. Your donation to INEB in the form of *Seeds of Peace* subscription is meaningful for us to make such activities possible, particularly for fellow Buddhists in poor countries.

With metta,
Anne Lapapan Supamanta
Executive Secretary



Pilgrimage to Tibetan Buddhist Sacred Sites

A fourteen-hour bus ride along the road from Delhi to Dharamsala could not deter our delight to visit the headquarter of Tibetan in exile. We, sixteen INEB members and friends from Siam including one monk and one seven-year old boy managed to reach a guesthouse at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics to begin our pilgrimage to learn Tibetan Buddhism and the situation of Tibetan refugees from 19th-28th March 2004. The program is jointly organized by Buddha's Smile and INEB. An enthusiasm from our brothers Prashant Varma and Rana who coordinate the pilgrimage assured me that we would meet only the best of Tibetan Buddhism.



In McLeod Gunj, thousands of people, Tibetan and non-Tibetan, gathered to attend the series of annual public lecture by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Without knowing a word of Tibetan language, we sat at the courtyard of Namgyal Monastery and exposed ourselves to the power of *metta* and *panna* from His Holiness's voice. We could also feel his sense of humor from the occasional laughs from the Tibetan audience.

INEB is always bestowed kindness by our patron, His Holiness The Dalai Lama. Despite his tired days of annual teaching, he granted us a special audience for almost an hour. During the precious moment, he reminded us that the way out from all violence and problems is already paved by our great teacher, the Buddha. The only thing is that we have to sincerely practice the Buddha Dhamma. He then expressed his hope over the restoration of Bhikkhuni sangha as well as cooperation and understanding between Tibetan Buddhists and Thai Buddhists. As a meaningful gift for his birthday in July, he prefers a deep discussion on comparison of the Tibetan and Thai Buddhism to cultivate friendship.

We were also fortunate to meet with many high lamas and receive their teachings, including Samdong Rinpoche, the Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile. He squeezed a meeting with us into his busy schedule. One of the moving issues he raised is that, the Tibetan in the past could endure physical torment without losing faith and peacefulness. But now a lot of Tibetans are shaken by consumerism, materialism and modernization, departing further and further from spirituality. These influences never remit their attempt even in a faraway land of hardship in the Himalayan range.

Added into a blessing to us is the teaching from renowned Buddhist scholars such as Pema Dorje and a quick audience with His Holiness the Karmapa at Gyuto Ramoche University near Dharamsala.

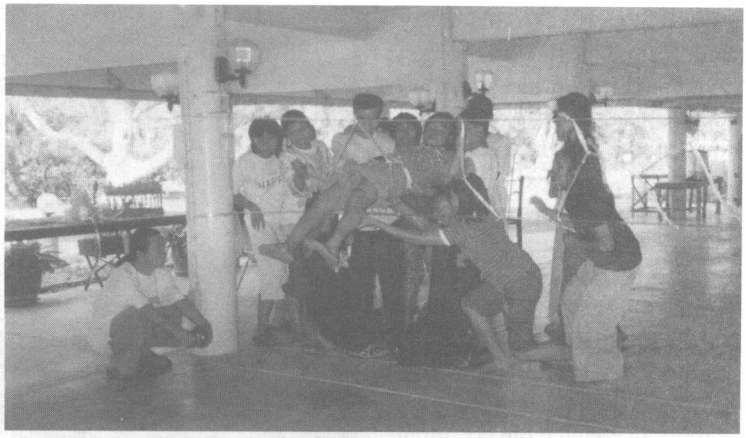
From the busy town of McLeod Gunj, we moved on to a quiet Tashi Jong Monastery. We touched upon the tradition of Drukpa Kagyu school with strong practices of retreated hermits. Here we had a lively discussion on meditation with Choegual Rinpoche. Our pilgrimage ended with a mediation retreat in the sacred caves of Rewalsar where Guru Rinpoche began his journey to bring Buddhism into Tibet.

We find that an exposure visit like this is an effective means to enrich our understanding of Buddhism of different schools and also strengthens our cooperation. To join our walk, physical strength is secondary to the openness of mind and respect of fellow Buddhists. Then, prepare now to look beyond superficial differences to the oneness of Buddha Dhamma. Next year we will return to these lovely and holy places again.

Lapapan Supamanta

Cultivating Seeds of "Bodhisattva" at INEB training

Sixteen young people from Siam, Laos, Cambodia and Shan State came together for INEB's international training **Socially Engaged Buddhist Leadership for Youth** during 15-26 December 2003. They are young social activists and senior university students majoring in social development. The training aimed at transferring concepts of socially engaged Buddhism to the younger generation, enriching their commitment to social responsibility and creating a network of young "bodhisattavas"



The program consisted of four parts. The focus of the first six days was on the principle of socially engaged Buddhism. Pracha Hutanuwatr pointed out from the beginning that social activism is not a sacrifice. Rather it is a way to cultivate personal quality in which self-interest and public interest is not mutually exclusive. With the limit of time, topics discussed include the Four Noble truths, the Ten Paramita and the Akusalamula, the five disturbances, the Buddhist social and community building principle (*vajjidhamma*), interdependence and interrelatedness, etc. The participants were introduced to social analysis technique of finding cause and effect to understand social *dukkas* as well as several socio-political economic theories. Precepts at personal and social level were also discussed.

The second part of the training aimed to provide better understanding on several social issues for participants from Buddhist perspective, e.g. gender injustice, impacts of globalization on third world countries, mainstream education, etc. Resource persons were the Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, the Ven. Sittisak Kittisobhano of Sekiyadhamma Group (a group of socially active monks and nuns in Siam), Mrs. Rajani Dhongchai from Children Village School (an alternative school for the poor and oppressed children) and Ms. Ranee Hassarangsi from FOCUS.

In addition to concepts and practices, community and team building formed the third part of the training. The intellectual capacity and commitment need a body to act out, both individual and collective body or community. The Ven. Taweesak, also from Sekiyadhamma Group led the third part through several games.

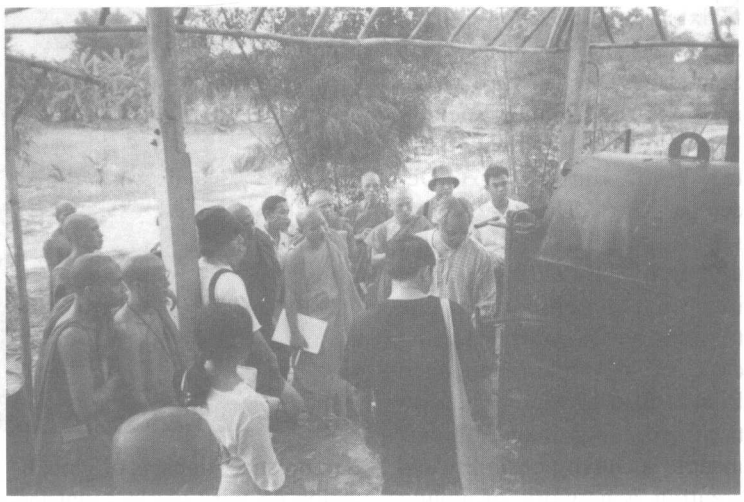
Knowledge of how to manage one's own life was another dimension of the training. As social activists, particularly the young ones, there are so many of challenges that endanger one's hope and happiness. Working against greed, hatred, violence and delusion needs a strong spiritual basis. Meditation is a key and is a strong emphasis in the training. Seeing young people actively and joyfully practicing meditation could be a good sign for our network.

The conclusion of the training was a meeting with Sulak Sivaraksa. The session opened opportunity of free discussion in the related issues. The younger generation learnt a great deal from this old man who is still active in social activity even at the age of more than seventy years old.

The training was ended by a Beginning Anew ceremony. The participants created a small ceremony as a token to affirm their commitment to social responsibility. The ceremony started with a reading of a poem to pay respect to the Buddha, followed by a poem that expresses their experience of self transformation. The leader of the ceremony announced their commitment for social activity with compassion and wisdom by using non-violent means and practicing mindfulness. The ceremony also affirmed a sense of network among them.

Lapapan Supamanta

On Exposure in Thailand and Cambodia



"I will always keep this in my memory and will never forget the great time we had together, the lessons I learnt", said one monk at the closing ceremony. But this was not just one single opinion, in fact all participants agreed. They, i.e. 25 monks, nuns and lay people from Burma, were talking about their exposure trip to Thailand and Cambodia which lasted two month. This fruitful "Fifth Grassroots Leadership Training for the Sangha" (GLT-Sangha V) took place from 23 November 2003 to 23 January 2004. Based at and mainly organized by Wongsanit Ashram, the course aimed to encourage the Burmese Buddhist Sangha to take part in community development and social work and to give its members the confidence, skills and perspective to do so. This seems to have been hard work for participants and resource persons, but indeed it was much fun as well and everybody enjoyed the time being together.

The course was divided into seven sections which were as follows: Orientation and Sustainable Development Concepts; Introduction to NGOs & Exposure Trips; Social Analysis; Alternative Education; Community Empowerment and Further Exposure Trips in Thailand; Exposure Trip to Cambodia; Basic & Deep Ecology; Reflection/Synthesis/Visioning/Evaluation.

In the first week participants got a general introduction to several topics, which were dealt with throughout the course. Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa talked about the role of Buddhism in Southeast Asia and tried to draw the participants attention on modernisation, development, globalisation and arising problems. A few days were then given over to social analysis from the viewpoints of Capitalism, Social Democracy, Marxism, Feminism, Buddhism, and new paradigm of thinking, i.e. a holistic approach. Afterwards the group visited Moo Ban Dek, an alternative school for disadvantaged children and further projects on Alternative ducation such as Dhamma Nurak Nunnery School, Thai Nun's Institute and the Rung Arun School, an alternative school for the middle class.

The group then got the chance to visit various communities, projects and NGOs in Thailand to discover possible positive avenues to follow. Issues dealt with were Appropriate Technology, Organic Compost and Toiletry Making, Organic Vegetable Growing, Integrated Farming and Mushroom Growing, Herbal Medicine and Reforestation. Using natural resources helps people to stay or become self-reliant in a time where changes towards consumerism and capitalism are going on. The importance of using non-chemical fertilizers for healthy food and a healthy environment became very clear to everybody. Most of the time both, lay people and monks, valued it a lot being able to practice things themselves. For instance making liquid compost, mixing ingredients for shampoo, planting mushrooms or making charcoal.

This section also included an outline of micro credit unions as practiced by the monks from Tab Tim Nimitra Centre. This is always a definitive moment in the life of a Sangha course, because many of the monks come to the course believing that they have no place in community work which focuses on money. As they begin to see how the Satja Savings Groups are run, how they benefit the communi-



ties in which they are centered and how the monks involved are able to carry out the work without compromising the precepts, there is a point where the participant monks begin to see the dhama teaching in a new light. Many participants of Sangha V planned to introduce this system to their community as they mentioned at the end of the course.

What affected the whole group very much was the impact of the Ra Si Salai Dam. Villagers shared their experience and discussed problems brought by the construction of the dam and their efforts to overcome them. Struggling for their rights and fighting against the dam for 10 years now, communities are trying to preserve their culture at the same time. As an example, participants visited a weaving center, where women use natural resources to earn a living.

For two weeks the group travelled then to Cambodia, a country which is emerging into democracy after a brutal civil war during which most monks and nuns were killed. As the Sangha is being rebuilt, Buddhist organisations are active in the field of community development, helping the poor to rebuild their lives. The way in which this work takes place, using the dhama as the ethical background, is applicable to the societies from which participants come. With HIV/AIDS being a big problem in Cambodia, the topic was raised several times. Worried in the beginning, the attitude of the participants towards HIV-infected people changed when they learned more about the disease. As it is very much related to the spreading of HIV, victims of sexual abuse are another focus of buddhist based Cambodian NGOs, as are poor widows and the dispossessed. Education on such issues like human rights, peace building, literacy, health and the danger of people trafficking is a major activity of many of these NGOs. Of course Angkor was on the schedule as well. Monks, nuns and lay people were very much impressesd by these great and imposing monuments and enjoyed the two days sightseeing a lot!

Back in Thailand, a few days were spent on Basic and Deep Ecology, where participants could see how earth houses were built. They learnt about the importance of richness, diversity and equality of all beings on earth and their interdependence became very clear to all members. To illustrate the subject, role games and many different kinds of exercises played an essential role. One day the group travelled to Khao Yai National Park to be alone with and in nature.

"As learning never ends," like one monk put it, four days in reflection were spent together at Wongsanit Ashram to become clearer about lessons learnt and how to apply them. They all went home with great new ideas and a lot of enthusiasm. What now remains for them is to put into practice what they have learnt so as to benefit their communities, the environment and the society in their country as a whole.

Sandra Lepojewitsch

The Rewards of Giving

'I helped her with her work when she asked. Now that I need help, she brushes me off..." "I've given my children everything they wanted, but they are still disobedient..." "I've always made merit and given lots of donations—why was I robbed? Why do bad things happen to good people?"

These sentiments are not at all uncommon, and they speak of the frustration, anger and suffering of those who feel their kindness, generosity, and love for others has gone unappreciated, unreturned, unrewarded.

Why were the recipients of their good acts so ungrateful? Was our altruism given to the wrong persons? Did we not give enough?

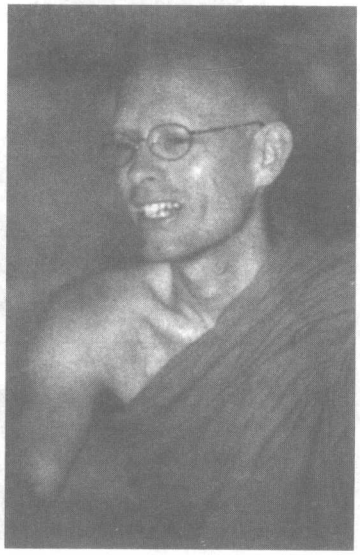
Ask such questions of Phra Santikaro Bhikku, and the monk would probably reply that the problem is rooted in our own ignorance.

"Today, consumerism has shaped the way we give. Our giving has become an act of exchange, or an investment," said the outspoken American-born monk.

"True giving must be free from expectations of anything in return. If you expect to get even a word of appreciation like 'thank you' from receivers, then it is not a free giving, but an exchange."

Gratitude must be voluntary, he added. So must an act of giving.

Sadly, many people today believe in the "no free lunch" or "good begets good" maxims. We give alms or donations to monks with a belief that the *boon* (merit) will reserve us a place in heaven and bestow on us happiness, success, and luck in the present lifetime.



Phra Santikaro

More often than not, we give material goods, support, and help to others with cretain expectations: either to be noticed, to be repaid, or at the very least to be appreciated.

When done this way, Phra Santikaro said we have used giving as a tool to put others in our debt, or control others to suit ourselves and our own desires.

Consequently, both givers and receivers will not feel free, and will subsequently suffer, the monk said.

Phra Santikaro urged us to weed out the consumerist spirit of giving that is based on the sense of self and accumulation for the self, and to cultivate the genuine value of giving. He suggested that we take a close look at nature and how it works.

"Observe our breaths," the monk wrote in a booklet called *Dana: The Way of Nature*. "We breathe in and we have to breathe out, otherwise we will die. Likewise, life is about give and take."

The natural law of interconnectedness works on a give-and-take basis.

We live and feed on the "free and unconditional" giving of Nature—the sun, water, wind, trees, rocks, animals and our fellow beings.

"Giving is indeed a duty in nature. Without giving, there would be no living," he said.

"Accordingly, we should give as we are given to. Giving should be free and unconditional. Trees give us air without being forced to or forcing us to repay their gratitude."

Phra Santikaro suggested that we give more consideration to the recipient of our giving, that we give what is really needed.

"We should give food to those who have none to eat. Give medicine to the sick. Or give time and care to the elderly, for example."

Giving things that receivers do not need is a waste, he said. This can be seen at many temples: Huge amounts of surpluses from donations, especially the yellow "sanghadana" buckets with food and daily consumer products, which collect dust at monastic residences.

Giving plays a key role in keeping our sacial relations alive and healthy, he said. "Like blood circulating in our body, giving helps nourishing our society."

In practising right giving, we are naturally following *sila* (the Buddhist precepts that prohibit killing, stealing, adultery, lying and reckless intoxication), the monk said. "Sila is a code of conduct contributing to communal livelihood and peace. So is

giving.

"Communities where people are generous and kind to one another will be happy places to live and violence will be scarce. In such a society, youngsters will be taught to give at an early age.

