

# SEEDS OF PEACE

Vol. 39 No. 2

July - December 2566 (2023)



*In Memory of a Rebellious Spirit*  
*Pracha Hutanuwatr*

## Publisher

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF  
ENGAGED BUDDHISTS (INEB)

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Suggested annual  
subscription \$100USD

## Payment info:

- A cheque payable to INEB.  
Personal cheques from the UK, US,  
and Euro are accepted.
- Paypal, please go to the INEB website.

## Seeds of Peace

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*Seeds of Peace* is published two times annually in January and July, in order to promote the aims and objectives of the the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) around the world, and organizations under the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF), including the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) and the School for Wellbeing Studies and Research.

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## Editorial Note

### Dear friends of INEB,

In this issue we celebrate the life of Pracha Hutunuwat who passed away on May 13, 2023. Many of you knew Pracha and are aware of his invaluable contribution to the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, INEB, the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), SEM College and more, through his expansive worldview, philosophy and intrepid learning journey. Following the funeral cremation on Saturday 20 May 2023, at a forest monastery near Bangkok, more memorial services were held in various parts of Thailand and Myanmar, particularly in Mon and Kachin states where alumni of grassroots leadership courses gathered together to honor his memory.

A new book titled *A Rebellious Spirit – Perspectives and Legacy of Pracha Hutunuwat* was published within 49 days following his passing. The book includes Pracha's perspectives expressed in eleven articles that hold the kernels of lessons learned from his experiences through the years. Other sections include a short story of his life, followed by tributes from friends and organizations. The book is for sale both in hard copy and as an ebook. Please visit INEB's website if you are interested in buying a copy. Several articles about Pracha are also in this issue. The image on the front cover represents Pracha's essence in a painting by Myanmar artist and woodworker Maung Hla Thaug.

This issue also offers articles on various topics to interest you including one piece by our friend Sallie B. King examines whether ethnocentric, nationalist groups are engaged Buddhists, and Craig C. Lewis's conversation with our longtime partner Jonathan S. Watts delves into engaged Buddhism in Japan which is the title of Watts' new book (*Engaged Buddhism in Japan, Volume 1, An Engaged Buddhist History of Japan from the Ancient to the Modern*). We also congratulate Rajagopal P.V. as the recipient of the 40<sup>th</sup> Niwano Peace Prize. Please read the article about why he was selected and his acceptance speech – *Four-fold Approach to Peace Building*. INEB's 2022 annual report highlights our work during the past year and appreciate the generous support by many of you which make this possible.

We close with the following reflection about Pracha by our dear friend Ko Tar from Myanmar.

**Pracha: The man who sings “*The Song of the Open Road*”**  
In fact, I never heard Pracha singing *the Song of the Open*

*Road* [a poem] by Walt Whitman. Rather, he manifested it, the spirit of the song. The whole life, he took to the open road,

*“Healthy, free, the world before me,*

*The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.”*

For more than twenty years of his productive youth, he worked for grassroots leadership people of Burma.

The ground is never cut off from Pracha Hutunuwat. The grassroots leadership trainings he performs! *“Here, I carry my delicious burdens, I carry them, men and women. I carry them with me wherever I go.”* It seems as if he swears it is impossible for him to get rid of the poor.

He is sincere and honest. He meditates. Once, he told me he still had some middleclass habits he should abandon. That we should follow him: that is to be grounded, that is to be generous and have humility. And to be aware of the systems and to look for alternatives.

I have been dubbed an elite by left-leaning friends. Now I am no longer called an elite by friends that know me. Thanks to him, as he changed many others, he changed me. For all the students and brothers of Pracha Hutunuwat, *“The earth is sufficient; we do not want the constellations any nearer; we know they are very well where they are; we know they suffice those who belong to them.”*

### Dear Pracha,

Thanks to you again; strong and content, afoot and lighthearted, we, your brothers, travel the open road.

Thus, your brothers wish you,

*“The river is leaving. It is making its unwavering way to no longer being a river!”\**

You pass away to the next level of life, as said by Moo.

Yours,

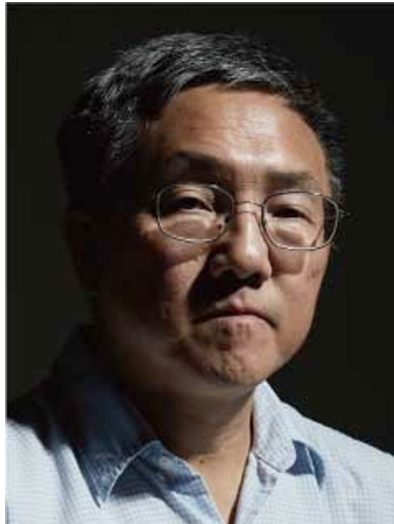
**Ko Tar**

\*Note: All previous quotes in italics before this line are taken from *The Song of the Open Road*. This line is taken from Farewell Poem for Dmitry Golyenko by Eugene Ostashevsky (The New York Review, May 25, 2023, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2023/05/25/farewell-poem-eugene-ostashevsky/>)

## Thongchai Winichakul Receives the [33<sup>rd</sup>] Fukuoka Grand Prize 2023

**Source: Fukuoka Prize** - <https://fukuoka-prize.org/en/laureates/detail/d335273d-b6ba-4076-a8ed-9f808fd7f702> Please refer to the source for the full article.

Professor Thongchai Winichakul is a historian who has investigated how the modern concept of nations and national citizenship crept into people's hearts and took root there, by focusing on the making and use of maps. His work has had significant influence on humanities and social sciences globally. He continues to support and lead the development of political awareness and activism among Thai students and citizens, and to contribute to connecting universities with wider society for the development of democracy and civil society.



Thongchai Winichakul

Message upon Announcement of Laureates

It is hard to describe the feeling when I got the news of receiving the Fukuoka Prize.... overwhelmed, surprised and ecstatic!

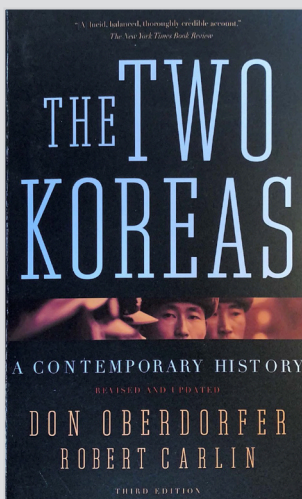
I am truly honored by this award from the people of Fukuoka.

I am very pleased that the Fukuoka committee and people of Fukuoka City recognize both my dedication to the historical studies of Thailand and Southeast Asia and my commitment to democracy and social justice in Thailand.

I believe that the pursuit of knowledge even the one that may seem irrelevant to real life and society on the one hand, and the advocacy for democracy and social justice on the other, are mutually contributive.

S

### Recommended Reading

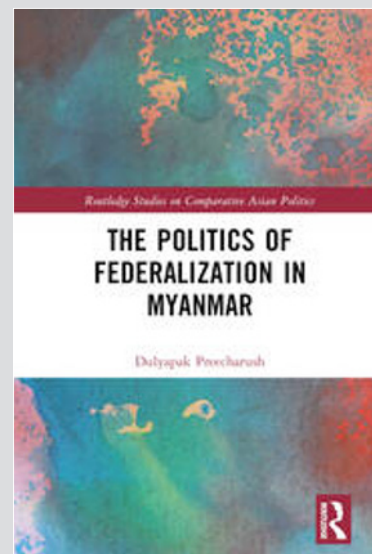


#### *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*

**Authors:** Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin  
**Publisher:** Basic Books, New York City, 2013

#### *The Politics of Federalism in Myanmar*

**Author:** Dulyapak Preecharush  
**Publisher:** Routledge, 2023





# 2022 Annual Report

## for

### The International Network of Engaged Buddhists

Compiled by INEB Staff

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- Code of Conduct
- Staff Update

#### Some Highlights from 2022



Activities to reduce violence against children and protect children expanded through the collaboration with Arigatou International.



Projects under the regional network for peacebuilders made progress:

- 2 country learning missions of the Sangha for Peace were successfully completed
- The gathering of women peacebuilders from throughout the region was conducted



INEB's projects under climate and ecology each made progress



Support of bhikkhuni ordination increased with one intensive workshop during INEB's international conference strengthened bhikkhuni solidarity. Also, the Bhutan Nuns Foundation hosted the historic ordination of women in Bhutan.



Strengthening gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) by incorporating it at all levels throughout INEB



INEB's enhanced digital presence has expanded its visibility and engagement



Lastly, INEB began planning for Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa's 90th birthday (March 27, 2023) by requesting greetings from his kalyanamitra around the world. These can be read on INEB's website -

<https://www.inebnetwork.org/celebrating-ajahn-sulak-sivaraksas-90th-birthday/>

## Executive Summary

The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) presents its annual report for 2022, which provides project updates by category as they appear in the contents. More space for in-person engagement began to take place as pandemic conditions eased around the world. The network benefited from these improved conditions, and INEB's members made substantial progress on their activities which are described within the report.

The INEB Secretariat's primary focus was to coordinate with the Jungto Society on INEB's 20th international conference that took place at several locations in Korea during October 2022. The joint meeting of INEB's Advisory and Executive Committees that was held after the conference provided an opportunity for meaningful exchanges and discussions that increased understanding among INEB members when INEB's project updates were presented. The conference activities and the joint AC-EC meeting was also an opportunity for new INEB Secretariat staff and INEB members to get to know each other.

In July the INEB Secretariat issued a public statement on its website calling for solidarity and preserving the sanctity of life in Myanmar. The Secretariat also reports that support for civil society organizations in Myanmar continues.



## Overview of Activities

### Reducing Violence against Children and Child Protection

The collaboration with Arigatou International has grown stronger as the projects have expanded and also because of meeting them in person. Project status includes:

- Continuing collaborating with researchers in 5 countries on the child protection research study
- Conducting 2 pilot workshops in July in southern Thailand with Songkhla Ban Bangdan Day Care, Phawong, Mueang Songkhla district. The draft Toolkit on Spiritual Development of Children in the Early Years for the Prevention of Violence and Children's Holistic Well-Being was piloted in both workshops. One selection criterion was that the teachers would identify and work with parents. Participants included 14 teachers and 14 parents, and the first group consisted of kindergarten teachers. Teachers from both Buddhist and Muslim schools participated. Parents shared that they told their children they were sorry for physically punishing them. Feedback from parents and teachers about the draft toolkit was shared with the Arigatou team.



Workshop Participants from Songkhla province in southern Thailand.

- Toolkit - INEB input provided the perspective of on how Buddhist principles are applied in school settings.
- November 2022, Rome, Italy - INEB staff participated in the international launch of the Toolkit and consortium meeting on nurturing values and spirituality in early childhood to prevent violence against children in their early years.
- Children on the Move, Rome, November 2023 – INEB staff, Opor Srisuwan joined Arigatou International’s Global Campaign “Protect Children’s Dignity! All for Children on the Move” to advocate for every child’s dignity, particularly children on the move.
- Presentation at the joint meeting of INEB’s Advisory Committee and Executive Committee – INEB staff, Opor Srisuwan, asked the committee members to request support from the religious leaders in the INEB network for INEB’s projects preventing violence against children and child protection.



INEB staff, Opor Srisuwan (center) with Arigatou International during the launch of the Toolkit in Rome, Italy.

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## CLIMATE AND ECOLOGY

### ○ Eco Temple Community Development Projects

Project updates during 2022 include:

- In May, the Eco-Temple Community Development Project of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) held one of its regular online meetings, during which two of its Japanese leaders, Rev. Ryogo Takemoto and Rev. Hidehito Okochi spoke on their work in solar and renewable energy during this critical time for world energy markets amid the Ukraine crisis.
- Small Sphere: Local Ecology through Food Security and Waste Management for Home & Community: Metta Garden Project, India & Sri Lanka (Kanchana Weerakoon): developing more networks with environmentally conscious monks in Sri Lanka to spread the practice of Metta Gardening in temples.
- Cross Sector Technology II: Ecological Architecture through Compressed Stabilized Earth Blocks (CSEB) – Tamil Nadu, India, Dalit women learned how to make CSEB. Gauthama Prabhu’s groups plan to train young Buddhist teachers in his community, not only in Dhamma, but also environmental sustainability.

The next Face-to-Face Conference is scheduled to take place during January 2023 in Thailand!

## ○ Inter-Religious Climate & Ecology (ICE) Network



Activities conducted in 2022 included:

- Convening 7-week-long online Interfaith Climate Justice and Regeneration Training. This training was in collaboration with Atisha Dipankar Peace Trust Bangladesh, Bhutan Soul Farmers, Ecobridge, ECO-Volunteer, Towards Organic Asia, that was supported by several Catholic groups.
- Conducting the 2nd ICE Forum: What is the Role of Faith-based Actors in the Global Climate Talks? 21 participants explored how faith-based organizations can motivate governments to act more promptly in climate mitigation and finance supporting developing countries.
- Launching Korea's first climate film, a documentary project titled, 'It's Now' in Korea with a goal of raising awareness on the under-addressed climate crises in Korea. This project was supported by ICE and OFM JPIC (Order of Friars Minor – Franciscan Peace Movement), and the Green Asia Network.
- September 2022 - The ICE Network released the 2022 Statement for Climate Justice by the Global South, representing the demand of the Global South toward wealthier countries to take responsible actions that support vulnerable people during climate crises. This statement was the first of its kind led by sixty-four grassroots groups in the Asia Pacific Region and was handed to the embassies of the G8 countries.

## ○ INEB Secretariat's Environmental Activities

Reducing the Demand for Wildlife Products in Thailand



Buddhist Lent Parade with the project from Ubon Ratchathani called Ubon Loves Earth - Refrain, Reduce, Refuse the Use of Tiger Fang and Ivory as Amulets

INEB has been collaborating with USAID and WildAid on the campaign to reduce the demand for wildlife products since 2020. Three workshops held in 2020 and 2021 helped build the momentum to support these campaigns. In 2022, survey results of workshop participants highlighted their strong desire to continue their ongoing local campaigns to reduce the demand for wildlife products.

Activities that took place in 2022 are summarized as follows:

- June - Conducted the 4th workshop for Buddhist spiritual leaders to design local projects as community campaigns to reduce demand for wildlife products.
- July – September – Funds were awarded to 7 projects that implemented “Community Campaigns to Reduce Demand for Wildlife Products” which addressed their specific communities’ needs in



various locations around Thailand: Kanchanaburi, Songkhla, Chiang Mai - Chiang Rai, Ubon Ratchathani, Roi Et, and Nakhon Sawan.

strategic plans are needed in order to truly reduce the demand on these products.

USAID's program - Reducing Demand for Wildlife Products campaign plans to expand their work with INEB to the Southeast Asian region. WWF Greater Mekong Subregion has also expressed their interest to work with INEB on their Beliefs and Values Programme. Initial discussions with both have taken place.

The intensive efforts of these projects increased the awareness of local people within a short period of time, yet, when the projects ended, it was too soon to know whether their impact and whether the demand for wildlife products was reduced. Developing long-term

## HOLISTIC HEALTHCARE

### ○ Buddhist Psychotherapy and Suicide Prevention

Since 2017, the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) @ Kodosan has been working with INEB partners and friends to develop a series of conferences and workshops on the wide field of Buddhist and mental health, including suicide prevention, Buddhist chaplaincy, and Buddhist psychotherapy.

The following are summaries of the sessions that took place in 2022 (Sessions #1 – 3 took place in 2021 and are not included below):

- #4 January 21: Buddhist Meditation Practice for the Traumatized and Mentally Ill with Ven. Zinai (Taiwan) and Rev. Soin Fujio (Japan).
- #5 February 18: Suicide Prevention & Spiritual Friendship (kalyanamitra 善知識) with Rev. Gustav Ericsson (Sweden) and Jonathan Watts (USA/ Japan).
- #6 March 25: Family Systems Therapy & Mentalization—Practicing Mindfulness and Vipassana in the Family with Jinji Willingham (USA) and Rev. Masazumi Okano (Japan).
- #7 April 15: Suicide Prevention in South Korea with Prof. Pumsoo Lee and two colleagues: Prof. Seunghee Lim and Prof. Myoung Ho Hyun.

- #8 May 20: Maitri Space Awareness with Prof. Elaine Yuen (U.S.A.). This practice evolved from the Tibetan yoga tradition by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche.

- #9 & 10 June 22 & July 22: A wide-ranging discussion amongst everyone in the group without a main presenter on: Teaching Meditation: from physical comportment to psycho-spiritual balance and insight, & how do you evaluate the development of your meditation students and those that you work with.

The group has been deeply moved and inspired by the level of sharing and camaraderie developed over the past two years. They are looking forward to meeting face to face in 2023, as well as beginning some public programs and workshops to share their discoveries with INEB friends and wider networks.

The full report can be found at:<https://jneb.net/activities/dyingcar/suicide-prevention/buddhistpsychotherapy-and-suicide-prevention/>

## Humanitarian Assistance

Conditions in at least two of Thailand's neighboring countries have caused persons to flee for their lives and seek asylum outside their home countries. INEB supported the following persons during 2022:

- 27 monks inside Myanmar that were part of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)

- 4 persons from Myanmar seeking asylum in Thailand; one person left for another country
- Provided a safe haven for all 42 of the Cambodians who have successfully received asylum in a third country.

## Peace and Interfaith Collaborations

### ○ International Forum on Buddhist-Muslim Relations (BMF)

BMF as an inter-faith forum needs to be able to transcend conventional interactions to find collaborative spaces for effective intervention. Ongoing dialogues at the grassroots and community levels need to be supported, in addition to the BMF supporting strategic interventions at different levels of influence.

August 2022 - Discussions began with several organisations including the Open Society Institute to develop and fund a series of programmes consisting of round table discussions and dialogues. The focus will be on the strategic intervention of Buddhist and Muslim leaders to influence policy directions that will drive policy formation. In order to open space for effective engagement at a strategic level, round table sessions would include two broad activities:

- Dialogue and consultations
- Capacity building - Buddhist and Muslim leadership receive training in policy and approaches for implementation.

We anticipate moving the BMF to Malaysia during 2023 with some funding and an approach which supports a project/office secretariat.

