

# ***Building a Culture of Nonviolence: Sixty years after Hiroshima***

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I am very honored to give the lecture here in honor of the late Professor Kenko Futaba, a noted Shin Buddhist scholar, president of Ryukoku University from 1983 to 1995 and then became Chancellor of Kyoto Women's University. I myself was privileged to be a visiting professor at Ryukoku University in 1993 during my exile from Siam because of the political unrest in my own country.

A pioneer in what today is called "engaged" Buddhism, Kenko Futaba campaigned passionately for the rights of minorities in Japan and was actively involved in enactment of the law liberating Japan's untouchables, the *burakumin*.

He was a prolific writer. Among his many publications are "Investigations in the History of Ancient Buddhist Thought in Japan," "Shinran's Humanity," "Shinran's Social Practice," and "Shinran's Transmission of No-self in Buddhist Thought History."

In our modern philosophical and religious age, marked by constant, aimless spiritual wandering, we must again affirm Dr. Futaba's endeavor to seek after the essential nature of Buddhism, restoring the conviction and the commitment to support it.

This lecture series hopefully will be a continuing inspiration for the nurturing of American Buddhism. Indeed it is a great privilege to be called upon to deliver this lecture which I dedicate to the 300,000 victims of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 60 years ago.

I should also like to remind you that soon after the Japanese capitulation, my country was able to make the peace declaration on 16 August, 1945. This was a genuine achievement of peace in Siam, because from 25 January 1942, a state of war existed *de jure* between the Siamese Kingdom and the United Kingdom as well as the United States. *De facto*, however, Siam was invaded by the forces of the Japanese Emperor, even though it was claimed that the intent of the said "invasion" was to use the Siamese territory to march into Western colonies in Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia. Siam might have not been declared as a Japanese colony proper, but in fact the sovereign powers of my country were lost or corroded following the Japanese invasion of 8 December 1941.

Without the Free Thai Movement under the leadership of Pridi Banomyong, then Regent of King Rama VIII, peace would not have returned to Siam. On the day the peace proclamation was announced, the Allied powers including the United Kingdom and the United States recognized the independence of the Siamese state, even though it took another while for Anglo-Siamese relations to normalise.

One important word that should be noted here is that the leader of the Free Thai Movement chose the name "Ruth" as his nom de guerre, in the spirit of "Truth".

This word "truth" carries greatest significance for mankind. Without truth or sincerity, man

cannot flourish, let alone grow. In Buddhism, man is often compared to a tree. Such a tree should develop from good seeds (truth-*sacca*), which, when sown should adapt to the soil (adaptation-*dama*). Once sprouted, it should weather the sun, wind, rain or even storms (perseverance-*khanti*). Fully grown, the tree spreads its branches and provides good use for humans and animals to use its trunk to rest, its leaves for shades and fruits for nourishment (charity-*caga*). In the same light, humans have to be sincere to each other, be able to adapt to various situations with perseverance, so that they can be able to help each other and to serve all sentient beings.

It may be said that Pridi Banomyong upheld these four righteous principles throughout his lifetime. Amidst the horrors of war, his sincerity, his ability to adapt to the environment and his perseverance all led to his proclamation of peace, thus returning the normal livelihood to the people.

In real life, peace cannot thrive where there is no sincerity. There is a Buddhist adage which says: "A council that has no honest and truthful members is no council." Hence, without truth, everything becomes futile, false, full of half-truth and thus lacks any essence.

In politics, truth has to come hand-in-hand with peace and independence, nurtured by the stream of freedom. By freedom I mean liberty in essence, not a competitive laissez-faire kind of freedom. This liberty would lead to fraternity and may eventually result in equality, legally, economically, socially and culturally. This is the quintessence of democracy.

The same way that a country enjoys its independence, so should its people. Each and every one of us should be independent by respecting oneself as a free person and not a slave, be it from an economic, political or cultural perspective. One should also respect one's heritage by understanding its essence. This should be done through the practice of inner peace, and sharing this peace with fellow humans, animals, and the natural environment. Once one has respect for oneself and is independent, one would respect other humans or animals, regardless of differences in birth, status, genders, power or any predetermined social norms. This is the way to fraternity that would lead to genuine equality.

