

# SEEDS OF PEACE

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Freedom  
from Fear

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Dear Friends of INEB,

We send our warmest greetings from Bangkok with best wishes for your health and well-being. Our work has steadily continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to ongoing support from our members and others.

This issue of *Seeds of Peace* has a number of country reports some of which describe COVID-19 situations in areas of India, for Rohingyas in Bangladesh through the Join Together Society in South Korea, and reflections from the Findhorn Ecovillage and Spiritual community in the United Kingdom. INEB's vision for a post-COVID-19 world from a Buddhist perspective thoughtfully examines for essential areas which are bound together by the principles of equality, interdependence and justice.

We are optimistic about the emerging youth movement to reform Thai democracy. We hope this movement will have tolerance and open spaces for full expression and participation of Thai people. This includes using nonviolent approaches such as dialogue rather than force during the transition period.

The articles represent diverse topics beginning with a new model for democratizing agriculture in Thailand. Our friend KV Soon presents timely insights in his article about religion, technology and social media. Donald Swearer has translated some of Buddhadasa's work that we are sharing in this issue. Our close friend Hozan Alan Senauke in Berkeley, California, has interviewed Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni about her monastery's response to meet the needs of the local community in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, during COVID. Our friend Mangesh Dahiwale wrote about Dr Ambedkar's early fascination with the Buddha and the Buddhist revival in India. Our friend, Ang Choo Hong, in Malaysia offers some stories of the Buddha about the importance of love to society. Please see the book reviews where PV Rajagopal from India comments about Ekta Parishad's new manual - *A Guide to Nonviolence Activism*.

Some of INEB's activities have been postponed or canceled such as the Young Bodhisattva Program in Taiwan, the INEB study tour to the Jungto Society in South Korea, the core group meeting of the International Forum of Buddhist-Muslim Relations, and INEB's joint Advisory Committee and Executive Committee meeting. Please check INEB's website for updates about activities that are being scheduled - <https://inebnetwork.org/>

### Update about INEB's Mindful Action: COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund

In response to the high levels of suffering among the poorest and most marginalized communities in South and Southeast Asia, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) has set up a COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund. As of this printing, INEB has awarded funds to 15 organizations in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Nepal, that are providing emergency relief in local communities. The initiative has directly benefited approximately 26,500 people including marginalized persons, Dalits, persons displaced by armed conflict, people who lost their livelihoods, and children at risk of gender-based violence living in camps in western Myanmar. The relief activities primarily focus on providing food, hygiene and sanitation supplies and activities, counseling, COVID-19 awareness campaigns, and information to protect children from sexual violence. We thank all our friends and partners for their generous support which has made the Mindful Action emergency response possible.



# Nagaloka's COVID-19 Emergency Relief Effort

Nagaloka, India



## The COVID-19 Situation

The COVID pandemic brought many challenges in the world, and more so for marginalised people and groups living in India. There was a very late and sudden lockdown decision imposed in India. The migrants and local Indians like rickshaw pullers, barbers, ragpickers, manual scavengers, daily wage earners, etc., were the most affected by this decision.

Everyone thought that the lockdown and the pandemic would last for 2-3 weeks, but it has continued for months. Slowly, the cost of renting shelter for many migrants became a serious issue threatening whether they would become homeless. They have no job security, no income, no open markets where food could be purchased for their children and themselves. Migrant workers began their journeys home from their workplace to their villages. While much of the world began to work remotely from home, almost half of the Indian population walked home.

Many social workers, NGOs, and activists have responded to these extreme circumstances. The front-line workers were so compassionate that they were ready to fight the pandemic by helping in many ways such as feeding the half country which includes migrants and the daily wage earners.

## The Nagaloka Team and Its Emergency Relief Campaign

Nagaloka initiated a campaign called "Nagaloka's Response to COVID - 19" that focuses on protecting the most vulnerable sections of the society, such as persons from the Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes, daily wage earners, domestic workers, manual scavengers, migrant laborers, widows, women and children affected by domestic violence, farm labourers, construction workers, rag pickers, etc. Our key objective is to protect these communities during the unprecedented outbreak as these communities are most vulnerable and

marginalized.

Many people have no money or rations because the lockdown has lasted more than 50 days. The government enforced lockdown prevents people from leaving their homes to look for work and food for their families.

Nagaloka has more than 120 volunteers working in 18 states covering more than 50 districts. As of this writing, we have supported more than 4,660 families, that amounts to more than 18,000 individuals, by providing them with dry rations for 15 to 20 days. During the relief work, our volunteers have observed that some families did receive rations/support while others did not. This inequality created tension between our volunteers and people in the communities. As a result, some communities have appealed to us for further support as many of the families are in great need and the emergency relief support available through us was limited.

## Relief Work Supported by INEB's Mindful Action: COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund

Nagarjuna received 6,000 USD from INEB's Mindful Action: COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund that was provided in two phases. The emergency relief activities supported marginalised communities' need for basic food in order to survive, to feed themselves, their children and older persons.

The Nagaloka Team was comprised of the Nagaloka alumni management body and our alumni volunteers working on the ground. A needs survey was conducted before each phase. The surveys provided information identifying how to proceed with each phase. The team



Arunachal Pradesh, India

coordinated and communicated constantly with the volunteers working in the communities to ensure that the relief activities were conducted most effectively and efficiently.

The direct beneficiaries included 591 families and 2,341 individuals living in 7 states and 10 districts. Each family received enough dry food to last them for 15 – 20 days.

### Risks and Challenges

The team targeted the areas that were badly affected by the lockdown. Our volunteers were educated about the virus

and followed the WHO - COVID - 19 guidelines to reduce the risk of both becoming infected and transmitting the virus. They used safety equipment like gloves, masks, sanitizers, etc.

Our volunteers encountered other conditions such as:

- In Arunachal Pradesh: The updates and relief work were delayed by two-three weeks because of heavy rain. Our volunteers could not conduct relief activities at Bijoypur and Dewan due to heavy rain. Also, since Dewan has had no electricity, we have not received any updates

about the situation there for several weeks.

- Our volunteers finished identifying the target groups - the poorest among the poor. However, many more families needed immediate ration support who were not among those identified in the target group. Sometimes while distributing the rations, the situation became worse because other families needing help became angry and frustrated that they were not receiving emergency relief.
- Passes were issued by local government authorities to enter communities that were time limited. Sometimes the pass expired before the emergency relief activities were finished. So, distributing rations took more days than expected. In these cases, the volunteers had to request another pass from the local government authorities. Requesting and receiving the passes from the local government was time consuming.

## Siam

# Fanaticism, Hate Speech And Buddhism

Sanitsuda Ekachai, *Bangkok Post*, 9 September 2020

If your ultra-royalist friends say we need to uphold the Nation-Religion-Monarchy state ideology to protect the country's peace, order and national identity, ask them whose nation and what religion they are talking about.

Also, how on earth could racism ensure peace and protect the royal institution?

If they erupt in anger and start calling you "nation haters" and "ingrates", then you know you have

asked the right questions.

As the Sept 19 rally led by the youth movement nears with great uncertainty over what might ensue, questioning our beliefs may be the first step for a self-proclaimed Buddhist country to avoid further violence and bloodletting.

Admit it, "nation" in the national mantra means a racially homogeneous country of ethnic Thais. "Religion" means "Buddhism" only. And



The Thai Pakdee (Loyal Thai) group meets on Aug 30 at the Thai-Japan Bangkok Youth Centre with students participating in support of the monarchy. (Bangkok post photo)

“monarchy” means a sacred institution beyond any criticism.

For starters, defining this country as a land owned solely by ethnic Thais is historically false. Making Thais superior to other groups is also racist.

Before the exodus of ethnic Thais from southern China to what is now Thailand about one thousand years ago, this land had been the home of many ethnic and indigenous groups dating back to prehistoric times. That’s a fact.

The ancient maritime trade also brought a continuous flow of people, beliefs, and know-how from foreign lands to this peninsula, making it a crossroads of cultures. Even after the Thai-speaking groups gained political control over pre-existing principalities, the kingdoms continued to welcome people from afar as part of the social fabric.

Wasn’t King Taksin ethnically Chinese?

Wasn’t the family of King Rama I from an ethnic Mon community?

Were not the ancestors of top statesmen from the Bunnag family in the early Rattanakosin era Muslims?

Didn’t the influx of Chinese immigrants strengthen and expand the local economy?

Were not the grandparents of many hyper-royalists who want to chase pro-democracy activists out of the country immigrants?

With the influx of people from foreign lands came their different religious beliefs. Buddhism was only one of them.

For centuries, multiculturalism and tolerance prevailed. To lessen other religions, including indigenous beliefs, and give Buddhism political superiority betrays the spirit of multiculturalism of the land.

This should not have posed a problem had the true spirit of Buddhism prevailed. Sadly, what happened is the state making Thai Buddhism into an autocratic and misogynistic system, turning its back on the Buddha’s teachings in its pursuit of wealth and power.

By adopting the state policy of racial superiority, Thai Buddhism has become a tool to propagate state racism and prejudice, shunning the

Buddhist principles of compassion and equality. Religious tolerance gives way to a quest for supremacy, resulting in the Sangha’s implicit support for state violence against other faiths.

It is not uncommon to hear monks and self-proclaimed devout Buddhists supporting state violence against the southern Muslims, the Rohingya, the hill tribes people, and migrant workers because they are “outsiders” and “national security threats”.

Do we want to uphold this kind of racist nationalism?

We also need to probe why any discussions short of glorifying the monarchy are taken as blasphemy deserving severe punishment.

Criticism of the monarchy is deemed sacrilegious because in the Thai traditional cosmos, kings are not only demi-gods. Given their obligations to accumulate merit and fulfil the Buddhist virtues as monarchs, they are also viewed as being on their holy paths to attain Buddhahood.

When royal reverence becomes a religion on its own, anything short of total devotion is unacceptable. Breaking away is a sin and heretics must go to hell.

It need not to be so. And it must not be so.

During his lifetime, the Buddha was attacked by lies and vile attacks several times. Never did he respond with anger, hatred, nor violence. Only with equanimity and kindness.

When a woman was hired to accuse him of impregnating her, the Buddha did not revile her or allow his followers to do so. Instead, he kindly reminded her of her conscience and allowed the truth to reveal itself.

When a brahmin attacked the Buddha with vulgarity, he composedly

made the attacker realise that when the abusive words were not accepted, their poisons remained with the giver.

When two monks engaged in arguments about the Buddha, one full of criticism while the other full of praise for him, the Buddha listened to their stances throughout the night with equanimity. Then he told the congregation that one should not allow oneself to be happy when praised nor agitated when being reproached.

The Buddha's teachings: Take ownership of our actions or karma. Refrain from reacting negatively or positively to what we hear, see, taste, smell and feel. Remain equanimous at all times with the constant awareness of impermanence and non-attachment.

The Buddha also warns against blind faith and mindless obedience to traditions, urging people to think independently and use their experience to arrive at their own conclusions.

The Buddha has shown us the way. Yet, the self-proclaimed Buddhist protectors of the monarchy insist on crushing critics at all cost.

Are they Buddhists or fanatics?

Repressive governments benefit directly from the ultra royalist/nationalist movement. Apart from the draconian lese majeste law, they also have the national security, anti-assembly and computer laws to arrest critics who are growing in numbers. Intimidation and harassment of critics and their families are routine.

The military-aligned government also uses the Covid-19 pandemic to maintain the emergency law and suppress pro-democracy activists.

Equally distressing, state authorities are using tax money to spread falsehood and hate speech through their information operations.

Misinformation and political divisiveness is intensifying. So is hate speech among hyper-royalists.

All Buddhists should know the teaching on Right Speech: Only speak what is factual, helpful, kind, pleasant and timely. State orchestration of hate speech on social media violates Right Speech at every level.

It's clear. Although the state makes Buddhism one of the three elements in the Nation-Religion-Monarchy mantra to hypnotise the populace, they only pay lip service to the teachings.

For the country to move on peacefully, we need to inject a new spirit into the Nation-Religion-Monarchy state ideology. There must be respect for cultural and religious diversity while rational discussions on

the royal institution must be possible.

Critics, too, should observe the principles of Right Speech, especially when the subject at hand involves other people's faiths.

But when the power balance is unequal, the responsibility rests with those with guns and repressive laws not to crush the calls for freedom of expression with raw power.

If they still consider themselves Buddhist, listen to the Buddha's advice: Welcome criticism as the path leading to a hidden treasure trove. Open your hearts to listen and improve.

If not, they are just power-hungry hypocrites.



### Siam

## 'LGBT People are Also Humans': Thai Buddhist Monk Backs Equality

Rina Chandran|@rinachandran, Thomas Reuters Foundation News

**B**ANGKOK, Aug 21 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - With his simple saffron robe and shaved head, Shine Waradhammo stands out at the often loud and colourful LGBT+ events that he occasionally attends in Bangkok, listening intently, taking notes, and engaging cheerfully with anyone who approaches him.

As a monk, Waradhammo is a rare - but welcome - presence in the LGBT+ community as Thailand prepares to pass a landmark civil partnership bill that would recognise same-sex unions with nearly the same legal rights as



Shine Waradhammo's support for LGBT+ rights is a rare and welcome move as Thailand prepares to pass a civil partnership law.

married couples.

A largely conservative Buddhist society, Thailand has a reputation for its relaxed attitude towards gender and sexual diversity since homosexuality was decriminalised in 1956.

Yet Thai LGBT+ people face discrimination and stigma in schools, the workplace and in healthcare facilities, and are often rejected by their families.

“Treating LGBT people badly goes against the Buddha’s teachings. LGBT people are also humans, they are also Buddhists, and as a monk I support and accept all Buddhist people, and aim to reduce their suffering,” Waradhammo, 52, said.

In Theravada Buddhism, which is practised in Thailand, LGBT+ people are sometimes mistakenly seen as paying the price for their bad deeds, or karma, in a previous life, said Waradhammo.

“The Buddha never said anything against LGBT people, so it is a very wrong interpretation of the scriptures that leads to bias and rejection of LGBT people,” said Waradhammo, who was ordained as a monk at the age of 21.

“Monks generally avoid talking about LGBT and gender issues, but we should be talking about issues that affect society, and religious teachings have to reflect the present times - otherwise religion becomes a dinosaur.”

## EQUAL RIGHTS

If the Civil Partnership Bill is passed, Thailand will be only the second place in Asia after Taiwan to allow registration of same-sex unions, with

couples able to adopt children, and with rights to inheritance and joint property ownership.

The bill was introduced in 2018, but the previous legislature failed to pass it before last year’s election.

Waradhammo supports a separate initiative by a Thai lawmaker representing LGBT+ groups for the Civil Code to be amended to define marriage as being between two persons rather than between a man and a woman - which he sees as more meaningful.

“The Civil Partnership Bill does not give equal rights. Changing the Civil Code would be better,” Waradhammo told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview.

“But changing the Civil Code would take longer, as we still have many old-fashioned people in parliament. So perhaps they will prefer to pass the Civil Partnership Bill first.”

Two-thirds of Thais have no objection to same-sex unions, a 2018 survey by the United Nations found, and four openly LGBT+ lawmakers joined parliament last year, pushing for more rights - from a change in rigid dress codes to marriage equality.

“It is a sign that people’s attitudes towards LGBT people are changing,” said Waradhammo, who is active on social media, and frequently posts on gender and sexual equality, and responds to questions and comments on how these relate to Buddhism.

## REAL DIFFERENCE

While Waradhammo’s influence is limited, his support for LGBT+ issues makes a big difference to those who

come in contact with him, said Anjana Suvarnanda, co-founder of the Anjaree Group, which promotes LGBT+ rights.

“He is quite exceptional; it is not common to see a Buddhist monk take such an interest in these issues, and be vocal and supportive, and even show up at events,” said Anjana, who has known him for about 20 years.

“He also helps us frame the argument from the religious perspective, reminding people of the Buddhist philosophy of accepting all people. If we had more monks like him, it would make a real difference,” she added.

Waradhammo, who poses playfully for selfies, sees his vocal support of LGBT+ people as necessary.

“I think it helps them to see a monk who is friendly and gives them an interpretation of the Buddhist religion that supports them,” he said, shrugging off his unique position.

“It is important that they know they are equal and accepted, and have the same rights as everyone else.”

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# Is Thailand Ready for This? The 10 Demands to Reform the Monarchy Institution

**THISRUPT**, <https://thisrupt.co/current-affairs/10-demands-reform-monarchy/>, 20 September 2020



This morning, 20 September 2020, the pro-democracy protestors marched across the street from Sanam Luang to the Supreme Court building to submit the ten demands to reform the monarchy institution.

Here's the translation of the 10 demands.

1. Abolish Article 6 of the constitution, which dictates that no one can make legal complaints about the king. Add an article to give the parliament power to perform checks and balances on the king, similar to the Khana Rasadon's constitution.
2. Abolish Article 112, the lese majeste law, which states that anyone who "defames, insults or threatens the king, the queen, the heir-apparent or the regent" will be punished with a jail term between three and 15 years. Allow the people the freedom of speech to criticize the monarchy.
3. Separate the king's personal wealth from the royal budget, which comes from taxpayers' money, and have the latter be under the Finance Ministry's supervision.
4. Reduce the royal budget accordingly to the country's economic situation.
5. Abolish unnecessary bodies, such as the privy council. Remove the king's military power.
6. Abolish royal charity projects. Install a system of checks and balances for royal spending.
7. The king shall not make public his

political view.

8. Abolish public relations campaigns and educational curriculums that idolize the monarchy institution (too much).
9. Find the truth about the killing of civilians who were critical of and were connected to the monarchy.
10. The king shall not endorse a military coup.

The following is an excerpt from the letter accompanying the 10 demands.

"The purpose of these demands is not to overthrow the monarchy institution. Instead, it is with good intentions to honor and maintain the monarchy institution under the democratic system, to sustain the institution in the context of the modern world. The monarchy institution must not have political powers, must be subjected to checks and balances, must be opened to criticism, and must not burden the people. Therefore, the monarchy institution shall exist honorably under an internationally accepted democratic system."

§

## South Korea

## Buddhist Relief Organization JTS Korea Sends PPE to Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh Amid COVID Fears

Craig Lewis, *Buddhistdoor Global*, 2020-08-26



JTS Korea isolation clothing in Bangladesh. Photo by WFP

The Buddhist humanitarian organization Join Together Society Korea (JTS), founded by the renowned Korean Seon (Zen) monk and engaged Buddhist Venerable Pomnyun Sunim, has provided 10,000 pieces of personal protective wear to Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh.