### ○ Regional Network for Peacebuilders

#### ● Sangha for Peace

The establishment and achievement of the Regional Network for Peacebuilders in 2022 is one of the INEB's success stories. Eighteen participants from INEB's partner organizations in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand came together to exchange peace work knowledge, as well as to gain experience and perspectives on peacebuilding and social inclusion. Participants are bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, members of the LGBTQIA+ communities and cisgendered persons.



SANGHA FOR PEACE, SECOND COUNTRY LEARNING MISSION IN SRI LANKA AT THE SARVODAYA TRAINING CENTER, DECEMBER 2022.

Through two country learning missions, participants met with stakeholders in Thailand and Sri Lanka in June and December 2022 respectively. In each country learning mission, the one-week long exposure and engagement activities focused on five learning curriculum modules:

- Buddhism
- Peace and violence
- Intra and inter-faith dialogues for peaceful coexistence
- Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)
- Community engagement; and peace in action

The learning missions accomplished the goals and have had significant impacts on both participants and the community members they met. Through deep listening and genuine dialogues, many difficult questions were asked, new perspectives were gained, and initiatives were discussed. Two video stories and two country learning reports will be available for INEB and participants as a resource to further their efforts and engagement.

Throughout the project's lifetime, trusting and supportive relationships have developed among network members. By the end of the project timeline in June 2023, participants will have designed a long-term strategic plan that aims to help sustain peace and inclusivity in South and Southeast Asia.

The network model used for this peacebuilders project has been recognized by its funder, USAID and FHI360, to be working well. INEB has received many compliments on how the project has been run. The credit also goes to the participants who formed a cohesive learning community that grew into a new network of regional peacebuilders. They have put in the resources and energy to initiate their own action plans based on what they have learned during the country learning missions. Some of the participants also participated at the INEB conference as panelists, or key speakers. They bring forth the message of inclusivity and demonstrate effective approaches to Buddhist peace activism.

## ● Women's Peacebuilding Initiative

The donors, FHI360 and USAID amended the agreement for the Religious Network for Peacebuilders project to include the women's peacebuilding initiative. Planning meetings took place during which 25 participants from 5 countries were identified in the South and Southeast Asia region.

Following the December gathering, several participants expressed that they wanted to offer more training opportunities on specific topics in their countries of



The participants attended a gathering for seven days in December 2022, when they explored and applied feminist leadership principles in their day-to-day peacebuilding and development practices/activities.

The gathering resulted in many positive outcomes including preparing an action plan with country specific activities for the women peacebuilders' network.

Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Additionally, the project's next phase is to make a documentary film of participants in their home countries to learn about their peacebuilding activities.

## ○ South and Southeast Asia Bi-lateral and Multi-lateral Interfaith Engagement

The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue also known as the International Dialogue Centre and INEB collaborated on a multi-faith initiative with funds to support Buddhist organizations in the South and Southeast Asia region. Four applicants received funds for projects in Myanmar, Thailand and 2 in Indonesia. These projects are very diverse in nature and applied unique approaches to increasing the understanding and participation of inter-religious dialogue. The initiative ends in April 2023.

## ○ Youth Digital Harmony

### ● 'Promoting Ethnoreligious and Intergenerational Harmony for Peace in the Digital Age'

INEB is collaborating with Religions for Peace Thailand (The Secretariat's office is located at the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University, Nakhom Pathom, Thailand.) on a new initiative 'Promoting Ethnoreligious and Intergenerational Harmony for Peace in the Digital Age.' Funding was awarded to Religions for Peace Thailand for the project's first phase of developing a curriculum for youth working in civil society and NGOs on digital literacy and digital media capacity building. The project's target countries include Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The partners have participated in Zoom meetings to learn from experts in the field about the issues generated in the digital age that will prepare them for developing the curriculum.

## INEB Institute for Transformative Learning



## ○ School of English for Engaged Social Service (SENS)

SENS 2022 MYO (Myanmar Online)  
March 14 – May 13, and Ongoing

- Due to the pandemic, instead of the annual in-person 3-month SENS course, a six-week course was conducted (with sessions 3-times weekly) for Myanmar humanitarian and democracy activists. Students met 18 times for about 2.5 hours each time.
- The SENS 2022 MYO course went very well with 11 students. Some had sought refuge in Thailand and joined from border regions. Most joined from within Myanmar. Many of these young leaders were taking serious risks to support the survival of civil society in Myanmar. Sometimes a few students missed class when they needed to move to a new safe house. Sometimes an arrest of a colleague or village leader or other dangers caused students to be absent. Co-counseling training provided the students with a much-needed space within which to share their hopes and difficulties. Students focused well and many enjoyed the safety and relief of being part of a respectful and enjoyable learning process.
- Following the course, the director continued to meet with about 9 of these students on a biweekly basis.

### SENS Short Courses – Economics – July 23, 2022

- First short course focused on Economics entitled: A Short Introduction to Global Economics from a People's Perspective, led by award-winning professor Dr. Allan MacNeill of Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri.
- The three hour event was attended by some 20 students and friends, and was highly informative.

SENS LibrETTO – English Teacher Training Online –  
September 10 – October 15, 2023

- First English Teacher Training Online supported by the Regional English Language Office (RELO) of the US Embassy in Bangkok was offered to 15 teachers on six Saturdays for three hours.
- Teaching assistance was provided by two alumni from previous SENS courses, one from Vietnam and one from China.

### ○ One-On-One Mentoring Program (3OM) in 2022

Continued the One-On-One Mentoring program to 28 students in China offering weekly tutoring (one-on-one sessions and group sessions) through October.

### ○ Young Bodhisattva

Due to the pandemic, the in-person training was postponed from November 2022 and rescheduled for October 2023 in Taiwan.

### ○ Digital Bodhisattva

- Reflective articles and podcasts continue to be regularly published on the relationship of emerging themes in digital technology to Buddhist values and compassionate action. Written topics have so far included digital surveillance, privacy and the metaverse. Six podcasts were aired.
- A social media strategy has been developed seeking to spread awareness and engage younger audiences in critical thinking about technology.

## Women & Gender Equality

### ○ Empowering the Bhikkhuni Sangha Bhikkhuni Ordination



Bhikkhuni Solidarity in the 21st Century  
at the Unmun-Sa Bhikkhuni Temple, Korea

Since the beginning of 2022, INEB has continued its commitment to support bhikkhuni ordination and establishment as one of the four-fold sanghas. During the INEB conference in South Korea (October 2022), a panel discussion on Bhikkhuni Solidarity was held at Unmun-sa Bhikkhuni temple. There, a connection was established among bhikkhunis of the three main Buddhist traditions.

Unmun-sa Bhikkhunis are well-established in their Mahayana tradition and have a prominent stand in society. Upon hearing about the problems of their fellow Theravadan and Vajrayana bhikkhunis from Thailand and Bhutan, who are still struggling for not only recognition, but also educational opportunities, the Unmun-sa Abbess made a promise to support them. This collaboration is to take place in mid-2023 when some bhikkhunis from Thailand and Bhutan will join the Jungto Society's Study Tour and visit the abbess of Unmun-sa.

Within INEB's project called Regional Network for Peacebuilders, the issues of bhikkhuni ordination and bhikkhuni rights have been raised during the country learning missions when the group met with government representatives. The problem of documentation is one of the major challenges for bhikkhunis. Without a proper identification showing their status as ordained persons, it is extremely difficult to have any official transactions (e.g. , getting a permit to repair the temple, setting up an

educational program for children at the temple). INEB will continue to work with bhikkhuni to help raise this issue.

The end of the second Country Learning Mission was marked by the blessed occasion of bhikkhuni ordination, which began with a vibrant celebration of Sri Lankan traditional dance and music. The ordination took place at Sakyadhita training center where 9 Bhikkhunis were ordained, 6 from Thailand and 3 from Sri Lanka.



Bhikkhuni Ordination in Bhutan

In terms of bhikkhuni ordination, the Bhutan Nuns Foundation set an example in June 2022 of working with communities of ordained and lay people to host a historic event of bhikkhuni ordination. The Bhutan Nuns Foundation organized the ordination of 144

women conducted by Je Khenpo at the Ramthangkha monastery. INEB has a strong relationship with Bhutan Nuns Foundation and was in full support of the event. With bhikkhunis on INEB's Advisory and Executive committees, we will continue to support bhikkhuni ordination in Thailand and elsewhere.

## Gender Equality and Social Inclusion - GESI

INEB staff is consistently applying the GESI approach expanding gender equality, feminist theory and social inclusion into its policies, practices, and projects.

## Collaboration with International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice - IWP

May 2022 - The initial planning meeting took place between IWP and INEB staff. INEB plans to develop a 5-year plan for a long-term collaboration with IWP.

## Networking & INEB International Conference

### INEB's 20<sup>th</sup> International Conference

The 20<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), was jointly organized with Jungto Society. The gathering took place from 24–30 October 2022, and focused on the theme “Buddhism in a Divided World: Peace Planet, Pandemic.” Approximately 120 persons attended the first in-person gathering since INEB's previous international conference in 2019. Additionally, approximately 35 volunteers from the Jungto Society coordinated and managed the conference activities.

Conference activities took place in several locations beginning in the beautiful mountain retreat of Mungyeong in the southern Korean Peninsula, and in the bustle of Seoul. During this 20th conference, almost 100 speakers and attendees, members of INEB from 19 countries around the world were brought together in the spirit of Kalyanamitra and renewed friendships.

The 20th Biennial Conference of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB).

Image courtesy of INEB



Virtual INEB Sangha Meetings

These virtual sangha meetings were a great way to stay connected and continued to provide country updates, especially about Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

Joint Meeting of INEB's Advisory Committee (AC) and Executive Committee (EC)

The joint meeting was held on October 30, 2022, in Seoul, Korea, following INEB's international conference. The agenda included project updates by INEB members and staff, and other business including updating the organizational member's roster.

Other Interfaith & International Collaborations

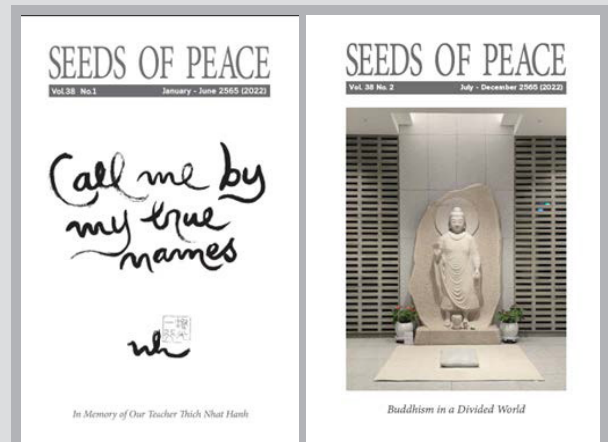
Joint Learning Initiative - JLI

This unique initiative is a collaboration between JLI, INEB and the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), that is intended to support developing a regional Learning Hub about anti-human trafficking. The learning hub aims to inform and improve policy and practice between faith actors, humanitarian and development actors, and the communities they serve. INEB and SEM will specifically examine the role of inter-religious actors, particularly Buddhist's in anti-human trafficking activities, as well as other activities taking place in the Mae Sot area of Tak Province located on the Thai-Myanmar border.

In December, SEM staff visited Mae Sot to meet with and identify potential partners that could participate in the pilot project. Initial mapping of partners from civil society organizations (CSOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) that work directly with migrants and other persons from Myanmar began, as well as ongoing conversations with JLI . The project is being implemented in early 2023.

Media

Seeds of Peace



TWO ISSUES OF THE SEEDS OF PEACE FOR 2022.

INEB's primary publication, the *Seeds of Peace*, has been continuously published for more than 30 years. It is available in the print version as well as online at the INEB website where all the previous issues can be accessed. In 2022, 2 issues were printed with the first issue honoring the life of Thich Nhat Hanh in articles written by INEB's members, and the second issue highlighted INEB's conference scheduled for October 2022.

## Publications

- Booklet – *We Will Never Forget* by Ng Shui Meng on the 10th anniversary of Sombath Somphone's enforced disappearance (56 pages)
- E-books are available for sale on INEB's website.

## New Expanded Digital Presence

A comprehensive communication strategy is being developed that includes: INEB's website, social media – FB, the monthly newsletter and podcasts.

- Website development - Updating the INEB website began with the goal of improving accessibility, presentation of information and general site speed. The new website is expected to be launched in early 2023.
- INEB's Monthly Newsletter has seen a consistent growth of subscribers and regular positive feedback with 1,200 by the end of December.
- INEB's Social Media Strategy is in development with support from TechSoup Asia.

## Public Events

December – Collaborate on an event raising awareness of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Sombath Somphone at the Bangkok Arts and Cultural Center, Bangkok, Thailand



## Secretariat

### Code of Contact

Code of Conduct that addresses INEB's policies and practices is nearing completion and approval, after which all staff and volunteers will be required to sign the document. The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to promote accountability and define key staff responsibilities. Wellbeing and self-care or self-love is another significant part of the scope and purpose which is about helping ourselves and our work community to feel, and be well and healthy, even if and when the work culture, situation and environment around us is not.

INEB's policies include:

- Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) including other marginalized and vulnerable groups
- Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse
- Safeguarding children
- Child protection (age specific for children under 18 years)
- Safety and security of persons and property
- Digital safety and security
- Anti-corruption guidelines
- Complaints, incident and response mechanisms and guidelines

### Staff Update

- Anchalee Kurutach, an INEB Executive Committee member, is managing the Regional Network of Peacebuilders project.



# Sangha for Peace

## The Report for the Final Country Learning Mission

By Anchalee Kurutach

The third and final Country Learning Mission for Sangha for Peace under the Regional Network for Peacebuilders project took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from April 24 to May 1, 2023.

Sangha for Peace members made a joint decision at the last country learning mission in Sri Lanka in December 2022 regarding the third trip that was supposed to be in Myanmar but couldn't happen due to safety concerns. Instead of applying the remaining fund for individual projects, participants decided on another in-person meeting in a majority Muslim country. It was clear that everyone values live connection, face-to-face dialogue, and hands-on community engagement as the most effective way to bring about new transformative learning and the exchange of knowledge. The Malaysian Country Learning Mission was completed as planned, with positive and impactful results. There was a balance between internal processing and external activities during this learning mission. The timing of Sangha for Peace's gathering in Malaysia fell on the week of Eid al-Fitr, one of the most significant and joyous occasions in the Islamic calendar to mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

### Presentations

The program began with participants hearing from Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, founder of the International Movement for A Just World. Dr. Chandra, as he is called, is a long-time friend of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. He is an academic, political scientist, and social activist who is known for his work



*The last empowering ritual*

in promoting peace, justice, and human rights. He has written extensively on issues related to human rights, multiculturalism, and inter-civilizational dialogue and has been a strong critic of war, imperialism, and human rights abuses. We were extremely grateful that he traveled to meet and spend time with Sangha for Peace members. During the presentation, Dr. Chandra talked about Malaysia's history of political developments, including current ethnic and religious conflicts. He highlighted how the Malay elites throughout history were prepared to accommodate and sacrifice. Hence, there was no war in the history: "Malay nationalism did not give birth to the Malay nation." Dr. Chandra shared his view that what Malaysia needs is greater appreciation of shared values. He also expressed concerns that there is not enough new generation in one singular force.

The next presentation was an informal dialogue

with ordinary Malaysian citizens, who shared their views about the society they live in. Two Malaysian families of Buddhist and Hindu faiths graciously met with the group and had frank discussions on many issues. These are two families that have chosen to homeschool their children, as part of a significant movement for education reform. The home-schooled youth present at the meeting shared his perspectives on today's society and expressed critical views regarding how disconnected young people are from each other and from the politics that matter. The sharing and exchange were rich and touched on many topics from social media to education to gender diversity. Later on, at a briefing session, participants reflected on how Malaysian society differs from theirs, especially on how economic security is prioritized.

Another presentation to educate participants on Malaysia's interfaith history and development was given by two scholars: Associate Professor Imtiaz Yusof from the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization; and, a Buddhist scholar Dato' Ir Ang Choo Hong.

Prof. Imtiaz began with a very impressive slide show entitled "Islam and Buddhism Relations over the Ages and Current Trends." His extensive knowledge and research on Islam and Buddhism shed light on many inter-religious topics. With first encounter between Islam and Buddhist communities dating back to the middle of the seventh century CE, Prof. Imtiaz's slide presentation showed this historic relation with rare footages. One such image was of the Shakyamuni Buddha illustrated as if he was a Muslim person. Prof. Imtiaz also introduced the concept of parallels between religions as something that helps build understanding and dialogue even though they (parallel lines) do not meet except at a meeting station/platform and separate again. Prof Imtiaz poignantly rejects the myth of religious or ideological superiority as philosophically and religiously untenable position. And from history to the present time communication continues between the two religions, especially after the tragic 9/11 event. Culturally, there are also many links among ethnic minorities in many countries throughout Central, South and Southeast Asia.

Da'to Aung's presentation emphasized Buddhist

trends for further discussion. Based on his data, he brought up a paradox, i.e., the Buddhist population is decreasing, while there are more people proclaiming their interest in Buddhism. Da'to Aung pointed out the challenges of Buddhism in the modern age, which he posited is not supported by global power. Da'to Aung proposed that Buddhism be modernized and customized to meet today's diverse needs and populations. Later, the session facilitated by Vidya K V Soon helped put a lot of issues discussed into perspective.

### Community Visits

The first community organization visited by Sangha for Peace was the SEED foundation. There, members of the trans and other lgbtqn+ communities warmly welcomed participants and shared their powerful stories of long struggles to care for the community despite violence and discrimination they had all experienced. The SEED foundation staff's spirits were uplifting and positive. Sangha for Peace group members, who have over the year learned to be allies with marginalized communities, were genuinely appreciative of the visit. There was a lot of gratitude from the program and group members for the outstanding connection felt throughout the meeting that afternoon.