"But in today's market-driven society, we take more than we give. Competition is high, be it in education or career. In this social climate, people are in search of power, money and higher status, thus violence is easy to come by," he said.

The Lord Buddha always placed an emphasis on Sangha (monastic and lay community), so much so that he said that "sanghadana"—a sort of indiscriminate giving which is intended to benefit a group rather than a specific individual—was the greatest form of giving, higher than giving to the Buddha or the enlightened ones, said Phra Santikaro.

"Giving that benefits people at large will definitely be better than that given to specific individuals," he said.

But today, many prefer to make donations to famed monks or influential people. Also, they believe that sanghadana only refers narrowly to giving to those wearing the yellow rebes.

"Sangha refers to a group of people, which should include groups of lay people, too—families, communities, organisations. Therefore giving, or making donations, to organisations that work for society can be considered sanghadana," he said.

Ultimately, cultivating right giving will lead us on the path to Nirvana, he said.

The Jataka story about Prince Vessantara is a case in point. The last reincarnation of the Lord Buddha, Prince Vessantara, pointed to the significance



of giving as a way to find the path to enlightenment. The prince gave away everything, upon being asked, even his beloved wife and children (though people today question his right to do that—the point was his ability to give, without attachment to his self, his wife and children considered extensions of that self).

In giving freely, as Nature does, we learn to let go of our possessions and selfishness and to be detached from expectations, he said, adding that how we give teaches us the virtue of modesty too.

"The act of giving should be polite and gentle, showing our respect to other beings. Givers should not feel they are of higher status than the recipients. For example, if they throw some change in a beggar's bucket, it reflects their egoistic arrogance —that they think they are better," said Phra Santikaro.

Ultimately, it seems that practising giving as a duty and as the way of Nature should help to end suffering. "In the end, we will see that there are no givers, no receivers, but the natural duty of giving and taking, rotating in society. Just like our breaths that recycle and circulate in nature. If we can rise to this virtue of giving, there would be no suffering."

Karnjariya Sukrung
Bangkok Post,
March 28, 2004

The 2005 INEB Conference

Please be reminded of The 2005 INEB Conference in October 2005 to be held in Nagpur, India. More detail will be announced shortly.

Operationalising Gross National Happiness



Gross National Happiness seminar in the Centre of Bhutan Studies, Thimpu, with the Crown Prince and Princess of Bhutan.

"While conventional development models stress economic growth as the ultimate objective, the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) is based on the premise that true development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other" prime minister of Bhutan Lyonpo Jigmi Y Thinley stated. "The four pillars of GNH are the promotion of equitable and sustainable socio-economic development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance".

More than 80 participants joined the first major International Seminar on Operationalising Gross National Happiness in Bhutan in February 2004. It was an exciting mixture of senior professors, Buddhist monks, managers, environmentalists, economists, social activists, financiers, and academicians. Challenging questions came from the some 300 students who attended the seminar in the building of the Bhutan Studies Centre, partially by cable cast.

In order to have real impact on development policies it is necessary to determine alternative indicators argued several speakers. Others saw a danger in shaping the GNH concept too quickly towards models similar to existing standards like Gross National Product (GNP). Even parallel development along materialist and spiritual lines could not work out as long as humanity will not be able to fundamentally re-formulate the connection between the two in terms of new scientific paradigms. Bhutan recently opened its borders a little bit more and traditional 'archaic' culture and modernity became contrasting aspects of every-day life.

The quest of the people of Bhutan for an in-depth response to this challenge "how to find a genuinely creative middle way between tradition and modernity" should be appreciated as an important and unique contribu-

tion towards global transformation.

"I feel that there must be some convergence among nations on the idea of what the primary objective of development and progress should be—something that GNH seeks to bring abouté said the Crown Prince of Bhutan Dasho Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck in his closing address. çThere cannot be enduring peace, prosperity, equality and brotherhood in this world if our aims are so separate and divergent especially as the world shrinks to a global village".

Hans van Willenswaard



Crown Prince Dasho Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck after greeting the Thai delegation

A Declaration by Participants in the Seminar on GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

We, participants, in the International Seminar on Operationalizing Gross National Happiness, held in Thimphu, Bhutan, from 18th to 20th of February 2004, and attended by some 400 individuals, including senior professors, research fellows, journalists, lawyers, medical professionals, religious leaders, managers, environmentalists, economists, social activists, financiers, civil servants and students from around the world, after intense deliberations, wish to declare:

I. Our deep appreciation to His Majesty, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the King of Bhutan, and to the Government of Bhutan, for having adopted over the past two decades the enlightened strategy of Gross National Happiness as the cornerstone of Bhutan's national development policy, articulated in His Majesty's statement, "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product."

II. Our great satisfaction with the quality of the seminar's written and oral presentations, which have provided a wealth of information and a number of valuable ideas concerning the strengthening and the operationalization of the concept of Gross National Happiness.

III. Our understanding that, notwithstanding the necessity of devoting further time to review all the diverse contributions of the seminar participants in order to synthesize them into a general expression of the opinions expressed at the seminar, some common threads and conclusions can be set forth as follows:

1. Happiness is and always has been a fundamental human quest and has been acknowledged as such in countries and cultures as diverse as the Bhutan and The United States of America. Happiness may be understood as a state of physical and emotional well-being and inner contentment, founded on principles of sociality and of not harming other sentient beings or the environment.
2. Happiness thus should not

be seen as a distant goal, provided by others; happiness is the path, in the here and now, which primarily depends on self-responsibility and self-fulfillment in sharing with others. Happiness is an immediate, proximate, goal that depends on the responsibility of both society and the individual and on the recognition that no individual can be completely happy in the presence of the unhappiness of others.

3. The materialism and competition that characterizes the dominant civilization in the world today have not been conducive to the pursuit of happiness, and, in many respects, actually has led in the opposite direction. "Gross Domestic Product," the monetary value of national economic activity, which has become the theoretical and de facto measure of national economic and developmental policies, reflects this dominant paradigm. Therefore, we recognize the need for major reform to take into account other policy dimensions and objectives, such as social and environmental well-being, which the concept of Gross Domestic Product does not address; happiness is being sacrificed on the altar of statistical economic growth based on run-away consumerism.

4. The operationalization of Gross National Happiness (GNH) should fully take into account national, regional and local considerations. Likewise, it should to take into account the interactive and interrelated dimensions of the particular needs and views of diverse cultures, age groups, genders, occupations and families; which coming together in the context of the common human identity and the search for unity in diversity.

5. The operationalization of GNH should be facilitated by the development of indicators that address human physical and emotional well-being. They must be be capable of use for self-evaluation, so that individuals and groups may gauge their progress in the attainment of happiness. In addition, indicators should facilitate full accountability, good governance, and socially constructive business prac-tices, both in day-to-day life and in long-range policies and activities.

6. Further reflection and research on the discussions and proposals that emerged from the Seminar may contribute to policy development both on the social and the governmental levels. In this regard, the Seminar welcomed the proposal of the Royal Government of Bhutan to the Seminar on Gross National Happiness on an annual basis in order to further explore the concerns and policy considerations expressed in this first Seminar. This may include meetings in various locations around the world, and the development of a variety of initiatives, including research, publications, experimental work with indicators, and policy proposals.

7. Finally, we pledge ourselves, as a matter of individual and collective human responsibility, to advocate actively and fully the goal of genuine happiness as the cornerstone of national policy everywhere in the world, to be fully socially engaged, and to advocate policies and measures that uphold the great objective of happiness for all.

Thimphu,
February 21st, 2004
LUNAR NEW YEAR

The 10th "Sem Pringpuangkaew" Public Lecture
The Ecumenical Vision of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and His Dialogue With Christianity"
Donald K. Swearer
2 May 2004

Donald Swearer is the Charles and Harriet Cox McDowell Professor of Religion at Swarthmore College, in Asian and comparative religions. He was the Numata Visiting Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hawaii in 1993 and a Guggenheim Fellow in 1994. He writes many book including The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia, the latest *Becoming the Buddha :The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand.* He is also member of INEB Executive Board.

The lecture is organized by Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) from 9:00-12:00 am. at SEM Building, Klongsan, Bangkok, Siam

INEB Upcoming Activities

INEB 2004 Young Bodhisattva Training

International Buddhist Leadership Training for Spiritual Resurgence and Social Innovation
11-30 July 2004 at Wongsanit Ashram, Siam

This INEB Youth program promotes leadership for spiritual resurgence as well as social innovation among young people from the Buddhist communities in Asia.

Contents covered include Socially engaged Buddhist principles; skilful means for cultivating wisdom and compassion; meditation, different schools of social and ecological analysis and Buddhist social/ ecological analysis tools; different kinds of reforms and revolutions; Buddhist approach for social change and dialogue with Christians and Muslims on their faith perspectives for change.

We invite young Buddhist within our INEB network to join. The eligible participants must be a Buddhist, female/male, ordained/lay, from any traditions, age 20-35, from South or Southeast Asian countries and seriously interested in radically improving their lives as well as contributing extensively to society. Application closes on 31 May 2004 and acceptance is confirmed by 10 June 2004. Scholarship is available for those who are accepted.

For application form and more information, please contact INEB Secretariat Office in Bangkok at <ineboffice@yahoo.com>

Training for Trainer Workshop: Buddhist Approach

1-10 August 2004 at Wongsanit Ashram, Siam

The program's aim is to empower and give confidence to Buddhist social workers so that they do their training/teaching work more effectively in a way that will empower their participants. The approach is to help trainers/teachers cultivate attitudes for participatory; clarify concepts related to participatory learning; gain confidence in using participatory learning tools. The program is designed by Pracha Hutanuwatr, a longstanding and experienced INEB trainer, for Buddhist social workers living and working in Asian context.

Suggested tuition fee is USD400 for general or USD320 for INEB members. Application closes on 31 May 2004 and acceptance is confirmed by 10 June 2004.

For application form and more information, please contact INEB Secretariat Office in Bangkok at <ineboffice@yahoo.com>

SPIRITUAL WALK IN THE HIMALAYAS

19 August - 1 September, 2004

A two-week spiritual walk in the Himalayas to the source of river Ganga and the foothills of the Kalind Parvat, the source of the river Yamuna (Holy rivers of India) is being organised by Buddha Smiles - India with the co-ordination of Wongsanit Ashram - Siam (Thailand). A special feature of this particular walk is that Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa will lead the walk from Gangotri to Gomuk, the source of river Ganga. The programme will include visit to ancient Hindu temples at Uttarkashi and Tibetan monastries in Dehradun.

Suggested Contribution: USD 500/- This includes food, accommodation, transport and pony charges as the need may arise. The surplus from this contribution will be made available for the "Buddha Smiles" project for children (A programme for peace, education and development) and towards the building of a residential school for poor and orphaned children.

To join the walk, please contact Dr. Ramu Manivannan, Buddha Smiles - India at E-mail : <ramu_manivannan@hotmail.com> or <spiritinlifemovement@yahoo.com>

Enduring Dhamma

The late reformist monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu once penned a poem saying how, regardless of the passing of time, he would never leave this world.

Buddhadasa still lives on,
never to die, Unceasingly serving
his fellow man and woman
With the dhamma teachings left
behind. Oh dear friend, can you
see what it is that has died?

For the upcoming centenary of Buddhadasa's birth, which will fall in 2006, a group of his students are organising a series of workshops to discuss various aspects of the monk's teachings, and whether they are still relevant to modern society.

"Dhammaghosana", literally "the propagation of dhamma'', is an apt choice for the project's name. The term was used by Buddhadasa to refer to a volume of his works in later years, totalling 72 books, that distil major Buddhist tenets from the Tripitaka and show how they can be applied in daily life. Eighteen topics were selected, ranging from dhamma's role in politics, to Buddhist interpretation of Christianity and meditation in the "nuclear" age.

This year and next, organisers plan to invite Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars, men and women, to lead each of the 18 workshops. Renowned social thinker Dr Prawase Wasi will lead the inaugural session that will discuss the laws of conditionality (idappacayata), to be held on January 24-25 at Ashram *Wongsanit in Nakhon Nayok.*

The purpose of the workshop series, however, transcends recitation of any particular title of Buddhadasa's works. And that's how it should be, said



Sulak Sivaraksa, leading Buddhist scholar and one of the monk's disciples, during a recent press conference to unveil the programme.

"Buddhadasa's statement that he would live forever should be taken as the continuing presence of him as a servant of Lord Buddha, not as an individual monk. Or, one could say that he was referring to the perpetuation of Buddhism, not as an institution that condones conservatism, nationalism or capitalism, but as a culture of awakening—from greed, anger, and ignorance.''

In other words, Sulak said the monk was envisioning the ability of each person to attain spiritual liberation, and to transform greed into the spirit of giving, anger into loving-kindness, and ignorance into wisdom. He noted how Buddhadasa's lifelong works were the perfect middle ground between a school that stressed scriptural studies and one that focused on meditative practice.

"The venerable monk kept a healthy balance between textual and practical orientations,'' Sulak observed. "Studies of the canon should not be at the expense of actual practice, while emphasis on meditation should not overlook structural inequities and the [corrupt] power of the state.''

Phra Paisal Visalo, another progressive monk, pointed out that Buddhadasa Bhikkhu made lasting contributions to Theravada Buddhism, making the religion more inclusive, profound and transcendental. When he was alive, Buddhadasa repeatedly emphasised how dhamma should not be treated merely as an individualistic pursuit, but that social awareness and engagement should form an integral part.

More, spiritual enlightenment is, contrary to typical views, a feat possible in the present life, and it goes beyond rational thinking or performance of traditional rituals. Finally, Phra Paisal said the late monk revived the essence of Lord Buddha's original teachings and made it relevant—alive—in the minds of modern people.

"Many of his books have inspired a number of prominent thinkers nowadays,'' Phra Paisal said. "Some also challenged the establishment and sparked a lot of debate when they first came out. For example, he wrote one book entitled Dhammic Socialism when the term socialism was banned by the state authorities. But he also raised questions about modernity—the proliferation of science, [mainstream] economics, and education.''

Buddhadasa's liberal approach, unbridled by the conventional line of thinking, has freed Theravada Buddhist teaching from the pervasive dominance of conservative forces and authoritarian power. Chulalongkorn academic Suwanna Satha-anand contended that the two factors have substantially constrained the poten-

tials of the religion, turning it into a monolithic, intolerant worldview that is subservient to violent use of power, reckless consumption, and indifference to social inequalities.

And there is a huge price tag to such development, Suwanna said. The task of untangling the webs depended on each one of us, she said.

Buddhadasa's legacy, particularly in highlighting how nature and dhamma are one and the same, has thus become one of the most salient points.

"Generally speaking, there are four main ways that people can relate to the world around them—and thus emerge four different systems of knowledge and patterns of relationship."

Suwanna cited the example of how people look at and treat "a lamb":

"Some may regard the creature as belonging to the same kinship, not unlike how indigenous people consider a river as the bloodline of their ancestors. Or they may see it as a creation of God, and thus there arose a myriad of rituals, symbols and theology to enhance the communications between man and the divinity. The third way, a Buddhist approach, is to see the lamb as a being that shares suffering with us, hence the need for practice to cultivate moral conduct, tranquillity and wisdom.

"The last way is to look at the animal as existing to serve humans. Problems emerge when this man-oriented utilitarianism becomes the only sèt of truths, and prevails over all aspects of living."

Buddhadasa's emphases on nature as an arena proper for studying dhamma, on the necessity of science to be free from materialist obsessions, and on dhamma as part and parcel of genuine democracy, are among the monk's efforts to counterbalance these trends. But Buddhadasa's most outstanding endeavour, Suwanna said, was his opening up to other religions — intriguingly—as a way to understand Buddhism itself. After all, the essence of Buddhist teachings is not—should never be—confined only to Buddhist devouts.

Prior to his departure, the venerable monk wrote three wills (panithan) that he wanted to impart to humankind. The first two revealed his broad-minded worldviews, which he upheld consistently throughout his life: insight into one's respective faith, and cooperation that goes beyond religious boundaries. The third, to liberate oneself from the grip of materialism, has become of increasing value in the present time, said Phra Paisal.

Yet studies of dhamma, the monk cautioned, should be done with as much care as if one were handling a poisonous snake. There have been cases of abuses, distortion, and use of violence in the name of religion. Buddhadasa himself once said that clinging to anything—money or the concept of nibbhana (enlightenment)—would effectively trap, instead of liberate, the person.

Vasana Chinvarakorn
Bangkok Post,
January 15, 2004

Progress or Peril?

The boat has long been moored; its wooden planks show signs of age—cracks and peels—after years of exposure to the sun.