The peace proclamation on 16 August 1945 can be considered as achieving peace in Siam, at least politically. Independence was restored to the Kingdom, both *de facto* and *de jure*. Democracy was also restored to an extent. Elements of dictatorship disappeared, and the once-powerful armed forces-a state within a state-lost political influence.

In achieving ideal peace, both politics and education have to be utilized so that each and every one of us would be able to treasure the value of peace, and that the country would enjoy peace and independence concurrently.

Let us, however, not forget that at the time of the peace proclamation, the Siamese Kingdom was surrounded by Southeast Asian countries which had previously lost their independence to Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the United States. During the Second World War, these colonial dependencies were invaded by Japanese troops, who claimed they were liberated from the yoke of western imperialism. Yet, in reality, it was the Japanese Empire which seized control and re-colonized these lands, be they the Philippines from the United States, Indochina from France, Singapore, Malaya and Burma from the United Kingdom, and Indonesia from the Netherlands.

Though peace was returned to Siam, all our neighbors were not in the position to enjoy peace and independence. Despite Japan having lost the war, all the territories invaded by Japan had liberation movements fighting against the return of western powers.

In this regard, it was Pridi Banomyong who was instrumental in assisting these movements in our neighbouring territories, particularly in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Indonesia.

As much as we would want peace and independence, so do our neighbors. If they need our assistance and we are in the position to do so, we should help them as much as possible.

Not only that, Pridi Banomyong led discussions with the leaders of our neighbors with the goal of establishing a League of Southeast Asian Nations, which would serve all these countries with different governmental systems to unite in peace.

A unified and peaceful regional community certainly has more bargaining power with the great powers or other regional groupings than a small, individual country. Pridi had the vision to realize that once India regained her independence, she would be as great as China, once China is free from warring factions plaguing the country at that time. Moreover, the United States would also exert influence over this region rather than the United Kingdom. This is said even without the mentioning of the sphere of influence extended by the Soviet Union.

It should be noted that every member of this League of Southeast Asian Nations would need independence and peace, both internally and intra-regionally, in addition to being democracies, which were more inclined towards socialism rather than capitalism.

Under a democracy, the voices of the majority must be heard without neglecting the voices of the minority. If a country consists of different ethnic groups, religions, languages, and cultures, the independence of a country implies that each and every region of that country can be free. Each independent country should be interdependent, similarly to the way the League of Southeast Asian Nations would have been.

Burma, which was a member of the League of Southeast Asian Nations, proclaimed that once it was independent, every ethnic group within the Union would be free and under autonomous rule in a sovereign country. This would mean that the central government would only be responsible for defence, foreign affairs and finance.

Therefore, the policy of the Government of Siam 60 years ago was that of decentralization to create regional autonomy-in the Northeast, the North and South. Had this policy been fully implemented, democracy and independence would have been established concurrently with peace in every region.

If so, Laos might have joined with Siam under an autonomous and democratic rule. Of course, peace should be key here, for all the countries in the region.

Concerning Siam, the central government was considering the demands for autonomy of the four Muslim-dominated southernmost provinces within the Kingdom. Indeed, the MPs played important roles in upholding sovereignty, democracy, as well as peace for every citizen in the Kingdom.

What I have just elaborated was the achievement of peace in Siam 60 years ago, beginning from 16 August 1945. Peace not only among all the regions in the Kingdom, but also peace among member countries of the League of Southeast Asian Nations.

It was unfortunate that the development of peace, within Siam herself and among her neighbours, ended abruptly with the coup d'etat of 8 November 1947 by a military clique. Democracy in form might have been in place until 1958, but its essence was gradually lost. What happened was the freedoms of the people eroded: the right of free speech was successively contained, the autonomous rule in the regions were undermined by the junta, resulting in many false charges against secessionist movements in the Northeast and the South, liberal-minded politicians and journalists were purged, prosecuted and executed. Even Buddhist monks were not exempted. Ultimately, peace was lost.

More unfortunate was that truth also gradually faded away. Anyone of integrity found himself more and more difficult in surviving politically. This was the time for characters with doubtful morals and opportunists subservient to the dictatorial powers-that-be. The fact was that half-truths replaced the truth. Education was there to intoxicate the masses with these half-truths instead of to search for truth, beauty or virtue. As a matter of fact, every educational institution in many countries has become deferential to money, power, and western mainstream thinking characterized by fragmentary, rather than holistic perspectives, with the brain separated from the heart. The goal of education was to prepare for a career that would match the time and effort spent. Whether the career in question was a right livelihood or not, it did not seem to matter at all.