The most engaging meeting during the country learning mission was at the University Malaya Center for Civilisational Dialogue. It should be noted that the



*Sangha for Peace at the University of Malaya Center for Civilisational Dialogue*



*Participants with their projects and names of future collaborators inside the bags!*

center's director, Professor Datuk Dr. Azizan Baharuddin, was the first to agree to the meeting with Sangha for Peace group even though it was Eid al-Fitr week (when most people were on vacation). Her commitment to inclusive peace work is exemplary. The dialogue on "Inclusivity and Peace" was attended by patrons, faculty staff, students, and other members of the University and of the Center for Civilisational Dialogue. About 50 participants were present and they were divided into five groups to discuss issues on education, ecology, politics and economics, gender, and digital communication. Each group was diverse in age, ethnicity, gender and religious backgrounds, making the dialogue rich, dynamic and engaging. Participants shared personal and institutional experiences and perspectives on these various topics and discovered commonalities and differences. Many planned to follow up on possible future collaborations. In the end, everyone recognized how this kind of inclusive dialogue circle can cultivate friendship, hope, and commitment for people of all faiths to come together and build a peaceful society.

### **Internal Sessions**

Other than meeting with communities, the group had a few internal sessions where we explored in-depth our strength, our commitment, and our support for each other. The purpose was to recognize each and every person as a peacebuilder in their own right and

how they are equally valued in the circle. Participants examined their action plans from the first and second country learning missions and worked on the final one. Understanding the scope of their focus, target group, skills, and approach; they shared their true passion and commitment with the group by making a statement about what they would continue to do. Altogether, everyone explored what others' personal projects were and offered support based on the level of interest and readiness for involvement.

We also had a meet-the-funder session with USAID and FHI360 representatives. This was a chance for participants to reflect on how the program has impacted their lives and their work as peacebuilders. They were encouraged to raise any concerns regarding any aspects of the program. The discussion was sincere and clearly expressed. Comments from participants focused on positive changes i.e., how the new knowledge and experience from program activities have transformed the way they see and understand the world and how they are now doing things differently in solidarity with the marginalized. The sharing was deeply felt as everyone in the group has had similar experiences from this learning platform. Representatives from USAID and FHI360 also shared their reflections based on their own observations. They expressed how this work benefited everyone, including funders themselves, and how the group has impressively proven that transformation work is possible.



*Participants with their projects and names of future collaborators inside the bags!*

friendship. In Malaysia, Sangha for Peace was a minority Buddhist group in an Islamic world. Many got to experience being told to conform to the majority rules such as the proper grooming when entering a mosque. This gave us a minute sense of what it's like being a minority, which helped us to contemplate what other minority groups are facing in our own society.

All in all, the country learning mission in Malaysia was a great success and a heartfelt wrap up of our Network for Peace project. At the end of the gathering, we all sat together in a circle, sharing words or teachings that inspired us. We united our strength as peacemakers and blessed one another with our presence and good intention. The country learning mission is over but the journey of us the peacemakers continues now with a network of kalyanamitras.

Special thanks to Vidya K V Soon and P Prema Devi, the team in Malaysia, who helped organize all the meetings and logistics. The gathering wouldn't have been possible without their tireless work and commitment to supporting peace building efforts in the region.

## Sight Seeing

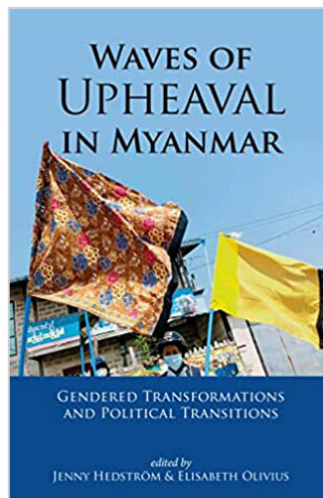
Sangha for Peace participants had a few chances to visit the vibrant Kuala Lumpur and experienced the cultural richness it has to offer. We went to the Islamic Art Center, the National Mosque, China town, Indian town and the famous Petronas Twin Towers at KLCC. The unstructured time spent together exploring these new places helped relax participants and deepen the

## Recommended Reading



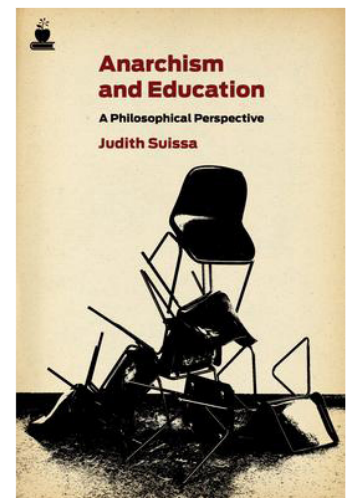
*The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar*

**Contributing authors:** Martin Smith and Jason Gelbort  
**Publisher:** Transnational Institute (TNI), Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2023



*Waves of Upheaval in Myanmar - Gendered Transformations and Political Transitions*

**Editors:** Jenny Hedström and Elisabeth Olivius  
**Publisher:** NIAS Press, 2022



*Anarchism and Education A Philosophical Perspective*

**Author:** Judith Suissa  
**Publisher:** Routledge, 2012

# Compassion and Connection: Jungto Society Hosts Study Tour for Young Leaders and Activists from the International Network of Engaged Buddhists

By **Craig C Lewis**

June 29, 2023

**Source: *BuddhistDoorGlobal*** - <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/compassion-and-connection-jungto-society-hosts-study-tour-for-young-leaders-and-activists-from-the-international-network-of-engaged-buddhists/>  
Please visit the link for the full article.



*All images courtesy of Jungto Society*

Jungto Society, the international Buddhist community founded by the revered Korean Dharma master and social activist Venerable Pomnyun Sunim (법륜스님), this month hosted an intensive eight-day study tour in South Korea for young leaders and activists affiliated with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). Nineteen Buddhists from nine countries and territories in Asia—Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam—gathered in a warm and welcoming atmosphere of *kalyana-mitrata*\* to practice, to learn, and to connect; to exchange ideas, to inspire, and to be inspired.

Buddhistdoor Global was privileged to join this unique assembly of monastic and lay practitioners,

leaders, and activists, and share a Dharmic journey that combined elements of study, experiential workshops, and field trips, with the discipline and commitment of a traditional Buddhist retreat.

Led by Ven. Pomnyun Sunim and hosted by the committed and tireless volunteers who make up Jungto Society, the exhaustive itinerary included visits to Buddhist monasteries and temples across South Korea, group presentations and discussions, Dharma talks and Buddhist practice. All of this was aimed at providing an opportunity for the participants to meet and connect, and to present and exchange ideas for expressing and practicing engaged Buddhism in today's increasingly polarized world.

Jungto Society is a volunteer-run community that aspires to embody the Buddhist teachings through social engagement, and by promoting a simple lifestyle centered on sustainable living. Jungto Society seeks to address the crises of modern society, such as greed, poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation, by applying a Buddhist worldview of interconnectedness and living in line with the principle that everyone can find happiness through Buddhist practice and active participation in social movements.

Each day of the study trip began with pre-dawn chanting and prostration in the Dharma hall, before the participants broke their fast with a traditional formal vegetarian temple meal known as *balwoogongyang* (발우공양), a ritualized evocation of the traditional alms round conducted by monastics during the time of the historical Buddha, and which is still practiced by some monastic sanghas in the present day—especially in the Theravada tradition. Unique to Korean Buddhist monasteries, *balwoogongyang* is typically served on ceremonial occasions and during intensive retreats, and is regarded as a type of meditation practice centered on gratitude and compassion.

“Originally, I had dreamed of becoming a scientist. However, through a fateful encounter with a teacher at a temple next to my high school, I ended up entering the temple. At that time, I considered religion—whether Buddhism or Christianity—to be merely irrational and empty talk. But as I studied the Buddhadharmā, I came to understand that these teachings are remarkably rational.

Our modern civilization is centered on science and technology, where science is the study and exploration of the principals and the composition of matter and how we engaged with it. Similarly, I recognized that the Buddhadharmā as an exploration of the principles behind the functioning of the human mind and consciousness, making it very similar to science. That’s why I gave up on becoming a scientist and instead became a Buddhist monk.”

“However, after living in the temple for several years, I noticed that the monks there were primarily focused on giving blessings for laypeople. Moreover, I was disappointed to see them talking about the unrealistic notion that praying would lead to a more favorable rebirth. In traditional Indian religions, karma signifies predetermined destiny. It is believed that being born as a woman or having disabilities is the result of sins committed in past lives, while being born into a higher social class or into wealth indicates having accumulated blessings. However, I began to see these interpretations of karma as mere justifications for the inequalities and discrimination in society. I began questioning whether the Buddhism that rationalizes inequality and discrimination in the world is worth believing in, or if I should leave the Buddhist community. During that time, South Korea in particular was undergoing an active democratization movement and the people were experiencing various forms of suffering. I was deeply disappointed by the Buddhist clergy’s allegiances with dictatorial powers, and how they disregarded the suffering of the people.”

“So what is the Buddha’s teaching?”

“With these growing doubts, I collected all the scriptures I could and started studying the materials related to the Buddha’s life. As I re-examined the entirety of the Buddha’s teachings, I discovered that the Buddhism that many of us are taught is completely different from the Buddha’s original teachings, and is, in fact, closer to the traditional Indian religion of Hinduism. This led me to contemplate establishing a new way of teaching the Buddhadharmā. The essence of the Buddha’s teaching is that our suffering is not caused by sins from past lives, punishments imposed by some higher power, or astrological factors, but rather by our own ignorance.

*“What are the teachings of the Buddha?” Ven. Pomnyun Sunim enquired of the assembled participants after they had eaten.*





If we can awaken ourselves from this ignorance, we can free ourselves from suffering. This is the fundamental teaching of the Buddha.

“In the Buddha’s teaching, ‘karma’ does not refer to predetermined destiny but rather to the formation of habits. Since it is something that has been formed, it can also be extinguished. Karma is considered a habitual pattern that repeats itself, but because it is formed it can be extinguished. Thereby, we can liberate ourselves from all suffering and attain enlightenment. The Buddha’s teaching is aimed at enabling us to awaken within ourselves, to reach a state without suffering, which is nirvana. It has nothing to do with seeking blessings or attaining a better rebirth. It is far removed from what people commonly refer to as religion.”

Each year, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) selects a group of promising young leaders and engaged Buddhist activists to travel to South Korea, where they are hosted by Jungto Society with the objective of learning from the activities of Ven. Pomnyun Sunim and Jungto Society in practicing the Buddhadharmā within the context of modern society: studying the ways in which Korean monastics and Jungto Society volunteers practice and conduct social engagement, and offering opportunities for monastic and lay Buddhists to share and exchange ideas for applying the Dharma in their respective societies. This annual program was suspended for three years during the COVID-19 pandemic, and resumed this year.

The INEB-Jungto study program for this year, which ran from 13–20 June, was divided between the Jungto Education and Training Center and Jungnimjeong-sa temple and retreat center in Mungyeong, Dubuk Jungto

Retreat Center in North Gyeongsang Province, and the Jungto Center headquarters in downtown Seoul.

The eight-day schedule included an examination of the humanitarian, social, and environmental organizations and projects founded by Ven. Pomnyun Sunim, including: Jungto Society and the Jungto Dharma and retreat centers, which offer settings for groups and individuals to study and engaged in personal Buddhist practice; the Peace Foundation, focused on conflict-resolution and working toward the reunification of the Korean Peninsula; EcoBuddha, which promotes simple living, sustainability, and environmental protection; Good Friends, a center for peace, human rights, and assisting refugees from North Korea; and Join Together Society (JTS), an international humanitarian relief organization.

The delegates and guests then participated in a series of intensive Dharma talks, group discussions, and sharing sessions centered on key aspects of internal and external Buddhist practice—from understanding Buddhist philosophy and personal Buddhist practice and conduct, to the bodhisattva aspiration to liberate all sentient beings embodied in the philosophy and practice of engaged Buddhism.

Topics addressed ranged the profound subtleties of the concept of no-self, to sustainable living and organic farming, humanitarian relief and empowering oppressed communities, and support for bhikshuni ordination in all Buddhist traditions.

In-depth panel discussions were also organized with Buddhist media representatives, Korean NGOs, and with workers from ethnic minorities in Korea, who offered first-hand accounts of the struggles and challenges of life



in contemporary Korean society.

The perspectives and learning takeaways from these study opportunities were then reviewed in the contexts and circumstances of each of the study tour delegates, to examine how they could be applied to help the activists become agents of change in their own communities, working with compassionate wisdom to effectively relieve suffering.

This study portion of the program was fortified by real-world examples of Korean Buddhism in life and practice. Field visits were arranged to centers of monastic study and practice: a pilgrimage to Bongam-sa, a ninth century Buddhist monastery and monastic retreat center founded in the mountains of central Korea; a visit to Bulguk-sa, a Buddhist monastery originally founded in the sixth century and now a UNESCO World Heritage site and home to seven national treasures; a pilgrimage to Unmun-sa, the largest monastery in the country for female monastics and home to the largest Buddhist college, which has produced more than 1,250 bhikshunis; and Jogye-sa in downtown Seoul, the chief temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, the country’s largest Buddhist order, where the program participants had an audience with Ven. Jinwoo, the executive director of the order.

The program delegates also paid a powerful and inspiring visit to Jungtoh Village Jajae Hospital, a hospice and palliative care facility for patients with advanced-stage cancer and other illnesses, founded in 2013 led by the Korean bhikshuni Nungheung Sunim, a living exemplar of compassionate action for the relief of suffering.

“The one who experienced and lived a life free from

suffering in a concrete manner is Gautama Buddha. Therefore, as Buddhists, we need to study the life of Gautama Buddha within the context of historical facts,” Ven. Pomnyun Sunim explained to the practitioners. “The Buddha, too, experienced various forms of existential questioning in his own life and liberated himself from the anguish. That is why, through the teachings of the Buddha, we can also free ourselves from suffering.”

“As to why the Buddha renounced his kingship and royal inheritance, it is crucial that we understand this aspect the Buddha’s life in order to fully grasp Buddhism. By clearly comprehending this, one can liberate oneself from the pursuit of consumerism and related desires.”

“Learning about the and teachings of the Buddha is not merely about studying history. It is about addressing our current sufferings and the climate crisis, and striving for a sustainable future. By learning the Buddha’s teachings, we can become a beacon of hope in resolving the pressing issues facing humanity.”

“The development of Buddhism, as many people talk about it today, should not be equated with pursuing consumerism. Building larger temples, receiving more offerings, and attaining higher positions to exert influence—can we truly consider these as the development of Buddhism? Instead, true development in Buddhism lies in relieving the sufferings of humanity.”

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\*Kalyana-mitrata (Skt.), Kalyaṇa-mittata (Pali); the Buddhist concept of virtuous spiritual friendship.



## The Role of Buddhist Spiritual Leaders in Humanitarian Response: A Listening Dialogue of the JLI South-East Asia Hub

By **Nonglak Kaeophokha** and **Rita Litwiller**



*Mae Sot, Thailand,  
March 30, 2023,  
Listening Dialogue  
with monks,  
novices and local  
community partners.*

In late 2022, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) initiated a pilot project in the Thai western border town of Mae Sot which is experiencing a heavy increase in people arriving from Burma following the coup of February 2021. The project is collaborating with the Joint Learning Initiative (JLI) based in the US to set up regional learning research hubs in various parts of the world on the role of faith actors in specific areas including humanitarian response, anti-human trafficking, education, migration and more. The focus of the project was to examine the role of Buddhist spiritual leaders regarding anti-human trafficking activities in the cross border area between Thailand and Burma. Limited information and research is available regarding this topic, and we soon learned how complex the situation is.

During several intensive visits to Mae Sot in December 2022, February, and March 2023, Thai Watanaram Temple was identified as the Buddhist

temple to collaborate with for the Southeast Asia (SEA) Hub. Key partners were also identified among the local civil society organizations, and one international non-governmental organization.

On the afternoon of March 30, a listening dialogue was facilitated by SEM staff between the monks and novices at the temple, and the project partners. Twenty two people attended the session with the majority (13) being from the temple and the remainder from the partners, as well as SEM and INEB. During the two and one half hour dialogue, all conversations were translated back and forth from Thai to Burmese and English. The ongoing translation provided another deeper level of understanding of the current situation.

While seated on the temple floor, we listened to the abbot and an assistant monk share their perspectives about the current situation, their roles at the temple, and the particular challenges they face as the steady influx of people fleeing to Thailand from Myanmar increases.

Because of the sensitive nature of the dialogue, forming trusting relationships are essential by learning as much as possible firsthand and acknowledging the diverse experiences and trauma often experienced by people arriving in Mae Sot.

The abbot clearly described the main priority was providing education to the children staying at the temple. Also, these children have limited access to community social services. Many children staying at the temple face difficulties because they do not have legal documents such as an identity card, passport, etc. He also emphasized that religious organizations cannot stand alone and need support from the local communities, as well as from the outside, which can ultimately help the children go further. The abbot is open to collaborating with local organizations and willing to continue the dialogue among the partners about the opportunities for supporting the children.

The abbot clearly mentioned the need for humanitarian support and children's education and basic rights. We agreed to find ways to support the temple such as teaching Thai and English classes, providing

specific types of training regarding protecting children from violence and sexual abuse. The partners will look at whether their organizations can provide essential ways to support the children staying at the temple.

We learned that it was too soon to begin working directly on anti-human trafficking activities. The listening dialogue process is a journey and INEB and SEM are committed to the project's growth and learning together with the partner's support. This is a first step for us to create locally-led joint learning initiatives for advancing knowledge, research and evidence on the role of local religious actors, especially Buddhists, in the areas of humanitarian assistance, development, peacebuilding, etc. We will continue to share our journey with you.

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Nonglak is the program assistant for SEM, and Rita is the program assistant for INEB. They often collaborate on joint projects. Please contact Nonglak at [nkaeophokha@gmail.com](mailto:nkaeophokha@gmail.com) for additional information.



supporting food security for indigenous people.

The awardee's projects reflect the objectives of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund:

- *Education* - To provide full or partial scholarships, especially to marginalized children and young people seeking to complete their education.
- *Community projects* - To provide small grants to active young adults (up to 35 years of age) to initiate start-up work or activities for youth in community education or development.
- *To support organizations providing education or humanitarian relief* at risk children and families.

We look forward to learning about the projects outcomes which will be presented at an event in December 2023.

**Donations to the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund for the projects to be awarded in 2024 can be made through INEB's website and indicate that they are for the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund at <https://inebnetwork.org/donation/>**



## 2023 Awardees of The Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund

We congratulate the eleven (11) awardees of the Sombath Somphone Memorial Fund that received up to 3,000 USD in funds to support their projects in Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. The competition for funds was high with 61 proposals received from 5 countries in the Mekong Sub-Region, and 82% were submitted by applicants from Myanmar. Proposals were submitted by non-profit organizations, small groups and individuals, which expanded the possibility for more applicants to receive funds.