Its owner, Thurian Kaewsalee, does not look any better. The septuagenarian often complains of weak arms and legs. Trying to point in the direction of a building complex less than a kilometre away from her house —a building complex that has become the source of her worries over the past several years—Thurian suddenly loses strength in her right arm. The sagging, brownish limb falls lifeless against her side, not unlike a limp sandbag thrown onto the ground. A muted sound of resignation escapes to the scythe of time.

"My ears are failing, too," Thurian says in a matter-of-fact tone. "It's been like this for the past two years."

The only remnant of life, and suggestion of undying defiance, is in that dark glint of her eyes. Until a couple of years ago, this little grandmother was at the forefront of a protest against a controversial multi-billion-baht nuclear research centre project in her hometown in Ongkharak district, Nakhon Nayok province.

How fresh were the memories of old!

Those who live along the canals, the offshoots of the Nakhon Nayok River, still recall

the sight of an old lady paddling her small boat, docking at each pier of her neighbours' houses, urging them to come out and join her. An atypical act among rural folk, let alone for a woman of such an advanced age.

A bedroom community to the northeast of Bangkok, the district of Ongkharak is an odd mix of what seems to be a rustic, backwater village and a growing, ready embrace of modernity. The majority of the people here continue to engage in rice farming, but the younger generations have been increasingly lured away by better-paying jobs in the world of commerce and service industries in the next-door capital city. The Nakhon Nayok River, once the bloodline of the community, is now flowing idly; virtually all of the locals have opted to commute by road, the vehicle of modern times.

* * * * * * * * * *

Grandmother Thurian Kaewsalee has been protesting against the nuclear reactor project—but physical conditions now pose a big obstacle. "Since my youth, I have been going around in a boat," Thurian recalled. "I only started using a telephone as a way to reach people two years ago."

The entrance of the state-of-the-art nuclear research centre project, under the aegis of the Office of Atomic Energy for Peace (OAEP), proved to be something far more Sophisticated—and threatening.

Thurian said when she first learned that there was to be a new research centre in her village, her heart jumped for joy. It was thought that a high-tech institution would elevate the local peoples' quality of life, bringing in more jobs, providing a better future for her children and grandchildren.

"The word 'nuclear' cropped up much later, and you know, my rice fields are just next door to the centre!"

Intriguingly, the few "pioneer" protesters are people in the very last phase of their lives. Thurian and the four other leading opponents, of more or less the same age, are fondly known as "The Four Old Men, and One Grandmother". All are basically simple farmers, with enough literacy to read and write in Thai. The only exception, a younger campaigner with relatively higher education, is a primary school teacher named Charan Rungruang.

From the outset, the crew of protesters were, in every way, at a huge disadvantage vis-a-vis the proponents of the nuclear research centre programme. Their number was and is small.

Charan, the teacher, said locals were fearful of the idea of having a nuclear reactor and a dump site for radioactive waste in their backyards. But the bigger, more tangible, dread was the local influential figures who have links with the state authority that are vehemently pushing the project.

"I believe that almost one hundred percent of the people here do not want the project. But they still think that any participation in a demonstration would be running the risk of becoming a bad guy in the eyes of the government," Charan said.

"They still recall the mass demonstration of October 14 [1973] when a large number of protesters were killed or detained. People warn each other not to join me, saying, "You may not be able to come home if you go with him [Charan]'. I myself have been reprimanded by my supervisors."

Curiously, the historical affinity of the district of Ongkharak to the Bangkok-based regime, dating as far back as the occasional visits of King Rama V, has created a cautious sense of citizenship. Unlike the Southern Muslims of Chana, who have been staging a sit-in against a multi-billion-baht gas pipeline project, the Ongkharak residents do not suffer an underlying sense of alienation that stems from ethnic and religious differences from the rest of the country.

Neither is the semi-rural, semi-urban setting here like that of Prachuab Khiri Khan, where the locals have united and successfully cancelled two joint ventures to build coal-fired power plants. In Ongkharak, the rural element means people are basically passive, and kowtowing to the powers-that-be, at whatever level, is deemed a wiser, safer strategy. Meanwhile, the expansion of city life has resulted in an individualistic, to-each-his-own attitude.

The attempts by Thurian and her peers are thus remarkable. The fact that the old woman is not affiliated with any organisation, her seniority, the diplomatic tactics she uses when dealing with state officers, and her commitment to the cause have enabled this grandmother to be accepted by all parties. Even among OAEP staff in charge of public relations, it is no exaggeration to say she was their "favourite" protester.

"They probably don't think of me right now," Thurian said, offering an endearing smile. "But in those days, they would pay me a visit every now and then, giving me some dessert, even [irradiated] sausages. But the more I ate

those goodies, the harder I protested!

"During a visit to the [OAEP] office, they were going to give me a treat. I immediately dug into my wallet and took out a 500-baht bank note. I just said that I could afford my own drinks. I wanted to show them that I knew what they were up to."

Those were the really busy days. True, the Ongkharak villagers were initially reluctant even to express their fear. But over time, they slowly learned of their constitutional right—that every Thai citizen is entitled to have a say in a public programme that will affect his or her life-and more about nuclear technology and its consequences.

The "eye-opener" was their firsthand encounter with the victims of the Cobalt-60 radiation leak in early 2000. Having a face-to-face talk with those patients, seeing at close range how some lost limbs, or babies, learning about the negligence of the agencies involved in handling the radioactive waste, the Ongkharak folks quickly realised that a similar kind of danger could be just around the corner.

But unlike a dam, a gas pipeline or a power plant, the concept of a nuclear reactor is far more elusive. How does a tiny lump of mineral emit radioactivity? Can we really trust the state agency's repeated guarantees that the technology is fail-proof? What are the loopholes in the bidding process and contracts that the media have talked about? Does the invisibility of the radioactive substances mean total safety?

For the farmers, most of whom have only Prathom 4 education, to be able to counter the technocrats on their own terms is out of the question. What with the complex technical jargon, the esoteric English language in the documents and the behind-doors negotiations, people like Thurian are all but helpless to fight back.

But common to the grass-roots struggles against mega-projects elsewhere, though, is the contest between two world views and ways of life.

On one side is faith in science and its prowess. On the other is a simple set of beliefs, what ordinary folks regard as common sense. Can anyone sleep soundly knowing there is a nuclear reactor and a dump site (set to become the country's biggest) in their neighbourhood?

There is also a question of what future each party foresees for the province of Nakhon Nayok, the homeland of people like Thurian. Can and should the small, sleepy town be turned into a super-corridor of glitzy technology? And at what cost to the local livelihood and environment?

Call it sheer obstinacy or blind ignorance, Thurian simply trusts what she can see. "They say that their safety is of the highest standard. But during the construction, the fish in my pond mysteriously disappeared, and I could see some footprints leading from it to the site. I told Khun Pathom [the current OAEP chief] that they could not guard against even the little things—how could we trust them with something bigger like the reactor?

"I picked up on the fact that sometimes their presentation of information did not agree, as if they had not consulted each other before. They claimed that the reactor would serve medical purposes, but I would say a reactor is a reactor. Even factories that claim an excellent safety standard can burn down. Where can we find the responsible party if and when something happens?"

In another public meeting, a friend of Thurian, one of the Four Old Men gang, stood up quickly to correct a piece of information given by an OAEP officer. Having lived there for years, the old man, normally taciturn, insisted that the site for the research centre originally had an access road, unlike the officer's claim. There was no further response from that officer.

The villagers are not the only ones who can point out some discrepancies of information offered by the proponents of the project.

The National Environment Board (NEB) cited several shortcomings in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report that the OEAP had commissioned the King Mongkut Institute of Technology Lat Krabang in 1997. One instance involved potential floods in the site area: the EIA team claimed that there had not been any record of such incidents, but the NEB said some OAEP staff members themselves mentioned that they had to row a boat when they first entered the place.

At the end of the day, however, the NEB's opinions did not have legal binding.

It is those fine points—inconsistencies—that cause people like Thurian to question the claims of safety precautions and benefits. There are other dubious dealings concerning the selection process, the long, tedious search for an agency to serve as a third-party evaluator of safety measures, and the punishment of some whistle-blowing officers in the OAEP, to name a few.

"The lack of transparency signals a lack of safety. What more can I say?" Charan asked.

But time is not on the side of these poor folks.

From the late 1990s to early 2000s, Thurian and her friends submitted one petition after the next to the corridors of power, asking that the entire programme be reviewed. Meanwhile, the construction of the centre progressed speedily. One by one, new concrete blocks sprouted up in the fenced compound, surrounded by emerald rice fields. A stark contrast of two realms.

The only grace period came in 1999 when a minister in charge announced to the villagers that the project was to be halted, pending a review of the preliminary safety assessment report.

"We asked him to sign his name in confirmation of his statement. But I knew then and there, though, that he only said this as a way to disband our gathering," Thurian said ruefully.

The latest announcement by the current minister of science and technology General Chettha Thanajaro is that the nuclear research centre must go ahead, and the ageing woman is fully aware of what waits down the road. In her prime, Thurian said she would put in all her energy, to the very last drop, in order to achieve her goals. A single mother, she had to suffer ridicule, all sorts of harsh work, fighting tooth and nail, in order to bring up her two children.

"I was determined that I would never borrow any money even though I didn't have anything to eat," the frail woman recalled.

"One thing that I will always be proud of is that I was able to keep some land for my children. Back then, whenever I earned a 100-baht bank note, I would not spend it. If I wanted some small change to buy food, I would do some odd jobs in order to get the money."

But such days belong to the past. Thurian may be able to save the family heritage, but what if the soil, the air, and the water in the area become contaminated?

The lyrics that the grandmother penned and sang during the heyday of protest come back at her now, though she barely has any voice to carry the tune.

When the foes march from the front, I can see them in time to flee away with my children/But what can I do with this invisible threat that swims in the water, that comes from underground, and that soars high all around me?/Is there any way I can ever escape?

Vasana Chinvarakorn

A Spiritual Walk in the Himalayas with Buddha Smiles

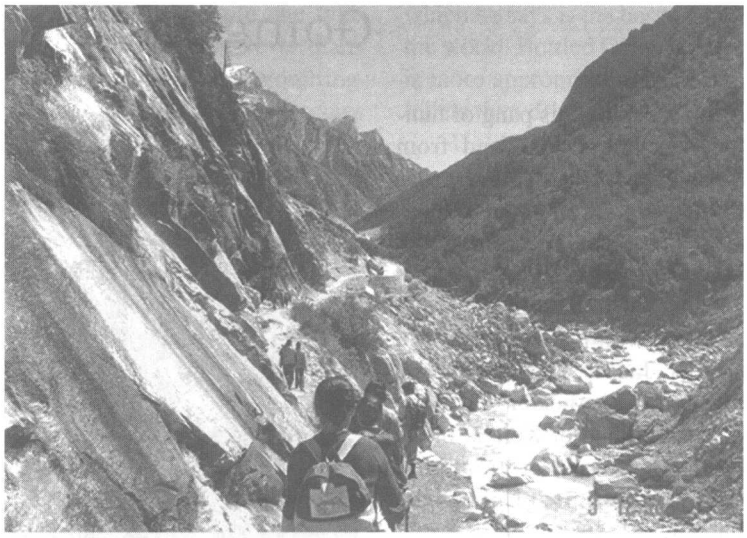
There are few experiences more sublime than walking in the shadows of great Himalayan peaks towards the source of the Ganga. When it is done with an international group of people from several religious traditions, and for the benefit of a good cause, the experience becomes even more meaningful. I was fortunate to be part of a spiritual walk in the Himalayas led by Buddha Smiles, an Indian organization devoted to the practice of nonviolence, holistic education, and commuity development. The walk brought together 12 people from Thailand, the United States, and India to collectively experience the spiritual sites and traditions of the Himalayan Garwhal region of Uttaranchal. While undertaken for its own sake—to bring people together to share and experience spiritual traditions —the walk was also a fundraiser for Buddha Smiles' work of providing quality and holistic education to children of underprivileged communities.

After departing Delhi, the first stop of our journey was Rishikesh, stretched out along the Ganga where it emerges from the hills. In Hindu mythology the goddess Ganga's descent to earth was broken by Shiva's head, forming the Ganga's many tributaries As the Ganga comes out of the foothills, its powers of purification are said to be at it highest, and millions of Hindus flock to Rishikesh and nearby Haridwar to bathe in their ghats and be purified of sins. Rishikesh is the well-known home of many ashrams, rishis, and centers of spiritual learning. On our way back we would spend more time

there doing yoga, meditation, and walking along the river. But after our first night there, we set out early the next morning to begin our ascent into the mountains.

Many spiritual traditions teach that physical discomfort and suffering are opportunities for spiritual growth. This was lesson one of our spiritual trek, as our jeep heroically battled the naseau-inducing bumps and curves of the narrow roads carved out of the high mountains. However, with the understanding that enlightenment comes at a cost, we stoically continued on. Soon we were rewarded with magnificent views of green and yellow valleys, terraced up impossibly steep slopes with fields of rice, bean, cabbage, and potatoes. We looked on as ancient temples, flocks of goat, caravans of nomadic people, and solitary sadhus appeared before us and faded into the distance. Far below ran the holy Ganga, which we would follow to its source.

The next ten days would reward us with many experiences and insights into the spiritual traditions and natural beauty of India. It took us to Yamunotri, the source of the Yamuna river, and its ancient Hindu temple and hot springs. We climbed through beautiful apples orchards and fields, coming across a solitary sadhu's hut tucked up in the hills. We also visited the Mindrolling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery in Dehra Dun where we saw the resiliency and faith of the Tibetan people in forced exile. Each day began with meditation and yoga, while the beautiful landscapes of Garwhal were a continuing source of awe and inspiration.



Perhaps most memorable of all was our three day journey to the source of the Ganga. From Gangotri we set out walking and put in a full day's trek to get to the last base camp before Gomukh, the glacier from which the Ganga emerges. The camp, located amidst a stark landscape of rocky outcrops, sparse scrubby vegetation, and towering snow-capped granite peaks, looked like the last outpost before the end of the world. When we arrived at sunsent, the dying sun was reflecting brilliantly off the snow peaks of Bhagirathi-I, II and III in a sharp and cold blue sky.

After a sub-freezing night, we set out walking for the glacier. Our strenous efforts were rewarded when we arrived to see the small cold stream of water pour out of the ice, on its way to becoming many hundreds of miles later the mighty Ganga that flows across the North-East Indian plains. Although from different spiritual traditions, we all easily appreciated the importance of this special place. Another truly rewarding experience of this journey was our climb to Tapavon from Gomuk. The sight of birds, meadows and surrounding snow peaks in Tapavon will be etched in our memory for ever.

And while having this once in a lifetime experience in the beautiful and spiritually important sites of the Himalaya, we were also able to contribute to the valuable work of Buddha Smiles. Dr. Ramu Manivannan, Buddha Smiles' founder-chairperson and our gracious guide, has walked over 500 miles in the Himalayas with groups like ours, both because he enjoys doing it, and because it helps raise funds for Buddha Smiles' educational work. With help from the proceeds of these walks, Buddha Smiles has recently constructed an alternative Gandian school in a small village of Tamil Nadu.

To learn more about future walks in the Himalayas and the Nilgiri Hills, or to make a contribution to Buddha Smiles' work, you can contact Dr. Manivannan at ramu_manivannan@hotmail.com and see the Buddha Smiles website at: www.buddhasmiles. org

Mike Levian

Going Natural

I am relishing this pang of hunger. The gurgling sound from down below. Is it an earnest plea for more food? Or is it a subconscious reaction stemming from years of habit—gorging this stomach of mine with anything so that it won't feel "empty"?

Dr Jacob Vadakkanchery, an Ayurvedic healer from the enchanted land of Kerala, India, has a simple answer to my present symptoms: Enjoy the hunger.

It has been five days since I joined this "Nature Cure" health camp for a sevenday retreat. I must say that feelings of uncertainty, anticipation and doubt have clouded over me, even on the first day when I stood at the entrance of Ashram Wongsanit in Nakhon Nayok, where the retreat is being held. What does Dr Jocob mean in his slogan, "Enter as a patient, Leave as your own doctor"? What's so special about depriving oneself of food?

True, Mahatma Gandhi did it. So did the Isan villagers during a protest against the Pak Moon Dam in front of Government House a few years ago. But don't those acts have more to do with sending a political statement to the powers-that-be? What's the difference between fasting and starving yourself?

It was a conversation with a friend who had participated in the same workshop last year that gave me the final push. "Try it," she said, "and you will experience a real, spiritual challenge."

