

## Inner Peace and Outer Peace: A Buddhist Contemplative Perspective

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Abstract prepared for the 2008 Workshop on Humiliation and Violent Conflict, Columbia University, New York, December 11-12, 2008

### Abstract

This paper is about peace, humiliation, and conflict resolution from a contemporary Buddhist perspective.

To most Western intellectual tradition, as well as to common people, the word “Buddhism” means no more than a religious institution of withdrawal from social commitment and responsibility. Western people were not, however, the first to accused the Buddhists of retirement from the social world out of selfish introspection (meditation). The Chinese (*Wang Yangming/1472-1529*) were the first who charged that Buddhists were: “*afraid of the troubles involved in the relationships between father and son, ruler and subjects, and husband and wife; and therefore they [escaped] from these relationship*”.<sup>1</sup>

However, the recent works on Buddhism and its interaction with socio-political activism by Christopher S. Queen, Sally B. King,<sup>2</sup> and many others<sup>3</sup>, demonstrate that the reality of contemporary Buddhist practice is somewhat different from the rather negative perception reported above.

Whoever reflects on the Buddha’s biography, he or she would see that Buddha’s life did not end with his journey to enlightenment but in social uplifting. The Pāli original discourses reveal to students of Buddhism that the early Buddhist sermons were powerful forces in ancient Indian society – which they are until now. Such discourses address not only meditative instruction but also social, politico-economic philosophy, criminology,<sup>4</sup> human rights,<sup>5</sup> war and ecology.<sup>6</sup> The early discourses’ association with peace and non-violence is noteworthy in this regard.

In this paper I share my inner experience of contemporary Asian Buddhist views and understanding of peace and non-violent activities. I first raise critical questions first and then look for answers from a “Contemplative Perspective.” My critical questions are: What exactly is meant by inner peace and outer peace by Buddhist traditions? Is there any link between inner and outer peace? If so, how? Can inner peace bring outer peace and then transform this into world peace? Do Buddha’s moral and ethical values have a potential for peace? Other relevant questions – such as how do we apply non-violent theory (*ahimsa*) to the actual situation – will also be discussed in a substantive way.

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<sup>1</sup> Fung Yu-Lan. *A History of Chinese Philosophy: Vol.2* ( Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 610-11.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher S. Queen and Ballie B. King, ed. *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movement in Asia*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996). Christopher S. Queen, ed. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. (Boston: Wisdom Publication. 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Sulak Sivaraksa. *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision of Renewing Society*. (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> K.N Jayatiloke. *An Aspect of Buddhist Social Philosophy* (Kandy: BPS No 128/129 1969)

-----*Dhamma, Man , and Law* (Singapore : Buddhist Research Society, 1992)

-----and G.P. Malalasekera *Buddhism and Race* (UNESCO, 1958)

Ven. Pategama Gnanarama. *An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy*. (Singapore: Tisarana Buddhist Association, 1996)

<sup>5</sup> Damien V. Keown, Charles S. Prebish, and W. R. Husted, ed. *Buddhism and Human Rights* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998)

<sup>6</sup> Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, ed. *Buddhism and Ecology: Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997).