The awardee's projects represent unique ways to address community needs which are based on educational approaches. These projects ranged from developing new educational materials for children; offering education opportunities to internally displaced children, orphans, out of school youth, and children in monastic schools; producing media content about land mines; in addition to

“If there is ever a story written about my life, Rights Beyond Border will be the good part in that story.”

### **Thai organization supporting Myanmar newcomers to leave a painful past behind**

*According to some estimations, at least 200,000 people from Myanmar have sought refuge in Thailand since the peaceful protests against an unlawful coup in 2021 were met with brute force from the military. Although in relative safety, people carry a heavy mental burden needing to cope with the uncertainty of their status in Thailand while also grappling with tragedies of the recent past.*

#### *One tale among many?*

Ma Phyu\* arrived in Thailand in last autumn [2022]. She paid an agent to bring her family across the border. Four women, her sister, her two teenage daughters and herself floated on used car tyres across the Moei River separating Myanmar from Thailand. Not long after they reached solid land, one of her daughters was arrested and the broker who arranged the transport demanded more money for her release, threatening to send her back to Myanmar if his demands weren't met.

This is when RBB (Rights Beyond Border), a founding member of the Myanmar Response Network, stepped in. They were contacted by UNHCR and after negotiating the daughter's release, and placed the family in a safehouse. The safehouse, however, proved to be less safe than expected. One of the daughters was harassed and spied while taking a bath. Although the family reported it to the police, given their lack of documents, no one took them seriously. Finally, RBB managed to move them to a different, this time actually safe, location. Staff visits them regularly, sharing information, hold family counselling sessions and provide other basic needs.

Since the military takeover in February 2021, tens of thousands have crossed the border into Thailand to

escape prosecution and ongoing fighting in Myanmar. As Thailand does not provide any official status for asylum seekers from Myanmar, the options are limited which include obtaining seemingly legal documentation to guarantee such as a migrant worker status, or registration with UNHCR for resettlement in a third country. None of those are without its risks and setbacks. There is a constant state of uncertainty and fear of arrest, while even a successful application can take months if not years to process. All this takes a heavy toll.

#### *RBB's approach*

“From the about 600 cases we have assessed, there is at least 20% with severe depression and some kind of PTSD due to experiences made back home, and another 30% with milder anxiety and anger management issues due to the volatile conditions in Thailand and overlong resettlement processes,” explains a resident RBB counsellor. People are all offered in-house counselling, while cases requiring medical attention are referred to the local hospital, where a Burmese speaking case worker is placed to create trust and bridge the communication gap.

In April 2021, RBB was working primarily as a child rights-based organization when they received a call from UNHCR about 20 unaccompanied children in their care, recent arrivals from Myanmar. RBB supported them to get into boarding schools and cooperated with the teachers, building their capacities in educating kids who bring with them this unique set of often harrowing experiences.

When possible, they also reach out to the families and provide basic needs support. Now their so-called rainbow bags have reached hundreds and psychological first aid provided to the recipients helps understand common trends better and tailor interventions accordingly.

### *An invisible toll*

“Children in general and unaccompanied children specifically are at particular risk – elaborates Ampika Saibouyai, the founder and director of RBB – “parents are sending them over to get them out of danger, but they are very isolated here”. As a consequence of their experiences the behaviour of many changes radically.

“They might seem to be alright at first, but their personality is completely altered, some become silent and withdrawn, others boisterous and loud or angry”. RBB tries to extent long-term accompaniment to them as well via different forms of work. “We have a problem-solving approach,” the resident counsellor continues “we try to focus providing them with an education so they have more opportunities in the future.”

“Sometimes it is quite hard, laments Ma Phyu, some little thing happens, that reminds me of the past and I have to catch myself and stop myself from going back there again. I do the same for my daughters. We need to focus on other things, like their school.” It also helps when she remembers that they are not alone. That the staff of the organization has their back. “RBB is like family to us. If there is ever a story written about my life, RBB will be the good part in that story”.

### *Challenges to long-term support*

It is however not always easy to follow-up or keep in touch. People sometimes refuse the support or reach out for very particular reasons. “Many people come when they have other long-term health issues and they need treatment, need access to a hospital. When their worries take the form of physical illness, like high blood pressure and heart disease” explains RBB.

Others need a PFA assessment (Psychological First Aid) for their resettlement process. People however also move around a lot and are hard to keep track of. “A lot of what we do is emergency response, but we need more long-term engagement”. This requires more coordination with other service providers, both Thai and Burmese. They are also considering building up more peer support structures. What most people they encounter lack is a certain kind of connection, a shared setting where they can unwind and unburden.

Ma Phyu is now creating that space for her family. “We are trying to spend more time together, go to the little shop nearby, get a cake and talk. Or sit together in the evening and discuss whatever is on our minds. Or it’s just my daughter reading out funny things she finds on the Internet. That is enough.”

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\*A pseudonym was used to protect the identity and privacy of the person.

The Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) is partner of the Myanmar Response Network formed in 2021 to assist Myanmar refugees in Thailand.



## For Pracha Hutanuwatr



Pracha and Sulak

Pracha and I are Kalayanamitra since he was primary school age until our later years. When he was a student at Suankularb Wittayalai School, he showed vision and promise by establishing a Siamese Youth Group. This was a group of progressive youth seeking to understand their own roots and social justice. Even though I was not directly associated with this group, they introduced themselves to me and asked for financial help to support their activities. Their request was made at the time I was setting up the Association for the Preservation of Arts and Environment. I felt that supporting this young progressive group was a good idea and they invited me to visit, learn and dialogue with them regularly every year. They conducted activities in many provinces, beginning in Pathum Thani Province. The group also included one student from Assumption School, who is known today as Ven. Paisal Visalo. He may have been the youngest member.

Later, Pracha studied at the Faculty of Education at Chulalongkorn University, where he had a dilemma of whether to follow Marxism or Buddhism. He came to my house often, even though some of his friends whispered that I am a dangerous person and was receiving funds from the CIA to destroy the leftists. These inuendoes did not matter to Pracha because he was

open to learning as much as possible and eventually did not follow Marxism totally, especially because he believed in using nonviolence to bring about societal change.

The work of Ven. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu influenced him more than others. Pracha wanted to ordain as a monk for a three months during Buddhist lent, but Ven. Panya Nanda Bhikkhu rejected being his preceptor because he believed that Pracha was a leftist. I asked Ven. Sot to accept him to be ordained with the head of Surat Thani Provincial Buddhist Sangha after which he lived at Suan Mokh Temple for more than a decade.

During that period, he produced the most precious interview autobiography book on *Telling at Twilight* with Ven. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu. He asked questions with many details which most people never ask, at the same time Ven. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu also openly answered the questions. I really value this book as an asset and should translate into English. Later on, after he disrobed, Pracha continued using this method when interviewing me. Sadly, our lay lives were so busy and didn't have much time as when he interviewed Ven. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu. Regardless, Pracha's book of those interviews was published and is titled *Hidden Away in the Folds of Time: The Unwritten Dimension of Sulak Sivaraksa*.

Pracha liked to write and translate books. In fact, he is the first to translate Thich Nhat Hanh's book titled *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation* into the Thai Language. This book inspired to others to translate most of his books into Thai.

Pracha wasn't involved in some of my work at the beginning, but became involved later. However, when facing problem he is ready to bring young people to help and address challenges such as the with the Wongsanit Ashram.

Our experiment with Alternative Education took place at Wongsanit Ashram where Pracha was working behind the scenes, especially with grassroot leaders from Burma through the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM). One could say that we are the first Thai NGO who worked inside Burma during the 1990's. Our experience in Burma formed long-term trusting relationships with many different ethnic and religious groups. Many alumni of the grassroots leadership

training established their own organizations to strengthen civil society. We also assisted their further growth and development by reaching out to our international circle, such as Schumacher College in England and Findhorn in Scotland.

Our experience with the Laos Sangha was also unique because some senior monk did not want to send the young monks to study at Buddhist University in Thailand. This was because after graduating they disrobed or returned to Laos where they promoted cultural icons from Thai society at the cost of uprooting their own culture. The monk leaders tried their best to keep their younger generations focus on meditation, even though they were under the Communist regime. Nevertheless, the Laos Buddhist Sangha still has its own space in which training was given to the monks and nuns regarding the societal structure. I would say the outcome has been more than we expected.

Regarding the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), I hoped for a long time to see Buddhists apply dhamma and nonviolent approaches for solving society's problems. My dream came true because of Pracha. When in Japan, he met with a progressive priests, also Marxists, to raise funds for a gathering of Buddhists working for society to establish INEB. Pracha was a key person who worked methodically to establish the network, since this was more than thirty years ago, maybe some INEB members have already forgotten about him.

In his later life, Pracha used modern technology to communicate with the younger generation. He brought many people of the younger generation to interview me, including those interested in alternative education. And the message went around the world, some of their interviews were published into books.

Besides the work that Pracha and I did together, he actively trained Chinese people who want an alternative to mainstream development in China, which is not easy to do.

Pracha also collaborated with friends in Japan, especially alternative movements, such as Sloth Club that focused on *Slow is Beautiful* by E.F. Schumaker and is the foundation for Buddhist Economics.

Pracha wanted to bring alternative development into the mainstream and introduced the work of Helena Norberg Hodge's book *Ancient Futures: Learning About Ladakh*. At the same time, he also agreed with the concept of Gross National Happiness which began in the

Kingdom of Bhutan, and emphasized Gross National Happiness rather than Gross National Products. These are some examples of the work that Pracha has done with other organizations and concepts.

Another activity that Pracha and Ven. Paisal Visalo encouraged me to do before I pass away is introducing and learning 'How to die with Mindfulness.' This concept is about simplifying the funeral process without it being costly, as it quite expensive these days. The activity couldn't be possible if COVID-19 still influences our society. At the end of March 2023, they organized a celebration of my 90th Birthday in Bangkok during which I enjoyed seeing many friends.

I wish to nominate Pracha for an international award, but he may not stay that long. I want you to know that I value you, Pracha, more than any awards that you should have. Our friendship should continue.

Pracha always initiated new ideas and made them materialize. For example, he wanted western society to know Asian thinkers that think differently from mainstream, and he convinced a publisher, Zed Books, in England to publish this book titled *The Asian Future – Dialogues for Change Volume 2* in 2005. He spent a lot of energy focusing on this book and also collaborated with Ramu Manivannan to be the co-editor from University of Madras in India. Finally, this book was published in England, and also in the Thai language by the Garden of Fruition (Suan Nguen Mee Ma). He dedicated this book to me.

I helped him a little bit, such as he wanted to send someone to interview Aung San Suu Kyi after her release from house arrested in Burma. I called her in Yangon and she was happy to give time and provided several choices of days to interview her. I had suggested that Pracha ask Pipob Udomittipong to interview her, because Pipob had translated her articles into Thai. Also, when he was married, Suu Kyi sent a message for their wedding, too. Unfortunately, Pracha didn't listen to me, he wanted to send Asami Yasuhito instead. Asami is a nice person and capable. He traveled to Yangon, but Suu Kyi's schedule had changed and she was quite busy. Therefore, he could not wait until her political activities were finished. He returned without meeting her, which is unfortunate.

**Sulak Sivaraksa**

27 May 2023



# The 40<sup>th</sup> Niwano Peace Prize Awarded to Mr. Rajagopal P. V. of India

## Reason for Selection

**Dr. Flaminia Giovanelli**

Source: Niwano Peace Prize - [https://www.npf.or.jp/english/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/040\\_reason\\_e.pdf](https://www.npf.or.jp/english/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/040_reason_e.pdf)

On behalf of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee I am honored to announce that the 40th Niwano Peace Prize will be awarded to Mr. Rajagopal P. V. of India in recognition of his extraordinary work in the service of Justice and Peace. His actions in favor of the poorest and most marginalized of his country, carried out through peaceful and nonviolent methods, and his struggle for the recognition of the equal human dignity and equal rights of every man and woman, irrespective of caste or gender, inspires great admiration. His particular accomplishments that garner the highest esteem include negotiating the surrender and facilitating the rehabilitation of gangs, the education of young people in the service of the poor, and, well aware that the primary needs of the poor are water, land, and forests, his commitment to care for the environment. Mr. Rajagopal's work for justice is also carried forward through dialogue with institutions with a view to counteracting the phenomenon of land grabbing, and obtaining, through appropriate land reform, the redistribution of land and the assignment of land ownership.

The means and meaning of spirituality are deeply rooted in all of Mr. Rajagopal's activities. Being a Gandhian in thinking and action, he strongly believes in a journey of social action that starts from an "inner transformation" and expands to the outer world. This spirituality is matched by Mr. Rajagopal's very remarkable organizational skills as evidenced by the transition from action carried out in small groups and self-help organizations to the creation of large movements such as Ekta Parishad, which has an active membership of 250,000 landless poor and is capable of mobilizing thousands of participants in national and international marches to call attention to the important problems of our time.

Mr. Rajagopal's biography and curriculum vitae is so

rich that one can go over it only in outlines. The child of a Gandhian family, he was born on 6 June 1948 in Kerala State, South India. He uses only his first name in public to avoid being associated with the phenomenon of caste, which is a clear sign of his vision of human equality. He first obtained diploma in traditional art and music from a reputed organization in Kerala, and afterwards a diploma in Agricultural Engineering in a Nai Talim system of education, the Gandhian method of "education for life." As Mr. Rajagopal himself stated, "it was a long journey, in terms of trying to find what I really wanted to do."

What he wanted to do became clear at the beginning of the 1970s when he moved to the Chambal district of Madhya Pradesh. There he found endemic violence, the

consequence of injustices and wrongs suffered by the population which had resulted in the growth of gangs (“dacoits”). Mr. Rajagopal along with other senior Gandhian leaders, became a peacemaker, obtaining the surrender and even the rehabilitation of the dacoits. This courageous initiative paved the way for another of great significance that developed during the 1980s: the organization of regional and national youth training programs to promote the concept of nonviolent action for social change.

Mr. Rajagopal’s commitment to justice and peace in this 20-year period culminated in the establishment of Ekta Parishad (Unity Forum) as an umbrella mass-organization with the mission of nonviolent activism for securing land and livelihood rights for marginalized communities. Thanks to Ekta Parishad, Mr. Rajagopal’s social activism has taken on a greater national and international visibility through successful land rights marches with the participation of thousands of people. Overall, the movement with the collaboration of other groups, secured land rights for nearly 500,000 families, negotiated a “Forest Rights Act” in 2006-2007, organized highly attended marches in 2007 and 2012, and a new land reform policy was agreed to by the central government and the state governments of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The last and more visionary march through ten countries, from Delhi to the United Nations headquarters in Geneva (Switzerland), planned to last a whole year (October 2019 to October 2020), couldn’t be completed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ekta Parishad activists and volunteers, more than 2,000 in number, reacted to the challenge of COVID-19 by delivering home care and health interventions in many Indian rural regions to fight the pandemic.

Mr. Rajagopal’s roots in Gandhian spirituality and philosophy made it natural for him to serve within institutions that maintain the Mahatma’s memory by applying his principles. In 1972 he was Secretary of the Mahatma Gandhi Seva Ashram, in 2005 he was elected

Vice-Chairman of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, and today he continues to be the Managing Trustee of the International Gandhian Initiative for Nonviolence and Peace (IGINP). Mr. Rajagopal’s nonviolent social action has also led him to be a man of dialogue with institutions, holding official positions such as Enquiry Commissioner of the Supreme Court on Bonded Labour, and a member of the National Council for Land Reform. His goal is the creation of a ministry and budget for peace and nonviolence. “If you are spending so much money on war, the military, and police, why can’t you spend some money on peace and nonviolence?” he asks.

The inter-religious essence of Mr. Rajagopal’s activism is in bringing together the poor, united in nonviolent protest for their rights, without distinction of religion. The movement’s protest demonstrations take place with the side-by-side participation of peasants of all religious beliefs.

The great movement originated by Mr. Rajagopal’s efforts has for years transcended the borders of his great country, India, as evidenced, for example, by the influence of Ekta Parishad on other continents such as Europe, and the international resonance of the Jai Jagat campaign. The United Nations is also on Mr. Rajagopal’s horizon. He would like to have this leading international body as an ally in his quest for what he calls “a nonviolent economy.”

Finally, we think it is highly significant to award Mr. Rajagopal the 40th Niwano Peace Prize in 2022 in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic that highlighted a downside of our interconnected world and forced us to rethink globalization. His social activism, while addressing the most salient issues of the globalized world, utilizes a closeness to the land and the people, and recovers a place for ethics and justice in development. Mr. Rajagopal ultimately reclaims for the people a way of development that is sustainable and human.





## Four-fold Approach to Peace Building Rajagopal P. V.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Niwano Peace Prize Ceremony, May 11, 2023  
International House, Tokyo, Japan

Source: Niwano Peace Prize acceptance speech - [https://www.npf.or.jp/english/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/040\\_speech\\_e.pdf](https://www.npf.or.jp/english/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/040_speech_e.pdf)

May I begin by recognizing the Honourable Guests and Other Dignitaries as well as Friends from other countries, and all of those participating in this 40<sup>th</sup> Niwano Peace Prize Ceremony.



Let me thank the Niwano Foundation for recognizing my work as being worthy to receive this award. I want to thank the President, the Board Members and those from the Jury who have given me this honour. I take note of the fact that there may be some in the audience who have already received this award. I feel proud to join this fraternity and I look forward to the opportunity of walking with such luminaries on the path of peace.

From a distance I have admired the kind of peace promotion that has been carried out in Japan since the war because it has had a deep resonance globally. I mean by this that the devastation brought about by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became a reference point for abandoning the production and use of nuclear weapons. It became an integral part of global peace education. Although after three generations we continue to see some nuclear weapon states using the nuclear threat, I believe this is for the sake of deterrence. The costs are well-known thanks to the persistence of the Japanese peace movement.