Now, if good old Dr Jacob knew what was swimming in my head, he might raise his thick eyebrows. According to him, the period of abstaining from food



should also be a period of total silence—not just verbal silence, but mental silence. Tut-tut.

On the other hand, I realise how my mind has become unusually alert. Sipping only fruit juice for the past two days, I find myself automatically shifted to low gear, in walking as well as speaking. But the seemingly torturous pace has brought me many simple joys. I savour each drop of succulent mango juice to the fullest and in quiet gratitude. I no longer fall asleep during afternoon lectures like on previous days when I carried a full stomach. I notice the swaying dance of the slim weed grass as I saunter along the walkways. At the morning yoga session, I observe, and beam at, the "butterfly" posture that an 87-year-old Chinese woman—who we call "Ah ma" (Grandma)—struggles to make every day. And of course, Ah Ma's little eight-month-old grandson and his toothless, endearing smile is such a wonder of life.

For a fleeting moment, I start to glimpse the tricks my own body has been playing with my mind, the seesawing between lack of food and desire for it. Which is real? Which is illusionary?

I am certain the few other participants who are fasting on plain water must be experiencing far stranger, stronger, sensations than I am. Because I can only take a week away from work, I cannot experience the whole range of this fasting trip, something that requires a minimum of 15 days. One needs several days to first ger accustomed to the one-meal-a-day regimen, which consists of rice and fresh vegetables, followed by the next couple of days of fruit only, then fruit juice only, and finally the pure water-only sustenance.

Fasting, Dr Jacob stresses, is not about waking up one morning and forcing yourself to stop taking any food. "You cannot fast that fast," is his usual quip. Besides, the procedure after the period of fasting is finished is even more delicate and requires greater precautions than the steps taken to gradually cut down food intake. But the testimonies I had heard from those who had done it, my friend among them, seemed to promise a lot. Naturally, one could expect a period of utmost distress: three bouts of high fever, continuous vomiting or diarrhoea, or skin rashes—you name it. Dr Jacob calls this stage the cleansing period, and likens it to a housepainter who preps his surface, sweeping and brushing every single pore of the surface before giving it a fresh, new coat.

Next is the healing phase and the epitome time for celebration—the stage when one feels a

deluge of energy. This may seem very strange, but those who have gritted their teeth and been through it invariably express how they felt as if they had been given a new life. An apt description, since Dr Jacob's clinics in Kerala also carry the name of *Navajivan*, meaning new life.

At any rate, Nature Cure is not only about eating. There is a host of things that Dr Jacob has introduced to the camp in order to "uncondition" what modern men and women have long taken for granted. He calls the refrigeratior a "mortuary" fit only for storing dead things, or at best, clothing. Soap, shampoo and skincare products are confiscated upon arrival at the camp, and each of us instead gets to enjoy the raw fragrance of green peanut multipurpose soap instead. No nylon toothbrushes, chemical toothpaste or dental floss either.

Twice a day, at dawn and before bedtime, I stand under the shade of a big mango tree, expressing my modest thanks for her generous supply of leaves, and transform them into .. er ... a quintessentially natural tooth cleaner. Contrary to the pessimist' s belief, there *are* still things that are free in this world.

One woman did manage to smuggle in cream for her chronic skin problems. However, she later confessed her sin, adding that it has turned out she didn't need to use what she had thought was indispensable after all.

The retreat isn't a return to the Stone Age. On the contrary, the Indian doctor asserts that modern medicine is in fact outmoded technology. Here, in this realm of Nature Cure, what we have been used to for most of our lives is turned completely upside down.

Take, for eample, the typical signs of sickness—fever, diarrhoea, coughing and vomiting. These are regarded as blessings by Dr Jacob. He says the body, the most wonderful healer, is struggling to cleanse herself of its toxins and therfore gives these symptoms. Modern physicians, with their arsenal of antibiotics, painkillers and whatnot, suppress this natural detoxification process. The result? The so-called toxic substances get trapped inside the body and accumulate in various cells and organs, awaiting the day they will burst out in the form of more severe maladies.

Worse, these modern drugs weaken body mechanisms still further. The Indian Nature Cure doctor argues that there is not a single modern (meaning Western) medicine that does not have side effects, particularly for the liver and kidneys. I wonder: Are physicians in hospitals and clinics aware of this as they write their routine prescriptions?

Dr Jacob does not see himself as curing people. Rather, he is assuing the role of a guide, assisting novices along the Nature Cure path, until they master the art of listening to their own individual voices inside their bodies.

The technigues he dispenses appear utterly simple. Back pain? Take a bath submerging your spine only twice a day. Constipation? Bather your hips only for an hour. He says that exposure to sunlight before nine in the morning and after four in the afternoon is one of the greatest remedies for diabetic troubles. For aches and bruises, apply a wet pad.

The Keralan doctor is a tireless advocate of coconut juice (he dubs it Coconut-Cola), which he says is the best drink in the world. Bottled Coke, he says, is more appropriate for cleaning toilets than drinking.

Unlike some other health camps I know, this Indian school of alternative medicine prescribes no vitamin supplements, and one needs very few external devices. Coffee-based enemas, common among detox fans, are not promoted here either. Only in unusual cases are water enemas advised. As long as one can conduct the toilet ritual oneself, why bother with extra gadgets?

But returning to nature's embrace is not always easy. Throughout the course, several people dropped out. Some left because of urgent business at home, but others because they could not cope with the strict regimen. For instance, some dreamed of, yearned for, instant noodles.

What about me? Will I succumb to the temptations of unhealthy food too?

Again, the mind seems to dictate to the body. Dr Jacob often muses how, it and when you are happy, the bacteria inside your body is happy as well. Most of the time, we tend to worry about the past or the future, looking at others but ignoring our own feelings. Our eyes see a myriad of things but not themselves.

The flow of fluids inside my stomach is gently calling for my attention again. A friend of mine once told me about a wise man who said that all the world's ills stem from one addiction—an addiction to the delicious taste of things.

Right now, I'd have to agree.

Vasana Chinvarakorn
Bangkok Post, March 21, 2004

The Interfaith Movement for Peace and Social Justice from the Perspective of a Socially Engaged Buddhist

I can approach the subject from a comparative theoretical perspective; that is, compare the ideas of peace and justice in many religions. But I wont do this because I want to make my talk relevant to the present context—that is what being socially engaged means—and because of the common obstacles to global peace and social justice that the different religions of the world have to confront. So my talk will be directed at outlining some of preliminary considerations that should be on the agenda of the interfaith movement for peace and justice. In brief, we need to urgently confront the challenge of terrorisms and planeterizing nihilisms. We need to transform or create new subjectivities to promote cosmopolitanism, forgiveness, nonviolence and peacebuilding, a task which requires both individual and collective efforts. We need to support institutional reforms at the multilateral level, such as of the United Nations. And we need to seriously develop our ideas on redistribution and recognition.

Let me first begin with the issue of faith or religion, and why an interfaith movement is especially pertinent these days. We are all aware of religious fundamentalism and sectarianism that have triggered inter- and intra-group violence in many parts of the world, that have brought about war and separatism, especially in the wake of the Cold War. For me, however, this is only the tip of an iceberg, because we live in a time of terror and global faiths and religions must develop appropriate measures to respond or deal with this terror.

Let me elaborate my point. On the one hand, we live in a time of terror, of terrorisms in particular. The importance of the plural form of the word "terrorism" cannot be overemphasized. The word itself is highly slippery and not as clear-cut as many commentators would like us to believe. It is not only that someone's freedom fighters are someone else's terrorists. These two terms in fact contaminate one another: One's freedom fighters are also one's terrorists in the changing context. The metamorphosis of Bin Laden (or actually the Bin Ladens of the world) is thus highly illuminating. The words "war" and "terrorism" are also seen as two separate terms when in fact a part of war has always been to terrorize the population of the designated enemy state—or even of one's people in the name of national security. Moreover, is violence the essence of terrorism? In other words, is terrorism inseparable from killing, and therefore it has to be condemned? But deaths also result from benign or nefarious neglect, which is highly evident in the contemporary neoliberal global economy. Susan George's book, *How the Other Half Dies*, touches on the letting-to-die and terroristic policy of the international financial and monetary institutions of the world. Many people in the world live in terror —live in the constant terror of starving, of dying from easily preventable diseases, of losing hope, and so on. Globalization has fostered forms of internal exclusion, and therefore for most of the peoples in the world, globalization in the sense of an emerging cosmopolis of humanistic utopia is simply not happening—is a simulacrum of the privileged few. We see it in the yawning income disparities between the rich and the poor, for instance. Etienne Balibar nicely captures the internal exclusion of globalization:

> For the first time, 'humankind' as a single web of interrelationships is no longer an ideal or utopian notion but an actual condition for every individual; nevertheless, far from representing a situation of mutual recognition, it actually coincides with a generalized pattern of conflicts, hierarchies and exclusions. It is not even a situation in which individuals communicate at least virtually with each other, but much more one where global communication networks provide every individual with a distorted image or a stereotype of all the others, either as 'kin' or as 'aliens', thus raising gigantic obstacles to any dialogue. 'Identities' are less isolated *and* more incompatible, less univocal *and* more antagonistic.[1]

On the other hand, terrorisms are increasingly loaded

with religious connotations. In fact, we may well be witnessing nihilisms masquerading as religions or faiths. This is particularly evident these days. In the wake of September 11, French philosopher Alain Badiou writes,

> ...if there exists one unique great imperial power which is always convinced that its most brutal interests coincide with the Good; if it is true that every year the USA spends more on their military budget than Russia, China, France, England and Germany put together; and if that Nation-State, devoted to military excess, has no public idol other than wealth, no allies other than servants, and no view of other peoples apart from an indifferent, commercial, and cynical one; then the basic freedom of States, peoples and individuals consists in doing everything and thinking everything in order to escape, as much as possible, from the commandments, interventions and interference of that imperial power.[2]

The American-led global war against terrorism is often depicted as necessary to eradicate the scourge of fanatical Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, the major threat to world peace in the present. Badiou reminds us that this vision is not only too simplistic but also nihilistic. This is not a clash between secularism and religious fundamentalism, but between two nihilisms. We can add that both draw upon religious connotations, which rest on purity and purification. Badiou continues, There is the "disjunctive synthesis of two nihilisms" following the crime in New York and the subsequent 'wars.' There is a synthesis because "Bin Laden, or whoever financed the crime, despite being on one side, and the foundations of the American superpower on the other; these two belong to the same world, that—nihilistic—of money, of blind power, of cynical rivalry, of the hidden gold of primary resources, of total scorn for peoples' everyday lives, and of the arrogance of a self-certitude based on the void. And moral and religious platitudes plated onto all that: on both sides Good, Evil, and God serve as rhetorical ornaments to jousts of financial ferocity and to schemes for hegemonic power" (pp.158-59). Put differently, the American military hyper-power is as terroristic and fundamentalist as the Bin Ladens of the world. Then there is a disjunction because "it is inevitably through the form of crime that these actors seek and find each other" (p.159). Violence leads to more violence in a seemingly endless vicious circle or cycle of repression. There is no perpetual war for perpetual peace. Finally, there are two nihilisms because, "On both sides, it is matter of striking blindly to demonstrate one's strike capacity. What is at stake are bloody and nihilistic games of power without purpose and without truth" (p.160). The "fascist nihilism" of the organizers of the New York attack is especially striking in "the terrible silence of the authors and planners of the crime" (ibid.). On the side of the American hyper-power is nihilism in the form of the market and in the "extreme political poverty, that is to say, in the absence of any project other than its perpetuation—the perpetuation of hegemony for the Americans and of vassalage, made comfortable as possible, for the others" (p. 161). The nihilism of September 11 has been matched by the nihilism of the American military hyper-power, who seemed content to exploit that event to perpetuate its hegemony. All these are meaningless and suicidal to say the least.

The interfaith movement—to be worthy of this name—must confront and challenge these two nihilisms. The Good and the truth are still essential for justice, which although infinite is worth at shot at. Religions appeal to universal values, but we must not forget that universalism may also be tied to power. Universalism is not good in itself. Rather it is ambiguous, and on this we have to be mindful. Claims to universalism may help guarantee equality as well as enforced homogenization or even legitimize domination in the name of normalization. They may be broadly practical but at the same time highly ethnocentric. All these depend on contexts, not some internal essence of universalism. At present, the universalism of religions is matched by the universalism professed and enforced by American power. The interfaith movement must tread well between and among these universalisms, being always careful not to be enamored by the totalitarian worldview. We must not forget that justice, because it is infinite, must also be open to the possibility of the maybe and the perhaps. Moreover, justice is infinite because there will always be new obstacles to equality and liberty at different places, in different times, in different contexts.

On both sides we see fundamentalism in the form of

purity—of two pure and implacably different identities, especially cultural identities. The clash of civilizations thesis feeds on this notion of culture and identity, on this fortress mentality. Although cultural identity is always in process and to a large extent imagined and constructed—in particular its reliance on difference to create meaning—identity has a natural and essential feel in the practice of everyday life. We cannot do away with identity, because with a subject comes agency. We cannot know what we want without a subject. A view must come from somewhere. But we must accept that identity is both "necessary" and at the same time "impossible." Of course cultural identity is not a figment of our imagination. It comes from somewhere and has its history. But we often confuse our historical narratives with the past. The past is dead. It still speaks to us, but only in the form of historical narratives, including myths and legends. As one cultural critic puts it, "Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is wanting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past." Simply put, cultural identity is a "positioning" rather than an essence. And this positioning is a continuous political task. We must recognize that, as many have pointed out, identity is a problem—that it was born a problem. And the problem is how to maintain the solidity or clarity of identity, which is a continuous and perpetual task. We need to be agents without a totalitarian subjectivity. If we cannot do away with identity, we must transform identities to make them progressive so to speak.

If the nation-state, as many have argued, is an imagined or imaginable community relying in part on the construction of the Other, then it is an urgent task for not only spiritual leaders but anyone who is interested in peace, justice, freedom, and equality to make 'cosmopolitanism' imaginable and practical, to struggle against forms of internal exclusion in the rapidly globalizing world. Moreover, many of the issues we face today are transnational in scope, thus requiring not only joint efforts but also a reconceptualization of the term self-determination. Self-determination can no longer mean having a free hand within a bounded territory—that is, as non-interference. Repression, poverty, and environmental destruction, to name some random examples, have transnational and far-reaching repercussions. We need more effective international regulatory mechanisms as well as greater local autonomy. Both should not be seen as antithetical, but necessary and complementary to one another. The philosopher Iris Marion Young has redefined self-determination as non-domination. Domination may be characterized as arbitrary interference. In other words, interference may be needed to prevent or limit arbitrary interference, internally as well as externally.

Justice cannot be defined as simply the absence of injustice, for that constitutes a double negation. We must not only promote tolerance but more importantly forgiveness. One philosopher has compared tolerance to invitation, whereby the Other is invited but must face certain conditions, which if unmet will result in the revoking of hospitality. Tolerance is conditional or limited hospitality. Forgiveness on the other hand is unconditional, is akin to visitation—welcoming the visit of the complete stranger. In Buddhism the word for forgiveness is "abhaya," meaning no fear—that is, fear deriving from greed, hatred, and delusion. Reconciliation is often a manifestation of tolerance. A more lasting peace however requires forgiveness. Forgiveness breaks the vicious cycle of violence.

Two weeks after the terrorist attacks, on September 25, Thich Nhat Hanh ran a full-page ad in *the New York Times*. Announcing an evening of meditation and music on the theme "Embracing Anger" to be held at Manhattan's Riverside Church that night, the ad featured a poem and a statement on violence by Thich Nhat Hanh. The poem is entitled "For Warmth."

> I hold my face in my two hands.
> No I am not crying.
> I hold my face in my two hands.
> To keep my loneliness warm
> two hands protecting,
> two hands nourishing,
> two hand preventing,
> my soul from leaving me in anger.

Nhat Hanh explains, "I wrote this poem during the Vietnam War after I heard about the bombing of Ben Tre city. The city of 300,000 was destroyed because guerrillas fired several rounds of unsuccessful anti-aircraft gunfire and then left. My pain was profound."

The poem expresses per-

sonal condolences for all who suffered in the attacks; it offered the teaching that violence is a form of injustice, which is compounded a thousand-fold by violent retaliation; and it conveyed heartfelt wishes and prayers for awareness, compassion, and healing. Nhat Hanh announced that he and others had begun a ten-day fast in support of all who suffered in the attacks, and he ended with "the conviction that America possesses enough wisdom and courage to perform an act of forgiveness and compassion."