“On 10 August, JTS Korea, in cooperation with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), delivered 10,000 pieces of protective clothing to the medical center at the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, which is fighting to stop the spread of COVID-19,” Sun Hee Choi of JTS Korea told *Buddhistdoor Global*. “The Rohingya refugee camp is

one of the biggest refugee camps in the world and is in desperate need of sanitary and medical facilities support.”

Experts and relief workers have warned of the potentially devastating risk of a COVID-19 outbreak among the approximately one million Rohingya Muslim refugees packed into crowded temporary camps near the township of Cox’s Bazar. The refugees, who have poured into Bangladesh since 2017, fleeing suppression by state security forces in neighboring Buddhist-majority Myanmar, are living in cramped shacks—an estimated 40,000 people per square kilometer—with poor sanitation, limited access to medical care, and

dangerously exposed to the spread of contagion.<sup>1</sup>

Bangladesh has so far reported 299,682 confirmed COVID-19 infections and 4,028 related deaths, as at the time of writing.<sup>2</sup> According to government data cited by media reports, 88 cases of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus have been found in the refugee camps and six people have died.

Religious tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in neighboring Myanmar have simmered for almost half a century, and Myanmar’s government classifies Rohingya Muslims as stateless foreign migrants, even though many communities have lived in Myanmar for generations. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have reportedly fled military clearance operations and attacks by Buddhist mobs, seeking refuge in neighboring Bangladesh in what the United Nations has described as the “world’s fastest growing refugee crisis.”

“JTS relief aid of 10,000 pieces of protective clothing is expected to play a pivotal role in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the camp, which has been experiencing great difficulty securing PPE and relief aid due to the global pandemic,” Sun Hee Choi told *Buddhistdoor Global*. “Along with emergency food aid, JTS provided 100,000 gas stoves from 2017–19, benefitting more than 500,000 Rohingya refugees. Not only did this improve cooking conditions and protect nearby forests from complete deforestation, but it also secured the safety of the women and children from the various dangers they faced whenever they went to gather firewood.”

In January last year, Ven. Pomnyun



JTS Korea isolation clothing in Bangladesh.  
Photo by WFP



Rohingya children are bearing the brunt of COVID-19 restrictions in Bangladesh refugee camps as education facilities remain closed.

From reliefweb.net

Sunim led a delegation of aid representatives, including JTS President Gena Park, JTS Goodwill Ambassadors screenwriter Noh Hee-kyung and actor Jo In-sung, along with the state Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) chairman Lee Mi-kyung, to deliver a consignment of gas stoves to the refugee camp.<sup>3</sup>

A widely respected author, Dharma teacher, and social activist in his native South Korea, Ven. Pomnyun Sunim has founded numerous organizations, initiatives, and projects that are active across the world. Among them, Jungto Society, a volunteer-based community founded on the Buddhist teachings and expressing equality, simple living, and sustainability, is dedicated to addressing modern social issues that lead to suffering, including environmental degradation, poverty, and conflict. Join Together Society, an international aid organization, works to eradicate poverty and hunger through humanitarian relief and sustainable development.

Ven. Pomnyun Sunim also works closely with the Thailand-based

International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). In May this year, JTS Korea donated US\$50,000 to INEB's Mindful Action: COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund.<sup>4</sup>

In April, JTS Korea also donated a consignment of PPE to medical staff at the Northern Mindanao Medical Center in the Philippines. The PPE consisted of 400 overalls, 250 N95 masks, 200 eye shields, and 3,000 surgical masks. The supplies were gratefully received as the center had been experiencing a serious shortage of PPE equipment.

At the time of writing, total global confirmed COVID-19 infections were reported to have reached 23.9 million, with 819,609 deaths so far recorded and 15.6 million recovered. The World Health Organization in March estimated the mortality rate from the SARS-CoV-2 novel coronavirus, believed to have originated in Wuhan, China, at 3–4 per cent, based on incomplete and preliminary data, with the elderly and people with underlying health conditions considered most at risk. More recent data suggests that the mortality rate may be significantly

lower, however studies are inconclusive due to variations in COVID-19 testing procedures in different countries, and differing methodologies for classifying and reporting COVID-19 as a cause of death.

<sup>1</sup> Concern Grows Over Looming Coronavirus Risk at Rohingya Camps in Bangladesh (Buddhistdoor Global)

<sup>2</sup> Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)

<sup>3</sup> Korean Buddhist Humanitarian Organization JTS Brings 100,000 Gas Stoves to Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh (Buddhistdoor Global)

<sup>4</sup> International Network of Engaged Buddhists Launches COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund (Buddhistdoor Global)

## United Kingdom

# COVID Days Reflections from Findhorn Ecovillage & Spiritual Community

Jane Rasbash



I feel so very privileged to live in Findhorn Ecovillage. It was an amazing place to spend lockdown with my window looking out on to trees, peaceful and quiet. I was able to connect with the forest and beaches near-by on daily exercise walks.

I heard that some perceived quarantine as a jail and some perceived it as a retreat. Some happily followed Government guidelines whilst others felt challenged by them. Some felt the community response exemplary whilst others felt it was overly fear-driven. Like many I felt aspects of all these perspectives in these strange, unprecedented days and am musing on how well we responded to COVID as a well-known spiritual, Ecovillage community.

There was lots of confusion and mixed messages from a fumbling UK Government although overall (to date) Scotland had less pro rata cases and a more cautious, consistent response. The community quickly came up with COVID Action Group (CAG) with

members from various stakeholders in the Ecovillage and this helpful group became the main mechanism for the Findhorn Community COVID response. CAG kept on top of the ever changing guidelines, disseminated information and set up systems to support vulnerable persons and shielding community members.

Taize singing sessions, local choirs and sacred dance moved onto Zoom and the Findhorn Foundation held daily online meditation sessions and Findhorn Live local walks. There were deep sharing groups and some said they had more communication with other community members through these online groups than prior to lockdown. Unexpectedly they reached out to people around the world I believe the sacred dance sometimes attracted 200 people dancing in their living rooms from several countries.

A creative community-led COVID response was the 'Findhorn Town Criers' a lively, reflective group of theatre performers who visited

several neighbourhoods twice weekly throughout the quarantine period. They were much appreciated delivering COVID News in fun, thoughtful ways with sketches and songs. The link shows a clip I filmed of their last performance a reflection poem made up of responses to the question 'What this time is teaching me?'. <https://youtu.be/Ti4fFH5F7nE>

The Findhorn Foundation had financial struggles as much of their income is from face-to-face courses that all had to be cancelled. Prior to COVID there were few Findhorn online offerings apart from the New Story programme that was not running during lockdown. The Foundation endeavoured to regroup and go online.

In July, the core spiritual values of work is love in action; listen to the small voice within & co-creation with nature took centre stage as Findhorn Foundation put on an online summit reaching several hundred people. Focusing on both economic recovery and spiritual alignment is a big challenge. Now several online programmes are rolling out and a few physically distanced Findhorn based courses tentatively recommenced at the end of August. Here's hoping to thriving in all ways seen and unseen.

Being a diverse and questioning community there are a fair sprinkling of people with differing views on the COVID crisis to those promoted by the UK Government. Some question the wearing of masks & are worried about the possibility of upcoming mandatory vaccinations, several aligned with Plandemic. A few people experienced challenges in openly discussing these topics and one or two mentioned they felt vilified. There was a strong representation of these views in the small group I met with.

The group came up with some

interesting next steps to consider:

- Create a forum for drawing lessons learned during COVID (inner & community)

- Cluster in cells for meeting & sharing & feed into collective body of the community

- Consciously move away from the zoom online world

The UK is one of the most COVID impacted countries in the world with so many deaths. Personally, I am am

happy to respect the guidelines and be cautious. However, I am curious how we will behave if there is another lockdown. How will the collective spiritual ethos of the Findhorn Ecovillage manifest in these unprecedented times? My hope is that as a community we review our experiences with open hearts and willingness to collectively become inspiring, respectful, creative and inclusive as we transverse into the 'new

normal' and beyond.

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Jane Rasbash (1 September 2020) The article draws on my personal experience, observations and some reflections from a small group of people who informally met as we came out of lockdown. It is not representative of the whole community.

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### United States

## In This Time of Crisis: To the Buddhist Community in the U.S.

**Hozan Alan Senauke**, July 2020

*And I must say tonight, that a riot is the language of the unheard.*

*And what is it America has failed to hear?*

—Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

In these lengthening months of pandemic, of racist violence, and social divisiveness, we call to mind Zen Master Dogen, who wrote: “We should without fail arouse bodhicitta, ferrying others before ourselves.” Bodhicitta, enlightening mind, is the expression of our commitment to the awakening of all: Freedom from sickness, from suffering, from exploitation, from fear and discrimination, from poverty and want, and, ultimately, from delusion. This is true, but first things first: Black Lives Matter. Freedom from the policeman’s knee, from the bullet, freedom from the callous brutality of a U.S. president and a government furthering White Supremacy.

One of our early teachers in the West, Dainin Katagiri Roshi, expressed

Zen practice succinctly in the titles of two books. His first book was *Returning to Silence*—this is zazen, dynamic stillness that is refuge for all who seek it. His second book was titled *You Have to Say Something*. Truly, the peace of meditation only expresses itself in enlightened and enlightening actions and words.

Our Buddhist communities walk hand in hand with countless religious communities and people of conscience. We will not accept hatred and division between the races and among ourselves. Yes, all of American history is scarred by white supremacy, racism and violence. For generations, some of us have actually profited from the exploitation of less-privileged communities and peoples—knowingly or not. Our nation itself has failed to hear the anguish of African-Americans and of many others. Now, painfully, all ears must be open to suffering sisters and brothers.

The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts, our ethical foundation, can be reduced to one essential vow: I vow not to live

at the expense of other people and beings. Each of us must personally examine our lives, our words and actions. We must examine our centers, temples, and communities, grounding ourselves and our centers and organizations in equality—equal rights, equal justice, equal opportunity, equal access to resources. Materially and spiritually, we must help raise up those among us who have been downtrodden. Actually, we must support them to raise themselves. Though each person has distinct skills, capacities, and appearance, finally our lives are equally precious to ourselves and to those who love us.

Dr. King wrote, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” This is beautiful...and incomplete. We need our complete effort to bend the moral universe towards justice. We must use our minds, our hearts, our voices, and our hands to accomplish the work of peace.

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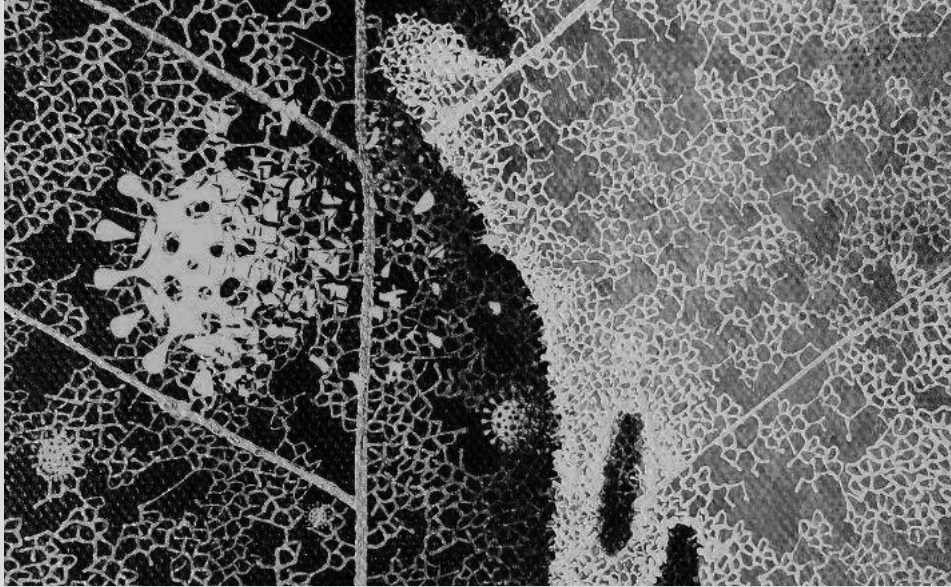
**Hozan Alan Senauke** serves on INEB’s Advisory Committee. He is Vice-Abbot of Berkeley Zen Center in California and founder of Clear View Project.

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## Enlightening Crisis: A Vision for a Post-COVID-19 World

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**T**he COVID-19 pandemic is a global crisis that threatens us in ways not seen since the world wars of the 20th century. Much local and international commerce, along with travel have come to a halt. Health systems are overwhelmed. Large populations in many countries endure lockdowns, “social distancing,” and realistic fears of sickness and death. The pandemic has interrupted numerous mechanisms of “globalization”—the contemporary phenomenon in which capital, business, and people have an unprecedented ability to move freely around the world, bringing illusions of greater wealth and well-being to all, albeit with very mixed results.

In reality, the pandemic is highlighting the already existing social distortions and growing inequalities of globalization and our present global order. Persons living in poverty and on the margins of society—because of race, religion, class, etc.—are the most vulnerable to disease and the least able to access health resources. The effects of poverty and discrimination—stress, diet, etc.—weaken immune systems. Crowded living conditions

and the need to keep working increases exposure for millions with very limited access to testing and medical services.

Yet, as with all crises, the COVID pandemic provides opportunities to reflect on and rethink the very structures of our societies. Numerous organizations worldwide have been preparing the ground for decades, “building the new within the shell of the old.” With each war, genocide and dislocation of peoples, environmental tragedy, and national economic meltdown, progressive organizations respond with sustainable grassroots responses, solutions, and alternatives to these crises.

From a Buddhist perspective, crisis provides a moment of suspended animation from the status quo and the usual activities of daily life. Reality, as we know it, is reconsidered. In Buddhist psychology and practice, this is a precious moment when the awareness or mindfulness developed through meditation practice by may be used to interrupt the neurotic processes of our habitual, everyday thinking. This moment opens us to ethical and sustainable ways of living that transform

neurosis into living with awareness.

However, without such mindfulness, without the wisdom of what is truly worthwhile to pursue in life, and without ethical consideration about what is of benefit to others as well as ourselves, the “pandemic virus” of our greed, anger, and delusion will quickly recreate our historical patterns of domination.

The COVID-19 pandemic is providing us with a creative moment. We can reconsider how to build our interconnected world, a very different kind of globalization. We have seen glimpses of what a Post-COVID world could look like as the smoke literally clears away: in northern India, we can view the Himalayan peaks as they have not been seen for decades; wildlife are reclaiming their natural habitats; cities around the world, choking with smog and pollution, have clean air again.

From this fundamental orientation, INEB is developing A Vision for a Post-COVID-19 World for these four essential areas:

1. Dharmic Economics, Right Livelihood, and Holistic Development
2. Environmental and Sustainable Interbeing
3. Cultural Diversity and Co-Existence
4. Good Governance, Human Rights, and Peace

These four dimensions of INEB’s Post-COVID Vision are bound together by the principles of Equality, Interdependence, and Justice. In *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar wrote in the Buddha’s voice:

Man’s misery is the result of man’s inequity to man...No caste; no inequality; no superiority; no inferiority; all are equal. This is what he stood for. “Identify yourself with others. As they, so I...as I, so they.” So said the Buddha.

Just a few years later, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote that we are “caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

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## Dharmic Economics, Right Livelihood, and Holistic Development

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**O**ur present economic systems are unsustainable—prioritizing continuous growth, short-term profit, and exploitation of human and natural resources. Operating according to an exploitative paradigm threatens the survival of living systems that have evolved over 4.6 billion years, the health and wellbeing of the 7.7 billion people, and the future of the human species itself. The consequences of this economic system, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, are unprecedented inequality, violent conflict, displacement and involuntary migration, food and water shortages, disease and epidemics, anxiety, insecurity, and fear. Further, ecological change—climate change, extreme weather and natural disaster, pollution and depletion, biodiversity loss—threatens the viability of all living systems.

Buddhism has important principles and values to offer as the foundation of a different economic paradigm. Buddhist Economics, or what we would rather call Dharmic Economics, means economics based on the law of nature (*dharma*) not the rules of man-made economic theory. In the present dominant world view, humans are seen as inherently selfish, as individual units for accumulating wealth. Human capacity is manipulated to maximize immediate profit, accumulate financial capital, compete, and grow. In the dharmic model as explained by one of INEB’s first patrons, the late Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, not only humans but all sentient life live together in types of groups or communities and thus



Smart Pagoda Eco Temple, Mab Euan,  
Chonburi, Thailand

inherently have a sense for living with and for others. He explained that humans, specifically, the duty (another meaning of *dharma*) to act for the benefit of society. This begins with understanding what is enough or “sufficient” (*santutthi*), reducing craving (*tanha*), and being joyful with what we have. Economic activity that creates a consumer lifestyle, amplifying craving and greed, cannot offer safety and serenity.

Dharmic Economics encourages a lifestyle that values the blessings we already have. The Zen poet Aida Mitsuo notes, “If we always take for ourselves first, there will never be enough. But if we share with others first, there will always be some left over.” These words highlight the Buddhist principle of generosity (*dana*). Our joy can come from the act of sharing, and this joy gained by giving up things, increases sustainability and does not deplete our natural resources. When we can see the vast living web in which we live, compassion and connection naturally arise. We can choose to act mindfully and collaborate, prioritizing life and the environment.

On a systems level, our present economic paradigm sees humans as separate from and having dominion over nature. The economy has been engineered like a machine to maximize these values. A dharmic perspective, however, sees that we are interdependent (*pratitya samutpada*), a living part of global ecosystems. We can envision an economy economy that functions as a complex adaptive system, reflecting our diverse ecosystems.

Another problem is our deluded belief that money, like our own self, is permanent. We act as if it has inherent value and should be accumulated. Furthermore, it can be magically created from debt, which, of course, requires continuous growth for repayment. From a dharmic standpoint, money is a construct or story, developed by humans to facilitate the exchange of goods and services. It is empty (*sunyata*) of an inherent, permanent existence (*anatta*). According to *pratitya samutpada*, it is only valuable when it is circulated. If money is created through exchange, continuous growth is not a necessary requirement.

Powerful hierarchies resist change. Systemic problems are addressed or ignored by governments, multi-national corporations, and transnational institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as well as by experts, the wealthy, and the elites. “Democracy” becomes a choice of which elites will make decisions for us.

In a community-based dharmic model, change happens through relationships and networks of interconnected individuals according to compassionate ideals. This is what Buddhists call *sangha*. Each person is a changemaker. We can speed the transitions by working together.