My own peace journey began from brutal conflict. This occurred in the Chambal Valley, a place in India which is 300 kilometres south-west from the capital, New Delhi. In working with senior Sarvodaya workers, I was confronted with the violence of dacoits, a group of rebels who would have been labelled as a terrorist group today. I lived and worked among them for a period of time persuading them to give up their arms and by serving jail sentences, getting reconciled back into society. We had a 50th Anniversary of the Surrender last year, and saw how the most hardened criminals could become votaries of peace. This transformation from violence to peace was possible for most of the 578 dacoits. It was time-taking yet the proof was in the pudding.

After this experience I moved to other places in India where I could address some of the root social problems, which had led a small number of people to

take up arms. I began to appreciate that direct violence or the use of arms was a result of structural violence or injustice. By removing the injustice, then the physical conflict reduced. In other words, I moved from resolving 'direct' or physical violence to what may be called 'indirect' or systemic violence. I believed that the cause of hatred, injustice and brute force needed to be resolved deep within the social structures. Only such attention to poverty, discrimination and exclusion could peace flourish.

Building a peaceful society based on justice using nonviolence, I came to understand is a step-by-step process. This has been the driving force that has kept me going for all these years. Undoubtedly in this process, I was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and his 'talisman' when he said:

“Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen in your life, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her].”

This focus on the people at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy was also reinforced by others whom I knew within the Gandhian circle such as Vinoba Bhave, J. C. Kumarapa, Radha Krishna Menon, Subba Rao and others. Ironically, I was living in a country whose culture had been shaped by Buddha, Mahavir, Kabir and Vivekananda, yet there was a need to continue to liberate the marginalized sections from poverty and deprivation and persuade more affluent sections of society to take up this form of peacebuilding.

I would not be honest in my statements if I did not acknowledge the contribution of thousands of people across India (and from some selected other countries) who have stood with me all these years in order that we could attain what we have achieved. These include those from: the marginalised communities that participated in many difficult actions; the team of workers who took pains to design and shape a large number of important events; a considerable number of middle-class friends; and political workers and officials that helped us to carry our dream forward at making change at the policy level.

In fact, this award will be shared by all of these friends. It became apparent after receiving the announcement of the award in the press, how much joy and jubilation was expressed by individuals and organizations. This truly has been a shared effort.

To summarize then the first part of my journey, I have used some of Gandhi's ideas and philosophies to reach out to the poorest section of society, and in the process, helped them to liberate themselves from poverty, injustice and inequality. I saw their advancement not only in terms of material gain, but also in their belief in nonviolence. Nonviolence is a practical tool for those that face so much violence and reprisals. Their nonviolence gets manifested in their struggle for access to land and livelihood resources. But in the process of their nonviolent actions, they also advance: interreligious and caste harmony, gender inclusion and respect for diversities. Such a change at the bottom has an impact on the entire society.

Learning from what we did, I want to elaborate on what we are doing at present. We have taken up a four-fold approach to peacebuilding that includes: (1) nonviolent governance; (2) nonviolent social action; (3) nonviolent economy; and (4) nonviolent education.

### **(1) *Nonviolent governance***

With the advancement in many fields, like science and technology, one would suppose that there would be more civilized behaviour by those holding power and positions. Unfortunately, as we look at leadership in so many countries, we find that this is not the case. In responding to making governance more nonviolent, we have been working to make decision-makers more accountable to the most marginalized communities. In many places we have taken up a kind of people's-based advocacy. We have encouraged dialogue as a way to solve problems rather than employing police and security forces to silence dissenting voices. We have worked with many policy makers to frame socially inclusive policies especially with regard to the land, forest and water issues in India.

We have not stopped at policy change, we have

also established a Department of Peace in one state in India and continue to advocate for Ministries of Peace in India and outside. Any peaceful and nonviolent governance comes from systems that enhance collaboration between people and the state; in this way people are in a better position because they have greater autonomy to solve their own problems. If one of the aims of the Four-Fold approach is to create a peaceful society and a peaceful world order, then collaboration between institutions and people is essential for solving conflicts.

### **(2) *Nonviolent social action***

In the present times there are many crises impacting on the life and livelihood of millions of people, what we are calling structural violence. People are responding by getting organised and demanding justice. We are concerned that there are more protests today that are turning violent and people are not able to achieve their goal. This is leading to increasing popular discontent. Those who are leading social actions should have a deep understanding of nonviolent methods. In the absence of this understanding, people can be provoked to use violence.

Nonviolent social action was the main strength of Mahatma Gandhi in India's Freedom Struggle. Vinoba Bhave, his associate organised large nonviolent movements for land reforms. These methods of nonviolent social action were adopted by our organization many years ago. We were able to train a large number of young people to organize marginalized communities at the grassroots level. Much of the success through these various actions are a direct result of this method.

I want to diverge for a moment to tell a small story. In our 2007 large nonviolent action, when 25,000 people marched from Chambal to New Delhi, a 350-kilometers walk over one month, we were led by a group of Japanese Buddhist monks who were drumming and praying at the front of the

march. The goal of this padayatra was for landless people to access land and livelihood resources especially forest land to indigenous populations. The spiritual dimension of the march brought by the monks not only attracted attention but gave us a greater depth in the practice of nonviolence. Social action is more than civil disobedience, for when it includes nonviolence, it highlights the willingness of people to suffer and sacrifice in the process of affirming life. It appeals to the generosity of the human spirit.

### **(3) *Nonviolent Economy***

Mahatma Gandhi, J. C. Kumarappa, and Schumacher suggested that the economy could be more participatory and 'bottom-up' in the sense of self-organized communities coming together to create an economy. In contrast, an economy that gives opportunity to a few and promotes poverty and misery for millions cannot be a 'good' or inclusive. The livelihood opportunities that the indigenous people, fisherfolk, refugees, slum dwellers, farmers and farm labourers are accessing today are often daily wage earning, which is not secure. The economy does not work in their favour.

In the Four-fold approach, the experience of having many small, and local producer groups coming together to market their products while building a sense of cooperation, reflects that they are building a more nonviolent economy. We can see a transition happening where many micro-activities such as organic and natural farming, handloom and hand-based production are creating a 'macro-narrative' distinct from that of the global economy that is largely controlled by large corporations. As Mahatma Gandhi said: "There is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed."

Nonviolent economy is also a response to the climate emergency that is affecting large populations, and it is time for us to revisit the ways we produce, exchange and consume to be more sustainable and nonviolent to the earth. J.C. Kumarappa, one of

Gandhi's associates said that it is necessary to build a permanent economy, an economic vision that was pro-people, pro-poor and environmentally-friendly.

#### **(4) Nonviolent Education**

Today young people seem to believe in brute force rather than in peace force because the kind of toys, social media, and films reinforce a behavioural pattern. Children haplessly fall victim to such negative influences or believe that through violence they can better achieve their goals. Parents are rather focused on getting their children into schools, colleges and universities so that they will become upwardly mobile and therefore more affluent, without considering how their children can build peace for the society.

Peace and nonviolence education is an important intervention, that we are trying through teacher training. The teachers are encouraged to set up programs like community service activities, or peace studies within the curriculum, with the aim of improving the student's behaviour and making them more responsible. Young people are encouraged to set up peace clubs. We are trying to create a network of organisations that would up take this agenda on a larger scale that would broad-base peace and nonviolence in as many educational institutions as possible.

In addition to classroom and extracurricular activities, we are advocating with various State Governments to see if they can establish Peace Ministries (or Departments) that would incentivize nonviolence education in multiple self-supporting ways. Children and young people would learn to value peace-making rather than expecting peace to be brought by the police or the armed forces. Peace education is central to peace building and only if we can have a deep resonance globally can this FourFold Approach be widely implemented.

Having presented to you this Four-Fold approach, I am aware that there are many skeptics who are doubtful

about the impact of nonviolence as a way of doing peacebuilding. To them I say, it is important to reflect on critical moments in history when wisdom was combined with our human advancement.

Let me begin with Albert Einstein in a letter to M.K. Gandhi in 1931:

“You have shown through your works, that it is possible to succeed without violence even with those who have not discarded the method of violence. I believe that Gandhi's views were the most enlightened of all the political men of our time. We should strive to do things in his spirit: not to use violence in fighting for our cause, but by non-participation in anything you believe is evil.”

Nelson Mandela in receiving the Bharat Ratna in 1993 which is the most prestigious award given by the Government of India said:

“The Mahatma is an integral part of our [South African] history because it is here that he first experimented with truth; here that he demonstrated his characteristic firmness in pursuit of justice; here that he developed Satyagraha as a philosophy and a method of struggle.”

Let me conclude by saying that Gandhi saw nonviolence as the instrument of the strong. This realization has come to me after many years of working with the most marginalized communities in India. It is for this reason we have developed the Four-Fold Approach to Peacebuilding.

Although this award is being given to me as a person, we have decided to create a “Peace Fund” that will help support the Four-Fold Approach to Peacebuilding in different parts of the world.

Again, my thanks for your kind attention to these remarks.

**Rajagopal P. V.**



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## Are Ethnocentric / Nationalist Buddhists Engaged Buddhists? Certainly Not.

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**Sallie B. King<sup>1</sup>**

James Madison University

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### **Abstract**

This is a brief response to Donna Lynn Brown's article, "Beyond Queen and King: Democratizing 'Engaged Buddhism,'" (*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* Vol. 30, 2023) and indirectly to others who have argued that ethnocentric and/or nationalist Buddhism could be a part of Engaged Buddhism. To this question, I will argue that this is not possible. Secondly, I take up the question of the "oneness" of Engaged Buddhism.

This is a brief response to Donna Lynn Brown's article, "Beyond Queen and King: Democratizing 'Engaged Buddhism,'" (*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* Vol. 30, 2023) and indirectly to others who have argued that ethnocentric and/or nationalist Buddhism could be a part of Engaged Buddhism. To this question, I will argue that this is not possible. Secondly, I take up the question of the "oneness" of Engaged Buddhism.

I invite us to examine these questions by considering the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). Here is its own statement of its founding, nature, and purpose, taken from its website:

In 1989, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) was established in

Siam (Thailand) by Sulak Sivaraksa and a group of Buddhist and non-Buddhist thinkers and social activists. INEB operates as an autonomous organization under the Bangkok-based Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation. Over the years the network has expanded to include members, both individuals and organizations, from more than 25 countries across Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia. From this diversity, an understanding of socially engaged Buddhism has emerged which integrates the practice of Buddhism with social action for a healthy, just, and peaceful world. (INEB "About")

As can be seen, this is an Asia-based organization, founded by an eminent Engaged Buddhist leader, the Thai layman Sulak Sivaraksa. On the question of "oneness" or unity, it is important to note that this is a network. As such, it draws for its membership upon

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people who already understand themselves to be Engaged Buddhists or who, minimally, are in sympathy with the INEB network's understanding of Engaged Buddhism, viz., the integration of "the practice of Buddhism with social action for a healthy, just, and peaceful world." A network is a very appropriate form of organization for Engaged Buddhism insofar as Engaged Buddhism is a movement that did not arise from a single founder with a specific location in time, place, culture, and Buddhist sectarian identity, but arose again and again throughout Buddhist Asia, and later the West, in response to the grave challenges facing the region in the twentieth century. Such a movement could never have the kind of clean lines marking who is in the group and who is out that might be possible in an organization with a single founder and formal membership criteria.

Here is some of what INEB has to say about its own institutional structure and what being a network means to it:

INEB is distinctive for its autonomous and rather anarchic network structure that emphasizes human relationship and shared values over organizational structure and ideology. The Secretariat in Bangkok does not dictate an official ideology or policy to the network, but rather, acts to circulate knowledge and understanding of the network to the entire web as best it can. Kalyanamitra ("spiritual friendship") is INEB's most core value and practice.

We come together not out of a series of policy agendas but a deeper felt connection with sentient life and the common struggle to overcome suffering . . . .

The focus of INEB's work as such is not the promotion and glorification of Buddhism but the overcoming of suffering through the practice of dharma, which means creating solidarity with individuals and groups who hold similar such values from other religions and other fields of social work. In this way, INEB has never

wavered from its commitment to non-violent engagement and the articulation of positive social development. (INEB "About")

Please note that what binds the membership of INEB together is "shared values" and that those values specifically include the integration of the practice of Buddhism with social action and never wavering from the commitment to non-violent engagement. Here, let me stress, are Engaged Buddhists, the great majority of them Asian, naming for themselves who they are and what their core commitments are. Self-identifying Engaged Buddhists may choose to join the network and in so doing are embraced by other self-identifying Engaged Buddhists, all of whom in the very act of choosing to belong to this network are identifying with and publicly embracing its core values. It is clear that those values preclude the acceptance of any hostility towards any other or any actions that would tend to promote enmity. Their concern is the universalist concern for the suffering of all forms of sentient life, a suffering with which they feel a "deep connection." Note that they profess solidarity with groups and persons of other religions, so long as they share the same core values. These core values rule out the inclusion of ethnocentric or nationalistic Buddhism as a form of Engaged Buddhism.

This understanding is supported when we see who the members of INEB are and who they are not. Readers are invited to look for themselves if they wish. INEB lists on its website its Patrons, Honorary Advisors, Advisory Committee, Executive Committee, and Executive Secretary (INEB "2023 AC EC Roster"). The list is overwhelmingly, though not entirely, constituted of Asian Buddhists. Not recognizing all of the names, I wrote to the INEB Secretariat and asked them if they include any Buddhist nationalists or ethnocentric Buddhists in their group. I received this answer from the Secretariat: "INEB does not include any Buddhist nationalistsethnocentric Buddhists in its organizational structure" (INEB Secretariat email 2/14/2023). That is to say, there are no Buddhist nationalists or ethnocentric

Buddhists in INEB. Here again are Engaged Buddhists *defining for themselves who are and who are not* Engaged Buddhists; ethnocentric/nationalist Buddhists are not. This is not surprising, considering that INEB and Buddhist nationalists or ethnocentric Buddhism have opposite ideologies—equal benevolence for all vs. primary concern for the own group; nonviolence vs. open hostility towards the “other,” leading in some cases to aggression and violence.

Of course, it is important in general to recognize that there are ethnocentric/nationalist Buddhist groups, and it is clearly valuable for scholars to study them. There is no question about this. It is just not okay to call them “Engaged Buddhists” since they are an *incompatible* ideology, and the name “Engaged Buddhism” (and “Socially Engaged Buddhism”) *is already taken!* It has been defined by its members in such a way that ethnocentric/nationalist Buddhists do not fit the definition. We must listen to the voices of those who self-identify as Engaged Buddhists. If certain scholars insist that ethnocentric/nationalist Buddhists are Engaged Buddhists just because they engage in social-political action, those scholars are forcing a new definition upon Engaged Buddhists, one that changes the very identity of Engaged Buddhism so much that Engaged Buddhists could no longer recognize themselves as part of it. It is not enough to simply consider the question of whether a group or individual is socially and politically active. It is also essential to consider core values and ideology. When these are brought into the picture, it is clear that Engaged Buddhism and ethnocentric/nationalist Buddhism should be kept distinct from each other. There is no problem if scholars will simply choose a different name for Buddhist social-political activists who are not Engaged Buddhists.

In my email to INEB I also asked the INEB Secretariat whether INEB has had dealings of any kind with Buddhist nationalist groups. I received two

responses. The first referred me to INEB’s “public statement” pages (INEB “Resources”) where are posted several statements, including: (1) “Conflict in Myanmar’s Rakhine State” (2012) in which, among other things, they “call on Buddhist monks across Myanmar to set aside fear and the delusive religious discrimination; to honor the Buddha’s robe and example by being peacemakers for all people” (“Conflict in Myanmar”); and (2) “Towards the Creation of a Fact-Finding Commission on Relations Between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar” (2013), in which INEB declares that “INEB’s mission is to respect the integrity of all religions and people, restoring harmony wherever possible.” They call for a fact-finding-commission [that] would have three objectives:

1. to bring forth the facts of Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Myanmar;
2. to ascertain the causes of this conflict;
3. to develop resources and proposals for the establishment of inter-religious peace and harmony in Myanmar. (INEB “Fact-finding”)

The second response I received was a statement written by the Peace Team of the Spirit in Education Movement (SEM), the latter a constituent institution of INEB, about their Peace Project in Myanmar. They report:

The overall Peace Project goal is for targeted Buddhist Sangha [i.e., monks and nuns] [to] contribute to communal harmony by actively opposing violence and nurturing a climate of tolerance, respect and compassion . . . .

SEM has spent time to sensitively engage and bridge connections with a broad spectrum of difficult-to-reach Sangha members [defined by SEM as “those who may be resistant to change due to their hard-line stance and adherence to militant Buddhist ideology”]—including ultra-nationalists. We focus on relationship and trust-

building, in order to create an inclusive space for dialogue and critical conversations to better understand and examine the Sangha's role in the current context. This is facilitated through an intra-faith [i.e., among different Buddhist groups] approach as a vital step in the process towards inclusive peacebuilding. . . .

Overall, SEM's approach is guided by an engaged Buddhist theory and practice. Our approach recognises that changing behaviours require not only a shift in theoretical understanding, but a shift in the heart; away from the language of separation that has institutionalised violence at all levels of society, and towards a language of connection, as a positive pathway towards a culture of peace. . . .

SEM's status as an external [to Myanmar] organization with connections to socially engaged Buddhism (through

SEM's co-founder, Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa, and sister organization, International Network of Engaged Buddhists), has also enabled a level of trust to grow with the Sangha, and a commitment from them to engage in this inclusive intrafaith process. . . .

As a result of interactions over the past several years, there . . . has been a clear shift in mindsets of many of target Sangha, from being unchallenged in their views and actions, to accepting the need to be open to others and their perspectives and accepting their own internal contradictory perspectives. The process has also given them opportunities to create personal and collaborative solutions to address conflicts they are facing. . . .

According to external evaluation of the Project (2016- 2018), 'SEM activities have had a transformative impact in the mindset of the sangha and this is reflected in their speech and action'. . . .