The powers that be painted the name of Pridi Banomyong black, accusing him of prematurely demanding democratic rule from Rama VII, who had already intended to grant Siam her first constitution. This is said without even mentioning the mud slinging allegations of his involvement in the circumstances surrounding the death of Rama VIII. It was in fact Pridi who defended the monarchy along with the constitution. When he passed away in 1983, the Parliament he had founded and had served as its first secretary did not show any sign of respect or reverence. In some text books his name could not even be found in the history of Thai democracy or the history Thammasat University, which he established and became the first rector.

In 2000, the year of Pridi's centenary, there were those who conspired to erase Pridi's name from the Government's list of nominations for UNESCO's important personages of the year. Indeed, though the plot was not successful, the Government's festivities to celebrate this occasion were done rather half-heartedly. This was not surprising, as the ruling powers-that-be are still fearful of truth and fearful of those with moral courage.

In any case, the word "peace" at that time was tainted by the Government's poisoning of the mentioned Peace Movement which was an international movement against the Korean War. Some years later, the word "peace" was revered again following President Kennedy's establishment of the Peace Corps in 1961 -- this, of course, without realizing what cruelty this very President unleashed onto Vietnam, much more than any of his predecessors. The United States has become the new imperialist power, replacing the old guards of Britain, France and other European countries. Peace is being jeopardised by the United States' collaboration with just a handful of multinational corporations taking advantage of the global public and destroying the natural environment. This is being done in the name of "development" and "globalisation" -- two catchwords used to mesmerise the people.

In the sense that the word "peace" was regarded in a negative connotation, many of us today have realised that the word "development" is not untainted. The Siamese Government, however, has yet to realize this. It has also yet to realize that ever since it has pursued the path drawn by the United States since 1947, the Kingdom is being gradually destroyed -- in terms of peace, independence, democracy, and also including religion and culture.

However, if we take Yohan Galtung seriously, as we should, he declared that the American empire will last for two more decades only. And John Ralston Saul's latest book, "The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World," is very prophetic.

Glenn Paige's book, "Nonkilling Global Political Science," is one example of the beginnings of a sea-change in how we will build democracy and freedom in the near future. Paige insists that a nonkilling society and nonkilling political science is possible, not unthinkable. Paige paints a picture of a human society that refuses to disavow the possibility of cultivating peace and human security.

I also call your attention to the tremendous work of two nonviolent revolutionaries, S. Jagannatham and his wife Krishnammal who, despite being over 90 years old, are still actively working to bring justice, equality and environmental balance to the untouchable classes of India. A biography of their work entitled "The Color of Freedom," published by the Gandhi Foundation in the USA, is most inspiring. Next year, we will celebrate Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's centenary. He, too, was a pioneer for peace and justice from a Thai Buddhist perspective.

In achieving ideal peace, both politics and education have to be utilised so that each and every one of us would be able to treasure the value of peace, and that the country would enjoy peace and independence concurrently. But even though we mostly acknowledge our failings in educating the public, we still aren't spending enough on education. Instead, resources are still being channeled into more weapons, more war and more violence.

For instance, every year most developed nations spend more on their military budgets than they do their education budgets. And we may be hard pressed to find a so-called Third World country that is "third world" militarily. Martin Luther King Jr. was straight to the point when he stated: our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men. It does take a bit of a talent to imagine otherwise. If similar investments were made in educational infrastructures, especially in the areas of peace and nonviolence, the results would be beyond our imaginations. We may well learn to imagine peace rather than war as the natural state of human affairs. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence." But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence.

Throughout his book Paige offers insights in nonkilling transformation through education and training, nonkilling knowledge in applied practice, transforming and creating institutions to facilitate nonkilling, and creating and adapting methods of inquiry, analysis and action most suitable for nonkilling transformational tasks. Paige puts it well when he writes, Violence-assuming political science tends to discourage non-violent creativity. By dismissing it in professional training as defiantly 'utopian', 'idealistic' and 'unrealistic', political science intellect is condemned to confinement in perpetual lethality. Nonkilling creativity offers promise of liberation.