Like the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh has consistently practiced non-opposition, non-separation, and operational interdependence in his political statements and actions. During the War in Vietnam, he refused to denounce the Diem regime, though he approved the movement that brought it down.

These principles are set forth in two of Thich Nhat Hanh's best-known writings: the poem, "Please Call Me By My True Names," and the fourteen precepts of his Tiep Hien Order, or Order of Interbeing. The poem was written in 1976 when Nhat Hanh learned of the suicide of a twelve-year-old girl, one of the "boat people" crossing the Gulf of Siam. She was raped by a sea pirate and threw herself into the sea. The poet, familiar with the harsh conditions in the remote villages along the coast of Siam where the pirate grew up, wrote of his deep identification with the girl *and* the pirate. "I was angry when I received the news of her death, but I learned after meditation for several hours that I could not just take sides against the pirate. I saw that if I had been born in his village and brought up under the same conditions, I would be exactly like him."

Commenting on the poem years later, Nhat Hanh adds-in words that prefigure his response to the attacks of September 11—"We think we need an enemy. Governments work hard to get us to be afraid and to hate so we will rally behind them. If we do not have a real enemy, they will invent one in order to mobilize us. ... It is not correct to believe that the world's situation is in the hands of the government and that if the President would only have the correct policies, there would be peace."

When confronted with large-scale conflicts there is no question that they demand a response. The problem is how to respond to a conflict without the splitting of the Subject. The problem is that many people believe that a nonviolent response means doing nothing, whereas responding with force or violence means doing something. The Middle Way of Buddhism defines very well how one should respond to violence. It is about avoiding extremes—being doing nothing on the one hand, or responding with similar violence on the other.

Through dialogue so much can be achieved. When two parties in conflict are prepared to listen to each other, and to see each other not as enemies but as human beings, then the animosity between them can be dissolved. Overcoming the dualistic thinking that sees things as good and evil, or friend and enemy, is the basis of nonviolence. And nonviolence is the basis of peace. Our task then is to keep the conversation going, incorporating new members in our community of conversation and interdependence. We must oppose the univocity that comes with splitting and stereotypes. Ironically as the world becomes çsmalleré and humankind has become more unified than in any time in history, we have not arrived at the humanistic utopia that this "global village" is said to promote.

Dialogue is the basis for nonviolence. And nonviolence is the basic teaching of the Buddha. However, as mentioned above, there is a common misconception that nonviolence is somehow equivalent to non-action.

For a violent action to occur there must first be a desire or intention in one's mind to commit the action. This desire arises as a result of greed, hatred or ignorance. Some people may commit a violent action because of ignorance—they do not know what is right or wrong. Others may do it out of hatred. There also needs to be an object for an act of violence to occur. Finally the person committing the act of violence must carry out the action against that object. An action can be either partially or completely fulfilled.

From a Buddhist perspective, violence has its origins in the three poisons of the mind—greed, hatred and ignorance or delusion—in order to act nonviolently you must overcome these three poisons. You must develop the mental attitude that is the opposite of greed, ignorance and hatred. So to carry out a nonviolent action you need an intention, an object and an act.

Hence, merely refraining from acts of violence only succeeds on a basic level in overcoming violence. To cultivate the good qualities of the mind and actively carry out nonviolent actions represents a higher level

of understanding. So in order to truly practice nonviolence we need to eliminate the three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance and cultivate positive qualities transforming the three poisons with generosity, compassion and wisdom.

This is why the practice of meditation is very important. For Buddhist, a basis of a new subjectivity is mental training. Meditation suggests that subjective transformations can happen not from no where, but anywhere. Practicing meditation allows us to understand what controls us, to really know our own mind. We can see the love, hate, fear and delusion in our minds. By understanding and acknowledging these emotions we can overcome our prejudices. This provides a basis for problem solving: a basis of wisdom and compassion. Together these can provide the basis for a nonviolent response.

Buddhism also has the concept of Karma, which can be very helpful, when we try to understand the eruption of violence. Everything we experience is the result of previous causes and conditions. As the opening verses of the Dhammapada teach us, "If one acts with a corrupt mind suffering follows. If one acts with a serene mind peace follows." We must be aware that how we act now will affect our life in the future. We reap what we sow and we cannot avoid the results of our karma. If we have this awareness then we will try our best to sow some seeds of peace.

For Buddhists the law of karma reminds us that when faced with violence we must not react against it violently. To quote a famous verse from the Dhammapada:

> Hatred does not eradicate hatred.
> Only by loving-kindness is hatred dissolved.
> This law is ancient and eternal.

Nevertheless as Sallie King has pointed out, there is still some ambivalence in the Buddhist community's attitude towards warfare. King writes, "It is quite obvious that offensive warfare is unjustifiable. The question before the Buddhist world is to what extent one can justify engaging in self-defensive warfare. The Buddhist tradition, in the end, offers no clear answer to this question." For instance, there will be deaths during and after a defensive war—war continues to kill after the ceasefire-and thus at the very least there will be negative karmic consequences.

Buddhists like many others may assert that having no war is the best goal. However they were—and still are—Buddhist armies, and many Buddhist communities were and have been warlike. Many Buddhists take war as a necessary evil especially in the context of the modern world's preoccupation with statism, nationalism, secularism, realpolitik, rationalism, etc.

In the *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya*, the Buddha is said to have justified the existence of a military force for the purpose of protection; that is, as long as protection is done "according to dhamma." A ruler has the duty to protect all sentient beings in his or her domain, the Buddha suggests. But what does "according to dhamma" mean? How can the ruler make dhamma present in the world, or uplift the world to the standard of the dhamma in times of war?

Sallie King argues that "One can make some headway in balancing Buddhist nonviolence ideals with the pragmatic need for protection by means of two devices: intention and degree!" King goes on to write, "Probably putting together an intention to defend, rather than destroy, with actions that seek always to minimize violence is the best one can do in adjusting Theravada Buddhism to a perceived need for self-defense." But then as King also observed, how do you square Buddhism's objective to reduce people's propensity for violent action but as well as justifying the concept of "just war"? This is among the pressing questions that must be thought over, especially in the light of the war against terrorism . For instance, what is minimal or proportionate violence? Is preventive war a form of self-defense? Since knowledge is always linked to power, we must conquer knowledge in order to resist power and violence.

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "To prevent war, to prevent the next crisis, we must start right now. When a war or crisis has begun, it is already too late. If we and our children practice *ahimsa* in our daily lives, if we learn to plant seeds of peace and reconciliation in our hearts and minds, we will begin to establish real peace and, in that way, we may be able to prevent the next war." So this idea of peacebuilding, preventing wars before they begin, is very important. This work attracts no headlines; in fact nobody may even notice it, but it really is crucial. When a war has started it is very difficult to stop it. We really need to start thinking about how we can stop the next war that will start ten

years from now.

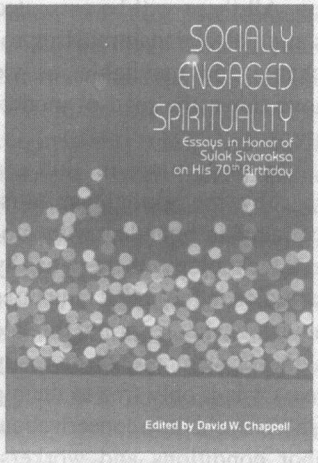
Society invests so much in war and violence. If similar investments were made in peace and nonviolence the results would be beyond our imaginations. As Mahatma Gandhi says, "We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence."

At the structural level we need far reaching reforms. We may begin with some functioning and existing institutions such as the United Nations. The UN needs serious reforms especially in the two areas it is weakest: maintenance of peace and trade and development. Some may see the UN as terminally ill, as incompetent and inefficient. For me, however, the importance of the UN lies in keeping alive the promise of peace and justice—equality and liberty. At times justice may be compromised and the UN might have been manipulated by the great powers, but the promise serves as an anti-dote to the nihilisms engulfing the world.

Finally, our meditation on many of the themes discussed above will reflect our views on redistribution and recognition. Redistribution requires addressing structural—often economic-causes of injustice. It sees class as the ultimate source of injustice. Recognition, on the other hand, sees injustice as rooted in institutionalized patterns of representation and communication—in the deprecation of culture. In other words, misrecognition leads to injustice. As a remedy to injustice, redistribution thus proposes economic restructuring, while recognition calls for a re-valuing of depreciated cultures and a de-valuing of hegemonic ones—a change in subjectivity so to speak. Redistribution and recognition are mistakenly seen as occupying two opposite poles because it is argued redistribution is based on the idea of equality and sameness (the elimination of difference) while recognition builds on difference and diversity. It is a flawed view because individuals belong to many collective groups, thus requiring both redistribution and recognition albeit in different doses depending on their specific contexts. A "Third World" working class woman needs both redistribution and recognition for instance. One can be dominant in one sense but victimized in the other. Justice requires both redistribution and recognition. On the one hand, we need to confront structural violence, TNCs, the debt problems, the IMF, the World Bank, consumerism and lots more. On the other hand, we need to debate on the virtues of "cultural survival" and difference, on the threat of cultural imperialism, on equality and diversity, on multiculturalism and relativism, and so on. The prospects for peace and social justice depend on challenging these issues with mindfulness, compassion, and nonviolence.

Sulak Sivaraksa

1 Etienne Balibar, *Politics of the Other Scene* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 154-55.
2 Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), p.157.



Socially Engaged Spirituality,
Essays in Honor of Sulak Sivaraksa on His 70th Birthday
edited by David W. Chappell.

It is a remarkable proof of the high regard in which he is held that 90 writers, nearly all distinguished men and women in their own spheres, have combined, under the leadership of editor David Chappell, to put together this collection in celebration of the 70th birthday, of the great Thai social and religious scholar and activist, **Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa.**

Suffice it to say that there is something here for everyone who sees the connection between their personal faith and the need for social action. The book is over 700 pages in length and costs a mere $25 in paperback ($40 in hardback), so get a copy and see for yourself. It is available in the United States from Kumarian Press, 1294, Blue Hills Avenue, Bloomfield, CT 06002.
(except from Ian Mayo-Smith's review)

Understanding Social Structures and Structural Violence

An alternative education that is rich in both ethical and Buddhist studies must also understand the structures of modern society, which are violent and unjust, in order to be really worthy. Otherwise, we will not be able to find a way out into a better future.

Social structures are also social constructions. They refer to organizations, institutions, laws, legal agreements, and viewpoints that have materialized. They are burdens that constrain the people and the community: they influence or determine social action. But they also refer to a psychological category. Each structure will pressure the individual to adopt the canon or abide by the created norms. Each structure sets up the boundaries of the acceptable and the unacceptable, of the pronounceable and the unspeakable, the thinkable and the unthinkable—in short, of the truth. In other words, the power of social structures is felt intensively, exerting influence over thoughts, actions, and even attitudes. Individuals who adopt the canon will enjoy a privileged status; those who do not will be marginalized. As such, social structures have become a reality even more so than human life and blood, than the jungles and trees, and than the water and the air. Social structures regulate or discipline our thoughts and actions in our daily life.

Consider these examples. If we see some female students who are ordered to strip off their dresses and crawl on the road, then there are some soldiers or policemen trampling on their bodies, we may feel outraged. But if we have been indoctrinated by the mass media or even by monks that they are the enemies of the state or traitors, we may not find such action barbaric. And even if we may not be indoctri-nated to hate or be wary of the students and the new generation, we still lack the courage to con-front armed soldiers and police-men. We have been indoctrinated to accept the idea that the au-thority of state officials is legitimate. Or even if we may feel that the state authority is ille-gitimate, we may still lack the courage to confront the state and its agencies for the reason of self-preservation. The state uses the law to force us to pay taxes and to enforce military conscription, telling us to sacrifice our lives for reasons of state and lavishly using our tax money to buy weapons, which ultimately are going to be used against us. We may have more reasons to fear our own state than that of our neighbor. We rarely ask whether or not social constructs such as the state and the nation are legitimate.

Social structures that are called the state or the nation may kill its inhabitants or jail them using various measures. The state may represent itself to others as civilized—always employing legal or juridical means, which constitute another form of social structure. Religion, another social structure, may make people believe that killing traitors or enemies is not sinful or may deceive people to spend an enormous sum of money every month in order to buy their way into heaven. Donating money or valuable personal possessions has been portrayed as the leading way of making merit these days. Many temples have become terribly rich using this ploy while the communities surrounding them remain impoverished. These are just some of the examples of how each of us internalizes and individualizes the existing social structures. Social structures then become a form of ideology, creating subjects or identities that work to legitimize the existing structures. An ideology comes into existence when a set of norms or a discourse is said to capture reality; the fixing of a norm with reality is an ideological maneuver. The concepts of "national security" and "national development" constitute an ideology. Inspired by such ideology, citizens will support or at least tolerate the construction of huge dams, extensive gas pipelines, intricate networks of roads, and so on—even though the real benefits will only accrue to the privileged few. All these will be presented as normal and natural, irreproachable and inevitable, as we move down the road of modernity.

In particular, in this era whereby the global capitalist economy is bounded with modern technology, there is hardly any voice in the social structures inquiring whether or not the free market system is just or really free. Or is it only free to the big fish? There's little concern about labor conditions and workers' rights and about the effects of high capital mobility on labor

and society. And what about animal rights in the livestock industries? No state or religion has really come out to speak for animal rights. Consumers also have very little bargaining power. They are compelled to consume impure food products, for instance; and to visit superstores and mega-malls, the new shrines of consumerism where we all can "amuse ourselves to death."

It is therefore pertinent to dissect and analyze social structures. Otherwise, many people will have to suffer as a result of development, of modernity or modernization, especially in times like these—commonly known as globalization. The natural environment has deteriorated at any alarming pace. Nature has been commodified and economized—transformed into resources. Plants, for instance, are patented and monopolized by major transnational corporations. Even humans have become resources.

Social structures are represented and held in place through the privileged medium of language, including symbols. Once, it was widely accepted that whites were more civilized than the rest of the peoples in the world. The inhabitants of India accepted this representation. Even Mahatma Gandhi once accepted this view. As such, Britain was seen more capable of governing India justly and responsibly than the maharajahs in the past. Studied in every school, English became the hegemonic linguistic currency, supplanting local dialects. Its prestige was unparalleled. Poor people are stupid, and stupid people are also poor, it was argued. Only the rich and upper class were capable of becoming leaders, it was believed. Once India won its independence, Nehru, who saw himself as privileged and who was educated in England, ruled India as the British had done. The Thai leaders during the period of absolutism thought similarly to Nehru. Some even felt that they had mystical powers, deserving to be deified.

Social structures are thus also a worldview, in which we accept without questioning. Our minds become the sites on which their build their foundations, on which their lay their bricks. We follow the social structures tamely. We become their cheerleaders or at least passive spectators. We are afraid to confront the truth or to ask for it. We are afraid to look for hidden truths and reevaluate distorted ones.

We rely on the views of others. We rely on the past. We rely on a multitude of ways of thinking. But we do not know that our thoughts need to be destablized because they are being dominated. As such we are afraid to renounce wealth, traditions, practices, religious and philosophical teachings, and other social constructs, because they help guarantee social continuity and the status quo. We anchor our identities to these structures, believing that they are essences, not constructions. In other words, we seek for clarity and certainty in these structures, forgetting that they can melt away.

Let us re-examine the following cases or sayings, and see how they structure and discipline our minds and feelings, and thereby influencing the way we use our bodies.

1) *For the benefit and prosperity of all citizens*: This may also be proclaimed in royal speeches or in the name of religion. Who would go against the prosperity of all citizens—especially when it has religious sanctions or invokes religious connotations? But if we understand social structures, we will find that the saying wants to (a) oppose or challenge the action of the state or (b) recruit cheerleaders or legitimizing experts of state policies.
2) *Strong and stable social structures are essential for the prosperity of citizens*: In other words, we need to open our arms to the free market, which does not mean a market that is just. We need an efficient government, which does not mean a government that is democratic. We need big or global corporations, which may not care about the environment, the security of their workers, or the welfare of the society. We need religious institutions, even though religious leaders may be corrupt or exploitative. We need extensive network of telecommunications and mass media, even though they may be used to propagate lies and stereotypes, and build up hostility and aggression. Strong and stable social structures thus open the way for the rich to exploit the poor, the strong to trample the weak.
3) *Massive social structures are necessary*: The citi-

zens may be oppressed, but they are necessary for the modernization of the country and the strength of the state—not to mention of transnational capitalism. We must not forget that the greatest threat to most citizens is their own governments, not the governments of designated enemy states. We must also not forget that in this period of neoliberal globalization, the state is increasingly unable to look after the welfare of their citizens —indeed must dismantle welfare policies in the name of the free market.