Quantitative Data Tracking of Changes with Sangha (60 target Sangha):

1. Hate Speech: Use of hate speech in public (social media, dhamma talks, etc) dropped from 47% before [the SEM workshops], to less than 1% after.
2. Nationalism: Reduction of strong chauvinistic nationalist mindset from 90% before to less than 1% after. (email from SEM 2/22/2023)

This is a statement from a self-identified Engaged Buddhist group that is a constituent part of INEB. They report that they are actively engaged with "difficult to reach" members of the Myanmar Sangha in an effort to reduce or eliminate hate speech and what they call chauvinistic nationalism among them. They do this in an effort to reduce or eliminate inter-communal violence and nurture "a climate of tolerance, respect and compassion" in Myanmar. This is a good example of how Engaged Buddhist ideology and mindset is antithetical to that of ethnocentric/nationalistic Buddhism. Indeed, here the former is striving to fundamentally transform the latter. It would make no sense to present under the same name—i.e., as a single phenomenon—both SEM and MaBaTha (Myanmar nationalist Buddhist group), i.e., two ideologies in which the first ideology is trying to profoundly transform the second. Indeed, such an approach can only confuse the reader and distort the nature of what is happening on the ground.

Finally, and definitively, the SEM report noted:

According to external evaluation of the Project (2016-2018), 'SEM activities have had a transformative impact in the mindset of the sangha and this is reflected in their speech and action. During these three years most of their targeted alumni have progressed in terms of self awareness (75%); and their approach to their teachings and community work (60%



increased understanding of peacebuilding in their communities and the causes of conflict; 90% label themselves as socially engaged). (Spirit 2/22/23; bolding by essay author)

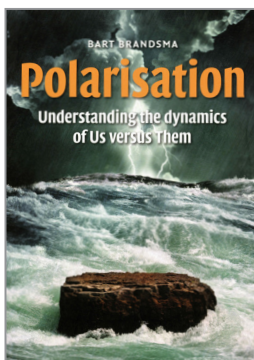
The statement, “90% label themselves as socially engaged” of course speaks directly to the issue addressed in this short paper. Wanting to be 100% clear as to what SEM meant by this statement, I wrote and asked for clarification. I received this response: “[I]t means that they used to be Buddhist nationalists, but now they have left that way of thinking and see themselves as socially engaged Buddhists in INEB’s sense instead” (Spirit 3/9/2023). In other words, to these socially active Buddhists, nationalist Buddhism and socially engaged Buddhism are two incompatible and irreconcilable identities. Becoming a socially engaged Buddhist displaces being a nationalist Buddhist. One cannot be both.

In sum, many things are open for discussion with respect to Engaged Buddhism. But it should not be made to include its opposite. Nationalist/ ethnocentric Buddhists are not Engaged/socially engaged Buddhists.

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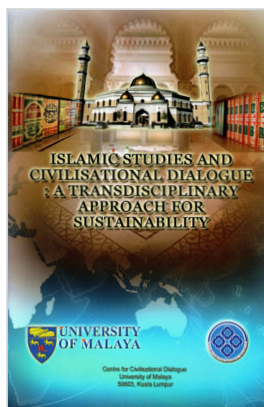
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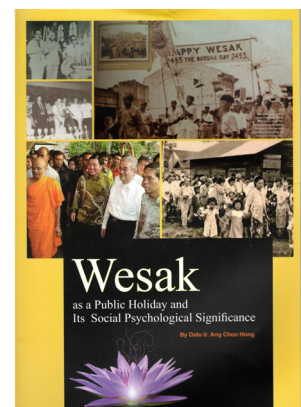
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**Author:** Dato Ir. Ang Choo Hong  
**Publisher:** Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia, 2021

## Faith and Freedom: My Decision to Disrobe and Uphold My Beliefs

**Phra Netiwit Chotiphathaisal**

Source: netiwit chotiphathaisol - <https://netiwit.com/my-decision-to-disrobe-and-stay-true-to-my-beliefs-a-statement-by-netiwit/>

On 10 September 2014, my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, just after the coup d'état, I was a high school student. As I considered the sources of societal problems, I saw the forced conscripted military service as one of them, violating the freedom and rights of Thai people. Thus, I published a statement that I would not serve in the military.

Since 10 July 2022, I have been ordained as a monk, studying and practicing Buddhism with a strong faith in the teachings of the Buddha. Without coercion to the service, I wish to continue studying and practicing Buddhism as much as I desire. However, I do not want to use the privilege of being a monk to escape military service or give the impression that I am running away using the temple as a shield, which would contradict my statement from almost 9 years ago.

Therefore, I have decided to disrobe and return to household life, willingly struggling in the legal process to uphold my beliefs and aim my Thai society toward a path of peace, non-violence, and no military conscription.

However, before disrobing, I have some unfinished tasks. I need to pass the Pali examination and will be retaking one subject on 15-16 April, which I devoted time to study for. After that, I ask for some preparation time before disrobing, which I plan to do before the end of April.

During this very short period, I want to maintain myself as a Buddhist monk and ask for the kindness of



everyone to give me a chance for cultivating and giving me the peaceful serenity that suits a monk who follows the noble life.

9/4/2023

Context: As the scheduled date for his conscription approaches, Netiwit would like to reiterate his conscientious objection to military service. Despite the legal requirement for him to attend conscription on April 9th, Netiwit is aware of the potential legal consequences of his decision, including the risk of a prison sentence of up to 3 years. However, he remains committed to his stance and hopes that his actions will encourage dialogue and reflection on the issue of mandatory military service in Thailand.

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# \*enter\* Digital Bodhisattva \_/\\_

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by **Dexter Cohen Bohn**

February 9, 2023

Source: *Buddhist Door Global* - <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/enter-digital-bodhisattva/>



Image courtesy of INEB

Welcome to the techno-dharmic realm of Digital Bodhisattva! You have just entered an exploratory domain of socially engaged Buddhism located at the crossroads of compassionate action and modern technology. Amid the maelstrom of content populating this vast digital landscape, your awareness has settled for perhaps five minutes on our humble offering, may your attention remain unfractured!

Indeed, fractured is what our attention has mostly become thanks to the cognitive and physiological penetration of modern technology. From palm-leaf scriptures to Gutenberg's Bible, and now Indra's inter-net of jewels, the world overflows with compelling, liberatory, even transcendent media right at our fingertips—but there is also a lot of noise!

Pandora's boxes now nestle in our pockets and on our shelves of devices with sleek rounded edges and simplistic iconography awaiting the initiatory tap of a

bored thumb on glass. We live in an era distinctly characterized by the hyper-mediation of experience through vast networks of powerful tech, all leveraging, reinforcing, and amplifying our desires and aversions seemingly for the better, but all too often for the worse.

Although this algorithmic dance has only just begun, many have already perceived troubling structural faults in the light-speed edifice of techno-capitalism. Some say that under the hegemony of Silicon Valley we are nothing more than digital serfs freely tilling the virtual soil of infinite newsfeeds while our feudal lords rake in value beyond comprehension. Others are building utopian clouds that float above these platform kingdoms, experimenting with new forms of society by encoding principles of trust, sovereignty, and decentralized governance.

## Enter Digital Bodhisattva

Socially engaged Buddhists have been paying careful attention to this dynamic landscape, exploring and



Image courtesy of INEB



Image courtesy of INEB

supporting skillful interventions in service of building a wiser and more compassionate virtual world. As such, the purpose of this column is to articulate the evolving terrain of “techno-dharma” as a path to holistic well-being in the modern age. Inspired by the Buddhist ideal of heartfelt service through skillful means, these articles are intended to trace the outline of an emergent Digital Bodhisattva whose energy we encounter in constructive social analysis, innovative practices, and the cultivation of a mindful virtual presence.

Beyond these words, Digital Bodhisattva is an active public forum and design space hosting regular discussions on the social, cultural, and economic impact of technology. We encourage diverse engagement in these conversations, weaving together views in our Clubhouse jams and podcast dives, check here for upcoming sessions—we’d love to hear your voice!

An initiative of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), Digital Bodhisattva was born during COVID hibernation in response to the proliferation of technologically conditioned suffering brought about by our rapid global shift online. Questions of data sovereignty and security, inflammatory social media discourse, smartphone addiction, the digital divide, and ethical use of artificial intelligence all

surfaced amid the interdependent challenges of technology and the need for a comprehensive approach from the perspective of socially engaged Buddhism.

Drawing on INEB’s decades of experience working with a broad spectrum of social issues, Digital Bodhisattva has developed the “Three I’s” methodology as a means for positively responding to the individual, cultural, and structural layers of this pressing topic:

### Interest

Building interest in the rich, overlapping terrain of engaged spiritual practice and technology is a core Digital Bodhisattva activity that we see as foundational to cultivating deeper understanding and mindful interventions. Through regular public discussions we encourage exploration of this domain as an opportunity for collaborative sense-making, freely expressing our ideas in the spirit of sincerity without assuming to have the answers. From these dialogues, common themes have already emerged

which are in turn forming the basis of short curriculums and educational materials that will similarly contribute to expanded interest. Happily, Digital Bodhisattva is not alone on this journey. Many inspiring projects, initiatives, communities, and individuals already exist at the confluence of these streams, which we intend to catalogue through an evolving resource hub where you can find the others, one click at a time.

### Insight

Cultivating insight into the complexity of our technological moment requires a penetrating analysis of the structural and cultural factors at play under the surface. For this task, Digital Bodhisattva is bringing together a range of thought leaders from the fields of technology, civil society, and religion into a high-level working group to address salient issues at these intersections. This work will include experimentation and research into blended spiritual practices, which utilize powerful tech as tools for enhancing self-awareness and building social cohesion. As a guiding force, this group will pursue engagement in policy and advocacy work at the local, national, and international levels through collaboration with institutional bodies in the public and private spheres. With this level of articulation of our aspirations, we intend to support the integration of ethical awareness directly into the design, implementation, and regulatory processes that govern the direction and quality of the technology that shapes our modern lives.

### Impact

Digital Bodhisattva's third "I" is where all the energy and aspirations of Interest and Insight come together for the creation of sustainable real-world Impact. To this end, we are actively developing social-enterprise projects designed to address various forms of suffering utilizing the principles of socially engaged Buddhism and skillful applications of advanced technologies, such as AI, Web3, blockchains, and data analytics. One such project, DanaFlow, is currently in an early research stage of understanding

how surplus offerings of food and material goods in Thai monasteries can be recirculated back into local communities as a support for those in immediate need.

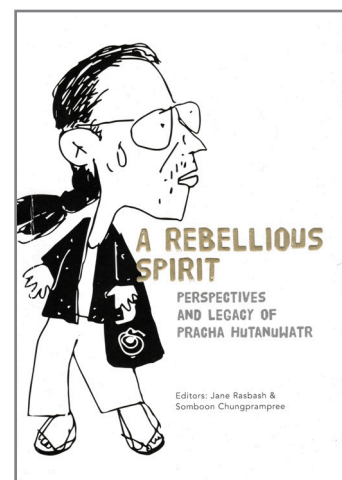
Ultimately, these activities represent a spiraling process of discovery open to friends from all beliefs, professions, and backgrounds seeking knowledge and a more integrative relationship between the head, heart, and hands of our time. Bearing witness to the swirling landscape of virtual life, we see how the readily the unwise use of technology conditions confusion, overwhelm, and social division. Over millennia, every spiritual tradition worth its salt has offered compelling responses to these concerns through relevant adaptations of language and practices. Indeed, the Buddha's resounding invitation of ehipassiko (Pali: to come and see the truth) reminds us that we must test the validity of the teachings in our own lives in order to arrive at truth—a challenge that Digital Bodhisattva accepts with a humble bow and firm conviction.

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Dexter Cohen Bohn the Communications Coordinator for INEB.

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### Recommended Reading



*A Rebellious Spirit: Perspective and Legacy of Pracha Hutauwatr*

**Editors:** Jane Rasbach and  
Somboon Chungprampree

**Publisher:** INEB

## A Short Story of Pracha Hutanuwatr Always and Forever, a Rebellious Spirit



Born on Friday 9 May 1952, Pracha grew up in a coconut plantation of Thonburi suburb which was later annexed as part of Bangkok.

### Background

Pracha's family was Chinese overseas. His father, Mr. Chawhui Heng, worked a variety of jobs from running a warehouse of agricultural products in Tha Tian and Song Wat neighborhoods to earning his life as a fisherman on a ship, and being a Chinese language teacher. His paternal family settled in Tha Tian. His grandfather helped to bring overseas Chinese persons who travelled from China to become acclimated to life in Siam.

His mother was Somphon Chew. Her father, or Pracha's grandfather, came from mainland China and spoke Teochiu just like his paternal family. His maternal grandfather earned his living making costumes for the Chinese Opera on Plaeng Nam Rd., China Town, while his maternal grandmother sold fruits and homemade Thai desserts at the Tha Tian market. Her famous desserts included mango sticky rice widely known as Mae Lek Tha Tian sticky rice.

Like many overseas Chinese families, Pracha's father married before venturing to Siam, so did his mother. His mother and father met and married in Siam. Therefore, in terms of siblings, there were altogether nine since his father had a child from previous marriage, whereas his mother had one son and one daughter. Altogether in a new family, Mr. Hui and Ms. Somphon had five children together with Pracha being the third of the lineage.

All nine siblings, with only five who are still alive, include the following:

1. Mr. Chet Thanakulrangarit (deceased)
2. Ms. Suraphee Fuangfung (deceased)
3. Dr. Narong Hutanuwatra
4. Ms. Somnoi Yuakyen (deceased)
5. Mr. Pracha Hutanuwatra (deceased)
6. Mr. Chatree Hutanuwatra

7. Mr. Prasat Kiatpaiboonkit
8. Mr. Chayadit Hutauwachara
9. Ms. Somlak Hutauwatra,  
the youngest female sibling

Pracha grew up in a family that lived from hand to mouth in a suburban home on a plantation with no electricity. He attended a nearby public primary school and later passed the entrance examination and enrolled in Suankularb School in grade seven. He was considered a rural boy who performed quite well academically.

The extreme poverty and the perseverance demonstrated by the parents made Pracha and other siblings realize the importance of weathering such a hard living since young ages. Such a predicament made each of the siblings super-tenacious, much more than an average child. This proved to be immensely useful for all of them later. It was a quality that helped them to succeed in anything they engaged with and how they devoted themselves to any cause with which they had the passion.

Since both parents were avid readers, even without electricity, they would light their home with oil lamps to read after the extremely tiring daily work and the multiple jobs they did. His father was a fan of the *Siam Rath* newspaper and listened every night to a radio program from Beijing via a shortwave radio. Perhaps, given such environment, Pracha naturally became an avid reader and always sustained his inquisitive mind. He even managed to build his own small hut under coconut trees not far from his house making it a library and a study just for himself. Many books were hoarded there and some have been passed on to his descendants.

A diligent and clever student, Pracha also cared for society since a young age. At Suankularb, he was engaged with various school activities being chairperson of the English Club, etc. He used to write and post a note to the school board when spotting anything wrong. Moreover, while in secondary school, he got together with fellow students from various schools to form “*Yuwachon Siam*” (The Young Siamese) including avant-garde students from many schools that did many activities together. They got together to exchange their ideas, to discuss, to read, to interpret and to debate. They organized rural camps for young people to live their lives in rural areas. It was during this time that Pracha studied the thoughts of Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu so keenly.

After completing high school and taking an entrance examination to enroll in university, given his academic excellence, Pracha could choose to enroll in any faculty. Eventually, he chose the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University to follow the path of teacher Komol Keemthong, a trailblazer who devoted his life for others and society. After studying for more than a year, then came a political situation, which was the time when students questioned the meaning of their lives in the university enclave. It escalated to the 14 October 1973 Thai uprising event which prompted Pracha to drop out of Chula and embark on fierce fighting against the military dictators. Under these conditions, he was forced to change his lodging almost every night and could not return home. Given his sheer determination, Pracha eventually decided to devote his life to Buddhism, *ahimsa* and nonviolence through an ordination with key supporters including Sulak Sivaraksa and Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu of Suan Mokkh.

Being part of the Buddhist Sangha did not stop Pracha from being engaged with society. He continued to work for society while practicing his contemplative life just as he proposed this way of life in his book *Contemplative Life and Social Engagement*. While ordained as a Ven. Pracha Pasannathammo, he was invited to give a keynote lecture for the Komol Keemthong Foundation in 1981. This helped his social engagement to be even more deeply entrenched, and it differentiated him from other activists since he never dismissed his spiritual wellbeing and self-development. Capitalizing on his social engagement and contemplative life, Pracha expressed his ideology through his translation works, his writing, training and organizing various organizations, as well as his travel in Thailand and abroad. By traveling he made an immense contribution to young people’s development in other countries throughout Southeast Asia, in Burma, Laos and Cambodia, and even mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, USA, UK and other countries in Europe.

Pracha devoted the last three decades of his life to develop socially engaged Buddhism and related work inside and outside Thailand, for example:

- ▶ In 1989, Pracha, his friends and his mentor, Sulak Sivaraksa, helped to found the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) to

coordinate among Buddhist activists and leaderships from other religions and countries to organize an exchange and to help each other in their social engagement.

- ▶ Pracha was invited to participate in the advanced course of Training of Trainer by A Movement for Society in Philadelphia, USA. He used the experience to organize groups and launched training courses in Thailand. Its curriculum was developed to cater to the Buddhist context. Eventually, he developed his own training project called the Grassroots Leadership Training (GLT).
- ▶ The Wongsanit Ashram in Klong 15, Nakhon Nayok, is an alternative community which has been developed with much help from Pracha. It serves as a space for social activists to experiment with their living on a 12 acre piece of land donated by MR Saisvasti Svastivatana to Sulak Sivaraksa and the Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation for public interest. It was meant to be an alternative community by living simply close to nature and use contemplation as a basis for activism and social change. It provides an opportunity for community members to learn and explore their own potential. It is a place for healing to restore the balance of life. It was a breeding ground for score of social activists, Thai and foreign, who have expanded their work in various parts of society.
- ▶ With his incessant inquisitive mind, Pracha has travelled the world to participate in various courses which he found may help to achieve a just society, He also wanted to apply such training courses to cater to education in Thailand that were based on Buddhist teachings and humanity. Particularly during his time at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, Pracha helped to design the Ecovillage Designed Education (EDE) curriculum which integrated the discourses on economy, society, cultural, education and the environment together to create a learning process to engender a decent and just society.
- ▶ With his interest in alternative education, Pracha founded the Yuwa Buddhichon Institute to epitomize Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's belief that "Morals of youth are peace of the world." It offers

training courses for youth and people who work with children and youth. It provides an educational environment in which the participants are encouraged to develop creative approaches to education to acquire knowledge and to ensure such education can bring about social transformation eventually.