A dharmic economy is grounded in the practice of critical mindfulness which brings principle into reality through our attention to our actions. Mindfulness allows for creativity and innovation when tired and dysfunctional forms are questioned and abandoned. We can help others’ transitions by openly sharing our own practices and choices, celebrating the work of others, and disseminating new narratives. We can support and partner with others who are operating according to wholesome principles and new stories.

From these broad ideas, we can begin to build sustainable lifestyles. However, dharmic economics will not appear as a single, monolithic form, like in capitalist or communist models. Sustainable economics must adapt to the needs and potentials of different regions and societies. For those living close to the land, where basic needs are more directly met by the surrounding



environment, the principles of Sufficiency Economy developed in Thailand can serve as a useful guideline. Accordingly, 30% of our land can secure water resources; 30% is dedicated to agriculture; 30% for forest cover (which also provides forest products); and 10% is used for our dwellings. Rural or urban, we all seek the “four benefits of sufficiency (*santutthi*)”: 1) sufficient food, 2) sufficient housing, 3) sufficient daily household needs, and 4) a sufficient and wholesome environment, with clean air, clean water, and natural beauty. These points may seem utopian or simplistic, but this model of development is being realized by a number of monks and eco-temple communities in INEB’s network in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and other southern Asian countries.

A fifth benefit is sufficient electricity. Collaborating with these groups in southern Asia is an INEB member in Tokyo who has been supporting people in the city since the 1990s to become energy sufficient. This work brings forth what we might call the “three benefits of energy sufficiency”: 1) reducing reliance on massive and inefficient, national power grids that overcharge individual consumers for the benefit of large industry; 2) divesting from fossil fueled and nuclear fueled systems that destroy the environment, while developing a green economy of sustainable, clean energy; 3) building a people’s dharmic economy by using profits made from selling solar energy to support a wide variety of community-based social activities that build human, social, and cultural capital for future generations.

Tera Energy, a newly formed Buddhist-based power company in central Japan co-founded by a new INEB member, is an example of new initiatives based on Dharmic Economy. Such initiatives point to the transformation of urban areas that have been most vulnerable to the dislocations of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, INEB is partnering with the Good Market, an initiative co-founded by INEB friends and others in Sri Lanka and now spread across the world as a living model of Dharmic Economics. The Good Market is a curated platform that helps us to find and connect with social enterprises, responsible businesses, and



Good Market Platform

changemakers who are creating a better world. Its goal is to catalyze the transition to a new economy by making the movement more visible and accessible for interested individuals and communities, working across economic sectors, income levels, language barriers, and regional divides. Good Market is set up as a self-financing, not-for-profit social enterprise. Surplus from transactions is reinvested to expand services for the wider community.

## Environment and Sustainable Interbeing

COVID-19 reminds us that biologically we are one with the whole planet. The biome of our bodies contains more non-human microbes with different DNA/RNA than human cells. Our bodies depend upon them. From a Buddhist perspective, we can ask, “Where do ‘I’ end and these microbes begin?” Humans share 99% of our DNA with chimpanzees and bonobos. The ecological crisis extends beyond climate change and “6th extinction” events—with overpopulation, pollutants from fossil fuel, nuclear waste, and plastics, and the loss of forests and



requires humans to recognize that our continuing existence must reflect a harmonious existence with other people and with nature. Through the lens of ecosystem thinking, if we do not restore the natural environment, more outbreaks of new epidemics are likely.

Buddhism's bodhisattva path expresses a double-sided practice: individual transformation together with social transformation. It is clear that we need both. The present lockdown provides a fresh opportunity to cultivate both aspects of the bodhisattva path, personal and collective. Personal practice begins with the Buddha's 1st Noble Truth, the truth of suffering (*dukkha*) and the call to experience it fully.

Joanna Macy—one of INEB's senior mentors and a respected deep ecologist—has asked of herself, "How can I be fully present to my world—present enough to rejoice and be useful—when we as a species are destroying it?" She teaches us that expressing our pain for the world can uncover a wellspring of solidarity and creativity. Over the past fifty years of her work, Joanna has begun to sense a "loosening of the hyper-individualism that for centuries has cramped our natural abilities and isolated the separate self to the point that it seeks release in mob mentality". This is what she calls the Great Turning, a transition already well underway to a life-sustaining society, rooted in the Buddhist notion of *bodhicitta* as the dedication to the welfare of all. Here, personal transformation moves towards social transformation. Joanna explains that the Great Turning provides us with more than "a light at the end of the tunnel." It provides us with a "compass and map, as well as a supply house of skills and tools—such as the buddhadharma, systems thinking, and deep ecology—for nourishing our spirit, ingenuity, and determination."

Individual INEB members have been putting this vision of the Great Turning into practice for years and much of their work is now being coordinated in the Eco-Temple Community Development Program. This project seeks to develop communities that are sustainably interconnected with the natural environment through

topsoil. In the long run, this crisis is a thousand times more dangerous than COVID-19, but short-term emergency always trumps long-term dangers. The coronavirus emergency can, in fact, be understood as another result of ecological damage, habitat encroachment, and destruction.

From a Buddhist standpoint, the fundamental problem is our relationship with the earth: we have lost the awareness that it is not just our home but our mother, and we can never cut the umbilical cord. We need to recover the sense of responsibility to it that many indigenous people have. Our sense of separation from the earth—seeing it reductively as a resource and means towards human ends—is a loss of life's meaning, a source of *dukkha*. Our species has become autistic. We just try to enjoy ourselves as long as we can, and then we die.

COVID-19 has exposed these flaws, rooted in ignorance. Social, economic, and medical problems that have become critical in recent months. We see the virus is flourishing in areas of poverty and inadequate health resources, with much higher deaths rates among marginalized and oppressed communities.

Buddhism teaches us, most clearly in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and Hua Yen tradition, that nothing exists in isolation from other things. All phenomena are interconnected; a change in one affects all the rest. This teaching is not a creation of human minds. It flows from a clear view of from nature itself and was realized by Buddhist masters who spent their lives in forest retreats, in a symbiotic relationship with nature. The environment includes humans, and environmental sustainability

Buddhist temples. These temples strive to manifest ecological values on the material, relational, and spiritual levels. Eco-temple communities are already experiencing a high level of resiliency in the face COVID-19's multiple dislocations. Unlike communities tied into the global economy—where people are panic shopping for food and basic needs, and where businesses themselves are going bankrupt after only a few months of inactivity—eco-temple communities are experiencing life that is relatively uninterrupted. For them, the gap between means and ends, between work and prosperity, is greatly reduced. With an initial focus on providing food, shelter, and a healthy environment, these eco-temples still have bandwidth for human interaction, study and learning, and personal development—which form the basis of a meaningful and contented life, something that is often so lacking in many of our psychologically and environmentally dysfunctional, consumer-driven societies.

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## Cultural Diversity and Co-Existence

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COVID-19 is a call for change, reminding us that our global human crisis extends far beyond the pandemic to the present capitalist model of development based on consumerism and the unsustainable use of natural resources. In the long and short run, this is economic-driven model is more harmful to the world's health, especially the well-being of vast populations of marginalized, oppressed, and exploited communities. The present situation helps us focus on the interconnection of human communities and the underlying principle of equality. Our need to heal our wounded humanity calls for compassion, loving-kindness, and mutual respect for all forms of life.

From a Buddhist perspective, the pandemic has

quickly brought us back to basics, to ground zero. For many there is a sense of horror and panic, a fear of “zero,” of annihilation. However, in Buddhism, “zero” is the mark of *sunyata*, “emptiness” or “voidness.” This is not a negative quality, but in the sense of the archetypal feminine, the womb, it signifies the unlimited potential of creativity. Going back to “zero,” we have the chance to re-create our present and our future, based on equality and cooperation that express the empty center of Indra's Net as imagined in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

Although the virus does not discriminate, people are affected differently depending on their economic status, race, caste, religion, gender, citizenship, or place of birth. Latent forms of racial discrimination and stereotyping have been allowed free rein, as individuals, communities, and nations react in fear to pandemic, uncertainty, and economic pressure. In India, as well as in other parts of South and Southeast Asia, simmering forms of communal and religious violence have come to a boil as the pandemic pushes people towards panic over resources.

Equality, cultural diversity, and co-existence are thus key areas of engagement. Crisis is fuel for all forms of oppression. Systematic and institutionalized oppression based on race, class, gender, etc. is pervasive, and the work to undo it requires a commitment and sincere effort.

Cultural diversity, however, is not simply a matter of meeting quotas. Neither is it a charity model based on the rich giving what they feel they can spare the poor. It is, rather, a practice of empowerment, where all members of society have seats at a round table with equal opportunities to bring forth their issues and to seek solutions with equal access to available resources. Cultural diversity implies justice and equality, and it invites us to understand that we must to slow down and dial down our greed. Various forms of social oppression and discrimination have been with us throughout history. Today, while the world and its peoples face an existential threat, we call for privileged individuals and



Interfaith Gathering  
for Peace, northern  
Sri Lanka

societies to examine themselves and relinquish their habits and patters of domination. In our study of the natural world and its systems, we see that diversity is a strength, the essence of a thriving system. In human systems, privilege, domination, and patriarchy are threats to diversity and our very existence.

We begin engagement by listening deeply to the suffering of others—the Buddhist practice of the 1st Noble Truth. The creation of a safe space is also essential, especially for historically oppressed voices. By listening, we can understand fully the extent to which structural violence causes inequalities and vulnerabilities on personal and societal levels. As a result, calling out all forms of abuse of power, silencing, and working to eradicate both the deliberate and unconscious exclusion of minorities from decision-making processes is the next step of engagement. From the protective to the proactive, we promote inclusion and alliance across socio-economic and political lines, building on each other’s strengths and wisdom.

Unified systems of belief and devotional practices in specific religions are often entangled with nationalism. This leads people to develop a particularized sense of religious-ethnic identity, which raises barriers to diversity. Many communities feel it is their moral right to

oppose what they perceive as threats to their own traditions, beliefs, and cultural norms. This is one root of social conflict among communities. INEB envisions a world in which people come to accept and understand their respective communities. At the same time, we recognize that apparent cultural and religious conflict often serves as a cover for political and economic conflict, distracting us from struggles for power and access to resources that are the real issues.

Beneficial acts that may radically change people’s thinking and inspire cultural diversity and co-existence include:

- 1) Developing a culture of listening and understanding other’s lifestyles, culture, and traditions
- 2) Promoting feelings of mutual accommodation and gratitude through cultural events such as festivals, concerts, performances, and the sharing of traditions
- 3) Sharing forms of social engagement in which diverse communities work on a common social problem or serve and support a particular community’s problem with their own experiential wisdom.

A practical example of the above is when INEB partnered with like-minded groups in 2013 to form the International Forum on Buddhist-Muslim Relations (BMF). BMF has brought together Buddhists and Muslims from South and Southeast Asia—where Buddhist-Muslim tensions and ethnic violence have increased over the last decade—to develop tools for constructive engagement and strategic action to go beyond conflict. The founders and supporters of the BMF are rooted in their respective spiritual traditions. They feel exploring the inherent values of these traditions is necessary to overcome present issues and challenges.

While the members of BMF have different religious traditions, they seek shared values and action. BMF understands that institutionalized religions are subject to political interference and economic influence. Beyond their grasp of core values and traditions, religious leaders need to be well-versed in the multiple social, political, and economic spheres, and to be open to collaboration with like-minded experts in those fields.

Through the inspiration of BMF, INEB itself has reached out in dialogue with fundamentalist elements in the Buddhist world in these regions, taking responsibility for our Buddhist traditions and how these traditions can be distorted for personal, political, and economic gain. INEB stands in solidarity with religions, traditions, and communities confronting the common threats to humanity—including the pandemic, fundamentalism, poverty, inequality—supporting spiritual values that lead to peace, harmony, and wellbeing. INEB appeals to all governments to embrace equality, to stop the segregation of communities, and to support each community as an expression of our shared humanity. INEB is also appealing to relief agencies to renounce discriminatory practices of delivering aid based on race, caste, religion, citizenship, or place of birth, and gender. INEB is making this universal appeal to maintain communal harmony and extend the hand of love and care to all people everywhere.

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## Good Governance, Human Rights, and Peace

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In a recent appeal to “political leaders, especially in emerging markets and developing economies” the heads of the International Monetary Fund and the World Health Organization wrote:

In far too many places health systems are unprepared for an onslaught of COVID-19 patients and it is paramount to give them a boost. And this can and must go together with support for economy-wide priorities required to reduce unemployment, minimize bankruptcies and, over time, ensure recovery.

We are seeing a variety of such appeals during the COVID pandemic by political leaders, national governments, and inter-governmental agencies—such as the UN, WHO, IMF, and Asian Development Bank—hoping to preserve the global status quo by providing massive amounts of aid to “emerging markets and developing economies”. This approach is a tired recycling of old methods of economic globalization that have made First World richer, created a global imbalance of power, and ruined the original objectives of the Bretton Woods Institutions coming out of WWII.

Such appeals only further show how our political systems around the world are in crisis. There are nations that political scientists identify as failed states. A failed state is one that has lost its mandate of legitimacy and governance, and they face social disruption and international economic conflict. Many such nations today fit this definition, including well-regarded Western democracies, and we are seeing them turn inwards to populism, isolationism, and virulent nationalism. The COVID pandemic exacerbates and highlights these problems, which involve the fundamental human rights



Interfaith Group to Stop Nuclear Proliferation, Japan

and prosperity of citizens.

While INEB supports on-going dialogue with larger institutions of governance and power, listening to their concerns, and helping to arrive at common solutions, we also feel it is unrealistic to imagine that degraded institutions will be able to remedy the problems they themselves have created. As such, INEB seeks to build “the new within the shell of the old.” It is important to work for a “new world order” that involves shifts:

1. From the concept of human-centered rights, to the rights of all sentient beings—what Buddhism calls “interbeing”.
2. From the domination of crony capitalism and vested interests, to participatory governance that balances economic development, natural resource management, and grassroots decision making.
3. From the narrow trinity of nation-ethnicity-religion to multi-cultural societies, where diverse identities are equally and openly respected in any one region.
4. From the ceaseless pursuit of wealth and material gain, to a post-consumerist society where human relationships and connection with nature form the basis of “the good life.”

INEB will seek to support the development of the four agendas above by:

1. *Using our values, practices, and presence to help build global community* INEB’s vision is to develop the practice of socially-engaged Buddhism to promote understanding, cooperation, and networking among Buddhist groups, among religious groups, among social action groups, and among secular civil society organizations. This widening base will allow us to join these groups in a movement for social transformation. INEB as an organization with members of diverse backgrounds will facilitate dialogue leading to cooperation between governments, inter-governmental agencies, and common people at the grassroots.
2. *Activating this global community for collective engagement with the present system, towards a paradigm shift*

INEB must challenge and expose the hidden agendas that wreak havoc among disadvantaged groups in rural and urban areas. INEB can provide a platform for like-

minded groups developing forward-thinking systems. Such groups may include community organizations, think tanks, research institutes, universities, social enterprises, trade unions, academics, etc. Wide cooperation across sectors is necessary for critical engagement with government regimes, inter-governmental agencies, regional power groups, and big corporations who often hold a controlling power over people's lives.

3. *Organizing and building capacity towards complex adaptive systems which are people-friendly and non-exploitative of beings and the environment*

This work should focus on areas of food, health, education, environment, energy, and technology. INEB has long worked for environmental principles that bolster food security and long-term health standards. INEB is also increasingly involved in the political and economic decentralization of energy, promoting its mindful and sustainable use. Finally, INEB seeks to become more involved in developing ethical perspectives for the rapid growth of IT. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, block chains, nano-technology, and bio technologies need to be aligned with environmental and structural sustainability, rather than blind exploitation. Technologies and business models need to be safe, affordable, and directed towards the betterment of the society, citizens, and the future. These systems need to be accountable to the people.

In the United States, INEB members and allies from other religions and progressive organizations take a long view in favor of justice and in opposition to political

corruption, inequality, poverty, social violence, and environmental degradation, as well as the ongoing scourge of the pandemic. For the last fifteen years, adapting traditional models of Buddhist values and practice, they have been engaging in electoral work, working with and for candidates whose values are closer to their own. At times, they may not be fully aligned with a candidate's full platform, but politics is a matter of reality and compromise. Standing fixed in a position of righteousness while the world is on fire is both intolerable and life-threatening. The Buddha's middle-way practice of balance and harmony does not stop at the threshold of politics. We must cross that threshold.

**INEB** - <https://inebnetwork.org/enlightening-crisis-a-vision-for-a-post-covid-19-world/>

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# Concerning the Continued Exploitation of Forests in Northeast Thailand & the Potential of Buddhist Forest Monasteries in Creating Regional Ecological Corridors

**Cedric Boudry**, *International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)*  
*Eco-Temple Community Development Project*



Thailand's national forest corridor from Phukheio-Namnow to Dong Phrayayen-Kao Yai

This map shows the national forest corridor in the yellow dotted line being connected from Phukheio-Namnow (upper left) to Khao Yai National Park in the large brown colored area.

In recent decades, Thailand has been facing the consequences of mass deforestation caused by the expansion of industrial agriculture and commercial lumber. Today, Thailand's forested areas account for 37% of land surface, ranking lowest in South East Asia. This percentage has been rising, however, since the "Royal Reforestation Project in Honor of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX)"\* was initiated in 1993, in response to these critical losses of forest cover. This project has put massive land and watershed areas throughout Thailand under governmental protection and management, in order to revive bio-diversity and freshwater reserves, vital to the survival of rural populations and climate change mitigation. Reforestation and conservation have seen a boon [merit] since then as Buddhist groups and individual landowners have actively engaged in reforestation activities.

Since 2012, however, there has been a lack of supervision as the management of these protected forest

areas is in the process of being transferred from the Forestry Department to the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP). With lack of clear jurisdiction and funding, the responsibilities of these two agencies have become blurred, which—according to the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)—has resulted in the fringes of these protected forest complexes being progressively razed for the use of export-oriented agriculture or other businesses.

Local, Buddhist forest monasteries have tried to prevent such land grabbing and have called for effective governmental surveillance and surveying of the land. INEB and IUCN have supported these efforts and have recently drafted the "Management Framework for Ecological Corridors between Forest Complexes", which aims at connecting into one ecological corridor separate protected areas, specifically the Phukheio-Namnow and the World



Heritage Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complexes in the North-East. This interconnectedness would improve the resilience and health of the protected forests, allow for better conservation of biodiversity and watersheds, and improve local populations to engage in conservation efforts, in addition to reducing the likelihood of wildlife trafficking. This proposal will be submitted to the DNP within a year as soon as all surveys and data have been collected and analyzed.