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

Hence, merely refraining from acts of violence only succeeds on a basic level in overcoming violence. To cultivate the good qualities of the mind and actively carry out nonviolent actions represents a higher level of understanding. So in order to truly practice nonviolence we need to eliminate the three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance and cultivate positive qualities transforming the three poisons with generosity, compassion and wisdom.

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

For Buddhists the law of karma reminds us that when faced with violence we must not react

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

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

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

Peace building might begin with resolving the economic, social and political inequalities that form the roots of violence: Violence that is inflicted on those from a different class background, those believing in a different religious creed, and those practising different customs. These differences are linked to the unjust social structure, which, in turn, depends on the world economic order operating under the laissez-faire principle.

The stark differences existing in society results in one side enjoying privileges, making the other find various ways of opposition, even perhaps not through the normal means of justice, since the law serves the rich and powerful.

Once one side abuses the other, it is natural that the other would retaliate, hence exacerbating violence. This corresponds with a Buddhist saying that: "Bad deeds cannot be ended through retribution." If such "bad deeds" as violence persist in our world, then our economies would continue to produce arms, making the superpowers and their defence-related industries profit, at least in the short run. Eventually, such investments would yield no value to society but would only create losses.

How do we then find a way out of the suffering that arises from violence? From a Buddhist perspective, all suffering in this world is directly or indirectly linked to the three root causes of suffering, that is, greed, anger and delusion.

In our present-day world, greed is expressed through the creeds of capitalism and consumerism. People are coerced to believe in money and worldly sciences, including modern technology which will not let us time to search our true being or the miracle of life. We should realise that the basis of western philosophy lies in Rene Descartes, whose dictum "cogito ergo sum" or "I think, therefore I am" has become immortal. We learned that Descartes is the Father of Modern Philosophy, but have we ever contemplated where the roots of individualism are? Individualism, expressed by oneself, is in fact a duality: If there exists a "one", there also exists an "other". This essence is contrary to the Buddhist principle of interdependence of all beings. In fact, we inter-are.

Today's world has transformed Decartes' "I think, therefore I am" to "I buy, therefore I am", the essence of consumerism. The reason why we study is to be able to get a job and make money. Money for buying goods which are made to intoxicate us through the powers of advertising. It follows that if we lose the power to buy, we lose the purpose of ourselves.

Have we ever realised that we have been misguided by something that is the cause of violence? To achieve peace, Buddhism proposes the dictum "I breathe therefore I am."

Our humanity is not about our thoughts. Thoughts may make us more intelligent, but they certainly do not make us be good. Even without thinking, we might be good. But without breathing, we die. We constantly breathe, without stopping. Yet, we do not seem to give any importance to breathing. Our first breaths come when we are conceived, and our last when our bodies are dead. With western education, however, we ignore the importance of breathing. We breathe in anger, hatred, stress, vengeance, greed, and delusion almost at all times.

Theravada Buddhists call the mindfulness of breathing anapanasati. We may want to try breathing in love instead of anger. We may be able to overcome the scourges of greed, anger and delusion through our conscious breathing.

When we are conscious, we are able to understand the essence of mindfulness, which is the key to life. To understand life means more than knowing the sum of its mechanical parts. At least we should come to realise that we should not be living our lives for our self-glorification, for climbing the social ladder -- which is abound with injustices -- but we should rather recognize that the downtrodden and exploited members of our society are no less important than us. We should also realise that we share a responsibility in protecting our natural environment, which is being incessantly destroyed. We should also learn how not to hate even those who are exploiting us, but we must rather work together to gain independence from the unjust social structures which are full of violence.

I hope what I have said would make you contemplate and perhaps would even make you act by challenging the status quo, the intellectual subservience to violent social and political ideologies which we have been naively following for too long -- the false ideologies that permit mistakes like Hiroshima, 9/11, and Iraq. I sincerely hope that the work of past personalities like Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Kenko Futaba will inspire you to work nonviolently for justice and equality in this new era. Perhaps, like them, you could achieve peace in your community amongst your people by first achieving peace within yourselves. Then you could spread your individual peace through a culture of awakening and overwhelm the evil, tyranny and violence existing in today's societies through nonviolent compassionate action.

We may be a small group of people. However, the British sociologist, Margaret Mead, put it beautifully: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, dedicated citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." To put it stronger, let me end my talk by quoting Gandhi who said a small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.