4) *The wealth and prosperity of our state is all that matters*: Never mind if the wealth of our elite is built on the ruins of other people's lives in distant lands or the dissolution of their cultures and dignity. Never mind if on the road to our prosperity we tear up families and starve babies. They are only the others. But who are we?

* * *

The oldest social structure is probably religion, which attempts to answer how humans should relate to one another and to the natural environment, including how they should position themselves in the universe. Religion guides humans on how to confront suffering, which may emerge naturally or from exploiting one another. The assumption that humans are superior to animals have led us to exploit animals in order to satiate our needs. Instead of living harmoniously with other sentient beings, humans place themselves above animals. But in many respects, humans are worse than animals such as the propensity to devise genocidal weapons.

From the conviction that places humans above animals, soon humans began to build hierarchies among themselves in terms of race, gender, class, and so on. There have to be the masters of mankind. Some men are labeled more rational than others, so they should dominate over others. But men are represented as superior to women. But rich women also take advantage of poor women. And so on. All these are social constructs. And the exploitative social structures hideously ramify as there is always someone who is weaker than oneself.

Many people believe that the possession of personal property or wealth constitutes a natural right. Many wealthy CEOs believe that this right should also be extended to faceless transnational corporations. They should have the right to own land, water, grains, herbs, etc. Why don't we ask whether or not having personal possessions is really legitimate or natural? What if personal possessions come from plunder or looting, legally or otherwise? This is because we have indoctrinated by social structures. Moreover, we have been indoctrinated to continuously seek for personal possessions: owning and self-aggrandizement have become virtues. We have identified with the values of the rich and the privileged: in many cases they are also our oppressors. We have identified with the aggressor and become their counter-players, abiding by their rules of the game. We become the building blocks of the social structures.

That having personal possessions is culturally and politically legitimate—while avoiding the ethical dimension—is the main theme of the present global economy. The West started it, and we Asians tamely follow their lead. A good example can be found in India. The present Indian government has declared that every droplet of rain in Rajasthan state belongs to the government, which in turn will provide concessions to private companies to buy and sell the water. How can nature belong to anyone or entity? In Siam the spirit of generosity espoused by Buddhism used to counterbalance personal possessiveness. It had long been supplanted by the spirit of capitalism. Gone too was the spirit of living harmoniously with nature and other sentient beings. It gave way to greed, arrogance, and competitiveness.

* * *

Note well that the social structure of personal possessions complements the centralization of political and social power that uses religion to hold the people under a spell. It can be stated that in the beginning the hierarchy created by religion such as the caste system went hand in hand with the uneven distribution of wealth and personal possessions. The more one owned, the higher one was on the pecking order. In India prior to Buddhism, the two upper most castes fused religion and governance to control the lower castes. Such social structures were directed at instilling fear in the people, encouraging them to beseech the protection or tutelage of powerful figures in society and to devote their lives to the upper castes.

Religions or cults that represent themselves as the only true way to salvation enslave and dis-empower their followers. The followers are enfeebled and lack agency. The threat of being branded 'heretics' or 'infidels' keep them in line. In Medieval Europe for instance heretics were often burnt at stake or brutally tortured. In other words, such religions keep their followers in constant fear: the fear of death, of hell, of diseases (which are represented as reflecting personal inanity), and so on. Religions also serve as a legal court, brandishing punishments in the present and after life. They are also meritocratic, giving rewards to performers of good deeds.

These constitute social structures that make people enamored with power. The education system is responsible for making people subservient to power intellectually, to accept the status quo and its injustices. Marxism, while opposing the capitalist system, forced its followers to raise the communist party to the altar. The military or defense department raises the specter of the enemy to legitimize the need for ever-increasing military budgets. The Thai soldiers, for instance, have never won against any external enemy. Destroying or controlling the enemies within (read: citizens) has been their main preoccupation. The government induces the people to feel insecure personally or collectively and encourages them to believe that its policies serve as the only anchoring in turbulent waters. The state is the only voice of reason. Patriotism means hyper-patriotism. Thus a traitor is anyone who opposes the state policies, and she or he must be exterminated or contained. The global mass media—comprised of extensive network of major conglomerates—are experts in legitimizing the actions of the powers that be, especially of transnational capitalism, a fact that has been heavily documented by many scholars. And opponents of the powers that be are represented as modern day infidels. One philosopher observes, "global communication networks provide every individual with a distorted image or a stereotype of all the others, either as 'kin' or as 'aliens', thus raising gigantic obstacles to any dialogue. 'Identities' are less isolated *and* more incompatible, less univocal *and* more antagonistic." Moreover, they make us believe that however inadequate the democracy we have is the best of all worlds, and so there is no need for change. Thinking about "democracy plus" beyond the boundary of the expressible.

Modern medical sciences make people fear illness and oldness—not to mention of ugliness, which can always be corrected by plastic surgery. There are medicines promising the bliss of longevity and sexual potency. The people tend to forget how compartmentalized modern medical sciences are; how they are wanting in spiritual dimension; and how they are commercialized and dictated by transnational capitalism. Modern sciences often play the God-trick, depicting themselves as providing the view from nowhere and un-related to the truths of social relationships. They denigrate local knowledge systems: there could only be one way of knowing—one universal science. Other knowledge systems merely provide local knowledge.

All these structures are some of the defining features of our age: the Age of Extreme Modernism. It is a time of terror. Any emancipatory community has to unlearn or deindividualize these social constructs and build new knowledges or resurrect subjugated ones. We need new resistance or project identities or subject positions, a feat which may begin not from nowhere but anywhere because power is everywhere, extensively and intensively. We must understand our complicity in buttressing and perpetuating social constructions. An emancipatory community must neatly negotiate between universalism and particularism, making sure that both can co-habit for justice. Difference, for instance, must not be cited as a pretext for torture, yet sameness must not destroy diversity or singularities. It has to tackle the issue of inclusion and democracy.

The mainstream mass media and education system often show or imply that there is only one form of the good life and only one possible way to achieve it. The good life can only be achieved under the present form of neoliberal democracy, no matter how alienating it is, no matter how many times it has broken its promises. Thinking about an alternative political paradigm is depicted as too idealistic or naively impractical. And the good life can only be achieved under the 'free market' system, which is the key to development and modernity. The international media corporations—themselves transnational corporations or part of major conglomerates—are often at the forefront of trumpeting the virtues of the 'free market' system. The mainstream education system is no

better. The objective of present day education has become utterly parochial or self-serving: obtaining a degree in order to find a well-paid job. Present day education is dis-empowering, offering no tools to dismantle the violent social structures and rarely voicing the view from below—from the peripheries or the margins. Education has thus become "a system of imposed ignorance" reinforcing the internalized power structures. Put another way, mainstream education is a form of autoimmunity, whereby the self in a suicidal manner immunizes itself against its own immunity.

These social constructs are highly centralized and increasingly centralizing, hooking up the centers in each society with the centers elsewhere in intricate networks. The centers in the great powers and the centers in the developing states are linked with the centers in the transnational corporations and international monetary and financial institutions. These centers want to destroy the notion of self-reliance and simplicity. Disrupting the flows emanating from or between these centers is represented as uncivilized or barbaric—even terroristic.

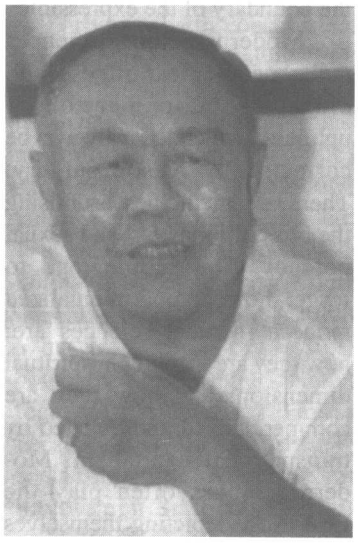
Any alternative community must challenge the pervasive spirit of extreme modernism and its discourses and knowledge systems. It must re-conceptualize the notion of private property and confront the violent social structures. Nature must not be portrayed as merely resources or something to be owned or exploited for profits. Rather it must be seen as something on which we all must depend and live with harmoniously. It must not exploit or marginalize the 'others' of the society in the name of justice or the collective good. It must foster compassion and mind-heart equilibrium. It must practice the three-fold training and be socially engaged.

Sulak Sivaraksa

Learning the Lessons of Life

W.H. Auden once wrote about how any autobiography is, at best, a partial recapitulation of a person's life. "The truth is that our friends—and our enemies—always know us better than we know ourselves," wrote the famous poet.

This quote, which appears in the preface to Sulak Sivaraksa's autobiography, *Loyalty Demands Dissent*, speaks volumes about the man's uncanny, intriguing character. Who else will have privileged access to probe into the deepest parts of your heart other than yourself? At the same time, is it not the case that any views of oneself will always be clouded by intangible, yet pervasive, mist of prejudices? Where do the boundaries of what's supposed to be knowledge end and those of truths begin?



Such diverse questions constitute an underlying theme of a new series of workshops initiated by Sulak, apthy titled "Humans and Their Learning". The once-a-month series aims to explore the lives of key players (some of them are not, however, celebrities) in the Thai social scene. The recent inaugural session, naturally, focused on Sulak but the organisers plan to invite other social critics, the so-called folk wise men and women (*prat chao-ban*), poets, artists, monks and journalists to come and share their insights with the general public.

Dr Prawase Wasi, a well-respected public figure, is scheduled to give a full day's talk, in question-and-answer style, today starting from 8.30 am at Ruen Roi Chanum in Khlong Sarn, Bangkok.

The liveral format—an audience member can raise any question with the speaker—is a refreshing alternative to the authoritarian, rote learning style of mainstream schooling nowadays. The candid answers given by Sulak during the first session, some of them not publishable, provided rich, and intriguing,

materials that shed some light on the unfolding, of Thailand over the past seven decades.

Surprisingly, despite being so outspoken, Sulak showed his humility. At the workshop, he talked about how he foresaw his limited impact and that he was not in any way a genius, let alone an avant-garde thinker.

"I can only break away from the conventions, but only at a superficial level. We must know ourselves, and not be obsessed by our own image.

"I sometimes see my role not unlike that of my old mentor, Mr [Frank Richard] Newte. What I have written may be of some value for certain periods of time, but sooner or later people will forget. To think that our works will bask in immortality, that would be a self-deception."

Few would deny, though, that of all the Thai contemporaries, Sulak is *the* guru on behind-the-scene lives of the two national pillars: royalty and monks.

Such knowledge, and his dauntless ways of sharing it with others, has led to several unpleasant experiences, including being charged twice on a *lese-majeste* (crime undermining the state) clause. The fact that he has not been "disposed of" has also earned him a rather unique reputation. Indeed, an American anthropologist once dubbed Sulak "a Thai institution, in a class by himself".

"A lecturer at NIDA once told me that he had long sought to meet me. He said he had asked Acharn Puey [Ungphakorn] how I managed to survive for this long, and Acharn Puey replied that as soon as I saw some foreboding signs, I would slip away in time [laughs].

"I'm not any braver than others, and this is not an effort to be humble. It is just that I happen to challenge the establishment, and they have not been able to get rid of me. Jit Phumisak, for example, was much braver, and more profound a thinker than me, But he was purged. In that sense, I've scored more than Jit."

On the other hand, Sulak has always been an advocate of non-violence. Again, it has distanced him from many other critics of the state, especially during the turbulent 1970s. The powers that be have not been on cordial terms with him, and neither are the leftists. Were there to be any school of thought he could be said to subscribe to, it would be buddhism, one "with a small b", that is open to other faiths and beliefs.

But it is this indigenous path of learning that Sulak laments has been discarded, looked down upon, as Thailand rushes to embrace modernity. Sulak once proposed that every newborn baby should be given a doctoral degree—so that one can really start the process of genuine education freed from self-interest competition. On another occasion, he said that any knowledge the does not serve at least "seven generations of humankind" should simply be abandoned.

"Look at the extractions of gas in the Thai-Burmese and Thai-Malaysian joint ventures. The authority only thinks about the profits of now. When U Nu was a prime minister of Burma, he was approched by someone seeking a concession to extract a mineral. He asked the person how many years the substance has been underground. A few million years, he was told, and U Nu simply replied that we should then let it stay there for a few thousands of years more, so that our great-grandchildren can become rich too."

Such ample troves of stories have seen Sulak endeared by many admirers. His detractors, meanwhile, have only found more causes to fret about, although some simply choose to play deaf. But were Sulak only to excel in the art of rhetoric, he would be no better than a maverick politician who exploits the unsophisticated trust of the grassroots people.

Compared to some social critics and activists whose energy has over time ebbed away or been directed elsewhere, Sulak has maintained his relentless campaigns to raise social awareness about social inequality and the needs for peaceful resolutions. The plights of the Pak Moon villagers, the protests against the Yadana gas pipeling project, the ongoing controversy over the Thai-Malaysian gas pipeline scheme—Sulak has been lending a critical support to the underprivieged on these various causes, but in a low-profile, unassuming way.

"Those poor people have suffered a lot, more than I do. I still have three meals a day to eat. During the rainy retreat, I can choose to eat either one or two meals. But the majority of people don't have that right at all. They cannot even enjoy a single meal a day."

All these years, what does Sulak consider as his greatest achievement? The answer turns out to be simple, but not shallow.

"One thing that I'm proud of is to have *kalayanamitra* [virtuous friends] in many places. Lord Buddha said true friends are the most significant [beside one's mind]. They are the only ones who dare to caution us to stray away from the evil path that is dominating the world nowadays.

Who form networks, then we can move, change, society.

"The more we study human life, the less we will become attached to it—those answers [to the world's problems] may not necessarily lie in humans. All those theories about heroes, the great men and women, I think they're just pure crap.

"But when we learn about human greed, lust, anger, their intrigues, shortcomings, and then see the interrelatedness with other beings on earth, then we will develop compassion, love, and understanding. Then we will see there is no boundary. There are no Chinese, no Rusians, no racial distinctions, none whatsoever."

The "Humans and Their Learning" Workshop series is scheduled to run once a month throughout this year at Ruen Roi Chanum and is open to the general public. For more details about the programme, call Arnat Saen-tho on 02-438-9332, 02-860-2194, or email roichanum @yahoo.com.

Buddhist Extols Virtues of 'Bad'

Sulak Sivaraksa, a prominent Thai intellectual and social critic, may be a Buddhist, but he calls himself a "naughty" one.

"A lot of Buddhists, when they become Buddhist, become a nice person," said the scholar and activist who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 and 1994 and won the Right Livelihood Award (also known as the Alternative Nobel) in 1995.

"For me, that's not enough. ... Buddhists should not only meditate, not only be goody-goody; they should be a little bit naughty, like me. The essential teaching of Buddha is we must work not only for personal transformation, but for social transformation."

That means standing up for what you believe in, even if it gets you in trouble, as Sivaraksa did in 1977. He was arrested in absentia while in the United States during a bloody coup in Thailand. He couldn't return home, and his wife was lucky she wasn't arrested. Their home and bookshop were ransacked.

Sivaraksa is here at the behest of his "bast friend," former Buddhist Bishop Yoshi Fujitani, for whom the endowed series of lectures is named ("He had been kind to me in my second exile, in 1991," Sivaraksa said) and Chaminade University's religion professor Poranee Natadecha-Sponsel ("who was my student a hundred years ago").

He has been exiled for criticizing the military junta for interfering in drafting a new constitution; charged with defaming the royal family—when he was, he said, criticizing the leader of a coup, Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon; and he's currently on bail for demonstrating against a much-criticized gas pipeling from Myanmar into his country, after being arrested four years ago.

"We must confront suffering and overcome suffering, "the activist said. "I work with the poor, not just in my country, but in Burma (Myanmar), Laos, Sri Lanka, India. Buddhists in India are untouchables, the poorest of the poor."

Mary kaye Ritz



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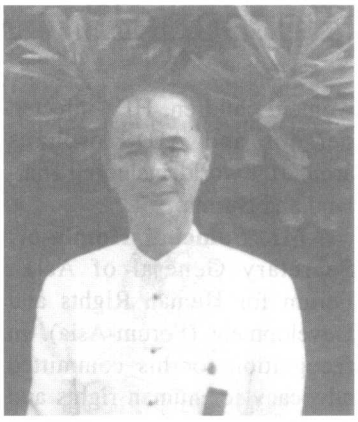
Sirichai Narumit-Rekagarn

The passing away of Mr. Sirichai Narumit-Rekagarn on 24 March 2004 is another great loss for contem-porary Thai society. Sirichai may not be well known publicly. He had always shunned personal fame as well as self-aggrandize-ment. The more he kept to him-self—to simplicity and humility —the more the rich and the powerful—who often lack mora-lity or taste—overlooked his goodness and capability. Few among the ruling elites such as M.R. Kukrit Pramoj had the eye to witness his reputable qualities.