In parallel to these agricultural and logging issues, Thailand is facing an energy crisis and looking for ways to meet rising demand. In seeking ways to increase its national production of electricity, green energy has been one direction of development, specifically wind farms. In fact, only 0.2% of Thailand's land mass holds the best conditions for wind farming, and some of it is reserved for agricultural purposes or protected forest areas. To overcome these barriers, the Agricultural Land Reform Office (Sor Por Kor) of the Thai government has unilaterally allowed both foreign and public/private wind farm companies to use these lands. Despite one court case by a group of local villagers to contest the construction of a wind farm on Sor Por Kor land, other wind farms on such governmental land have continued to develop as they were judged beneficial to local populations. This authority of these actions has been further bolstered by the use of Article 44 by the Thai military junta's National Council for Peace and Order which allows it to issue orders regardless of existing laws or regulations.

Wind farms [from Huay Bong to the Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai] are growing fast in Thailand's North East [from Chaiyapoom to Nakorn Ratchasima], where the meteorological conditions are more favorable. It has come to INEB's attention that some wind farms have been built or are planned to be built close to these protected forest complexes, and questions about the impact of the construction process and continued use of wind turbines on biodiversity have risen. Without proper surveying the effects of wind farming in these areas, reforestation efforts could be nullified, and damage to the vital watershed areas could impair the lifestyles of rural populations. As such, a consideration of the effect of this development is needed. Further, the rationale for their construction on protected land must be questioned. There have been in fact investigations of collusion between Thai governmental workers and wind energy companies.

These issues highlight the question of not only "what"

(clean energy vs. fossil fuels) but also "how" (the development of clean energy to resuscitate the environment and improve the quality of life of people living in these regions vs. to increase corporate revenues and vested government interests while continuing to encourage the mindless waste of energy by an urbanized consumer citizenry). The method of deployment and a holistic environmental design system are key concerns of INEB's Eco-Temple Community Development Project. Going forward, a coordinated effort is needed to realize the INEB/IUCN plan of connecting together preserved lands into a national forest corridor that is vital to the environmental wholeness of the entire region.

\* The "Reforestation Campaign in

Commemoration of the Royal Golden Jubilee" is a nature rehabilitation project being implemented to express loyalty and gratitude to our beloved King Bhumibol Adulyadej on His 50th Anniversary Accession to the Throne in 1996. His Majesty's interest and support to forestry activities and conservation of nature was and still is active and highly appreciated by all. This project was approved by the Cabinet on February 1, 1994, which directed the project to be implemented according to the Royal Advice from Queen Sirikit that urged the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives to devise urgent measures to halt deforestation and rehabilitate watershed areas of the country.

**Sources:**

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- "Section 44 collapses the administrative court judgment Unlock the land lock of the NACC, promoting the energy business" <https://ilaw.or.th/node/4585>

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# Strengthening Interfaith Relationships During the Time of COVID

## South and Southeast Asian Inter-Religious Dialogue and Freedom of Religion or Belief Project (SEA AIR FoRB)

Phillip Gassert



The European Union-funded SEA-AIR project kicked off 2020 with a flurry of events and plans for a busy summer. When these plans were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SEA-AIR staff shifted focus to online support and events while proactively planning for activities to resume according to local contexts. Through a series of webinar discussions, increased social media presence, and new grant opportunities, SEA-AIR staff and Interfaith Fellows adapted their work to the evolving new normal, planned for the future, and made new connections to international and grassroots actors. With many countries now slowly opening, the future is hopeful for meaningful engagement between the Fellows and religious communities throughout South and Southeast Asia.

The SEA-AIR project hosted the Interfaith Fellowship Townhall webinar series in April, May, and July. Fellows led discussions on child protection, protection from sexual exploitation, interfaith and digital peacebuilding, and majority-minority dynamics in the new context of a global pandemic. In addition to facilitating discussions among fellows, the SEA-AIR project hosted the UN Alliance for Civilization to present on relevant UN Plans of Action with opening remarks by UNAOC High Representative H.E. Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos. Project partner Religions for Peace also presented on their new initiative, “Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action”, which is implemented in collaboration with UNICEF and aims to mobilise faith communities on messaging around the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the webinars, the SEA-AIR project launched Facebook and Twitter pages in April. Since then, the SEA-AIR social media pages have featured over 45 posts, including video interviews with fellows, job posts, infographics on the fellowship program, online event invitations, and learning materials. The SEA-AIR pages will begin a Peacebuilding Vocabulary campaign in August and September as well as infographics and interviews with fellows regarding their work in response to the pandemic.

The SEA-AIR project finalized the selection of 10 additional fellowship grants for community-based intra- and interfaith peacebuilding activities in April, and in June awarded 12 grants to Interfaith Councils and other community organizations as a means to strengthen FoRB and social cohesion in South and Southeast Asia. While grant activities were originally planned to take place throughout 2020, all were delayed until no earlier than August. In the meantime, SEA-AIR staff worked with all grant recipients to finalize budgets, monitoring frameworks, and communication strategies and guidelines.

2020 has presented the SEA-AIR project with unforeseen challenges and delays, which also brought new opportunities for networking, conversation, and planning. While many challenges of the pandemic remain, SEA-AIR fellows and grant recipients are prepared to continue promoting interfaith harmony and freedom of religion in belief in their communities and countries.

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The Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF) through INEB and the International Forum for Buddhist Muslim Relations is one of the partners for the SEA-AIR FoRB project.

Please visit: <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/our-work/peace-support/southeast-asia/>, Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/SEAAIRProject>) and Twitter pages (<https://twitter.com/SEAAIRProject>).

**Dear INEB members,**

**Greetings from ADECOM Network!**

Hope that we are seeing you in a zoom meeting often about different contents initiated by Mr. Alan. My best greetings to all INEB members for their happy and peaceful life in this Pandemic situation.

In our place we are struggling a lot to protect and prevent the Corona positive cases. Our team and volunteers are working in the field to conduct various medical camps and distributed Sidtha and Homeopathy medicines to our community for their safety and security. This is the real COVID-19 situation in our place.

INEB supported two times for our relief activities in our region. We would be happy to mention our sincere thanks to the donors for this great support.

This is just to share our information about how the community people affected in our place.

**Thanking you for your cooperation and support.**

**In Solidarity,**

**Ms. P. Lalidamballe, M.A.,B.Ed.,**  
Managing Trustee

**Mr. S. Perumal, M.A., LL.B.**  
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# School of English for Engaged Social Service 2021

## Women and Climate Justice Theme

SENS Team



### Women and Climate Justice Theme

The climate crisis is accelerating rapidly. It is now urgent for us to share sound scientific information on the dangers and impacts of the crisis, cultivate the leadership needed to confront it, and work for climate justice. Climate justice asks us to change systems that generate inequalities and keep us from taking steps that are even now within our reach. As traditional providers for the needs of the household, women are among those most affected by the crisis in Asia, yet they are also the least likely to hold decision-making power on climate issues. SENS 2021 aims to help correct this imbalance by supporting women to lead in this area. Our program in 2021 will welcome both women and men, while giving priority to women.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us what social chaos and collapsing systems look like. Yet the climate crisis is not far behind, and will likely be much worse. There is much we can do to prepare, to build solidarity, and to avoid the worst outcomes of climate change. All of this requires building a network, for which English can play a key role.

### Health and Safety Precautions

COVID-19 has been well contained in Thailand, yet there may still be restrictions on travel in January 2021. We are well-prepared to make this program successful, while keeping everyone safe.

- If there are quarantines in place for citizens of your country arriving in Thailand, we will need to bring you by at least January 3rd.
- During quarantine we will support you with food and housing, and offer online instruction as well.
- We will then carry on with an in-person course as planned, following the quarantine period.
- We encourage you to apply, even if we do not yet know whether travel from your country will be possible in January.





### What Our Graduates Say about SENS

This course creates a safe, encouraging, and loving space in which I am accepted the way I am, and I am free to be authentic to myself and others, so that I feel confident enough to live in harmony with people from within my own personality!

Since I became a part of SENS 2020, English has been more meaningful to me. English helps me to build relationships—which is a source of my happiness—even with people who don't speak my mother tongue. Never before had I thought that I could make friends with foreign people, that I could laugh and cry together with foreign friends and that we could support each other from the top of our heart—all in English. Because I want to understand my friends as much as I can, English is now of vital importance to me. SENS is a bridge that connects English and other people to me in a natural way.

*Le Ha Anh Thy, Vietnam*

Social work is not my job, it's my passion, because I have also faced caste discrimination as a member of the Dalit community. From this program I learned that we have similar problems all over the world, and we need to come together to change our societies.

*Raj Kumar, Chhattisgarh, India*

I am a woman who is looking for changes for myself and for my communities. And SENS made this possible.

We come together from different cultural backgrounds, religions, ethnicities and countries to learn from each other and listen to each other. This is a message from SENS that everyone in the world should receive and act on. We are ordinary people from different corners of the world who lack political and financial power, but we are a group of people who believe that we can and we will contribute something to the world with the power of compassion.

From SENS, I learned the importance of listening, which is the primary ability we human beings have, but it seems we have forgotten it for a very long time. Here we value different traditions, religions, and personal opinions and honor them through listening. Listening is the foundation of respect. Listening is the basis of trust. Listening is the bridge between different opinions. Listening is the key to peace and harmony. Listening is the only way lovers, friends, families, communities, religions, nationalities, countries, and the world can heal.

*This student wishes to remain anonymous.*




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## 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ecologia Youth Trust

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I first encountered EYT while attending the 1st Ecovillage Training at Findhorn Foundation in 1999. The training was inspiring and helped form the foundation of my understanding for social and ecological movements, and the work by its community members around the world.

It was during that time that I learned about EYT and their work with Kitezh Children's Village in Russia. I have a good connection with a friend from their community, and later on we had an exchange internship program between Kitezh and the Wongsanit Ashram in Thailand.

That connection helped us to develop a deeper partnership through various projects in South East Asia. This relationship has been built for more than a decade, beginning in 2007 until today. Our collaborations have been primarily in Thailand and Myanmar, through the work of Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) and its partner in Myanmar, Kalyana Mittra Foundation (KMF).

SEM and EYT collaborated on the Cross Ethnic Integration project in the Andaman Sea area (CEIA), supported by two grants from UK Big Lottery Fund. Their work over the past 6-7 years has contributed to improving the quality of life and increasing access of the rights of migrant workers from Myanmar, in addition to developing a better relationship between Thai and Myanmar communities. More details about the project outcomes can be found in the report 'Migrant Workers are Human too!'

Whilst the project primarily focused on the rights of migrant workers there were two significant youth focused activities in the Big Lottery Funded project. The inter-ethnic Peacebuilding for Youth Empowerment camps brought together Thai Christian, Muslim, Buddhist & Mogen (sea people) and migrant worker youth who had been impacted by the tsunami for reconciliation, friendship and learning. Teachers at migrant worker schools set up in rubber plantations were also supported to enable Myanmar children to get an education and prepared to attend Thai schools.

I vividly remember the situation in January 2005, one month after Tsunami struck the coastal area of Southern Thailand bordered by the Andaman sea. At that time, the plight of the Burmese migrant workers was not raised. It was as though they did not exist and reports did not include the numbers of persons among them that were affected – alive or dead.

I organized a Buddhist ceremony for those who had died, especially the migrant workers from Myanmar. Two Buddhist monks from Myanmar were invited to chant and make merit for them. More than one thousand migrant workers joined this ceremony. We were shocked that the head of sub-district came to the temple with a gun and shouted to migrant workers saying that their gathering was a risk to Thai national security. His actions made me very upset as the migrant workers had been promised support for developing a better relationship with Thai authorities with the hope of gaining their rights.

When the project was phased out of the area, in Ranong and Phang Nga provinces, the Thai communities always invited the migrant workers and their families to join them for cultural exchanges and formed friendships among them. This is one tangible result of SEM's and YET's deep commitment that has lasted for more than a decade, and hopefully will last far into the future.

Lastly, I would like to say that this organizational partnership has been made possible through close personal relationships with Jane Rasbash, Pracha

Hutanuwatr and Liza Hollingshead which has expanded through the years. We have deep gratitude to all of them and best wishes to EYT, as they move forwards to support disadvantaged people, especially the youth throughout the world.

**Somboon Chungpramree (Moo)**

International Program Director  
Spirit in Education Movement (SEM)

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# Sulak Defends Students' Call for Monarchy Reform, Warns Ultra-Royalists

By *The Nation*

<https://www.nationthailand.com/news/30392921>



Prominent social critic Sulak Sivaraksa has spoken out to defend students' right to freedom of expression over their unprecedented 10-point manifesto for reform of the monarchy.

The students' call for reform does not exceed bounds of what is appropriate, said Sulak.

"The 10 demands are reasonable, since for the monarchy to continue to exist, it has to be transparent and open," he said in an interview with the 101.World Facebook page.

He also called on those in power to listen to protesters' voices and make changes accordingly, while adding that it would be a bad move to ignore their proposals and attack them.

Thousands of students gathered at Thammasat University's Rangsit Campus on Monday (August 10) to voice critical opinions about the monarchy. Among their 10 proposals was a call to separate HM the King's wealth from Crown Property Bureau assets. The former junta government led by PM Prayut Chan-o-cha changed the law to allow the King to directly oversee the Crown Property Bureau.

Criticising the monarchy in the public is illegal in Thailand under strict royal defamation laws.

Thammasat's administrators issued an apology and vowed to punish students for straying from the

agreed rally agenda, while some politicians accused the protesters of breaking the law and undermining the Palace. However, academics nationwide have defended the right of students and protesters to freedom of expression and urged university administrators to open up space to exchange ideas of public interest.

Sulak cited the Thammasat University massacre of October 6, 1976 as a lesson that using drastic measures against anti-government protesters could lead to more bloodshed. In 1976, police, troops and right-wing militia laid siege to Thammasat's campus and killed dozens of students who were protesting the return of former dictator Thanom Kittikachorn.

Sulak cautioned the government would face a public backlash if it cracked down violently against protesters. It should instead listen to their demands or at the very least refrain from launching counterattacks against them, he said.

He also warned of the threat against pro-democracy protesters from ultra-royalists.

"These extreme right-wingers are very dangerous – Pridi Banomyong once noted that this group thought they were the King and, worse, took actions beyond anything the monarch would do," said Sulak, referring to the former prime minister.

"I want to remind the ultra-royalists that if they are really loyal to the King, they should not see those with different opinions as bad people. They should respect different views," he added.

He also urged people to offer the youthful protesters moral support and good-intentioned warnings if necessary, but not to blame them if they did not listen since youths had their own unique perspective. "We should remind them to use polite language when they talk about the monarchy. Experience will teach them behave better," he added.



# A New Model for Democratizing Agriculture in Thailand

Thamturakit is revolutionizing the way food is grown and consumed all across the country – and we should all be paying attention

**Thea Walmsley,**

A Growing Culture

July 16, 2020 Medium.Com -

<https://medium.com/@AGrowingCulture/a-new-model-for-democratizing-agriculture-in-thailand-bcddafce67bd>

The Pun Pun Center for Self-Reliance, an organic farm and teaching center located in the North of Thailand, was founded sixteen years ago as a way to transition to a more sustainable, self-reliant model of living and growing food. Since then, it has bred a nationwide movement towards a new, democratized financial model for Thailand's agriculture system.



It started as Jo Jandai and Peggy Reents, the farm's co-founders, began to see the cracks in the industrial agricultural system in Thailand: "In the conventional model, consumers are paying a lot for food, and farmers are paid very little — in the end, the middlemen are the ones who are profiting," explains Reents. "So we set out to create a model where the farmers had more control — where they became their own middlemen."

The traditional agricultural model in Thailand,

favored by large conglomerates, gives farmers huge quotas they must meet by the end of a season in order to be paid a set rate. "It's all contract farming," says Reents. "The farmer is responsible for all the expenses, so when you really budget it out, the farmer barely makes anything."

The need — and the opportunity — to do something different became clear: consumers were growing more concerned about unsafe pesticide residues on conventional agricultural products, but organic produce was overpriced and hard to find. Farmers, in turn, were becoming more interested in moving away from monocrops and industrialized forms of agriculture towards self-sufficiency models, where they could grow diversified crops that they could support their families with while making profits from their surpluses.

"We're almost like a black sheep in comparison to the rest of Thailand because we don't do cash crops — we don't invest a lot of money in farming, we try to think about self-reliance first," explains Jandai. "The

idea is that we have to grow enough for ourselves first — the leftovers, we can sell.”

## ***Thamturakit*. A New Model for Agriculture – and for Life**

*Thamturakit*—which translates to “A Fair Business” in Thai — was co-founded by Pun Pun Farms and Ajaan Yak, an expert in sufficiency economies in Thailand. “We wanted to see if we could create an entirely new business model for farmers where they were could access markets that they were in charge of themselves — to remove the middle-men,” says Reents.

To do this, they started with what they saw as the core element of creating a new model: a new kind of education. In order to become a member of the social enterprise, everyone must undergo a four-day training session — whether they’re a farmer, consumer, or someone wishing to make products from farmers’ crops. “This way, they get involved,” explains Reents. “They make connections, they get to know each other, they get to know the farmers. It’s hands-on — they get their hands dirty, help on the farms, and learn about farming techniques, the challenges facing farmers, and environmental issues — even if they aren’t farmers themselves.”

But the centers serve a deeper purpose, as well. “The learning centers started as a way to ask how we can learn to make life less complicated,” Jandai explains. “We want to know how we can live more easily. How can we live happily? How can we enjoy our life more?”

“Before I started Pun Pun, I used to work in Bangkok for seven years,” he explains. “I realized at that time that I couldn’t live in Bangkok anymore because city life is not for humans — it’s for robots. So when you live in the city, you cannot be human — you cannot think about love, you cannot think about freedom, you cannot think about happiness — you can think only about working and making money. It’s like a machine.”

It was this discontent that led Jandai to begin questioning the deeper inequalities that made up the conventional system. “Humans should not be hungry because we live on the most fertile planet in the universe. How can we be hungry in the middle of fertility?”

These questions brought Jandai back to the land. “When I worked in Bangkok, I worked more than eight hours per day every day but never had enough food to feed only one person. But when I went back to the land, I worked less than one hour per day and had enough food to feed six people.”