- ▶ For business people and politicians, Pracha helped to found the Right Livelihood Foundation which may not reach its ideals, but has contributed immensely to society.
- ▶ In addition, he attempted to found the Ecovillage Transition Asia which focusses on the transformation to a livable city that would offer an education to ordinary people in urban areas and encourages people to farm in the city. This was inspired by the idea of transforming relationships between humans and nature to ensure sustainable ecology. Even though this is a low profile project, he personally contributed to it.
- ▶ Pracha always focused on social transformation through valuing change among people in society. Therefore, toward the end of his life, he developed the Awakening Leadership Training (ALT), conducted in Thai and English, to help organize groups of students, dreamers and practitioners here and abroad to come to terms with leadership in modern society and the new paradigms that true leaders have to be internally stable, awakened and humble.
- ▶ Lately, Pracha devoted himself to developing the SEM Publishing House to disseminate good information to people in society. Some publications are intended as reading materials for ALT participants so that they can learn the kind of knowledge shunned by most textbooks.

This is part of the work Pracha had been mainly engaged with.

It is also good to get a glimpse of Pracha family life. It is good to harken back to stories about Pracha, his mother and his family, his life during ordination as a Buddhist monk who was so keen on practicing the Dhamma.

Apart from the benefit felt by himself and society, his 12 years in monkhood was also a tremendous blessing



for his family members, particularly his mother. She had been practicing Daoist meditation for a long-time and had since acquired deeper understanding about Buddhism. Later in her life, she was ordained as a nun at Suan Mokkh practicing and studying Dhamma of the Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's school for one year under the close guidance of Ven. Pracha. According to Buddhism, one of the best ways to express gratitude to our parents is to help them become enlightened and practice the right kind of Dhamma as well as progressively cleanse their mind. Based on this, Pracha has done his best as a son. More concretely, he even reminded his mother that death could happen anytime by constantly asking her "Mom, do you fear death?" This served as a mantra for his siblings to keep reminding her during her final hours and to stay close to her as much as they could.

Once, his mom needed an emergency operation when she was nearly 80. His younger sibling who took care of her asked her while she was on bed and being pushed into the operating theater "Mom, do you fear death?," and she replied "I don't." After several hours of intense waiting, the nurses pushed her out of the operating theater. Taking a glance at her children, she declared in feeble voice "I am not dead yet" yielding such an outburst of laughter from everyone.

This could be said to be a Dhamma heritage, the spiritual refuge for the family left by Ven. Pracha.

Another story also reflected a character of Pracha. When his mother retired herself from such hardworking life and moved away from the bustling atmosphere, every time when Ven. Pracha came to visit her, he brought an audio recorder to record his conversation with his mother. Pracha asked many questions for her to recount many interesting stories from the past. He collected several cassette tapes, because he intended to write and publish a memoir of his mother since for him, she was a trailblazer and a rebel who was so inspiring. Many attested to her character when she raised her fists amidst a thousand of people inside the main auditorium of Thammasat University while shouting "My son was not wrong." This took place when Chatree, Pracha's younger brother who was a student of medicine from Chiang Mai University, was convicted and sentenced to jail for supporting the peasant uprising. For Pracha, his mom was an ideal model for a rebellious life, someone who always fought for justice. Unfortunately, Pracha's life was

cut short, and devoted himself to many other social causes, until he could not accomplish what he wanted to do for his family.

Pracha married Jane Rasbash after meeting at a Deep Ecology Summer School in California in 1994. Jane moved to live at the Wongsanit Ashram where she assisted Pracha and Ajarn Sulak organize the Alternative to Consumerism Conference at Buddhmandala Park near Bangkok in 1996. At the same time Pracha and Jane initiated the Grassroots Leadership Training for People from Burma. Later on, they settled in Scotland at the Findhorn Ecovillage Community. They continued to work together, write together, provide training together and support each other for years before and after their marriage ended.

In his later life, Pracha moved to a Bangkok suburb of Sai Mai area where he lived in a two-story wooden house made of wood dissembled from the previous house given to him by his older brother and his mother. The ground floor is teemed with warm earth, lushed with bamboo groves and other plants, not dissimilar to his old home in Thonburi, and as always littered with many books.

Pracha is survived by his only son, Namo Chettanaweerabut Hutuanuwatra, and his wife, Chofa. Both Namo and Chofa have been contributing immensely to Pracha's cause.

Late morning on 13 May 2023, Pracha Hutuanuwatra passed peacefully while saying a prayer and counting beads and on a piece of Khata at the Siriraj Hospital.

It could be summed up that "Pracha" lived the life of a social revolutionary who never hesitated to devote his whole life to his dream causes. He devoted his life to prove the truth. He lived a rebellious life not bound by any tradition. His passion was to help people to be intellectually free from any narrow mindset and values, and dare to choose the life they wanted. He always envisaged a just society and a justice system that genuinely serves as a pillar of society. Pracha believed that by helping people or giving them a chance to discover their good nature, it will give rise to their discovery of power which can help to bring about social change from each person eventually.

As of now, we believe the rebel spirit of Pracha has a chance to rest in peace somewhere in another realm.



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## Sulak Sivaraksa Pracha Hutunuwatra Quietly Turns the Wheel

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Interview by **Keibo Oiwa**

Pracha's home and workplace on the outskirts of Bangkok.

**Pracha:** As spiritual people, we have to understand the political system. We have to understand the economic system. We have to understand how global warming comes into being, by what kind of thinking.

The structure of economics creates something opposite to the teaching of the Buddha. Because this economic system helps create greed in people. It makes people greedy. This is opposite to the teaching of the Buddha.

The Buddha teaches us to reduce our greed. But the whole capitalist system encourages us to create more greed, and satisfy our greed. It's opposite to this teaching.

I also try to learn about different social structures that can help reduce greed. It's possible to create a social structure that doesn't stimulate greed.

For example, our Bhutanese friends try to create a new paradigm of development, a new indicator and measure of the health of the society. Instead of GDP, creating GNH (Gross National Happiness), etc.

**Pracha:** I was a socialist, part of the student movement in the early 1970's. And my experience was very disappointing at the end of that three years.

Because I saw a lot of internal fighting among the revolutionaries. I doubted if this would lead to a better society later on. So at the end I decided to become a monk. The first week, Honorable Sulak invited me to join a meeting called Pacific Ashram, using a monastery in Chiang Mai.

That was in 1975. And, one time in that meeting, I made an appointment to meet with a Thai monk who explained about mediation. I felt, "This is what I was missing in my life." Meditation.

I wanted to learn more. So, I extended a bit more a bit more, a bit more every time. I was monk for eleven years altogether.

I experienced some results from meditation that I feel are very important in life. I'm a socialist in the sense that I want to see more equality in society. I want to see social justice in society.

But when I stopped believing that Marxism can give the answer, I went looking for an alternative to Marxist socialism. I feel that Buddhism has some deep answers to this.

As a Marxist, we always criticized the oppressor, the capitalists, the unjust social structure, everything outside. But from meditation, I realized that dictatorship, the oppressors, the capitalists, are also inside me as well. The enemy is not only out there, the enemy is inside us as well.

So, if we want to change to make a better society, we need to change the inside, our conscious structure, as well as the social structure. Socially Engaged Buddhism for me means that we change both at the same time.

***The opponent is not only outside, but also within ourselves.***

**Pracha:** Normally our instincts always help us to take ourselves as the center. That's how we survive as we take risks. If we are not attached to our own views, we'll listen

to each other more. Because we don't always have the right answers ourselves.

**Keibo:** Right. That's so true.

**Pracha:** I think ultimately it helps not to take yourself and your organization as the center. But with more awareness, deeper awareness, of our own inner world, we know that every group takes themselves as the center.

We give more space so that every other group can be the center as well. Not only us as a center.

So there will be a multi-centered kind of movement.

**Pracha:** When you see injustice, you get angry, you don't like it. This is normal for activists. If you see injustice and you don't get angry you are not really an activist. But meditation helps us to understand that when we are aware of this anger, we can transform it into compassion.

We understand the oneness between the one who creates injustice and victims of the injustice, and that they and us, ultimately speaking, are not separated.

Meditation and spiritual practice also help us to be detached from our own view. We need something to believe — that we are right, that we have the right answer. But if you practice meditation, you know that whatever you think is the right answer is still very subjective. It's your own will that this is right.

It's best for you, it's right for you, but may not be right for others. When you are not attached to your own view too much then you have clear standpoint. When you listen to others, you listen deeper and you allow others to be right.

Meditation helps us to be aware of negative energy. Sometimes we are greedy. We want to be the top dog, that's greedy for power, right? Sometimes, money comes in somewhere. You want more money. That's greed. If you don't have that awareness then you let that energy get in your way.

You start fighting with your colleagues. Not for the sake of some good cause, but just wanting to be the top dog, for example. So, that's the first thing: not to be dominated by all this energy.

Secondly, meditation also helps you to generate

positive energy inside yourself.

Just being mindful of your body, one way or another, long enough you generate joy by itself. If you prepare well and meditate you live more and more in the present moment. The meaning of your life is here and now, not when you "succeed" in doing something. So we don't have to rely on "doing" to get meaning in life. We can rely on "being" as well.

### *Wongsanit Ashram*

Ashram: Promoted by Gandhi as a center for right lifestyle and spiritual training.

**Sulak:** The Ashram is a place we started 25 years ago. It's a spiritual place for people, like activists who've burnt out from too much activity. They can go there to rest and to meditate. Those who need an alternate lifestyle can live there. Learn how to experiment in living with nature. Close to nature, close to each other. Away from the mainstream, like Bangkok culture.

**Pracha:** In 1992, I was asked to come here, and I ran this place for ten years. Before I came in, the formation of the idea of building this Ashram, as a cultural center, for activists, had already started.

And then we started running courses here, and different kinds of activism. People work from here, and go out and do activist work of different kinds.

The Ashram is a place where we try to combine activism and meditation. Where you can learn to meditate and change society at the same time. We decided that the Ashram is an alternative for the middle class.

If you are middle class and want to do activism, it's quite difficult. If you live in Bangkok, you have to care for your house, your car, etc. To keep that going and do activism at the same time is not easy.

So we run the Ashram very collectively, try to make decisions together, sharing power. At the same time, live a simple life and use it as a base for go out and work for change.

**Keibo:** How was your life then, when you were living here?

**Pracha:** When I ran the place, I tried to move it into a really participatory decision-making approach.

This was one thing. Direct democracy. And in a small community, I deeply believe in that. It works.

It may not get things done as quickly as a normal hierarchical organization. But everyone grows up together. When there is an issue, we discuss, discuss and discuss it. At the end, when we learn the issues deeply, most of the time we come to consensus.

Another idea we try to experiment with is, people live in the Ashram balancing themselves.

Doing spiritual work, manual work, and also contemplation. We experimented a bit when I first came.

I worked in the field, digging the land. Worked in the office, meditated in the morning.

It works for some, but it's more difficult for average people.

We try to live a really simple life. You look around, the accommodations and things like that. We try to see how normal people live their lives, how villagers live their lives and we try to live like them.

Even the accommodations for guests, we make it a bit simpler than that of the middle class. Without air-conditioning, without hot water running, things like that.

If the answer to the future is to live more simply, in that area, we are doing OK.

### ***Living simply is the answer for the future.***

**Keibo:** But a lot of people believe that the simple life means boredom.

**Pracha:** Oh no ! A simple life is so rich.

**Keibo:** Still simple life can be a quite a tough life sometimes?

**Pracha:** It's challenging.

**Keibo:** Challenging...

**Pracha:** You need to be able to develop a deeper kind of compassion. Not only to others, but compassion towards yourself. Because we also get stuck with our own egos. To develop human relationships in a community is a challenge for egoistic individualism. We have to work on that.

When I was here, I did not push to impose spirituality on everyone. Not everyone wants to buy into that and we feel that is OK. As long as you do your work properly, and you respect the lifestyle of the community. But we do encourage people to combine activism and meditation.

**Keibo:** Were there any cases where non-Buddhists came in and stayed here? And practiced meditation with you?

**Pracha:** One good thing about my teacher, Buddhadasa, is that for us; Buddhism as a brand name is not so important. The core of the teaching is important. For him, anybody can practice Buddhism without changing their religion.

There were some Westerners who came to temple when I was there, and said, "Oh I would like to be a Buddhist, but I have a Christian background."

My teacher said, "No. You don't have to change." "You can do all the things we are doing, but you can remain a Christian."

And I deeply believe in that, the universal aspect of the teachings. That you can use it through any frame of reference.

**Keibo:** How do you feel when you cross that river? How do you feel to be back here?

**Pracha:** I feel at home. And I feel sort of melancholy. This became a place that provides accommodation for people who want to use it as a place for seminars, meetings, training, etc.

**Keibo:** Good food.

**Pracha:** Yes, good food, simple life, etc. We have all that.

But I still feel that this is a place waiting to be renewed again. New leadership will come in, and this can be a one of the vital places for generating new energy.

### *Scene 9, meditation*

**Pracha:** Normally when we walk, we walk to go somewhere, to arrive at some place.

But in walking meditation, with every step you arrive.

Every step is the destination. Life is here and now.

When we meditate, there is no other aim. The only aim is to be in the present moment.

If memories and thoughts are coming in, this is very normal.

Just smile. Be aware of them, and come back to your feet.

When you feel more aware of your body, you can develop a sense of oneness with nature around you. And you can say to yourself, "Nature is walking. Nature is walking."

Feel that there is no separation between yourself, the floor, the roof, the wall, your friends walking in here. We are all one.

Now bring your awareness to our breathing process and tell yourself, "Nature is breathing calmly. Nature is Breathing calmly."

Now bring your awareness to your whole body, and tell yourself, "This whole being is at peace. This whole being is at peace."

Some part of your body may feel aching, tired. Just bring attention to one of those feelings in the body. Observe the feelings and observe the observer.

Seen and unseen, human and non-human. They generate this loving kindness throughout the universe. Feel that your whole body, is the energy of love. And this energy expands, further and further, without boundaries.

**Pracha:** Normally, I always teach this meditation together with a certain way of thinking and looking at the world, which we should call "wisdom."

In Buddhism, we have at least two kinds of meditation. In the first kind, you develop your mental energy, you make yourself able to concentrate. So that your mind will be better in terms of focusing on thinking through one issue or the other.

This aspect can be used externally as well. You can focus on making a lot of money. You can focus on how to shoot a gun properly. That also uses meditation. Buddhism can also be used in that way, which can be harmful.

That's why I said that in meditation, that part of it has to go together with the cultivation of wisdom.

**Keibo:** Harmonize with...

**Pracha:** Harmonize with wisdom.

**Keibo:** Wisdom.

**Pracha:** Yes. That is a certain way of thinking, about the aim of life, a way of thinking about our relationship with nature, etc.. I would talk about the Buddhist attitude about money, wealth, and power recognition.

In the modern world, we encourage people to take these as the aim of life. From the Buddhist point of view, this is the wrong view. Because once you put this as the aim of your life, it means you have to develop greed more and more, so that you can achieve more and more.

Which makes your life a misery, because greed, like other kinds of desire, is endless.

The more you develop it, the more it expands. You're never able to satisfy greed.

As Gandhi said, "We have enough for everybody's need, but not enough for everybody's greed."

So for me, it's very important to use meditation to support, to cultivate a new worldview, a new paradigm of thinking that man and nature cannot be separated. We have to think of ourselves as part of nature, so that we change our way of looking; economics, politics, culture.

It's with this basic change in consciousness that we change the social structure.



THE DALAI LAMA

27 February 2023

Dr Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa  
International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)  
666 Charoen Nakhon Road (Between Soi 20-22)  
Banglamphu Lang,  
Khlong San Bangkok 10600  
Siam (Thailand)

Dear Dr Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa,

It is with pleasure that I offer you my congratulations on your 90th birthday.

As you know, we have known each other for so many years. I very much respect you and consider you like an elder brother. May I applaud you for the meaningful life you have led.

With my prayers and good wishes,

Yours sincerely,



JUNGTU SOCIETY

THE JUNGTU SOCIETY KOREA

Dear Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa,

I would like to send my most heartfelt congratulations on your 90th birthday.

Ajahn, by founding and nurturing INEB, you left a remarkable footprint in the modern history of Buddhism. The wonderful legacy of yours will be well cherished and furthered by the rest of us.

I wish you good health. Please keep guiding us for many more years.

With Metta,

Ven. Pomnyun Sunim



To:  
FAMILY OF MR. PRACHA HURTANUWATR AND  
SPIRIT IN EDUCATION MOVEMENT (SEM)

30<sup>th</sup> June 2023

**Condolence letter**

On behalf of KBC I am writing in express our condolences for the passed away of MR. PRACHA HURTANUWATR. We can understand it well what you are going through, having lost a valuable and important person of your Family and Organization.

For KBC, Mr. Pracha Hurtanuwat has been involved and devoted in very important initiation and foundation steps of becoming Community Development Department (CDD) of Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC). He has been very dedicated in supporting and strengthening the Organization Development of the Community Development Department as well as grassroot Communities of KBC such as Grassroot Leadership Training (GLT) for 79 Alumni from KBC. So everything he has done for our organization in Development Aspects was incredibly wonderful and Fruitful that we have seen now a day. So we always thank to GOD for sending Mr. Pracha Hurtanuwat to KBC for development work and vision. He was always a great person with remarkable qualities and he will always be remembered as a respectful leader for our organization.

Once again, please accept our deepest condolences for Mr. Pracha Hurtanuwat. We send our prayer and hope for the best for your Family and Organization that you shall overcome the current situation very soon and gets back to normal condition soon.