Born on 21 March 1927 in Bangkok, Sirichai grew up in a family of artists. His father, Luang Narumit taught art courses at the Royal Military Academy and his mother, Anong, ran an important art venture in the Ratchabopit temple area. Many leading Thai artists during and after WWII belonged to this artistic circle. Moreover, his grandfather was also an artist, whose mural paintings of *Rama-yana* can still be seen at Wat Phra Keow in the Grand Palace.

Sirichai, himself, was an architect full of original ideas and innovations. He obtained his bachelor degree from Chula-longkorn University, and com-pleted his master's degree at Cornell University. He taught at Silpakorn University and later at Chiang Mai University. In Thai society, it is difficult to find three generations of artists.

Sirichai was filled with goodness: he devoted his life to the collective good, found the time and the heart to help the underprivileged with compas-sion, and stood out in preserving



the arts and nature. For instance, he was continuously involved in improving the quality of life in the slum area of Klong Toey district, Bangkok. His actions spoke louder than words, but he always shunned the limelight. Despite his credentials and skills, Sirichai often took the backseat in major artistic pro-jects.

The inner beauty of Sirichai was an important force enabling him to lead life beautifully, especially in his relations with others. He was ever supportive, not only intellectually but also emotionally. His friends and students can easily attest to this fact. Sirichai was a quiet and soft-sopoken person. But his friends often point out that he was filled with humor whenever he spoke. This made it easy and pleasant to work with him.

Sirichai played a leading role in the Architects' Society of Siam, the Siam Society, and the Society for the Conservation of National Trasures and the Environment. He helped pre-serve leading sites in the Ratta-nakosin island area and perso-nally led many educational walk-ing tours in that area, a place in which he had lived as a child. He also dedicated his life to improv-ing the quality of life in Bangkok; in particular, he wanted Bang-kok to be fringed with lush greenery, not high-rise buildings —but in vain.

Sirichai was bored of Thai society and went to work with the BBC in London for many years. He helped produce many good and educational radio pro-grams. But he could not help missing his country and so he returned to Bangkok. But the City of Angels was over-crowded, bogged down by traffic congestion, and dominated by skyscrapers. He encouraged its inhabitants to resettle in other provinces. To be a living exam-ple, he along with his family resettled in Chiang Mai. He expanded his circle of virtuous companions there and helped founded the Nakorn Ping Pre-servation Group. It collected and re-used discarded trashes—long before the word "recycle" became fashionable. And work-ing with local groups and monks, he helped lobby against the con-struction of an electric tramway at Doi Suthep (which would destroy the scenery and pose environmental repercussions)

A simple and humble man, Sirichai had a Japanese wife and one daughter. Together they formed a loving family full of giving.

Though forgotten or over-looked by many, his contribu-tions and goodness will live on —at the very least in the hearts of those whose lives have been touched by him.

Sulak Sivaraksa

The Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation's Outstanding Personality Award 2004

Professor Jean Louis Armand, President of The Asia Institute of Technology (AIT), in recognition of his dedication to promote opportunities in higher education for the benefit of disadvantaged societies in the region and to restore the link between higher education and social relevance.

Countess Albina du Boisrouvray, founder of Francois Xavier Bagnoud Foundation and Association Francois Xavier Bagnoud. In recognition for her dedication to the causes of women, children, HIV infected persons and AIDS orphans around the world, including Thailand and Burma.

Mr. Somchai Homla-or, Secretary General of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia). In recognition for his committed advocacy for human rights and dignity as well as humanization of unjust national and international law.

Mr. Taweep Woradilok. He is recognized for his dedication to people and society. As a journalist, lawyer, writer, poet, song composer and translator, all his work is aimed to support common folks, to speak for the poor despite suppression authority.



The Komol Keemthong Foundation's Outstanding Personality Award 2004

The Committee for Campaign on Reform of Mass Media For its struggle for freedom of expression and democracy. It mobilizes social force to demand that mass communication via radio and television be free from dominance of authoritarianism and capitalism but respond to righteousness and social responsibility

Network of 30 Anti-corruption NGOs For its campaign to collect 50,000 names to demand investigation of the minister and high ranking staff of Ministry of Public Health who were involved in the 1998 scandal of corruption in procurement of medicine and medical supply. This is the experimental exercise of civil rights according to the new Thai constitution.

The Rural Doctors' Club Although the members are working in the government sector, it cooperates closely with the people sector and mass media in courageously disclosing the 1998 scandal of procurement corruption by the administration of the Ministry of Public Health. It tries to coordinate and work out within the government sector to address the case.

The Rural Pharmacists' Club It is recognized for its laborious research and data collecting on the 1998 scandal of the procurement corruption as well as its continuous insistence in demanding investigation of the case. The club also takes responsibility in the dissemination of information on the issue to the general public.

National Association of Community Radio For its non-violent effort against practices of both government and business sectors that violate people's rights to access to information critical to the protection of people's livelihood. Its work is based on constitutional mandate that broadcasting frequency is a public good to be used for the benefit of the people. It started since 2001 in Kanchanaburi and Singburi provinces before spreading to 145 stations nationwide.

The Network of Slums in

Four Regions The network of slum people is recognized for its work to protect the housing rights of the urban poor who suffer from violent slum clearance. It also supports the search for the resolution of problems such as unhealthy environment. And to the most fundamental one, habitation insecurity, the network has put much effort in drafting a people's bill on the habitation rights of the urban poor.

The two awards were given at **The 2004 Komol Keemthong Foundation's Public Lecture** on 28 March 2004 at Silapakorn University in Bangkok. In this event to commemorate Komol Keemthong, **Prasart Meetaem**, a lecturer at Prince of Songkhla University delivered the speech on "Knowledge Management for the Survival of Mankind: From Songkhla to New York"

มูลนิธิโกมลคีมทอง

For Angkarn Kalayanapong, A renowned Artist of Contemporary Siam

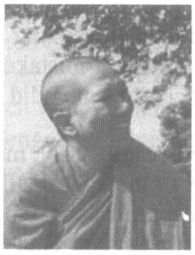
Samana Bhodiraksa of Santi Asoke, Sulak Sivaraksa and Naowarat Pongpaiboon will be at an event to honor **Angkarn Kalayanapong**, a renowned artist of contemporary Siam in both poetry and painting (and also our beloved old friend) at Santi Asoke on 2nd May 2004. The event features seminar and exhibition on poetry and art.

Fifteen women from differnt countries and cultural backgrounds are being honoured with an Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award at the United Nations.

They are:

Bhikkuni Dhammananda, Thailand
Mae Chee Pratin Kwan-orn, Thailand
Dr Carola Andujo Rolon, Mexico
Anchalee Thaiyanond, Thailand
Lama Karma Pema Tsultrim, India
Bhikkhuni Shih Liao Yi, Taiwan
Bhikkhuni Bhagya Jayavanii, Malaysia
Erica Dias, Sri Lanka
Ranjani De Silva, Sri Lanka
Pimjai Intamoon, Thailand
Venetia Walkey, England
Karma Lekshe Tsomo, USA
Bhikkhuni Dhammanandi, Vietnam
Bhikkhuni Shih Shiou I, Taiwan
Upasika Bongkut Sitthipol, Thailand

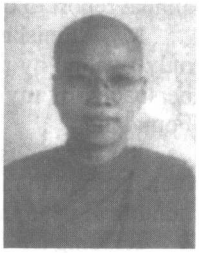
2004 Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award



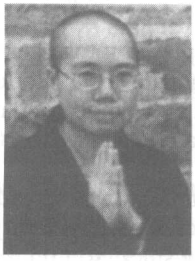
Bhikkuni Dhammananda



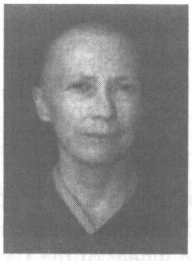
Lama Karma Pema Tsultrim



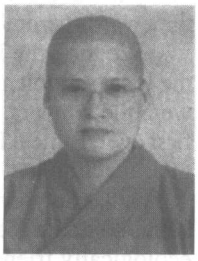
Bhikkhuni Dhammanandi



Bhikkhuni Shih Liao Yi



Karma Lekshe Tsomo



Bhikkhuni Shih Shiou I



Ranjani De Silva



Upasika Bongkut Sitthipol



Venetia Walkey

My dear Sulak,

When I was informed, through the usual channels, that some friends of mine would be gathering in Bangkok in late January, one of the first thoughts that came was to ask them to convey my greetings to you. And an image formed in my inner eyes of your gentle smiling and secure visage as you acknowledge the salution.

You may have heard that there is a new complication in my spinal condition. At least for now, after months of appeal, the Malaysian Government is allowing me to undergo physiotherapy at the KL Hospital, no doubt to offset the embarassment caused by the exposure of the attempt to deceive the Inter-paliamentary Union and UNESCO. I enjoy the therapy sessions, only because it gives me the opportunity to break the monotony and breathe the air ouside prison.

If you have the chance, please send me a note with your comments on the Asian Society's recommendations vis-á-vis the Myanmar situation

Warmest personal regards,

Anwar Ibrahim

Dear Ajahn Sulak

This is to wish you a very happy Birthday on March 27th. I do not know whether you will be celebrating it in the US, Timbuctoo or Soi Santipap but I hope this will catch up with you on your 71st anniversary.

My gift this year a handful of poems "Pathways to Peace" has been included on the website of their International Secretariat for We The People's Initiative and our activities have again been recorded in their annual report to the UN.

My astonishment at being chosen for an award for Outstanding Women in Buddhism for 2004, was only rivalled by my conviction that they must have made a mistake! After much heart searching I was persuaded by my peers and teachers that I must accept it, but I did so only on their behalf and for our Foundation.

Far from outstanding, I was outsitting on my trusty golf stool, much to the amusement of the press. I managed not to fall flat on my face either physically or metaphorically during the ceremony and felt very humble to be in the company of women who had accomplished so much.

Reading Dr Tavivat's succint appraisal of "Buddhism and Thai Socio Culture" in the current edition of the WFB Journal, I was happy to find my position is within the category of "Buddhism as the Transformer of Society "...Ven Bhikksuni Dhammananda and Ajahn Sulak in the forefront. I have been very lucky to have such wonderful Kalayanimittra. I always remember your telling me "You must be brave" the awards ceremony was another such occasion.

We took the Dhamma Bicycle with us and displayed it together with photographs of the race which the local schoolchildren took part in on the International Day of World Peace last September. The slowest were the winners. I also launched an appeal to hold a "Tour de Thailand" on Dhamma Bikes, perhaps the first ever, Ethical Bicycle Race. I am collecting signatures and we will target the Bicycle clubs and see what their reaction is.

What do you think of this idea? It is such a simple way of spreading the Dhamma which Nai Taksin wants to do, together with the development of the civil society. Everyone is sports crazy and the bicycle ecologically friendly. The wheel of the Law has got stuck, so I think The Buddha would approve of this vehicle to help it start turning again.

I am reading Krishna Murti again, he is a great inspiration. It is sad that so few people seem to know his work and like Ghandi, EF Schumacker, and artist activists like Joseph Beuys they are largely unknown today yet their work becomes ever more relevant. I'm glad the Bkk Post has published a few articles about Krishna Murti's teaching, recently. I try to draw people's attention to these seers whenever I have an opportunity.

Thankyou for acception our invitation to join our committee as a special advisor. Thankyou for inspiring me in so many ways. I continue to try and bring the aesthetic back to society, learning by doing and having fun in the Dhamma.

I shall be celebrationg my 72nd Birthday on May 10th, It would be wonderful it you could join us.? Meanwhile, enjoy your 71st.

With all good wishes in the Dhamma

Venetia Walkey

Dear Ajarn Sulak

Hope, with the grace of Lord Buddha you have reached safely back from India and continuing your noble mission of voicing people's rights.

I am writing this to inform and share my personal experiences with you: what I have learned here in Thailand and what I would like to be in the future. You have been one of my ideal persons in my life. You have been very kind to me and because of you I became able to stay here in Thailand and gained international exposure in a global working environment. I have been always motivated, encouraged and inspired with your vision for the betterment of the people, who are suffering from the illusions of the globalization. I would like to express my gratitude for your kindness and gracefulness. Your thoughtfulness will always remain in the core of my heart and soul.

Being in Thailand, I became able to gain good work experience with international working culture. Simultaneously I have learned a lot in terms of developing and creating organizations with visions of capacity building in foreseeing the sustainability of one's own culture and language in balancing with the current dynamic environments. However, I felt that I need to still focus in developing my own specialization. This specialization was transfused in me when you recommended me to participate in INEB conference in Seoul last year. During the conference especially in the discussion group, I felt awakening of my mind from the delusion of knowledge wisdom. I was always thinking how to plant the practical Buddhist concept in the modern corporate world in day-to-day operation level and also in strategic level. By attending this conference and the workshop on "Buddhist prospective of development" in December 2003 has awakened a clear approach and guidance in developing new model for the corporate world. Currently I am studying on various basic concepts of Buddhist Philosophy. I hope and wish that I could be like you to be a helpful, supportive, motivator, inspirer and visionary personality for the future generation—not only for Tibetan people but also for all suffered people of the world.

Concerning the translating of your book in Tibetan Language, I am still struggling. It's been almost sixteen years I have not been in touch with my language in the form of very deep writing or translating. However, I am taking this as a challenge and improve my skill in my own mother tongue. I would like to share that I have been learning Chinese, French and Thai languages for the last eight months. I feel that language is the entry door in understanding other cultures even though we speak international languages. I felt learning Chinese language is very critical especially for me. I have to know the Chinese Culture deeply so that I can have more access and understanding of the Chinese Government towards Tibet and our people.

Currently, I am trying to find out funds for one of the Rinpoches in Tibet to build a school in his area: Eastern Tibet. I hope and wish I can explore the opportunities for those children who really need of modern education while keeping balance of our own unique culture. I have been in touch with some of our Thai friends, who really can support them and build school in Tibet. I have mentioned about this to Ven. Pomnyun also, when he asked me "what network you are interested from the INEB conference" during my last day at Jungto Society. He was a little bit worried about the transparency of the fund. I assured him that there will be clear transparency of the fund, provided Jungto society is willing to support. The location of the school would be eastern Tibet where Chinese government has more liberal policy. However, I couldn't follow it up with Ven. Pomnyun yet as I am waiting for the detailed information from our Rinpoche. Once I get the details I will follow up with Ven Pomnyun and send my proposal.

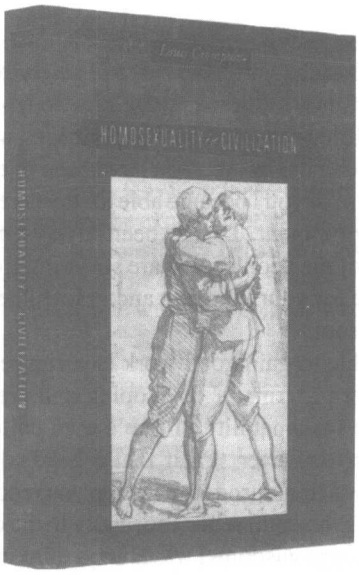
Regarding my health, I am absolutely fine and getting better in shape. About the tuberculosis, which has attacked me four times within ten years, with the grace of Lord Buddha has already gone. I would like to thank Doctor Pandi (Thammasat Hospital Rangsit), who helped me in getting free treatment for the problem. This was a last stage of TB: drug resistant, and without him I would not be alive today. And this goes to you and Prof. Armand's kind generosities that made me able to stay in Thailand. Being a Tibetan living in exile it would be a great difficulty specially in getting support from the other nationalities in South East Asia because of pressure from Communists. I think that I am very lucky to meet a great person like you two and subsequently met many kind hearted people through both of you.

Please accept my sincere gratitude for your generosity and support towards me and our people.

Best warm regards
Tenzin Rabgyal

Homosexuality & Civilization

By Louis Crompton
Cambridge, Mass, and London, England : The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003



The standard conviction that homosexuality is an aberration and that heterosexuality is the norm is a social construction, as opposed to a reflection of the unchanging state or essence of nature. A comparative and historical approach to homosexuality helps deconstruct the prevailing sexual orthodoxy.