Between starting Pun Pun, running the education centers, and growing *Thamturakit*, one might think Jandai’s responsibilities made him even busier. Instead, it has brought him a deep sense of peace. “Life is so easy,” you’ll often hear him say. “Why do we design our lives to be so complicated?”

Once farmers have undergone the training, they can begin to sell their products through the network. “We have over 1,000 farmers across the country who are now involved in the enterprise,” says Reents. “Most of them started out by farming conventionally, but through the process of joining the enterprise, began to transition to an organic, self-sufficiency model.” The membership base has only grown from there; as of now, over 100,000 people of all positions in the food system and from all across the country have undergone their training.

*Thamturakit* is a largely volunteer-based organization, as well, with its members offering up skills like accounting or architecture to help keep costs low and giving urban residents a way to get involved and contribute to the cooperative’s success. “A lot of it is driven by the consumers themselves because people want to be involved with it,” says Reents. “People are just so disconnected with where their food comes from, what’s happening with farmers, what their struggles are, what their opportunities are, and what support they need from the public, so once they get the education and relationship-building, they really

want to be involved if you open up the opportunity for them to do so.” This community-building is the core essence of what makes the model work. As Jandai puts it, “to be self-reliant, it means we have to rely on each other, also.”

“It started as an experiment to see how much of the system could be controlled directly by farmers, without having to rely on middlemen,” says Reents. But it expanded to become a space for relationship-building, education, and shared understanding between the groups that led to the movement becoming what it is today. “We cannot continue to be farming in the way that we are,” she explains. “We have to imagine something different.”

## A New Pricing Model

One of the ongoing challenges for farmers is price fluctuation. “In the conventional market, the prices for produce fluctuate so much, which is so hard for farmers — they don’t know how many other farmers are growing the same things they’re growing, and how that will affect the final price they get,” explains Reents.

This new model addresses this in two innovative ways — by helping farmers transition to a new model of agriculture and by changing the pricing structure of the food that is sold through the network. Under the self-sufficiency economy model, farmers grow a wide range of crops: “You can’t grow organic rice only, buy the rest of your food, and sell through the network that way. This model is that you grow everything you need for your family and then you sell the extra that you have leftover.” This allows farmers to cut down on their food costs for their families while still making enough profit to sustain themselves and contributing positively to biodiversity and environmental health.

Those leftover crops are sometimes hard to sell, however, because farmers don’t have large quantities to distribute through other market-based mechanisms. In response, *Thamturakit* set up a pickup and delivery system that collects the small bunches of a variety of

different crops and delivers them to members of the network. “This is the opposite of the model that’s conventionally done around us, which is where a farmer grows one variety of hybrid corn to sell to a company, and they’ll come one day and pick it up from you on one day and that’s all they get from you,” explains Reents. This approach celebrates an agricultural model that ensures that farmers are well-fed first, that they are paid fairly, and that the community benefits from access to the diverse crops that farmers grow.

They also had a plan to address price stability for farmers in the model’s design: instead of crops being bought based on their wider-market value, all the crops at *Thamturakit*’s markets are priced the same. Farmers’ crops are bought per kilo, regardless of the types of crops, allowing them to sell the entire diversity of the crops they grow while stabilizing their incomes.

“There have definitely been challenges with this,” admits Reents. At first, lower-value, easier to grow crops flooded the market when farmers knew they would get the same rate for those as they would for higher-value crops that are more difficult to grow. “But what they found is that in this model, everyone is very intricately involved with this company, so when we began to talk to their members about how this is an issue, you find that the members want this to work as well — they’re invested, and they see the value in the diversity, so it stopped being an issue.”

## Building Equity in the Enterprise

The premise of *Thamturakit* was to disrupt the status quo of conventional agriculture; to build a more equitable way of growing, selling, and consuming food. To make the model viable while adhering to these values, members can buy shares in the organization — but rather than the size of the share correlating to the number of votes one has, each shareholder, regardless of the size of their share, gets one vote in the decision-making process of the organization.

“We need to design a new kind of business where the profits go to more people,” explains Jandai. “When people are buying shares, we don’t need them to be buying a lot — one share can be three or four dollars — but we want many people to be buying the shares. So this way, the profits are spreading to many more people. They aren’t expecting to make a lot of profit on their shares — they just want to support the idea, they want to see a new business that makes the food circle fair for everybody.”

The enterprise also does not accept funding from venture capitalists, banks, or other corporate sources, as they want to keep the enterprise focused on its values and on the people who are directly involved with agriculture, allowing them to make the decisions that are truly in everyone’s best interest: consumers, farmers, and the planet, alike.

“We want to have organic food be the same price as chemical food; we want to expand the amount of land that can be organic land, we want to have more clean water,” says Jandai. “So the business that we do has to be fair for everybody, and it has to be good for the environment, the ecosystem, everything.”

The response has been enormous — at one point, *Thamturakit* was at risk of losing the land that one of their learning centers was housed on, so they called on their community to help by inviting them to buy shares in the organization. 6,000 people — mostly people who had already undergone the training — donated a total of over five million U.S. dollars to help, and they were able to retain the land. “People weren’t investing to make a lot of money, says Reents. “They see the value of this work, they see the changes that it brings to have farmers and consumers undergo this training, and they want to see it grow.”

Although the organization has been able to build and finance large ventures through crowdfunding, Reents emphasizes that this isn’t its biggest accomplishment. “The focus is less on how much money we can raise; it’s about asking how we can think outside the model that we currently live under.

What happens when we try to imagine creating a different model? It might be really small to start — ours was small at the beginning and it took a while for farmers to become interested — and it takes time to build that momentum. But I think the main point of it is connections. It’s about belonging and participation, and what can happen with that when you get more people involved and choose to grow together.”

Since humans began farming thousands of years ago, agriculture has served as the fundamental basis for our societal order. It has shaped our ways of living and relating to each other more than arguably any other development in our history. And since the beginning, hierarchies have existed — disparities between those who produce the food and those who distribute it, between those who own the land and those who work it — and these disparities have endured, ordering and shaping our present-day societies into what they are. We often romanticize agriculture’s past, while ignoring the fact that it has been steeped in injustice and hierarchy from its conception.

This model reimagines that hierarchy. The birth of *Thamturakit* shines out as an example of what is possible when the control of agriculture is placed back into the hands of those most directly involved; when sustainability, community, and equity are built into the foundations of a system; and what happens when a few people are brave enough to disrupt the conventional model in the pursuit of something better.

As long as an unjust agricultural system endures, inequality will remain as a bedrock of our larger society. In reimagining this new model for agriculture, *Thamturakit*’s founders have shown us that an entirely new way of ordering society — one that is not only sustainable, but truly just — is not only possible; it’s already taking place.



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# The Importance of Love to Society - A Buddhist Perspective

World Interfaith Harmony Week  
18th Feb 2020, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur

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**Ang Choo Hong,**  
*Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia*

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## Teaching Love

Nelson Mandela once said, “No one is born hating another person. People must learn to hate. And if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” This quotation from him is really apt at a time when the world seems to have forgotten the human nature to love.

If we look around, we would realise that love is so natural, and everyone must have some objects of love to fulfill their natural desire to love. For instance, our family members are our objects of love. We shower them with love and we feel good. When all the children grow up and move out of the house, we, old couples, usually redirect our love to animals, by keeping some pets. And when we find pets difficult to take care, we may redirect our love to fish, or flower, which do not complain! Overall, it’s a manifestation that we need to love, to keep ourselves happy.

As Nelson Mandela pointed out, we can be taught to love. But teaching love is not so much giving advices or lectures on love. Love requires action rather than just words. In the Buddhist scriptures we frequently come across many advices on love or Metta (the Buddhist Pali word for love, which is usually

translated as Loving-Kindness), but there are also many actions of the Buddha which showed us what love is all about. I will therefore tell you some stories about what the Buddha did, to drive home the points.

## Nursing the Monk Tissa

Once there was a monk by the name of Tissa, who was stricken with dysentery, which disabled him making him lay on his own filth. He was in such a dismal condition when the Buddha and Ananda came and saw him. Both the Buddha and Ananda together cleaned him, nursed and comforted him. Thereafter the Buddha assembled all the monks and exhorted them thus “He who serves the sick serves me.” (Yo bhikkhave mam upatthaheyya so gilamam upatthaheyya, Vin 1:300.)

Here is an illustration that love must be extended to the sick or the less fortunate one, to comfort them and to relieve them of their suffering. We called this compassion or Karuna.

## Upali the Householder

There was a householder by the name of Upali, who was a follower of Nigantha Nataputta. One day, after

hearing certain doctrines of the Buddha conveyed to him by Digha Tappasi, another householder, he decided to see the Buddha and had a debate with the Buddha (Religious dialogues in ancient India was common). Nigantha Nataputta approved him to go and have the debate with the Buddha, thinking that Upali would be able to convert the Buddha to his faith.

After the debate, Upali was so convinced that he decided to become a disciple of the Buddha. The Buddha, instead of quickly accepting him, advised him thus: “Of a verity, O householder, make a thorough investigation first. It is good for a distinguished man like you to first make a thorough investigation.”

It is obvious that the Buddha was not obsessed with adding numbers to his number of disciples, but more concern with teaching the truth to the learner. This is a vast contrast to present day missionaries who are preoccupied with increasing their number of followers.

After eventually accepting Upali as a disciple, the Buddha advised Upali to continue to offer alms (dana) to Nigantha Nataputta and his monks. This is again in great contrast to many present day preachers and converts who enjoyed running down their former religions, a clear indication of lack of love.

The advice given by the Buddha is very relevant to contemporary society to maintain harmony, goodwill and mutual respect among people of different faiths. This is love that cuts across religious labels.

### **Sunita the Night Soil Carrier**

Sunita was Sudra. He was a night soil carrier. One day, Sunita set out on his normal rounds of the houses in Savatthi, the capital of the kingdom of Kosala. Outside of the city was the Jetavana monastery where the Buddha was staying. That morning as he made his rounds he heard people shouting, “The Buddha is here.” “Let’s go pay him reverence.” Sunita was curious

so he followed the crowd to get a closer look.

Then he saw a man whom everyone was bowing to and showing reverence. It was the Buddha coming into Savatthi to receive alms. One of the bystanders shouted at Sunita “What an awful stench! What are you doing here?”

Sunita realised that he still had a full pot strapped on his back. Sunita got scared and tried to get out of there. Just then he looked up and saw that the Buddha was looking directly at him. Then to his terror the Buddha started walking toward him! Oh no, Sunita thought, I have to get away, I am too dirty to be in the Buddha’s presence, but the Buddha was getting closer.

As Sunita was backing away he tripped and fell and to his dismay landed on his back with a crash! The pot on his back had shattered and now Sunita was laying in all of the smelly night soil that he had been carrying.

Lying in a pool of excrement unable to breath due to the stench Sunita thought, “I wish I could die and be done with it!”

As he cleared off his eyes he looked up he saw the Buddha bending over him with a smile. He heard a voice “Sunita, Sunita” but Sunita could not believe it. How could the Buddha whom even kings and rich men prostrated themselves to be calling his name?

Then the Buddha spoke again: “Sunita, it is for your sake that I have come. There is within you a pure, fragrant, and radiant spirit. Do not despise yourself. Come, follow me. Enter my brotherhood, the Sangha, and become a monk.”

“Me? You mean someone like me can become your disciple?”

“Sunita, the enlightenment that I have attained is precisely for the poor, for those who suffer, for those who know their own unworthiness and lament it. The Dharma I preach is like a pure river from which all can drink, the rich and the poor, kings and outcasts. Through it, all can attain Nirvana. Believe my words Sunita, and come follow me.” So Sunita exerted

himself day after day, living alone in the depths of the forest and practicing in accordance with the Buddha's teachings.

Here again we see the Buddha's love cutting across caste. His love and compassion also helped to elevate the status of the down trodden and bring back their human dignity.

## Vakkhali

A Brahmin by the name of Vakkhali was infatuated with the physical beauty of the Buddha and became a monk just to spend his time admiring the Buddha. One day the Buddha noticed this strange behavior of Vakkhali and asked him, "Vakkhali, what are you doing here?"

"My lord, I am here admiring your physical beauty. By sitting down here and gazing at your person makes me feel good and happy."

Then the Buddha admonished him, "This physical body is filled with shit, urine, sweat, blood, phlegm, mucus, saliva. It is dirty, smelly and filthy. There is nothing for you to gain by looking at this physical body!"

"Vakkhali, he who sees the Dharma sees me; he who sees me sees the Dharma." (O Kho Vakkhali, Dhammam passati so mam passati; yo mam passati so Dhammam passata.)

Despite this admonishment, Vakkhali refused to leave the Buddha. At the last day of the rains retreat, the Buddha instructed him to leave. Thereupon Vakkhali contemplated suicide. As Vakkhali was about to jump off a cliff, the Buddha appeared before him and said, "Come, O Bhikkhu" at which point Vakkhali realised Arahant hood.

Those of you who listened to this story attentively would by now guessed the sexual orientation of Vakkhali. The Buddha did not despise him or ridicule him. The Buddha still showered him with love and eventually saved him. Love does not discriminate against people's sexual orientation.

## Angulimala

Anguli means fingers and mala means garland. Angulimala was so called because he was a murderous bandit who would cut off his victim's fingers to form a garland around his neck. He did so because he was misled by his teacher who convinced him that his salvation was possible only when he completed a garland of one thousand fingers.

When he was looking for his last victim to complete his garland, and was about to kill even his own mother, the Buddha risking His own life, went alone into the forest to confront Angulimala. When Angulima saw the Buddha, he chased after Him, but no matter how fast he chased he simply could not get close to the Buddha, who was actually standing. The Buddha physically and spiritually tired him out. In desperation, he shouted, "Stop!" The Buddha, in a koan-like manner, told Angulima, "I have stopped. You should stop!" Angulima eventually succumbed to the physical and spiritual power of the Buddha, dropped his sword, and became a disciple of the Buddha.

Here, a criminal was reformed with love.

## Keraniya Metta Sutta

The above stories demonstrated how the Buddha showered His love to the society, irrespective of social status, religion, criminal background and even sexual orientation. This is Metta, which the Buddha taught us through His actions.

There is even a complete scripture called Keraniya Metta Sutta, which the Buddha taught us to always wish for the wellbeing of all sentient beings. This is a short ten stanza sutta, which goes thus:

1. He who is skilled in (working out his own) well being, and who wishes to attain that state of Calm (Nibbana) should act thus: he should be dexterous,

upright, exceedingly upright, obedient, gentle, and humble.

2. Contented, easily supportable, with but few responsibilities, of simple livelihood, controlled in the senses, prudent, courteous, and not hanker after association with families.
3. Let him not perform the slightest wrong for which wise men may rebuke him. (Let him think:) May all beings be happy and safe. May they have happy minds.
- 4.& 5. Whatever living beings there may be — feeble or strong (or the seekers and the attained) long, stout, or of medium size, short, small, large, those seen or those unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born as well as those yet to be born — may all beings have happy minds.
6. Let him not deceive another nor despise anyone anywhere. In anger or ill will let him not wish another ill.
7. Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life even so let one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings.
8. Let him radiate boundless love towards the entire world — above, below, and across — unhindered, without ill will, without enmity.
9. Standing, walking, sitting or reclining, as long as he

is awake, let him develop this mindfulness. This, they say, is Noble Living here.

10. Not falling into wrong views — being virtuous, endowed with insight, lust in the senses discarded — verily never again will he return to conceive in a womb.

This is a complete guide on learning and practicing Metta. The first three stanzas set the moral standards for the practitioners of Metta. It is interesting to note that one has to live a moral and virtuous way of life before one can talk about or practice Metta. The next 6 stanzas detailed how Metta should be practiced and radiated to all living beings. The last stanza gives the benefits of practicing Metta.

Many Buddhists chanted this Sutta daily, as a way of reminding themselves to radiate loving-kindness or Metta to all beings.

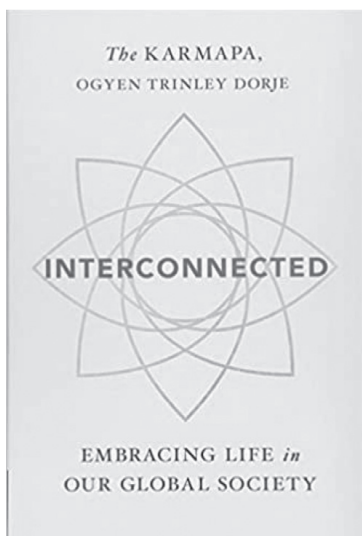
In conclusion, the Buddha taught us, through His actions and teaching, to love all sentient beings without any discrimination.

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Ang Choo Hong is a member of INEB's Advisory Council from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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## Recommended Reading




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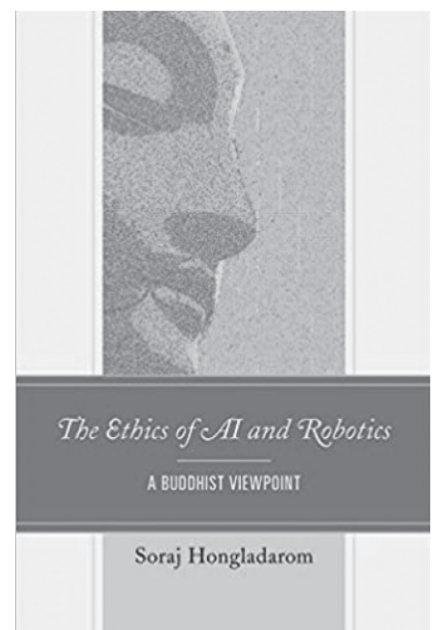
Interconnected Embracing Life  
in Our Global Society

Author: H. H. the Karmapa,  
Ogyen Trinley Dorje  
Publisher: Wisdom Publications

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The Ethics of AI and Robotics:  
A Buddhist Viewpoint

Author: Soraj Hongladarom  
Publisher: Lexington Books





# Religion and Technology

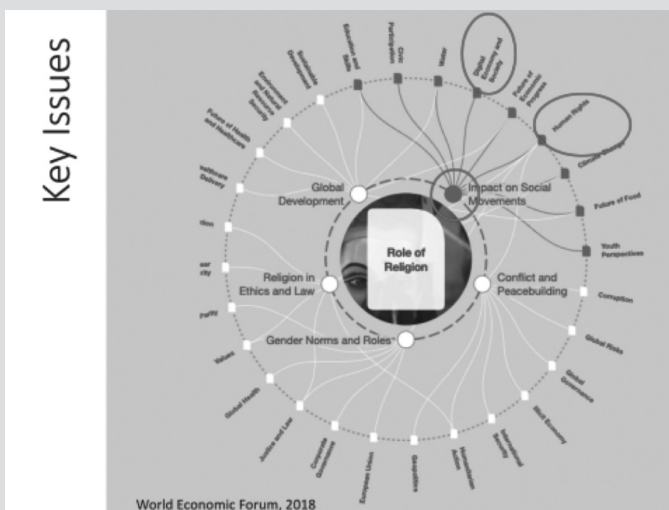
## IR4.0 and Social Media: Managing Segmentation to Polarisation

**KV Soon (Vidyananda)**

November 2019

This is a summary of the my recently present paper at the International Buddhist Conference Indonesia held in the city of Batu [(Malang), near Surabaya.