II

Once again, I have been asked to give a broad overview of 'my' thoughts and activities, which are often put in the file of "socially engaged Buddhism or spirituality." This is a difficult topic for many reasons. To what extent can I talk about the "myself" without talking about others, for what is considered "me" is always partially or wholly formed in relations to

the others, including culture and society? It is impossible yet necessary to talk about oneself.

And, of course, I have often talked about humility and simplicity --for instance, that the Buddha and His Holiness the Dalai Lama are role models not because they possessed supernatural powers but because they are simple monks. Now language is often assertive and affirmative. Meditative silence may better capture humility and simplicity, but then I won't be saying anything to the audience. And conspicuously striving hard to portray or maintain humility and simplicity may generate the very opposite outcome: unabashed self-promotion, turning oneself into a trademark.

The "Sulak" whom you see and hear speaking in front of you is a septuagenarian Siamese Buddhist who wears funny (or exotic) clothes, talks about religion, spirituality, peace, and local and grassroots wisdom, and is a mileage plus frequent flyer who travels several hundreds of days a year to numerous destinations worldwide on his lecture circuits.

Some of you know that I speak a lot about religion and spirituality, especially Buddhism, and how they are linked to peace, environmental sustainability, education, and so on. I think spirituality and religion is pertinent to politics nowadays, especially when religious platitudes such as God, Good, and Evil can be easily witnessed on both sides of the War on/of Terror. There's a certain moralization of politics at the global and national levels, but not in the sense that politics is becoming or has become more moral. Rather political antagonisms are often represented in moralistic terms, breeding violence. We are always Good and they are always Evil, and they must be destroyed.

On the contrary, I believe that religion is highly beneficial to politics, if by "religion" we focus on spirituality and by "politics" we mean our relations to others--the demands others pose to us. Personally, I prefer the word "spirituality" to "religion." And spirituality is inextricable from politics, which I will discuss in greater details below. So that will be the topic of the bulk of my talk. I will dedicate the remaining part of my talk to highlighting some of the spiritual and political activities that my network of non-governmental organizations has done in recent years.

So, let us start with spirituality, a word that is often confused with mysticism or other-worldliness. For me, spirituality is not a transcendental state, but it is in the here and now for it is primarily about cultivating relations with our self and the Other. Spirituality posits a relationship between the self, truth, and goodness in a distinct way. Spirituality is linked to philosophy, or at least the philosophies of the so-called Antiquity in the East as well as the West.

Broadly speaking, philosophy is about access to the truth, the various conditions that enable as well as inhibit the self or the subject to have access to the truth. Spirituality, on the other hand, is about the necessary transformations that the self has to go through in order to have access to the truth. The being of the self requires an ethical conversion or change. For instance, it involves practices, exercises, and experiences that the self must undertake in order to have access to the truth, which can save the self. In other words, spirituality suggests that left to itself, the subject cannot know or understand the truth; there are no intrinsic qualities in the self that enable it to have access to the truth.

Modern philosophy, especially since Descartes, has eclipsed the spiritual dimension of the pursuit of the truth. The Cartesian "I" is ossified, as it is the ultimate and unquestionable knower. On this view, the self does not have to be transformed in order to have access to the truth; the self is inherently capable of the truth. Here, the change in the conduct of the self can only come from true knowledge.



Put differently, knowledge is de-linked from ethical transformation, philosophy from spirituality, and truth from goodness. One can know and speak the truth as well as act unethically, so to speak. This is for instance the case of 'scientific' knowledge. Once disconnected from spirituality, modern philosophy is about discovering or amassing true knowledge in order to perfect knowledge and the mind. Thus, G.E. Moore writes in his *Principia Ethica* that Western thinking, which he probably meant the Cartesian method, is not only unable to teach ethics, it also cannot define morality or goodness.

As a philosophy that is inseparable from spirituality, Buddhism focuses on fostering the conditions of right conduct vis-a-vis the self and the Other rather than on perfecting knowledge. To prepare the self for acting correctly with regard to events, passions, and other sentient beings-in both positive as well as negative contexts-is at the heart of Buddhism, not the improvement of one's mind via the accumulation of true knowledge. Buddhism is a form of performativity. It is about being for another, about eliminating self-attachments to conduct the self correctly -- hence the Buddhist conception of *anatta* or non-self.