Put differently, the dimorphic gender division is accompanied by a polymorphism of (sexual) desire, which in human history has not always been considered a social, political or personal problem.

Louis Crompton has written a *tour de force*, providing a stimulating, finely detailed yet fast-paced overview of gay history across the centuries and through cultures and civilisations. The focus is still on Europe and on male lovers, though Crompton includes two interesting chapters on China and Japan and one on lesbianism in 18th century Europe plus scattered portraits of sapphic lovers.

The philosopher Michel Foucault argued that homosexuals became a species only after 1800 when it emerged under a psychiatric classificatory system. Before the 19th century, Foucault insisted, there were numerous types of sexual acts and sexualised parts of the body but not sexuality; that is, an identity distinguishing who we are. Crompton, however, contends that the category of the sodomites emerged well before the 19th century.

Crompton naturally begins with classical Greece, which was well known for its bisexuality to say the least—though it has often been assumed that the love of males was a fashion confined to a small intellectual elite during the age of Plato. In fact it was pervasive throughout all levels of Greek society and held a honoured place in Greek culture for more than a thousand years, that is, from before 600 BCE to about 400 CE.

Crompton points to the celebration of same sex love in Greek mythology whereby deities ranging from Zeus to Hercules engaged in such practice; in the plays of Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides and Sophocles, among others; in the passion for athletics and the cult of male nudity; in the philosophical works and dialogues of Socrates, Plato, and Xenophon, for instance; in Homer's *Illiad*; in the passionate poems, which celebrate lesbianism, of the highly exteemed Sappho; in the lives of important political figures and rulers like Solon, Epaminondas and Alexander the Great; and so on.

In classical Greece, Crompton concludes, "for a man not to have acquired a young male lover or *eromenos* to which he would serve as mentor or protector seems to have bespoken a lack of character or a deficiency in sensibility."

However, in the sixth century before Christ, as Greece was celebrating same-sex love, "in nearby Palestine a law was incorporated into the Hebrew scriptures which was ultimately to have far greater influence and, indeed, to affect the fate of homosexuals in half the world down to our own days." Especially pertinent to the fate of homosexuals was the book of Leviticus, which condemns homosexuality in Chapters 18 and 20 and indicates a specific penalty for same-sex practices —death—which in practice often meant burning.

Judaism became the parent of Christianity, and as the Roman Empire became Christian in the fourth century the Old Testament death penalty for homosexuals was incorporated into its law. Subsequently, this served as a legal precedent for dealing with homosexuality and was cited by the criminal codes of numerous European states.

Against the backdrop of the growing prejudices against homosexuality fanned by Judaism and the early Christianity, the tragedy of the biblical city of Sodom earned a new twist. Traditionally Sodom was presented as a city of immense wealth, which it does not want to share. In the Gospels, Jesus refers to Sodom in this context. (Jesus is rather reticent on homosexuality in the Gospels. Crompton insists that it is likely that Jesus shared the prejudices of his society, but he did not want to offend his followers.

Others such as Denis Diderot and Jeremy Bentham suspected that Jesus might have been attracted to men, especially to John.)

Ultimately, Sodom transformed into a homosexual city, hence its destruction by God. This was the line taken by, inter alia, St. Augustine in his book *The City of God*. Crompton notes, "The roots of Levitical ferocity toward male lovers remin obscure, though their likeliest origin appears to have been rivalries with near Eastern cults that honoured transvestite shamans"

Moreover, according to Crompton "it was Saint Paul who did most to shape the theology and sexual ethics of Christianity. Paul approached the subject with homophobic vehemence, seeing it as an abominable sin rather than in the spirit of his new faith's founder"

The pre-Christian Roman Empire acknowledged the prevalence of homosexual relations. On the whole, however, such relations were not seen as platonic but were perceived primarily as a form of dominance, as an expression of imperial masculinity. Thus to be a beloved protege of a respected ruler was not an honourable thing as in Greece.

Nevertheless, many important Roman rulers ranging from Caesar to Hadrian had male lovers. With the rising power of Christianity, however, persecution against homosexuality obtained legal sanctions culminating in the Code of Justinian in 534. The code, which prescribed the death penalty for illicit sex with males, Crompton observes, "remained a force until the Napoleonic age and was of prime importance in determining the status of Europe's homosexuals throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the eighteenth century"

During the Middle Ages, legal sanctions against homosexuality continued to draw their justifications from Christian teachings. For many the Renaissance was a period of intellectual and aesthetic freedom, but ironically the hunting of homosexuals increased in its severity. Crompton says "the Renaissance did not see a lessening of these punitive actions; rather, the age fostered new efforts at suppression unprecedented in their scope and virelence even in those Italian cities where it was born. Moreover, the Renaissance was soon overtaken by the Reformation."

In the end, more men and women fell victim to homophobia in the three centuries from 1400 to 1700 than in the Middle Ages, as Protestants and Catholics competed in enforcing harsh laws.

The oppression ultimately climaxed in the Spanish Inquistion, which interestingly was largely unconcerned with lesbianism. The actual rate of executions in Calvin's Geneva was also high, especially when considering the fact that Geneva was a small-sized city then.

In France, repression was severe though it also had a number of homosexual monarchs such as Henry III and Louis XIII. Nevertheless, many Renaissance intellectual and artistic giants who celebrated same-sex love in their personal lives craftily revived homoeroticism employing Christian themes. Donatello's *David*, for instance, was the first free-standing nude in a thousand years. We can also witness homoerotic themes in the works of Michaelangelo, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci and Caravaggio.

In England, which had thus far been silent on homosexuality, same sex attraction was celebrated in the poems of Christopher Marlowe and the sonnets of Shakespeare, among others. In fact King James I was a homosexual, and so was Francis Bacon, the greatest British philosopher in this period.

Imperial China and pre-Meiji Japan provide a striking contrast to the situation in Europe. On China, Crompton observes, "China looked upon the phenomenon of same-sex attraction calmly, as an inescapable fact of human existence." China, indeed, provides us with the longest documented period of tolerance in human history, 2,000 years extending from 500 BCE to the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644. And, though homosexuality was officially frowned upon on the earlier Manchus, this disapproval seems to have been largely a formal gesture. In pre-Meiji Japan (800-1868), Crompton contends, *nanshoku*, or the love of males, "became and honoured way of life among the country's religious and military leaders so that it's a acceptance paralleled, and in some respects even surpassed, ancient Athens".

Soon the middle class in Japan also came to have a passion for *nanshoku*, as evidenced by the high number of wards in various cities with teahouses providing boys in residence or on call.

During the Age of Reason patterns of persecution ebbed in France before the revolution but intensified in England and the Netherlands, which had the most

liberal political traditions in 1700. In England the growing size of the homosexual subculture could no longer be overlooked, and the middle class organised to lynch homosexual suspects. Crompton largely points to religious hysteria as the cause of the widespread persecution in the Netherlands.

Crompton ends his history in the efforts to reform sodomy laws during the Enlightenment. They were championed by leading figures such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot and Frederick the Great (himself a homosexual). But the results were mixed.

In revolutionary France, Crompton asserts, "anti-clerical felling was strong enough to sweep sway sodomy laws, and those Catholic lands on the Continent that came under the anti-feudal and anti-ecclesiastical influence of the Napoleonic Code shared this liberalisation. Police surveillance continued, with litte check to arbitrary enforcement. In Protestant countries, where tyranny of the church had been less severe, there was no general reaction against statutes that were religious in origin".

Louis Crompton's *Homosexuality & Civilization* fonfirms the feminist assertion that the personal is political. It seems fit to ask a Foucauldian question: Must we de-individualise ourselves, including our sexualities, for emancipation?

S.J.
Bangkok Post,
February 21, 2004

Becoming the Buddha

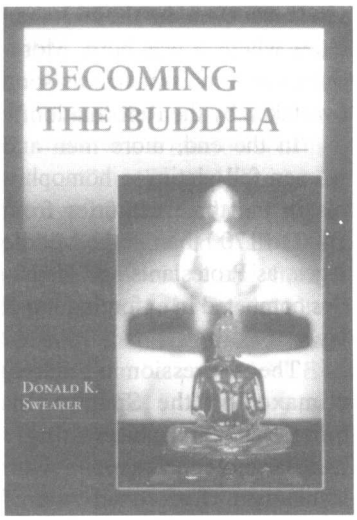
Donald K. Swearer
Princeton University Press,
New Jersey, USA, 2004

I read Kamala Tiyavanich's *Forest Recollections: Wandering Monks in Twentieth Century Thailand* since 1997. I am satisfied that she has put an outstanding effort in collecting data.

Then she launched another book *The Buddha in the Jungle* in 2003. The title is catching. It tells stories on Thai monks in olden days, though academically compiled. It is quite a good reading yet not as good as the first one.

Recently I have a chance to read another book with a word "Buddha" in the title. It's *Becoming the Buddha* with the sub-title *The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand*. It tells interestingly about the making of Buddha images, consecration and the "opening of the eyes" ritual.

Don Swearer has prolifically written books and articles on Buddhist traditions in Siam and Southeast Asia. All are in excellent quality. His work on



the late Buddhadasa and the Ven. P.A. Payutto are remarkable. It shows his understanding on the leading figures of contemporary Buddhists in society and wisdom together with an understanding of the history of Buddhism, particularly in the North of Siam. He worked with Sommai Premchitt on *Camadevi* (a legend queen of Northern Siam) in English.

Swearer has been working with many Thai and non-Thai academics who hold more or different knowledge than his with an extraordinary modesty, unlike arrogant westerners in general. In his recent work, he learnt from a number of Thai people so he could be able to understand Buddhist tradition and rituals. He also went through texts and scriptures on Buddha images in Pali and other languages, in the Theravada tradition and beyond.

His book tells the readers about the legendary of making Buddha images since the time of the Buddha. Then history of constructing of temples and creation of Buddha relics are explained before ending Part I with the making of Buddha sculptures.

The second part is on consecration rituals of "opening of the eyes" including arrangement of ritual precinct and initiation ceremony. This part makes us understand the contents of the ritual and the belief of common folks. In the past the only foreign scholar who could explained the Thai Buddhist rituals with real understanding with his work on *Vesantara Jataka* and the topknot cutting ceremony. Phya Anuman Rajadhon followed his good ex-

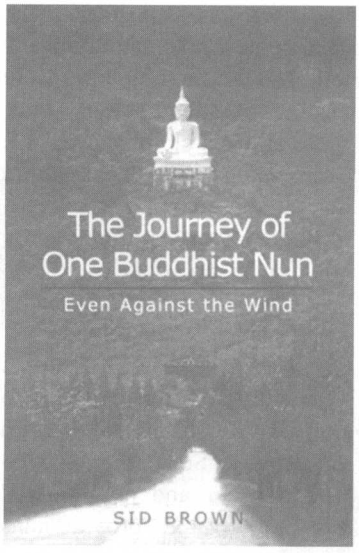
ample in writing an explanation on popular Buddhism and Thai folklore in both Thai and English.

The latest work by Don Swearer is valuable in terms of Buddhist culture, anthropology and also history. In the last chapter, he quoted commentary on Buddha images from contemporary Buddhist leaders, namely the late Buddhadasa, the Ven. P.A. Payutto and the Ven. Bodhiraksa. Even though he did not include one from the Dhamakaya he puts two Buddha images from this Dhammakaya school on the cover. It can be a revulsion or a reminder for us, but anyway it looks quite good.

Sulak Sivaraksa

The Journey of One Buddhist Nun: Even Against the Wind

Sid Brown
State University of New York Press, 2001



Last year I was excited by *Dipa Ma*, a story of a common woman who is accepted as a high spiritual practitioner. The story is very encouraging for a non-ordained person, particularly a woman, who wishes to seriously practice Dhamma, for understanding the suffering and pursuit of happiness while remaining a laity. I persuaded the nearest woman of mine to translate this into the Thai language.

Recently I read *The Journey of One Buddhist Nun: Even Against the Wind* by Sid Brown. This book is very interesting. It makes us aware of the value of Thai *mae chi* (white robe nun) who are unrecognized by most of us. The author describes a life of one real nun, but renames her "Wapi". The subtitle *Even Against the Wind* is from Dhammapada :

The perfume of flower blows not against the wind.
Nor does the fragrance of sandlewood, tagara, and jasmine
But the fragrance of the virtuous blows against the wind
The virtuous may pervade all directions

The author is an American woman who came to write her thesis on Thai *mae chi* . She stayed at a nunnery in Ratchaburi province. She interviewed one *mae chi* extensively. The life story of this *mae chi*, despite her looks as a typical nun, brings us to go deeply beyond appearance to understand, not only life but society, especially of those who are women and poor.

Mae chi Wapi in the book was a poor Northeastern girl. Her mother remarried to Wapi's father after her first husband's death leaving their children with her. Wapi's father once left her mother for another woman but returned afterward. After having another child, he left his family to become a monk.

The mother, in spite of her single-handed struggle to feed their many children, never blamed her husband. She even had to raise grandchildren left behind by her children. She took it as her *karma*. She kept on making merits, doing donations and helping her neighbors. No matter how poor she was, she regularly offered food to monks and went to temple every Buddhist day.

Since her childhood, Wapi inclined toward spiritual life. She was fond of meditating by murmuring "Buddho". She disliked mundane lifestyle and marriage. She loved her father but thought that her father was irresponsible to his family. She herself had to leave school and helped her mother in selling stuffs, raising younger siblings. All these was her duty, no happiness at all.

Wapi's mother took her to temples which she liked very much. She wished to become a nun. Her mother, while begging her to keep doing chores, was aware of the value of ordained life. Finally Wapi was allowed to ordain. Not knowing of any nunnery, Wapi came to see her father who was then an abbot.

Her father did not know any nunnery either. There was only one nun in his temple, but her role was to cook for monks. He took her to a famous nunnery in Bangkok. The nunnery offered a good chance for nuns to practice Dhamma, but required payment for food and lodging. Wapi had no money and her father went back.

The nunnery was kind to offer her a chance to try for one

week after realizing her zeal. Then, one nun who taught meditation called *Mae chi* Seni offered her a deal. If Wapi agreed to take care of her sick father and her sister who was mentally retarded, she would accept Wapi in her nunnery in the northeast to practice Dhamma, without any charge.

Wapi then received ordination and practiced dhamma on such agreement. *Mae chi* Seni taught her Dhamma and supported her. She allowed Wapi to study in different nunneries during the Buddist Vassa Training three or four months a year.

Mae chi Wapi's practice was so profound that she could see hell and its beings. Some hungry ghosts came to beg merit from her. She could recall her past life as murderous man, making her fear of sin and even more committed in practicing Dhamma. (I used to tell a western Buddhist of seeing hell beings while doing meditation, he said he does as well.) However, she was envied and condemned by her follow *mae chi*. She almost died while being bitten by wasps.

Wapi tried to resort to the Dhamma in overcoming her deeply embedded hatred. Sometimes she was disturbed by lust even though she never liked men before. Then, *Mae chi* Seni sent her to a nunnery headed by *Mae chi* Seni's teacher. The nunnery head deceitfully rebuked her. She never knew that a spiritual teacher can be that deceitful. How could Wapi, a disciple, contradict a teacher, considering the Thai context? Neither could she tell *Mae chi* Seni as they were teacher and friend of hers.

Telling a story of *Mae chi* Wapi, relating it to Thai culture and to other nuns depicts the reality of poverty, children being sold to be prostitutes and tortured by pimps. Some are lucky to escape and get ordained.

The Venerable Monk Im is very admirable for his effort to help establish the Thai Nun Association. So are the Association director and her talented assistants for they provide nuns and lay women vocational training. They also set up nunneries independent of temples.

Nunneries under the Association offer religious and secular education. Even though *Mae chi* Wapi is provided with education, we see from her life that if we can support nuns or those who do not wish higher ordination, the Association is very beneficial. Our support to strengthen the spiritual and secular ability of women, adjusting women's culture to be relevant to the times, notnecessarily following western feminism, might have been a worthwhile mission

For nuns important to the story, their real the names are mentioned. So are names of other key figures such as *Mae chi* Khanittha Vichiencharoen, *Mae chi* Sansanee Sathirasutt. Missing one is *Mae chi* Ranchuan Indrakhamhang.

This small book cannot include the whole movement of *mae chi*. But the story told by the author so far is worthwhile. It is a heartening that there are nuns who are serious in practicing the Dhamma so much so that they can perceive the other realms, heaven and hell. For those who are scientifically oriented, the book opens a window to the depth of Buddhism and the width of Thai society, especially of women who are poor and exploited both by men and by the unjust social structure.

Sulak Sivaraksa



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