I took the opportunity to present a perspective about technology, data, digital economy and social media along with it's impact on religion, inter-religious / inter-ethnic relations. Here are some of the key points:



and transforming in many ways – fast! There are many dimensions of these changes and here am focusing on information and communication technology (ICT).

According to the World Economic Forum (2018), The role of religion, has now shifted to much broader scope to look are “digital economy and society” as an integral part of Impact on Social Movements to conflict transformation and peace building.

## 2. Being Prepared for the Problems of the (near) Future

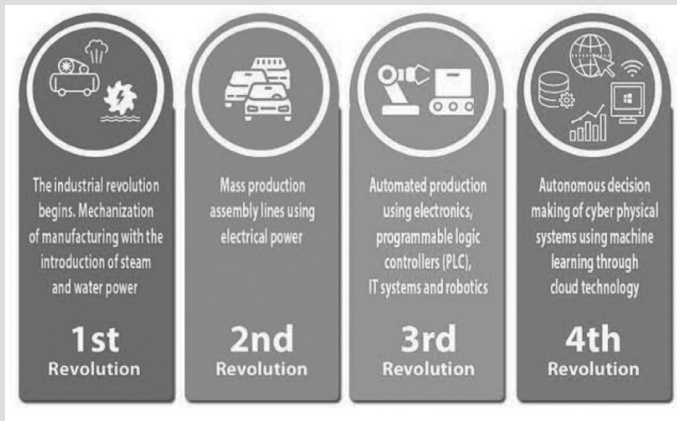
One of the phenomena that is happening in our world today the rise of automation, artificial intelligence, robotics and a whole world of business done virtually on the internet. We are also seeing the rise of autonomous machines such as self-driving cars and robots. This is due to what is called the 4th Industrial Revolutions (IR4.0) where technology is integrating with machines and this will transform the way we live, work and play. It has begun to dramatically began transform our lives.

*‘The rise of robots and automation is projected to lead to the displacement of 20 million manufacturing jobs*

## 1. Religious Teachers Need to Expand Their Knowledge to be Socially Engaged

Knowledge of religious teachers need to go religious text or traditions. We need to have broader knowledge of our world and its relations to our spiritual practice. It is only in this way socially engaged and appreciate the world of the people we are serving.

It is crucial to appreciate that our world is changing



by 2030. A report from Oxford Economics estimates that about 8.5% of the global workforce stands to be replaced by robots, with about 14 million manufacturing jobs lost in China alone.' (Oxford Economics, 2019)

### 3. Addressing Some Potential Issues

#### a. Joblessness.

Joblessness will be an issue if automation continue to replace jobs. This may lead social, emotions and spiritual challenges, we need to know how to address it in the different dimensions. This is a social issue that inter-faiths leaders need to come together and to address as one.

#### b. Education.

We need to educate our children in critical thinking, problem solving, innovation and creativity - with strong ethical and moral values. Religious educators need to do some rethinking if we need to be prepared for the (very near future). One thing for sure is that we cannot do things the say way we have been doing.

Considering the emerging technologies and the impact of society, religious need to adapt to be socially engaged.

### 4. The Impact of Social Media

This is perhaps the most important discussion, media and the rise of social media networks. A hot topic among religious leader is regarding the impact of social media.

For religious leaders who are involved in conflict transformation initiatives.

To understand the impact of social media, it is critical to appreciate the digital economy, its size and potential. There is no doubt, very soon, that much business transaction will be done online or through digital means.

Digital economy refers to an economy that is based on digital computing technologies, although we increasingly perceive this as conducting business through markets based on the internet The digital economy is also referred to as the Internet Economy, Increasingly, the digital economy is intertwined with the traditional economy, making a clear delineation harder.

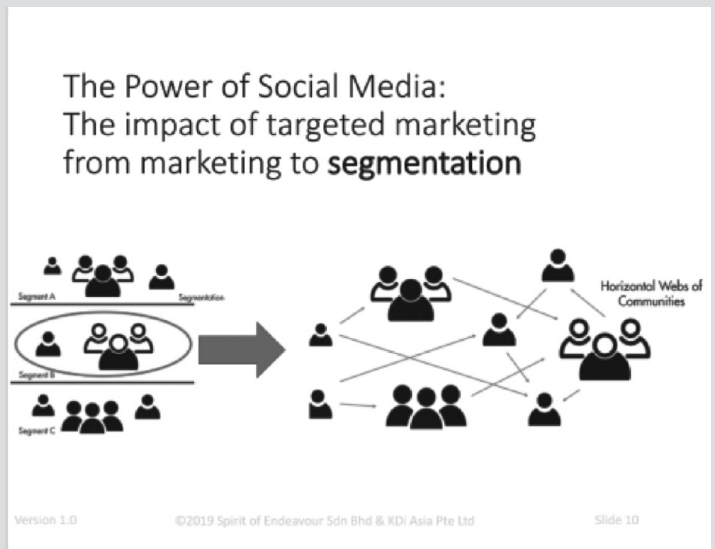
Digital transactions in ASEAN, for example is predicted to be USD\$415b by 2025 for ASEAN. The large businesses to the smaller businesses will have to market the product effectively. For the digital economy to grow, he digital economy needs a very strong and support marketing platform which is relatively low cost.

Social Media becomes the medium of choice to market and promote their business. Compared to traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers of even distributing leaflets), social has many advantages.

There are some very unique qualities and its advantages of social media is to monitor the movement.

#### a. The Power of Social Media to TARGET and SEGMENT the Audience.

As you use social media you provide all sort of personal information form gender, age, location interests, etc. This something the conventional media such as radio, TV or newspaper could not do effectively. Along with the information you provided, many social media companies harness data from your patterns of usage, the things you read, how you communicate and who you communicate with. A digital profile of you as a social media users is already built. These data will determine the products and services you may like. This data is continually refined as you use and interact on the social media platforms.



### b. The Power of Social Media to BUILD COMMUNITY.

Based on your postings and interactions, the social media systems will be able to determine your interests, including people who share similar interests. This is very powerful as advertisers and businesses will be able to cross-recommend or introduce products almost anywhere. Platforms like Facebook allows and encourage the setting up of group and communities, of course more data is collected. For the advertisers, this means very targeted advertising.

### c. Close the Loop by Keeping Similar Interest Groups Together.

ALGORITHMS allow the careful automated targeting and distribution of information and news to specific groups of people. Users of social media will continue to receive external news, information of interest and related advertising through a careful analysis of the all data regarding usage pattern and demographics of each user match. These data are then matched to external news and information.

What this means is that as a social media user, you will continue to see more and more of news, articles and suggested content close to you interest or what you have been viewing. This allows you to stay within the that is aligned to your interest. You will probably never get any news of information about topics outside your interests. This is the (virtual) segmenting of communities.

## 5. From Segmentation to Polarization: Interest Beyond Advertising and Promotion

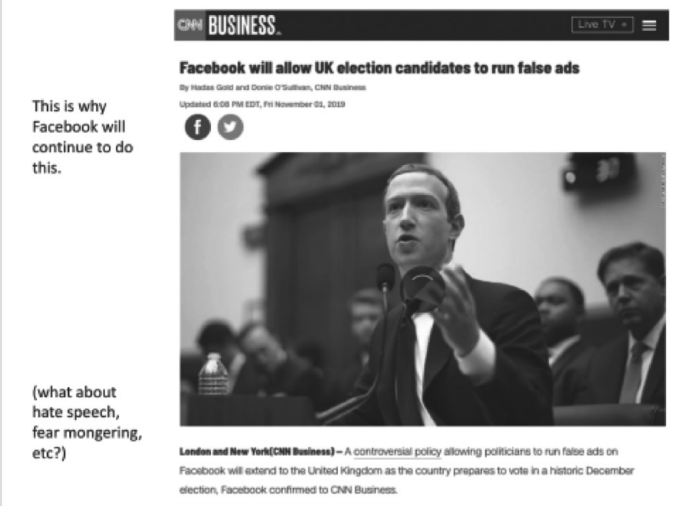
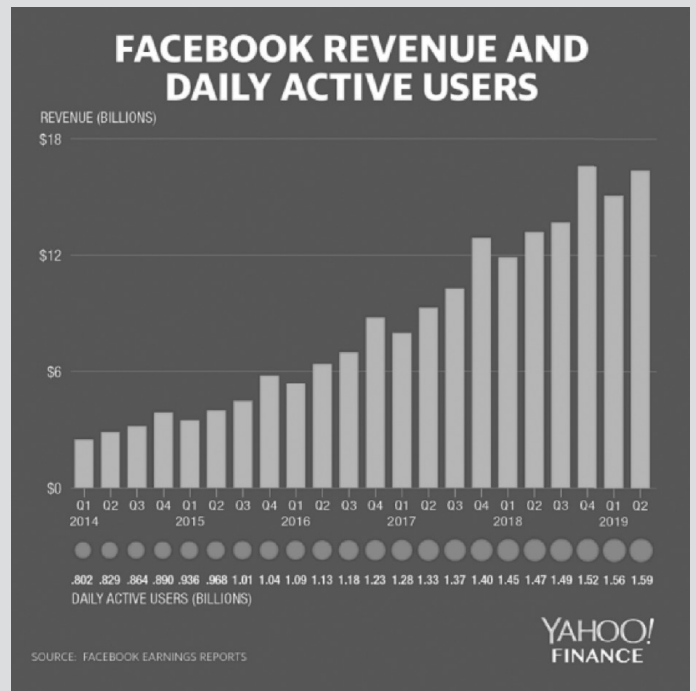
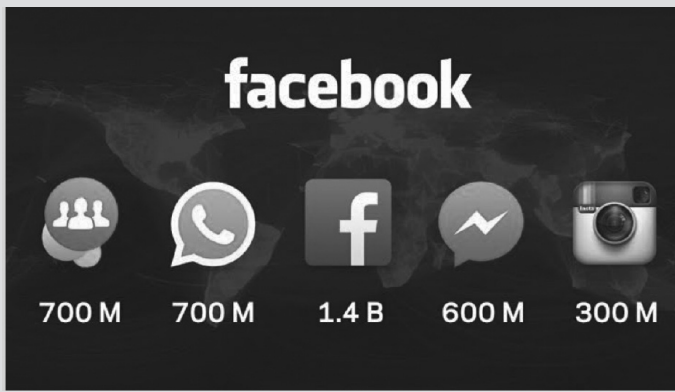
The ability of social media to reach out to very target audience and the capability of segmenting of users into communities and interest groups effectively attracted other people to use this medium. Among them are politician, interest groups and even individuals. They have found the use the social media an absolutely useful, efficient and economically way to promote their respective messages, philosophy and way of life.

Because of the huge adoption of social media a huge industry of online marketing consulting services have started to help organisations and individuals, organisations, interest groups and politicians have began to use these social media platforms to promote their messages effectively.

INEB and Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa respectively have their own Facebook and YouTube presence.

The whole social media has garnered so much interest with billion of users (above) has become a complete economic eco-system in itself where many people had leveraged and benefitted financially from this ecosystem.

This means there is lots of money being made on these platform. There is little incentive to change the current operating model.



Through the use of data analysis and algorithms, users of social media engaged in news which are within their sphere of interests keep such news and messages within own interest groups. This keeps fake news, misinformation and hate speech going in circles of people that read or believe them. Opposing messages will find it very difficult to penetrate other groups, this unless money is spent to target specific group. Else, they remain in a circle. Positive speech, or attempts to counter hate speech for example, has very little influence outside the interest circle. Have your ever noticed how YouTube, for example, recommends and continue to suggests similar content to you all the time. This is “preaching to the converted”.

**6. Key Challenges: The Polarization Begins**

The model to segment communities is designed to ensure that targeted messages reach their audience effectively. In the social media eco-system, we (users) are the products.

There is definitely a catch, a huge catch. Users are being kept in the loop of their own interest - constantly being pushed news, information and even connections that of the similar interest. Here are some of the problems:

**a. Information or Misinformation.**

On the social media there is not real fact check. News and information (including misinformation) are not vetted before being pushed into the communities. Many things are written or posted by non-journalist or (mis) information aligned to political and interest groups. In short, social media becomes a platform for the generation of fake news, including divisive and hate speeches.

**b. Preaching to the Converted.**

**c. Little Discussion, Only Reaction.**

The language of social media is short and simplistic. This is limited by the space or number of characters permitted, does not allow for real discussion or discourse. Hence you will see only very short replies and reactions. Discussions are too few in the billions of messages that are posted each day.

has created a culture of selective consumption of information. This selective consumption, dominated by continued messages from businesses, politicians and

interest groups has polarized people. Because of the global nature of social media, the speed information travels creates a more global polarisation.

### The Next Steps

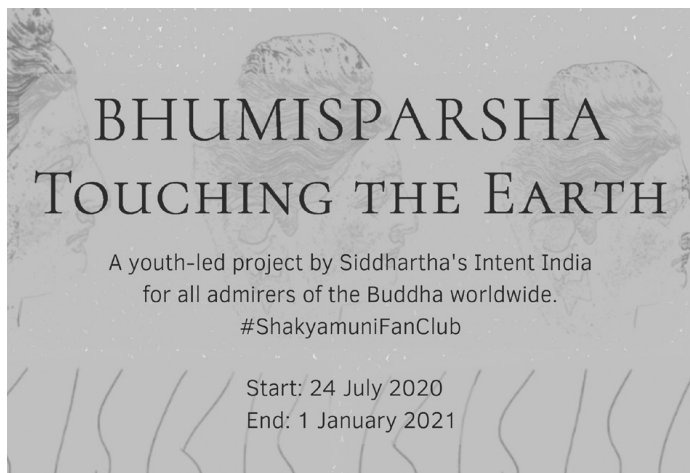
In the context of interfaith relations and conflict transformation, understanding how information is carried and share and how new technologies plays a strong role in this is a starting point. Peacemakers and spiritual leaders need to first of all understand the tools and influences we have.

Moving forward, there need to be discussions and dialogues to develop mitigation strategies. Like it or not, the issues we are facing such as fear, conflict and peace

needs to be appreciated in the context of a digital environment.

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KV Soon (Vidyananda) is a member of the Executive Committee of the International Network of Engaged Buddhist (INEB). Professionally, Vidya, as he is known, is digital transformation specialist. He is currently the Director for the Fijian Government Digital Transformation Programme, Technical Advisor to the World Bank on E-Government and regularly conducts training and workshops on digital initiatives and social impact. Vidya can be reached at soonkv@gmail.com



### BHUMISPARSHA: A PROJECT

*Welcome to all fellow followers and admirers of a man called Buddha and his teachings, and also to those who simply have some curiosity about him.*

*Welcome to this cyber-gathering that is dedicated to remembering the Buddha and his teachings.*

Bhumisparsha Touching the Earth is a 5-month project conceived by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, to nurture a community online that reflects on and celebrates the Shakyamuni Buddha.

From July 24, 2020 to January 1, 2021, Bhumisparsha aims to accumulate 100 million recitations of the Shakyamuni mantra, to collect stories of how fellow admirers first heard Shakyamuni's name, and share music, art, and other forms of creative expression inspired by our connection to Shakyamuni.

The project is led by a group of young, like-minded admirers of the Buddha from all around the world. Shakyamuni and his teachings are now more relevant than ever, for this generation and the next. Bhumisparsha invites you to join this occasion to remembering the man who found a tradition of wisdom and compassion, 2500 years ago.

For Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche's letter, go to: <https://siddharthasintent.in/bhumisparsha>

# Babasaheb Ambedkar's Early Fascination for the Buddha, Buddhist Revival in India, and Buddhist Internationalism

**Mangesh Dahiwale**

In one of the versions of preface of the Buddha and His Dhamma and in a few speeches, Babasaheb Ambedkar mentioned that his love for the Buddha goes back to 1907 when Dada Keluskar presented his biography of the Buddha to young Bhim. Dada wrote this biography in 1898. Dada was like a mentor to young Bhim and it was he who arranged scholarships from the Maharaja of Baroda on two occasions. Sayajirao was himself a strong supporter of the Non-Brahmin movement and close friend of Dada. Maharaja's love for Buddha is evident in many incidences in his life. Even Shahu Maharaj was exposed to Buddhism during his travels to Sri Lanka.

The conclusion from these facts is that Buddhism and Buddha's teachings were available for people. P.L. Narasu's *Essence of Buddhism* was published in 1907. One of the Hindi biographers of Babasaheb Ambedkar mentions that Babasaheb Ambedkar was carrying books on Buddhism when he sailed to Columbia University in 1913. Babasaheb Ambedkar went to Baroda to serve Maharaj of Baroda twice. Maharaja of Baroda also founded Oriental Institute which has a journal and prominent presence of texts on Buddhism.

We can trace that Babasaheb Ambedkar's voracious reading even in Mumbai before going to USA might have included other Buddhist books as Dada was so close to young Bhim and often loaned his books to him to read.

In the Columbia University, Babasaheb read the Pali texts and other books coming out on Buddhism, which may include Paul Carus's book that was one of the influential books for Americans interested in Buddhism. Some of the new books that are published recently show how Buddhism was gaining ground in USA during that period.

Babasaheb Ambedkar refers to Mahabodhi temple which was in the hands of Brahmin Mahants in his reply to Gandhi in the Annihilation of Caste and displays his deep love for the Buddha as the teacher of Noble love in the same writing in 1936.

We now know that Babasaheb Ambedkar had a large number of books on Buddhism, at least 2,000. Babasaheb Ambedkar devoted his time to learn Pali language in early 1940s and he has thoroughly mastered the Pali language, so much so that he even tried to create a modern textbook for Pali language and a multilingual dictionary.