In Hellenistic philosophy, spirituality comes in the form of the care of the self. We see in Socrates, the Cynics, the Stoics, and so on. To know oneself requires that one first care about the self, which is a spiritual exercise. In Buddhism, which is also a philosophy of the Antiquity, we can see it in the form of right understanding or even better nonviolence. A Buddhist education is therefore more of a technique or an art than a body of knowledge or ideas. It is an art of happiness, a happiness that is realized through various achievements: achievement of persistent effort, achievement of protection, good friendship, balanced livelihood, achievement of faith, achievement of virtue, achievement of charity, and achievement of wisdom. For those who have achieved the higher education they will experience the cessation of defilements and sufferings, a condition that may be described as *nirvana*. It is an art that spans throughout one's lifetime -- not something that one does in a particular phase in life.

Meditation is central in Buddhism. "I breathe therefore I am" may be the Buddhist response to Descartes. The purpose of meditation is for the transformation of our being, away from the five hindrances, namely sensual desire, hatred, indolence, anxiety, and uncertainty, and toward compassion, generosity, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. In other words, meditation leads to wisdom, which enables one to act appropriately vis-a-vis events, passions, and others.

Buddhism suggests that without training which leads to the conversion of the self, one will never be able to confront personal as well as collective sufferings, contemplate their causes, which are linked directly or indirectly with greed (*lobha*) and/or lust (*raga*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) or ignorance (*avijja*), and work toward their cessation. The cessation of suffering is possible if we train ourselves properly in morality (*sila*) mindfulness (*smtidhi*) and understanding or wisdom (*pafifia*). In Buddhism *sikkhti* refers to the training that entails developing oneself so that one is able to lead life in a beautiful and correct manner, pursuing the Path (*magga*) that will lead to the cessation of suffering. *Sikkhti* and *magga* thus can be seen as one.

Ultimately, the path leads to a noble and celibate way of life or the Noble Eightfold Path, which begins with Right Understanding or the recognition of the interdependence of things and being for another as opposed to the view of an autonomous or fortress self. The Noble Eightfold Path is as follows: 1) Right Understanding; 2) Right Thoughts; 3) Right Speech; 4) Right Action; 5) Right Livelihood; 6) Right Effort; 7) Right Mindfulness; and 8) Right Concentration. The Buddha grouped points 3, 4, and 5 as morality; points 6, 7, and 8 as concentration; and 1 and 2 as wisdom.

The transformations that Buddhism is looking for are as follows. One, the transformation of greed into generosity. This not only means the giving of basic necessities-the redistribution of rights and resources-but also entails speaking the truth to power and to a society full of lies, distortions, and half-truths. By giving more than taking one reduces self-attachments. Simplicity, humility, and self-reliance will serve as one's guidelines. Buddhism sees self-attachments as a major cause of fear. Practiced seriously and consistently, generosity contributes to the absence of fear, and without fear one will have no enemies: one will not see "the others" as enemies, and one will be able to truly forgive the wrongs that others may have done toward oneself. Remember the war cry "If you are not with us you are against us"?

Two, the transformation of hatred into compassion, which is akin to a flame of love without the smoke of jealousy, possessiveness, anger, etc. Gradually reducing self-attachments, one relates to all sentient beings and the natural environment mindfully and harmonically. One nurtures rather than oppresses them. Justice and equality will guide one's conducts, physical as well as mental. Generosity may be about the provision of equal opportunities, but compassion is also concerned about equal outcomes.

Three, the transformation of delusion or ignorance into wisdom. Buddhism points out that wisdom emanates from reflexivity or critical self-reflection. One must have time to cultivate inner peace and reflexivity through mental training or meditation. And one must try to expand one's circle of virtuous companions who act as one's external voices of conscience. With wisdom one does not fear to admit one's wrong doings and offenses: one develops responsibility for the consequences of one's actions or inactions -- that is, for both commission and omission. And one confronts and works to dismantle the hindrances in one's mind and the structural violence that accommodates it. Without wisdom, the oppressive structures will remain intact, and generosity and compassion will be merely palliatives.

I can go on and on. I have spoken and written a lot about this matter elsewhere, so I won't dwell on it any longer. The point of my digression is to show the spiritual dimension of Buddhism, and how it seeks to transform our relations to the self and to others. This therefore leads to another important practice: nonviolence.