Sincere condolences,

Rev. Hpaawyng Tu Mai  
General Secretary  
Kachin Baptist Convention

Obituary

Nidhi Eoseewong

8 May 1940 – 7 August 2023



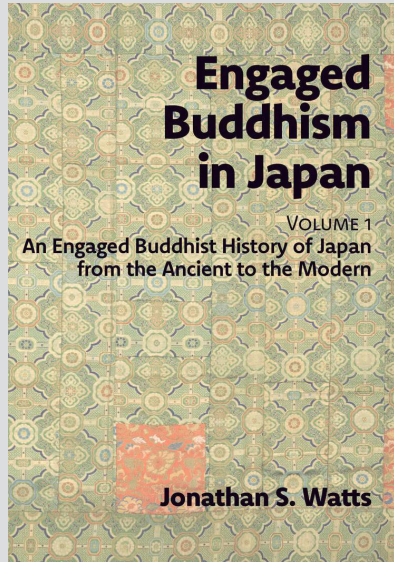
Nidhi Eoseewong was a distinguished Thai academic, historian, writer, and political commentator. He taught history at Chiang Mai University, where he spent the majority of his professional career and retired in 2000, but remained active in the academic community. In his final interview with Matichon TV on May 20, 2023, Dr. Nidhi remarked on the changing landscape of Thai politics after the victory of Move Forward Party. He urged Move Forward to align their actions with the people's needs and not forget their promises. He died from lung cancer on 7 August 2023, at the age of 83.

## *Rebirth and Revolution - Engaged Buddhism in Japan: A Conversation with Jonathan Watts*

By Craig C Lewis

June 2, 2023

Source: *Buddhist Door Global* - <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/rebirth-and-revolution-engaged-buddhism-in-japan-a-conversation-with-jonathan-watts/>



From [sumeru-books.com](http://sumeru-books.com)

Engaged Buddhism can be understood as a fusion of the Buddhist teachings with social activism and compassionate action to address the suffering of individuals and communities. Yet more than this, engaged Buddhism is founded on the understanding that the Buddhist path is not solely a personal quest for enlightenment, but is a practice through which individuals actively contribute to the well-being of society, recognizing that spiritual awakening and social transformation are as interdependent as existence itself, and that true compassion and wisdom are embodied in, manifested through, compassionate action.

In Japan, engaged Buddhism emerged in the modern era as a desire for change in response to tectonic

social shifts post-World War Two. Perhaps some of the more well known socially engaged figures of Japanese Buddhism to outside observers include the Soka Gakki International founder and peace advocate Daisaku Ikeda (b. 1928), and Nichidatsu Fujii (1885–1985), Buddhist monk and founder of the socially active Nipponzan-Myohoji order.

Rooted in the country's rich and ancient Buddhist heritage, engaged Buddhism in Japan has evolved into a growing response to the pressing social issues faced by contemporary society; a guiding force bridging spiritual practice and societal transformation. Yet engaged Buddhism in Japan, much like the broader landscape of Japanese Buddhism, has a complex and nuanced topography that is frequently misunderstood.

The veteran socially engaged Buddhist and Buddhist scholar Jonathan S. Watts has taken up the formidable and unenviable challenge of dispelling this confusion through a meticulously researched and in-depth analysis in two volumes titled *Engaged Buddhism in Japan*, the culmination of 16 years of engagement with socially engaged Japanese Buddhism.

Jonathan began working at the headquarters of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in Bangkok in 1990, shortly after graduating from Princeton University

with a BA in comparative religions and political science. At INEB, he was mentored by the renowned exemplar of engaged Buddhism Sulak Sivaraksa.

After relocating to Japan in 1993, Jonathan worked in a variety of Buddhist settings that included 19 years at the research institute of the Jodo-shu denomination in Tokyo, the last 16 years at the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship, and the last 14 years at the Zenseikyo Foundation and Rinbutsuken Institute for Engaged Buddhism, a non-sectarian foundation formed in the post-war area that is training Buddhist chaplains. He has also taught contemporary Buddhism in Japan and Asia at Keio University since 2008.

Having spent the last three decades immersed in the international engaged Buddhist movement, Jonathan has worked closely supporting the development of engaged Buddhism in Japan and the Japan Network of Engaged Buddhists (JNEB). He helped form the INEB Think Sangha, an engaged Buddhist think tank, in 1996, and became member of INEB's Executive Board in 1999.

Buddhistdoor Global sat down with Jonathan to find out more about engaged Buddhism in Japan and the newly released *Engaged Buddhism in Japan*.

Volume One of *Engaged Buddhism in Japan*, subtitled *An Engaged Buddhist History of Japan from the Ancient to the Modern*, explores some of the key historical themes that make Japanese Buddhism so unique and difficult to understand—even among the international Buddhist community. This first volume also provides a critical and comprehensive account of engaged Buddhism in the modern era, which has until now never been properly documented. Volume Two is

subtitled *Contemporary Exemplars from Intimate Care to Social Ethics*, and takes on the task of profiling a cross section of new and dynamic engaged Buddhist activities of Japan in the 21st century Japan.

*Engaged Buddhism in Japan, Volume 1: An Engaged Buddhist History of Japan from the Ancient to the Modern* is now available worldwide, published by Sumeru Press in Canada, and distributed through mainstream channels. There is also a special run being printed in Thailand, organized by INEB, to ensure that these books are more easily obtainable and affordable to readers in South and Southeast Asia. Volume two is scheduled to be released in September 2023.

**BDG: What inspired you to take on a project as in-depth and ambitious as Engaged Buddhism in Japan?**

**Jonathan S. Watts:** Coming to Japan from Thailand in the 1990s was sort of like being sent to the Alaskan tundra in terms of engaged Buddhism—there was not much of an engaged Buddhist movement active at the time. I was working at the Jodo-shu research institute, where we ended up writing a book on end-of-life care. But otherwise it was mostly translation work. It was here that I was introduced to Rev. Shojun Okano in about 2004, and he wanted to produce a book on engaged Buddhism in Japan that was comprehensively and responsibly executed. We felt that previous articles and books in the Anglophone sphere were not properly done—painting the Soka Gakkai and/or Rissho Kosei-kai movements as the face of engaged Buddhism of Japan, which we felt was not properly contextualized.

At the time Rev. Okano proposed the book I was busy with other projects,

so Rev. Okano agreed to hire me. Rev. Okano is the head of Kodosan, a small Tendai-based denomination, and they have a small research institute, like a lot of Buddhist denominations do. I was working in the Jodo-shu Pure Land one, so I went to work for Rev. Okano on a part-time basis, then about four years ago I went full time.

The overarching purpose of this project was to write a “good” book about what’s really going on in Japan in terms of engaged Buddhism. The second purpose was to document what’s going on in Japan at the grassroots—not merely following the activities of the big organizations. And thirdly, the aim is also to actually promote engaged Buddhism, which is something in which both Rev. Okano and I strongly believe.

I started working there in 2006, and we just began diving in. Basically, Kodosan’s approach is founded on the Four Noble Truths and by extension looking at what’s the real root of the suffering of the Japanese people. A lot of engaged Buddhism up to that point in Japan had been overseas aid and charity work—Cambodian refugee camps, and things like that. But by 2006, Japanese society was starting to fall apart: it was the eighth year in a row of more than 30,000 suicides nationally, so that was one of the first issues we picked up on, and over the years developing the JNEB web presence—reporting and translating basically anything and everything, writing articles about what is going on in Japan. We did a lot of suicide prevention at the beginning, and then the Fukushima disaster happened, and a range of other things, and I was pleased to notice a new kind of engaged Buddhist movement developing in Japan with some real substance.

Ironically, the COVID-19 pan-

demic provided a sort of respite from working as an activist, and I had the last two years to begin finally bringing the book together.

One of the big issues for me, coming to Japan from Thailand, was that I couldn’t initially make head nor tails of Japanese Buddhism, as I think is the case for many people: there are no monks, and the priests have wives, and they drink alcohol, so what’s going on here? And then I’d go to INEB meetings and people would ask me: “Jon, what’s going on with Japanese Buddhism?” “We can’t understand!” “Explain this and explain that.”

Even within East Asia, the Koreans and Taiwanese couldn’t understand it. And that’s part of the reason why this book has become such a large volume with a lot of historical information: because I felt that these themes had to be written about—not only to understand Japanese Buddhism, but to understand the history from an engaged Buddhist perspective. The way I define engaged Buddhism is that it has its perennial aspects, going back to the time of the Buddha, but if you really want to define it, it’s something that begins in the colonial period as a response to colonialism in Asia.

I did a lot of research on engaged Buddhism as it developed in Japan from the late 19th century. As a result, the first third of Volume One is a history of Japanese Buddhism with an engaged Buddhist slant. The second part is from the beginning of the Meiji period, which is 1865 up to World War Two, and then the third section is postwar up to 1998, when suicides in Japan started to become a serious issue and we entered this new era known as the “disconnected society” (mu-en shakai) of social withdrawal and isolation, which is very different from prosperous postwar Japan.





Photo by Ryoma Onita

**BDG:** Is it fair to say that the last third of Volume One covers engaged Buddhism as we would recognize it today?

**JSW:** Insofar as engaged Buddhism in Japan has been written about, yes. Although we're still comparing 1998 with 2023. The people who may know a little about engaged Buddhism in Japan, they tend to think about these new religious groups, such as Soka Gakkai and Rissho Kosei-kai. But I think their activism, while still ongoing, is very much rooted in that prosperous postwar period because most of their work focuses on peacemaking and international peace.

There's one group, the Nipponzan Myohoji, who really walk the walk in terms of engaged Buddhism and they have been there from the beginning in Japan, although they're a very small Buddhist community and don't really have a comparable level of funding, so they're not very well known.

**BDG:** What were some of the most significant challenges faced by socially engaged Buddhist priests in redefining Japanese Buddhism?

**JSW:** In many ways, I think, socially engaged Buddhism is a way to redefine Buddhism in the modern era. It's one of the aspects I look at when I teach:

socially engaged Buddhism is not only a movement for becoming involved with society; it has also been an internal reform movement. When you see INEB's founder Sulak Sivaraksa talk, he'll criticize traditional Thai Buddhism. Similarly, the influential and innovative Thai monk Buddhadasa Bhikkhu was very critical of traditional Thai Buddhism, which he saw as needing to be updated to make it relevant for the people.

Japanese Buddhism, especially the traditional sects, became deeply marginalized in the postwar period, and Japan became a very secular society—I think because of the involvement of religion in the war, many people really lost their trust in traditional religions and Buddhist denominations, and monks began making a lot of money from conducting funerals. A new term emerged: funeral Buddhism. And because of this, Buddhist priests came to be seen in a markedly negative light, just showing up, conducting funerals, and making money, and then driving around in nice cars, drinking, and playing golf. And so engaged Buddhism is, in some ways, also an attempt to reform Japanese Buddhism, to examine this issue of are we going to have a monastic movement again? Are Japanese priest going to try to become monks again?

Can you put the cat back into the bag? I don't think it's possible.

Basically, 98 per cent of Japanese priest are married, drink, and don't follow monastic precepts, but engaged Buddhism is a different way of practicing, a lay-bodhisattva way of reviving the monk-hood, which was really in many ways the ancient ethos of Japanese Buddhism from the very beginning—it emphasized the bodhisattva commitment and a more laicized bodhisattva practice that's not caught up in traditional monasticism.

Sila can be said to refer to the monastic code of discipline, but sila also denotes virtue and ethics. In classical Buddhism, Theravada, sila can tend to be a negative: don't do that, refrain from this, but in Mahayana, it's seen as a positive: what can you do? So this has been a way for priests to try to re-enter society and become respected in society by what they do.

Engaged Buddhism in Japan, Volume 2 includes all the case studies—you know, the suicide-prevention movement and the priests who do that. They earn huge respect because they don't get any money for this work. They do it completely voluntarily, operating hotlines and opening their temples to people who are really mentally disturbed. So in many ways, this route is a way to redefine the

sanctity of Japanese Buddhist priests, without getting bogged down in this idea that they need to become monks again.

**BDG: Can you also speak to the role of gender in this context? How has it played out in Japanese engaged Buddhism?**

**JSW:** Well, this is really still the gorilla in the room, which is going to be a focus of my afterword in Volume Two. There are a lot of women who appear in the second volume as engaged Buddhists, but the gender issue itself is really something that has yet to be directly faced. One of the biggest issues is that most of the Buddhist women in Japan are the wives of priests, and they have a very nebulous, often undefined status because they don't fit into the doctrine. Japanese Buddhism is stuck in this sort of doctrinal double standard—for the Jodo Pure Land denominations it fits into their doctrine more, but for Zen it doesn't. So, sort of doctrinally and legally, these women are almost out of sight, although they often run the temples as much as their husbands do.

I'm hoping that this issue will become the next movement. It's been interesting, because we can see many Buddhist groups in various countries jumping on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) bandwagon, and it's a big bandwagon here in Japan. Japanese Buddhists love to jump on social bandwagons, and they're jumping on the SDGs, many of them completely uncritically, but it can be used as a sort of expedient means because one of the main aspects of the SDGs is gender equality and empowerment. Japan (and South Korea) are ranked low by the World Economic Forum, which conducts a

poll as part its annual Global Gender Gap Report, so this is hopefully an issue that is gaining some traction.

One of the reasons that the Japanese priest system became the way it is was because in the beginning of the Meiji era, the Japanese government wanted to create heteronormative nuclear families for industrialization, and the Buddhist temple was supposed to be a paragon of this heteronormative nuclear family. And because these temples are passed down through male succession, it's very important for male priests to have a wife and create a male heir. But now there are some priests who are going, "Well, maybe I won't get married. . . ." And so as we get into this post-modern evolution of Japanese society, the heteronormative nuclear family is no longer standard. I think temples are going to start changing, to reflect this social trend. And I think along with this, we're going to see the gender issue become more and more prominent.

**BDG: So we can expect to see more women becoming leaders in the field and practice of engaged Buddhism?**

**JSW:** Well, I think everywhere, because one of the things that's happened is that, with the incredibly low birthrate in Japan, there are a lot of temple families with only one child, and it's a daughter. And sometimes the daughter will marry a man, who'll then become a priest, but sometimes that doesn't happen. So in some of the denominations, especially the less monastic-focused, like Zen, the Pure Land denominations, I know a number of temples where the vice-abbot who will now become the abbot is a woman. So more and more women will become abbots, just by default.

In light of these trends, the

sexuality issue and the gender issue is much more open to negotiation in Japan than in much of the Buddhist world—as you know, the Buddhist establishment in Thailand doesn't even like the idea of bhikkhunis, much less the idea of temples being run by bhikkhunis.

**BDG: Did you see any other emerging trends or potential areas of growth and innovation in this field while you were researching for Engaged Buddhism in Japan?**

**JSW:** One of the big themes that I focus on in both volumes is at the core of socially engaged Buddhism, which is working on structural violence and systems change. Most Japanese engaged Buddhism since the end of the war, and even up until now, is what Sulak Sivaraksa refers to as social welfare work or sometimes "goody-goody Buddhism!" Which I think is slightly more of a trend in East Asian forms of socially engaged Buddhism. They do "nice" relief work and aid work, but none of them are speaking out about economic policies or political systems, and things like that, nor are they exploring new forms of social development, like we see in Southeast Asia. That's a big issue for Japan because the Japanese people, more than any other East Asian nation, tend to bite their tongues and not be vocally critical of the system.

I look at these issues that began in the Meiji, and I have to wonder: what are Japanese social ethics? They're not Buddhist, because most people in this country don't know what the Pancasila (Skt., Pali: five precepts) are. People have no idea what Buddhist ethics are. The social ethics here are basically a kind of Confucianism, a very authoritarian kind of Confucianism in



Jonathan S. Watts. Image courtesy of Jonathan Watts

which you just follow whoever is the head of your organization, or department, or community. And this is coupled with the perennial theme of Japanese clannishness, in which people are very group-oriented, whereas Buddhist ethics refers to all sentient beings: be concerned not just with people in your own group, but everywhere.

One of the things that's happened with this sort of collapse within Japanese society—the low birthrate, the high incidence of suicides, and the loss of employment-for-life (now almost 40 per cent of Japanese are part-time workers)—is that everyone is losing their community, so there's a vital need to go beyond one's own community. And what we're seeing with these new engaged Buddhists is that they're reaching to these people who have fallen through the cracks in society, whom nobody else cares about, and who have been ostracized from their communities. This, then, is a rebirth of a kind of Buddhist social ethics, and part of a big shift toward social justice, another concept that's traditionally been weak in Japan.

So this is, in my view, the final frontier to give the work that's being done here even more substance. There's a lot of really good work being done now, but there's not much systems critique. We have all these priests working hard on suicide prevention, but nobody is going: "Well, why is everyone so suicidal? Maybe we should work to address the root causes and not only the symptoms."

**BDG:** Can you speak to the message or impact that you hope this in-depth two-volume analysis will have? What would you like people to take away from the stories and insights you share?

**JSW:** Especially for Volume One, my dedication is to all my INEB kalyanamitra [spiritual friends] and all their questions about Japanese Buddhism—I hope that this will help to unlock some of those mysteries and also provide a new sense of respect. I was for years one of the many naysayers who thought that Japanese Buddhism was sort of a corrupt train-wreck of alcoholic non-monks. But when we understand the history, we can understand the depth of the reality on the ground. There are still problems, of course, with the fact there are very few monks—there's nobody like Ven. Pomnyun Sunim in South Korea, for example, which keeps Buddhist priests here from being important social leaders.

Volume One starts with a vignette of an INEB East Asia meeting, with the Taiwanese and Koreans kind of dismissing Japanese Buddhism. But then they met these priests doing suicide-prevention work, and we spent an evening going on rounds of the streets feeding the homeless, and they were like, "My gosh, our monks can't

get close to the people like this because of the wall that stands between monastics and laypeople." So the Japanese in many ways have realized what it means to be lay bodhisattvas. I hope that people will come away with a new sense of respect for that.

And then, of course, I want to offer a deeper understanding of Japanese Buddhism itself, which is quite opaque and hard to grasp from the outside—Volume Two especially explores a number of incredible people doing really great work at the grassroots. The best work is being done at the grassroots, not being cooked up in sectarian headquarters, which can be really tone-deaf, yet they're the ones who receive a lot of publicity because they have the advertising budgets.

I hope that, as one of the main purposes of Engaged Buddhism in Japan, the reader can gain a clear sense of the type of engagement of the groups that are more well known—not to deny the good that they've done, but rather to gain a little more of a critical perspective on what they've done and are doing, and thus understand socially engaged Buddhism a little better for what it stands for: it's not just social welfare, it's social transformation. Of course, it's also about transforming your own place in the world first, as much as it is about going out and helping others.

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Jonathan Watts is a member of INEB's Executive Committee.

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The School of English for Engaged Social Service (SENS) is a project of the Institute for Transformative Learning of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (The INEB Institute) under the umbrella of the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, registered in Thailand.



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