Pali is an important language to understand the Basic Buddhism (fundamental Buddhism that comes close to the time of Shakyamuni). Buddhism afterwards evolved into many schools and interacted with many cultures creating many forms of Buddhism, but the roots can be traced to Majjhima Janapada where the Buddha mainly taught. The extant Pali works were first written down in Sri Lanka. The Buddhism in Sri Lanka remained protected and sustained due to the geography of Sri Lanka, and,

hence one can say that Buddhism in Sri Lanka remained as it was after King Ashoka. The significant action took place in continental India where Buddhism was threatened by many philosophies and hostile schools of thoughts, mainly Brahminical ones. That's why we see in Indian Buddhists a strong fascination for grasping "essential Buddhism" which they thought is present in Pali texts and to understand "Buddhist historical changes" in the Indian peninsula.

These two strands were important for the people fascinated by the Buddha in the Indian subcontinent then: basic teachings of the Buddha, and the evolution of Buddhist responses to the hostile schools.

The thesis that Babasaheb Ambedkar advocated in the Revolution and Counterrevolution in ancient India is the part of the second strand to understand what happened to Buddhism in the Indian subcontinent. While the Buddha and His Dhamma was a projected to make available the fundamental and foundational teachings of the Buddha. In that attempt, Babasaheb Ambedkar wanted his people to go back to the teachings of Sakyamuni. Once the core is grasped, evolution of Buddhism in the context of other cultures is not difficult to understand.

The third strand that Babasaheb Ambedkar evolved for Buddhism was to make it influence the contemporary world and the context in which he found the humanity of his day. The third strand is the Buddha or Marx addressed to Buddhists all over the world. The comparison is basically between the Buddha in Pali texts and Karl Marx. Babasaheb Ambedkar didn't compare existing schools of Buddhism with Marxism, he went back to Pali texts.

Babasaheb Ambedkar was exposed to various schools of Buddhism through his vast reading. He was to meet D.T. Suzuki in Japan through one of their Hungarian contact, Felix Vylie. As we know now that Paul Carus invited DT Suzuki to edit Buddhist books (Chinese and Japanese) and opened a gate for Buddhism for many. DT Suzuki could also read Pali. Paul Carus and John Dewey were friends and both were present in Chicago Exposition of 1893 that included the World Parliament of Religions.

In 1950s, when Babasaheb Ambedkar became

involved with the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), he was already knowing its founder G.P. Malalasekhera very well. GP Malalasekhera was an internationalist and moved in many Buddhist circles. He wrote an influential track on "Buddhism and Race question," where he discussed the Caste question as well and was published by UNESCO in 1958.

Buddhist internationalism was always in the mind of Babasaheb Ambedkar as he firmly believed in the World Buddhist Mission in 1950. This means that Babasaheb Ambedkar has seen a great value in Buddhist internationalism and he was open to relate with Buddhists all over the world. Thus, we can see fourth strand in Babasaheb Ambedkar's scheme: Buddhist internationalism (fellowship of the Buddhists all over the world).

To summarize:

1. Babasaheb Ambedkar brought his followers as close as possible to the teachings of Sakyamuni and encouraged study of Pali language to understand Pali Texts directly and for themselves.
2. He invited them to study and learn from historical interaction of Buddhism with other hostile schools in the Indian Subcontinent and keeping interaction open for Buddhist Schools throughout the world.
3. He encouraged his followers to engage with contemporary social, economic, and political problems with the tools of Buddhism.
4. He was a Buddhist internationalist who promoted fellowship between the Buddhists all over the world.

These four tracks that Babasaheb Ambedkar worked on remain important for not only future of Buddhism in India, but throughout the world.

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Mangesh Dahiwalé is a member of INEB's Advisory Committee and director of the Jambudvipa Trust of India. Mangesh can be reached at mangesh.dahiwalé@gmail.com



# Timely Thoughts from Buddhadasa

Translated by Donald Swearer

## Mindfulness is Necessary in All Situations

One must make a strenuous effort to be mindful. Do nothing without mindfulness. When one opens a door, puts a key in the door, puts a key in the door, closes the door and so on, one should do so mindfully. Mindfulness in anticipation of an event is more useful than being mindful subsequent to an event. Foolish people are either mindful or wise..

The Buddha said, “Mindfulness is necessary all the time in all situations.” Why did the Buddha make such a claim? He did so because mindfulness (*sati*) is the path to wisdom (*paññā*). Mindfulness always incorporates wisdom.

## The Middle Way Flourishes When the Feelings are Not-attached

The Noble Eightfold Path is the Middle Way that flourishes in the state of non-attachment. The Buddha said, “The Middle Way is a state of non-attachment.” Feelings are feelings regardless of their nature and entail attachment. The condition of non-attachment is one of liberation. The Noble Eightfold Path is this state of being.

Right view entails a condition of non-attachment and contemplation that is evident in one’s mindful behavior, a state of on-going moderation.

The Eightfold Middle Way is the path of friendship. In Dhammic terms it refers to the shared path toward enlightenment (*Nibbāna*). This is the meaning of *kalayanamitta* and the Noble Eightfold Path. The Middle Way can be referred to as *bodhipakkhīyadhamma*, namely the path to wisdom, the path to *Nibbāna*. It has several designations, e.g. the Noble Eightfold Path, the Middle Way. The terminology, “Middle Way” is rooted in

the natural ebb and flow of the mind that evolves toward *Nibbāna*.

That *Nibbāna* is otherworldly is a misperception. *Nibbāna* is, rather, the path toward being a truly worthy person (*ariya*) intended for ordinary people. Therefore, to seek to end suffering, namely, *Nibbāna*, is intended for everyone.

## Suffering Opens One to Insight into Suffering

The notion of a self is a misconception that arises from craving (*tanhā*). In the flow of interdependent co-arising there is no self. We must acknowledge that the notion of a self is a false. How do we realize this truth? We do so by understanding the nature of everything in terms of the principle of interdependent co-arising.

## Seeing the World as “Middle,” Neither Good nor Evil

Buddhists look at the world in terms of cause and effect, namely, *idappacayatā*, Interdependent co-arising. We do not prescribe things in a singular way as either “good” or “evil,” “meritorious” or “demeritorious,” “happy” or mired in “suffering.” This sensibility gives us a way of being at ease in the world, an awareness we find in the Buddha, himself. It is a sensibility that should not be identified as either “worldly” or “other-worldly,” “good” or “evil.”

*The Middle Way is the way of interdependent co-arising, the way things are in their natural state, neither “good” nor “evil,” a state of calmness associated with *Nibbāna*, the ultimate condition of peace and calm. It is a new sensibility, based on the Middle Way teaching of the Buddha, one not identified with the extremes of right*



or left, defeat or victory, acquisition or loss, wealth or poverty, a sensibility or peace and quiet.

Do not become infatuated with one of these extremes or another.

## Develop Habits of Calmness and of Loving *Nibbâna*

We must work at developing the habits that incline us toward us toward peace and quiet, including studying and putting into practice the teachings of the Buddha. Do not forget, moreover, that the ultimate state of peace and quiet is *Nibbâna*.

*Nibbâna* has several meanings. One meaning is having a “cool heart and mind” because one has eliminated attachment (*kilesa*). When one has only overcome attachment temporarily it is referred to as *sâmâyikanibbâna*. *Ditthadhammanibbâna* is a sense of *Nibbâna* that we have at a given moment when we are free of attachment. Ultimately, when we are freed from attachment we realize the condition of not-self which is *Nibbâna*. Sometimes this occurs naturally without the intervention of our own intentionality.

## Loving Others is the Very Heart of Morality

Loving others is at the core of the Five Precepts. It counters deception, conflict, and the five basic kinds of evil. It is the world of Ariyametta that arises when we love others. Loving others is at the heart of addressing the world's problems and leads to peace.

## What does It Mean to Love Others?

Loving others requires highly developed heart and mind. When insufficiently developed, that love is incomplete, stymied, and imprisoned; and is effectively stymied.

Selfishness is instinctual. Subsequently it increases until selfishness flourishes today. Selfishness lacks the freedom to love others. Only the mind of an Arahant is freed from such imprisonment. Such love may be spontaneous. For most of us, however, significant effort is required to overcome selfish affection and to realize a state of liberation (*vimutti*).

## What is the Usefulness of Loving Others?

Loving others is at the very heart of all religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Islam. When we love others, self-centeredness (*tuaku-khongku*) gradually disappears until one day it is entirely gone. This is the state of Arahantship. This truth is universal, not simply my personal assertion. To the degree that selfishness declines, to that degree depravity (*kilesa*)—greed, hatred, and delusion—declines, and our love of others increases. Therefore, all of us should ground our lives on the principle of loving others which will dispel selfishness and help us realize a condition of Arahantship. The Buddha's great love extended to all human beings. Such love helps others to become truly worthy persons.

## Realizing Samâdhi

The term, *samâdhi*, refers to the realization of a state of intentional quiet assurance and the clarity of insight knowledge. It is a natural state that does not require training. Depending on one's disposition, it may arise spontaneously.

In Buddhism *samâdhi*, refers to focusing one's awareness and realizing a state of joy, purity, and gentleness. It is an appropriate means to achieve a state of understanding (*paññâ*), purity, peacefulness, and awareness. *Samâdhi* is a state of mental awareness important for all of one's activities and is signaled out in Buddhism as *citta-sikkha* (instructing the mind).

In and of itself *samâdhi* is able to realize the state of “purity, luminosity, and peace,” a mental condition associated with the Dhamma in the most authentic sense of the Three Gems.

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Buddhadâsa Bhikkhu, Translated elections from Problems Attendant To Humanity. Chaiya: Dhammadana Foundation, B.E 2549/C.E/2006, Sermons and Speeches. Chaiya: Suvichan, B.E. 2498/C.E.1955. Teachings From the Tail Of The Dog, Chaiya: B.E 2523/1980, Observing Nature, Bangkok: B.E. 2523/1980, Buddhadâsa Is Still With Us. He Is Not Deceased, B.E.2549/2006.

# From Hearts to Hearts: An Interview with Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni

**Hozan Alan Senauke**

*Buddhistdoor Global, 2020-09-04*

<https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/from-hearts-to-hearts-an-interview-with-ven-dhammananda-bhikkhuni>

Venerable Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, born Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, is Thailand's first fully ordained Theravada *bhikkhuni*. She received full monastic ordination as a *bhikkhuni* in Sri Lanka on 28 February 2003, and is now the abbess of Songdhammakalyani Monastery in Nakhon Pathom, near the Thai capital Bangkok. The temple was founded by her late mother, Voramai Kabilsingh, who was ordained in a Dharmaguptaka lineage\* in Taiwan in 1971, becoming the first modern Thai *bhikkhuni* to do so and receiving the Chinese monastic name Ta Tao Fa Tzu.

Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh received an MA in religion from McMaster University in Canada, and a PhD in Buddhism from Magadh University in India. She taught for 27 years at Bangkok's Thammasat University, in the Department of Philosophy and Religion. In lay life she was married, with three sons and six grandchildren.

In her academic life and since ordination, Ven. Dhammananda has been a prolific writer, authoring more than 100 books exploring the history of, and issues relating to, Thai Buddhism, including the place of women. As a layperson and as a monastic, she has worked tirelessly to re-establish the Theravada *bhikkhuni* lineage in Thailand so that women may become fully ordained monastics. This work has been controversial and has been met with resistance among some in Thailand's religious institutions. At the same time, Ven. Dhammananda receives strong support from other Buddhist women and men in Asia and around the world.

**Buddhistdoor Global:** Ven. Dhammananda, I'd like to begin by returning to the questions I asked the last

time we spoke. First, your place, Songdhammakalyani Monastery, when was it founded?

**Venerable Dhammananda Bhikkhuni:** My mother, Voramai Kabilsingh, founded the temple in 1958.

**BDG:** How many nuns do you have in residence now?

**VDB:** Right now, we have 12 fully ordained *bhikkhunis* here and three *samaneris*, all of whom are Thai.

**BDG:** Have you ordained any *bhikkhunis* from other countries?

**VDB:** I have given temporary ordination to more than 800 *samaneris*. Among them, one from Malaysia and several from the United States. This is a temporary ordination for nine days. We have fully ordained 11 *bhikkhunis*. But for full ordination we have to travel to either Sri Lanka or India.

**BDG:** So Theravada ordination is available in India?

**VDB:** Yes. This depends very much on the *bhikkhus*. If they have Theravada *bhikkhu* attending, a minimum



In front of Songdhammakalyani Monastery in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand



Ven. Dhammananda distributes food in front of her monastery. Image courtesy of the author

of five, then the ordination is valid. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi was at one of our ordinations in Bodh Gaya.

**BDG:** You were ordained in Sri Lanka?

**VDB:** Yes. My full ordination was in 2003.

**BDG:** I remember you from the early 1990s, when I first visited Thailand and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). You were still teaching at Thammasat University. When did you realize that you wished to be ordained?

**VDB:** It must have been in the air for a long time, you know, but not decided. In 2000, it became very clear that I wanted to take the monastic path. At the time I was very much involved in television; a very colorful life. You always get dressed up, you look nice, and I have to admit that I enjoyed that, looking nice. One day, when I had put on my makeup, I looked at myself in the mirror and asked myself in English: "How long do I have to do this?" In Christian terms, this was clearly a call from God. Yes, it was very sudden and challenging to me. Yes, I had to make a decision. That must have been toward the end of 1999.

I went to Sri Lanka and I came back very quietly.

When I went to be ordained, I was alone. My Sri Lankan host arranged everything for me. When I came back to Thailand, I was very quiet. But then I was invited to appear on television, on a military-owned channel. On the day that I was supposed to be interviewed, both programs were canceled at the last minute. The cancellation kind of blew up the issue. Why did the military block my interviews? That's when the news of my ordination spread out to the public.

**BDG:** That that was your temporary ordination or your full ordination?

**VDB:** My novice ordination. Then I had to spend two years as a novice before I took full ordination.

**BDG:** I'd like to talk about what you've been doing during the pandemic. First of all, is everyone at your temple well?

**VDB:** Yes, we are keeping well.

**BDG:** Have there been many infections in the local community?

**VDB:** Actually, the first case in Thailand came from

our province, Nakhon Pathom. The country went into lockdown on 25 March. The suffering of daily wage earners has been immense. We *bhikkhunis* felt it strongly as we first went on our morning alms round among the local people.

**BDG:** When did you start distributing food?

**VDB:** Very early on. We responded to the needs of the people very quickly. I felt that we had to do something. Actually, one of our volunteers began the work. The first time, we provided food for 40 people. We provided each family with five kilograms of rice, oil, chili paste, soap, shampoo, instant noodles, milk, drinks, fresh vegetables such as cabbage and pumpkin, and so on. A neighboring factory contributed eggs and bread. Later on, when the sangha joined in, we served 100 people, increasing to 150, then 200.

People lined up in front of our temple, right next to the highway—a long line. This was during April and May when it was very hot. But they stood in line. We marked the ground for social distancing. The participants respected personal health protection and maintained social distancing very well. Before they approached our tables, people had their temperatures taken and cleaned their hands with gel. We have been very cautious. In the field, we always wear masks and face shields as we provide food rations. We go out, under the wall outside the temple, setting up tables of offerings.

**BDG:** Wow! You know that this is not happening in the United States? No one is taking care like that!

**VDB:** It is truly from hearts to hearts. This is Buddhist practice. When people are experiencing so much pressure, this is an expression of compassion. We talk so much about *metta* and *karuna*, loving-kindness and compassion. But it is not inaction; when there is compassion, it has to overflow and you have to do something about it. You know that the feeling of having to do something is very strong.

**BDG:** And are you still feeding people?

**VDB:** We did that for 10 weeks. And then the government said that they would provide 5,000 Thai baht (US\$160) each month for the poor people, for those unable to help themselves. And I see there's a gap in what the government is doing. They asked people to register online. You know, as soon as they said register online . . . I don't even have a smartphone. How do you have online access when people don't even have a smartphone? The very poor cannot access that. And then you have to provide a house number, but they don't have homes; they live in shacks. The government will give out checks, or the money will be transferred to their bank accounts, but they don't have bank accounts. I realized that there's a big hole in how the government is providing funding. So we came up with the same funding: 5,000 Thai baht per family per month. And we have volunteers who look for people who don't have access to government funds, screening the cases, and handing cash to each of them directly. We did that for three months, just completed. We have been able to help 55 families this way.

**BDG:** Where did your funding come from?

**VDB:** We were organizing the Asian Buddhist Conference in Nepal for this year, but now nobody can travel. So we borrowed 500,000 Thai baht (US\$16,000) from those funds and transferred this amount to healing projects and relief. Well, people start coming in and we raised another 400,000 Thai baht (US\$13,000).

**BDG:** Having completed these three months, what is your next plan?

**VDB:** I don't think the economic situation will improve particularly until next year. We have to be realistic. Our temple itself has cut down on expenses. We cannot expect donations from people now. It's really hard. On our side, we are lucky that we are in the safe zone and we have donors—from Switzerland, for example. We have been well cared for. But just today, we received an email from United States. Someone wanting to come and stay with us for retreat. But, it's

not possible. We are still very careful. Last week we learned that six Thai soldiers who went to the US for training returned with COVID-19. And last night we heard that Thai monks in Las Vegas died from COVID-19. So we are concerned about not opening a door to infection from the US. Now we are talking about providing them with meditation guidance via Zoom.

**BDG:** You know, last week my wife, Laurie, was on a conference call with INEB and she was really inspired by the relief work they're doing. After the call, she told me, "Look at what they're doing. What are we doing? What should we be doing here in Berkeley?" I think that's a powerful message.

**VDB:** We are going to be doing more with our community because we're okay, we're stable, so we should be giving. If you can give, give, and if you need to receive, you should receive. Don't be afraid if you don't have anything. We started giving people two kilos of rice. I was on the back of a pickup truck and putting rice into small bags. That picture went on Facebook, and a man came up to me and he said, "I have to do something about it." Compassion arises within you, you know, and you need to do something. We didn't have much and then this man came with 600 kilos of rice in his pickup, the best kind of Jasmine rice from Yasothon Province, 500 kilometers to the northeast.

This man alone brought 3,000 kilos of rice. Every week he would come with rice. Then, when people saw this on Facebook, I didn't even have to say anything. So I don't think you have to do much. Simply help, and help will come.

**BDG:** Are other temples and monasteries in Thailand doing this kind of work?

**VDB:** We have about 26,000 temples in Thailand, but from the media we only hear about a few. Some big temples provide pre-cooked breakfasts, lunches, and suppers, but they simply called restaurants and they would bring ready-made boxes of food. In a very few

temples do we see monks coming out to serve. But in our case, they saw that we were doing it ourselves. We were dragging sacks of rice, pushing rice on carts, you know, putting food on tables so that people could pick it up.