It is therefore vital to reaffirm a central tenet or message that the Buddha had conceived more than 2,500 years ago: ahimsa or nonviolence. It is a short and simple but profound message, reasserting the interconnectedness of all human bodies -- a message which is often neglected or forgotten, leading to grave sufferings. Nonviolence affirms our common vulnerability. It is a reminder that life is precarious, and the precariousness of life is an inescapable human condition.

Various forms of self-attachment, feeding on greed, hatred, and delusion, have been relied on to construct an air of invulnerability or invincibility, severing the deep ties that bind human bodies together. Militarism, which is deeply entwined with inter alia sexism and racism, is one of the starkest manifestations of this attempt to overcome vulnerability at all costs, of the failure to transform vulnerability into a positive resource for life. The logic of militarism suggests that the "others" must be exploited, oppressed, or killed for "us" to go on living, and so on.

On the contrary, nonviolence, which is the recognition of anatta or "non-self," seeks to foster conditions that will cultivate or nurture precarious lives throughout the world. This calls for an engagement with others based on interdependence, compassion, generosity, understanding, and mindfulness, for an enjoining of knowledge and spirituality. And this is not a matter of choice, for a choice implies the presence of a fully autonomous self. Rather, it is because we are nothing without the others.

Now, let me be a little more concrete and specific by pointing to consumerism, the ideology of sport cars, designer clothes, fancy condominiums, etc., that is incessantly produced and circulated in the virtual economy. I've spoken a lot about the perils of consumerism, claiming that it is a new demonic religion and that the shopping mall has become the new temple. I've suggested that development is literally devoid of spiritual dimensions as it simply means flooding the world with material things, and have pointed to the tense relations between Buddhism and capitalism. I hold these views because capitalist development and consumerism do not entail the care of the self, as mentioned above; they are merely concerned about wealth, money, property, status, reputation, and so on. But perhaps a caveat is necessary. Nominally, capitalism stresses the care of the self in a peculiar way; that is, by cultivating a ceaseless sense of harrowing lack and anxiety, which is known as *tanha* in Buddhism. And like quack doctors, it provides pseudo-remedies-often at hefty prices.

There are always products and services to be purchased to "improve" us. There are always big brothers or experts everywhere to look up to for advice, guidance, and tips-ones equipped with modern and 'scientific' knowledge that will help improve our work performance, sex and marital life, and so on. So we accumulate more materials and better bodies of knowledge without really caring about our selves, without undertaking spiritual exercises. On this view, we can "improve" ourselves while remaining immoral. To be loved or to be "normal" we turn to consumerism or modern knowledge, but hardly to spirituality.

So, the self or subject under capitalism is always craving to fill the lack, which is a bottomless pit, in order to feel invulnerable. Why invulnerable? *Tanha* is manifested in the three unwholesome roots (*akusala-mula*): greed, hatred, and delusion. We crave for more wealth, power, status, and sensual pleasure to make us feel whole or invincible. We have to deny others these things. We feel anxious to acquire them and fear of losing them. Therefore, we hate others, fearing or simply deeming that they will steal our enjoyment and property.

We have to undermine, regulate, control, or kill them to feel sovereign. And we don't mourn for their losses. Instead we rejoice, making the wheels of violence and hatred spin indefinitely. We fantasize that our self is our own in absolute terms and we compete ever more aggressively to attain and retain the objects of our craving, oppressing others, denying the precariousness of life, and severing human interconnectedness along the way. So with our fortress mentality, we live in secluded high security neighborhoods, or uphold militarism, or think about launching "pre-emptive strikes."

Craving has existed in all societies at all times. The solution that capitalism provides to craving is however more cravings; that is, valorizing something that is said to be natural: consume more, immediate gratification, and so on. Craving does not hurt, so to speak. You can put in more cream in your coffee because there is always cream with no fat or cholesterol. You can smoke more cigarettes because there are ones with ultra low tar. You can have more debts because the more debts you are in, the better credits you have. Modern war with smart bombs and precision guided weapons even promises zero casualty-on our side at least. Indeed, "There is no river bigger than *tanha*," as the Buddha declares.

Buddhism and spirituality, however, take the opposite view. *Tanha* has to be reduced or minimized to pose the least harm to oneself and especially to others. The idea is to cultivate a lifelong spirituality that aims to reduce unwholesome aspects of life and society and conversely to nurture wholesome ones. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa once described it as a process of "simple living, higher thinking." And this path has a universalist ring to it: it is open to everyone; anyone can awaken the intrinsic Buddha nature in himself or herself.