**BDG:** Are there other temples in Thailand for female monastics?

**VDB:** Oh yes, since my ordination we now have 285 *bhikkhunis* in 40 provinces.

**BDG:** It's amazing that the women's order has grown in this way, that there are so many *bhikkhunis*. What do you see as your work in the next period, until the pandemic lifts?

**VDB:** Right now, we are in Vassa (rains retreat). During the rains, we study the Vinaya. Each day we have class, and we send out videos from the classes to *bhikkhuni aramas* in other provinces.

**BDG:** That's good. It's something all of us have struggled with. And we've had to struggle to put our entire program of practice on a digital platform. We're learning things about this every day.

Ven. Dhammananda, I'm so happy to be in touch with you and to be able to have had this conversation. You know, the meeting last week really warmed my heart. The people who were at the meeting are some of my closest friends. And now, we're trying to get together every two weeks instead of every two years.

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If you wish to support the work of Ven. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni and Songdhammakalyani Monastery, please visit the donation page on the Thai Bhikkhunis website.



# Kraisak Choonhavan

1947 - 2020

Published : 11 JUN 2020

Writer: Online Reporters

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1933220/kraisak-choonhavan-dies-at-72>



**K**raisak Choonhavan, a well-known academic and politician, died at 72.

The only son of Gen Chatichai Choonhavan, Thailand's 17th prime minister (1988-91), and Khuning Boonruen, Kraisak was well-known for his role as a negotiator who helped turn Indochina "from a war zone to trade zone", a key policy of his father's government.

After finishing his studies, he taught at Kasetsart University in Bangkok before joining his father's government as an adviser.

He represented the Thai government at meetings to solve disputes in Cambodia and at peace talks in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

After his father's government was toppled by a coup led by Gen Sunthorn Kongsompong in 1991, the family went abroad. A year later, Kraisak returned and joined the 1992 uprising.

Kraisak was elected senator for Nakhon Ratchasima in 2000 and chaired the Senate's committee on foreign affairs. He joined the Democrat Party and was elected deputy party leader. He became a party-list MP in the 2007 election before the Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva dissolved the House in 2011.

A BBC Thai interview in August described him

as "one of the people closest to and most affected by military coups".

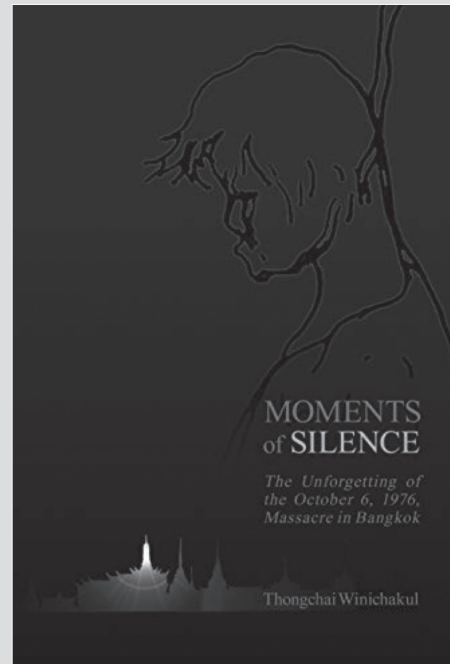
He was born in 1947, the year his grandfather, Field Marshal Pin Choonhavan, staged a coup. When his grandfather's adversaries staged a coup 10 years later, his parent took him to Argentina. His father's government was also toppled by a putsch in 1991 when he was serving as an adviser.

Before the 2006 coup, Kraisak was one of those who heavily criticised former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and spoke on a stage of the People's Democratic Reform Committee. However, he backed down when the protests urged the military to stage a coup.

After the latest coup in 2014, Kraisak heavily criticised the Prayut Chan-o-cha government on curbs on freedom of expression and policies that affected the environment and communities.

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## Recommended Reading



Moments of Silence

Author: Thongchai Winichakul  
 Publisher: University of Hawai'i Press

# Swami Agnivesh

1939 - 2020

**Special Correspondent**, New Delhi, September 11, 2020

Abrided version taken from The Hindu – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/swami-agnivesh-passes-away/article32583703.ece>



*Sulak Sivaraksa and Swami Agnivesh*

Social activist, scholar, politician and Arya Samaj leader Swami Agnivesh passed away at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) in New Delhi, on Friday, after he was hospitalised due to liver cirrhosis earlier this week.

Agnivesh, a former MLA from Haryana, is known for his work against bonded labour through the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which he founded in 1981. The organisation worked on issues surrounding bonded labour in India, especially in the quarries in and around Delhi.

Agnivesh became president (2004–2014) of the World Council of Arya Samaj, which is the highest international body of the Arya Samaj. He was also an advocate for dialogue between religions and remained involved in various areas of social activism including campaigns against female foeticide and the emancipation of women.

He was a prominent associate of Anna Hazare

during India Against Corruption's campaign in 2011 to implement the Jan Lokpal Bill and also served as the chairperson of the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery from 1994 to 2004.

Born in Andhra Pradesh, Agnivesh founded Arya Sabha in 1970, a political party based on Arya Samaj principles. Agnivesh was elected to the Haryana Assembly in 1977 and was made the State's Education Minister after two years. He, however, resigned from the post in protest against the Haryana government's inaction against police who had opened fire at workers protesting bonded labour.

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## Recommended Reading



Wisdom Now and Always

Author: Miguel Mendonça

Publisher: Miguel Mendonça

August 4, 2020

Dear Sulak,

I have been reading this book with members of my sangha for several weeks ~ and whenever I read it I think of you ~ I imagine that you, and those around you, might enjoy it, be inspired and illuminated by it. It is so relevant to the times in which we are living. It is written by the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje ~ the head of the Karma Kagyu Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism of which Naropa University is a part.

I hope this finds you healthy and well. I think of you so often, so grateful for the many blessings you bring to this world.

Warmly,

Laura Marshall

(Katherine Marshall's sister)

24 Rocklands Street  
Duffy, ACT 2611  
AUSTRALIA

26 August 2020

Dear Aj Sulak,

Many thanks for sending me your ปญฺญทวารวชิณ published in March this year. Is it your latest book? Probably you have published another book since then. You are a phenomenon, and I can't keep up with you. I have a great many of your books, but certainly not all of them.

It was kind of you to say a few words about my Khun Phan book. I don't think the southern policeman book is your cup of tea – you rightly point out my other studies (PhD thesis, the translation of Prince Wachirayan's autobiography) that are more directly concerned with Thai Buddhism. Some people must be reading the policeman book. On the ANU Press website there have been more than 2,500 complete downloads, and I recently gave a Zoom seminar to the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at NUS in Singapore.

I have been writing a few book reviews for the *Journal of the Siam Society* to bring new work by young scholars to a wider audience. Also, you may know that your descendant "Pu" (Anuk Pitukthanin) at Khlet Thai will publish a collection of my essays translated into Thai, edited by Preedee Hongsaton. Preedee is a published novelist and short story writer who used to teach in the Department of History at Thammasat but fell in love with a Swedish woman and flew off to Lund where he lives with their two young sons.

I see you have reached 87 years. What, pray tell, is your secret of a long and active life? I am just short of 80 and in good health. My wife, Sue, remembers very well brief conversation with you at the launch in 2016 of my festschrift, *A Sarong for Clío*.

Greg Reynolds

Greetings Ajahn Sulak!

Dear Ajahn Sulak,

It occurs to me that we have had no contact for some time. Just a word to wish you well, and let you know that I am thinking of you and my many friends in Siam.

I follow your exploits on FB, but that is not the same as a letter, and presently I am isolated in the countryside in France in order to protect my daughter, who is vulnerable, from the Covid-19 which is on the rise again in the Bordeaux region.

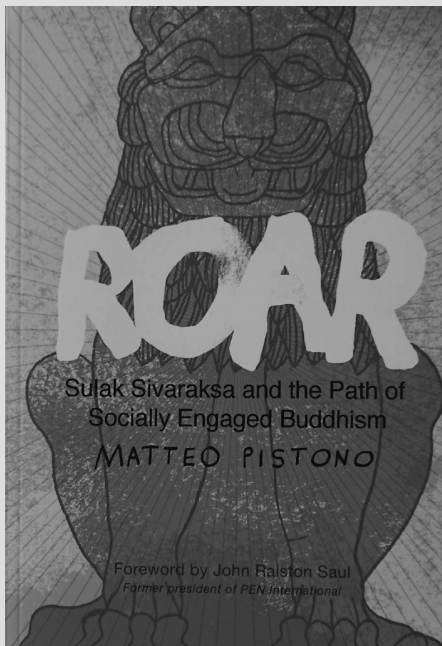
Please let me know if there are any tasks I can perform writing wise, I am constantly writing short stories for a Horror Anthologist to keep my mind active while working on a novel, but they do not inspire the same passion I have when writing for you. Let me know.

We are well here, just keeping our heads down, as I say, so please give my love to Moo and Pracha and the others, and let me know when you have plans to travel to Europe once this plague has been conquered, I will travel to see you in any EU country.

Voila, lots of love, from your friend and student,

Danny Campbell





## Review of Pistono's *ROAR: Sulak Sivaraksa and the Path of Socially Engaged Buddhism*

by Matteo Pistono

Reviewed by *Thomas Francis Brown*

Matteo Pistono, *ROAR: Sulak Sivaraksa and the Path of Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Forward by John Ralston Saul, formal President of PEN International. Afterword by Harsha Navaratne. North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, 2019. ISBN: 1623173329. Amazon: \$15.95.

The publication of Pistono's biography of Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa is long overdue. The release of *ROAR* completes the trilogy of Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa. It was to be a companion publication with the release of Ajarn Sulak's *Hidden Away in the Fold of Time* to coincide with and celebrate his 84th birthday on 27 March 2017. That did not happen until two years later in 2019.

At the outset, it is prudent to provide an understanding of the title *ROAR*, its origin, and the significance of defining Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa's *ROAR* and his path of Socially Engaged Buddhism. *ROAR* comes from two of the most important scriptures in the Pali canon: *The Great Discourse* and *The Short*

*Discourse* on the Lion's Roar. "In these discourses the Buddha likens himself to a lion and equates his teachings, the proclamation of the Dhamma, to a lion's roar" (p. 164).

Ajarn Sulak began early on in his life to apply the precepts of Buddhism to society and all the ills that permeated it. He addressed, confronted, and engaged the evils of society. Ajarn pointed out the myriad contradictions between the Buddha's teachings and how the wealthy and ruling elites in society treated the farmers, the poor, and the disenfranchised. Treatment that is in total contradiction from the Buddha's teachings. This was ongoing by Ajarn Sulak as he began to engage society long before the phrase of "socially engaged Buddhism" became available. That is, the phrase originated and blossomed full bloom in the Buddhist Fellowship (BF) newsletter in America by Parallax Press's publication in the 1980s and 90s. Ajarn Sulak began using Buddhism as his beacon and guide to socially engage himself in society long before the term coined by BF became available. He uses Buddhism in a

very calculated and tactful way with his actions of addressing the wrongs of society and all its injustices. Actions taken by him that often placed him and his family's life in harm's way. Ajarn wanted a better and just society for everyone.

Pistono's biography of Ajarn Sulak begins with a very splendid, enlightening, and forthright foreword written by John Ralston Saul. Saul captures and surmises all that Ajarn Sulak stands for and cares about through his lifelong pursuit for a just and equitable society for all.

In *Roar*, Pistono interlaces together a very complex and integrated tapestry of Ajarn Sulak on the path of socially engaged Buddhism. Pistono's tapestry captures and interlocks both the historical and personal events that provoked change and activated Ajarn Sulak's *Roar*. Each chapter's path travels through multiple historical and personal events of Ajarn Sulak. The historical and personal events presented in each chapter, moreover, captured who Ajarn was then, how did he change, and what made him what he is today. Who did Ajarn want to be and

become and how his ideas and perspectives changed?

Pistono's biography of Ajarn Sulak embarks you on Ajarn Sulak's path of socially engaged Buddhism through eleven chapters of *Roar*. In each chapter, Pistono captures the central path and presents to you how Ajarn engaged society to make it better. He organizes Ajarn's biography over the progression of his life experiences of, when, where, and how he applied Buddhism to society to make it better. Pistono's biography of Ajarn Sulak answers all these questions and much more. What changed Ajarn from his perspectives then and how they all embarked him on the path of socially engaged Buddhism. The title of each chapter represents and makes known the thrust and the substance of what Pistono is telling you about Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa on his path of socially engaged Buddhism.

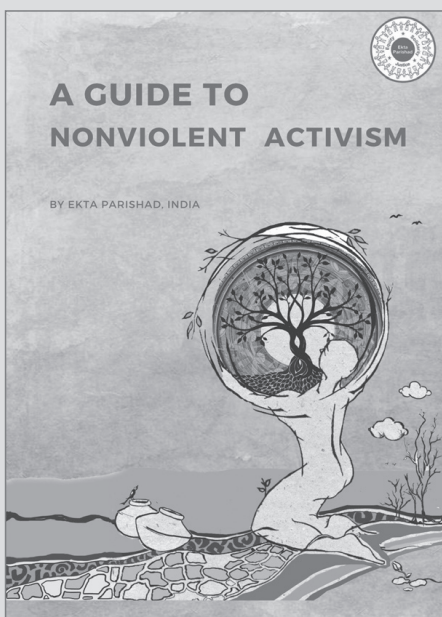
Remember that Pistono integrates, interlaces, and interlocks both the historical and personal events and factors that changed Ajarn Sulak. There is so much to grasp and absorb from each chapter about Ajarn, his Roar, and his path.

The Afterword by Harsha Navaratne is one of a kind and I applaud him. In it he captures and surmises eloquently the myriad foundations and organizations that Ajarn founded and supports throughout his life on the path of socially engaged Buddhism. Well done!

Finally, *Roar* completes the trilogy of Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa. I extremely recommend *Roar* to you. If you have not already read the previous two books in Ajarn's trilogy, Begin with *Loyalty Demands Dissent* followed by *Hidden Away in the Fold of Time*, and then Pistono's *Roar*. *Roar* is a mastered tapestry of Ajarn

Sulak's life. In *Roar*, Pistono converged eleven chapters of Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa's life's events on his path and created a magnificent tapestry. A tapestry that both resonates and illuminates Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa's path of socially engaged Buddhism. Pistono's research and writing of *Roar* over a period of five years is monumental task. Pistono had access to Ajarn's personal library, his associates, his acolytes, and his family; he interviewed seventy of them. Pistono interviewed Ajarn Sulak multiple times over the course of five years. He traveled to four continents conducting interviews for his research of *Roar*. It goes without saying, that Pistono interlocks and references the myriad events that brought change to Ajarn Sulak. *Roar*, is a monumental and commendable task. Congratulations, Pistono!

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## A Guide to Nonviolent Activism

by Ekta Parishad, India

Forward by PV Rajagopal

this manual. I strongly feel this is an effective tool for training young people and will help deepen their understanding about the art of nonviolence.

We live in a world where scientists have invented the most

sophisticated weapons capable of destroying the planet and the entire human life. We laud ourselves for such advancements, and yet we need to be aware that we have ways of perpetrating violence in the course of one second.

I am happy that our friends followed a consultative process to complete

The challenge that many of us face is the belief that building a nonviolent and peaceful society is to create a too powerful enough to tackle the threats presented by these destructive forces, nonviolence should be inculcated as a priority in the minds of all individuals the world over.

The planetary destruction is also related to how people are using violence in their relationship with nature. This situation can be corrected only through developing a deeper understanding of violence and nonviolence in our daily lives. Humankind needs to move to a higher level of consciousness to deal with these multiple forms of violence that affect both people and nature directly as well as indirectly.

In order to contain violence, it is crucial to train a larger number of young people in the art and science of using nonviolence methods effectively. This manual is meant to help with empowering young people, particularly those at the grassroots level or in conflict situations. This may help uncover different aspects of nonviolence and explore the ideas related to the application of nonviolence in areas where conflict persists and in the day-to-day life as well. Young people may find the theory of nonviolence quite fascinating. But, it is important for them to build their beliefs on action and experiences so that there is a greater confidence in the new way ahead.

I am happy that this manual is

ready. Let me now invite trainers to use and test it in their training programs and reach out to as many young people as possible to expand the circle of nonviolent actors for change. I request both experienced and new trainers to remember that experiential learning of nonviolence is preferable so as to help the youth develop belief in this important approach to solve problems and make it a goal of their lives proving that nonviolence works, even in difficult situations and that it is more powerful than violence.

In the last 40 years, my colleagues and I have been systematically using nonviolence to organize people in India on various issues that affect their lives. We have of course experienced the outcomes in small groups as well as large mobilizations involving thousands of people. We have experienced its power in one day, and also seen the momentum building up in a span of weeks and months. This demanded from us a high level of commitment and some courage to suffer. However, to our satisfaction, we never faced any violent resistance from the state. On the contrary, in the majority of the cases, we were able to bring the so-called opposition on our side through dialogue.

Learning from every action has been important to advance the cause of nonviolence. We have been open to learning and received really interesting and important inputs from the people; this helped improve our approach to nonviolence. Very

often we were deeply surprised to notice how the poor people have adopted a nonviolent lifestyle in relation to their fellow human beings and also with their environment.

Finally, let me congratulate Ekta Parishad's Ramesh Sharma and the wonderful team of Ankush and Isha (Adivasi Lives Matter) who took the responsibility to devote this manual based on concrete experiences, for the use of trainers, and in order to advance the work in the field of nonviolent training and action, which alone can create a peaceful world in the long run.

I am sure it will not be out of place if I use this opportunity to appeal to all the peace-lovers to use and promote this manual in a way that you feel useful. I feel this is also an appropriate moment for time to appeal to those friends who are spending their time and resources to promote conflict and violence, to understand that these are temporary. Kindly reflect for a moment and if possible, correct your path in the larger interests of humanity. We hope that all people will begin to invest in building a peaceful world for the coming generations.

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# SENS

**School of English  
for Engaged Social Service**

**January 10 - April 7, 2021**

**Wongsanit Ashram, Thailand**

## **The INEB Institute**

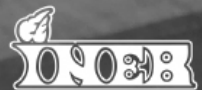
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Theme for SENS 2021:  
**Cultivating Women's Leadership  
in the Work for Climate Justice\***

*\*Men are welcome to participate!*



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