As a form of spirituality as well as philosophy and as a path for the transformation of the self to make it mindful of right conduct vis-a-vis oneself and others (e.g., the correct conduct of conduct), enjoining truth with goodness, Buddhism is about social engagement. I have pointed out numerous times that there is no idea of individual salvation in Buddhism. Buddhism is about personal and collective transformation, and hence the idea of inter-being.

As David Loy suggests, "I am not in the world, I am what the world is doing right here and now." And, Loy continues, "The world begins to heal when we realized that its sufferings are our own." It is in this sense that Buddhism, as a form of social engagement, should also be involved in politics.

So, let me devote the remaining part of my talk to give a brief sketch of the activities that my network of socially engaged Buddhists have been doing.

We have attempted to expose the Thai public to spirituality and alternative visions of leading life as well as politics by translating works by Mahatma Gandhi, E.F. Schumacher, Vandana Shiva, Noam Chomsky, Ivan Illich, Thich Nhat Hahn, the Dalai Lama, Staish Kumar, Helena Norberg-Hodge, David Korten, and numerous other authors into the Thai language. We regularly hold seminars, talks, and workshops on various issues from economic development to art and culture, generally from Buddhist or spiritual perspective, to engage with progressive elements in Thai society.

One of our NGOs, the Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development, has been effective in supporting grassroots leadership among monks and nuns to promote sustainable development at the village level. Generally respected in society, monks and nuns are vital agents of empowerment and community development. In addition, we are trying to renew Buddhism by clarifying and elaborating on its democratic roots. The Sangha as a possible model of a democratic community is what I have striven to highlight.

Through another NGO, the Spirit in Education Movement, we aim to develop a comprehensive educational movement to counter the trends of consumerism, using spiritual strength to empower individuals and communities to choose alternative ways of development with confidence and full awareness. The Spirit in Education Movement is also involved in grassroots leadership training program for fringe or marginalized communities in the Thai kingdom as well as in neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and Burma. The aim of the training is to empower communities to be more self-reliant, to help protect the local natural environment, and to maintain cultural integrity.

SEM and Wongsanit Ashram group, which is alternative community that fuses Buddhism, spirituality, and ecological awareness, are working closely with the Assembly of the Poor. At the core of the Assembly are rural and urban poor from various provinces and regions, largely small farmers and agriculturists. But many non-governmental organizations, academia, students, and businesspersons are also part of it. The Assembly has held a series of non-violent demonstrations against the government's development strategy and against socioeconomic inequalities. Now the Assembly is promoting greater cooperation between rural and urban communities, and via the Midnight University, it is helping to empower marginalized and dispirited communities nationwide.

Needless to say, our network has actively combated consumerism and sought alternatives to it. At the individual level via, inter alia, SEM and TICD, we have organized numerous workshops and courses that seek to cultivate mindfulness, contentment, and compassion; that is, the antidotes to the acquisitiveness and selfishness that consumerism enthused. In our view, happiness arises from 'more being' not 'more having'.

At the community level, we advocate economic localization, which is based on empowerment and sustainable development. Through the courses and field activities of, for example, the Ashram group and TICD we have helped foster strong communities. In other words, communities that are by and large self-reliant, self-sufficient, and participatory; that live in harmony with the natural environment; and that foster the diversity of cultures, identities, and (as it turned out, more appropriate) lifestyles.

At the national level, we keep a wary eye on the government's economic and development policies, making sure that they are not implemented at great human and environmental costs. The protest over the construction of the PTT-UNOCALTOTAL gas pipeline from Burma to Siam is but one manifestation of our activities. Moreover, we try to hold transnational corporations accountable for their activities in Siam.

Lastly, at the international level, we have started the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) almost two decades ago. We urge Buddhists not only to sit for meditation but to get up and confront social suffering as well as to find out their causes and to overcome them nonviolently. We are part of many transnational alliances. We closely collaborate with other NGO movements that are scattered worldwide and maintain direct links with institutions such as Schumacher College in Britain and the Naropa University in the United States as well as Gandhian movement in India. We are helping to redefine progress and find ways to help re-member human solidarity that has been split by colonialism, imperialism, science, war, development, racism, and various other isms. These splittings and the hostility and antagonism that they entail may be healed or bridged by social engagement derived from spirituality.