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RUNNING TIDE



Issue 35: Social Engagement

RUNNING TIDE

Running Tide offers a voice for faith and practice, as well as critical, existential and socially engaged enquiry within the broad framework of Pureland Buddhism.

We publish short articles, poetry, pictures, interviews, comment and Buddhist resource materials.

Opinions expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Amida Order, Amida Trust, or other associated organisations.

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EDITORIAL

A LOT HAS HAPPENED SINCE I STARTED PLANNING THIS edition of Running Tide: the run up to the EU referendum and the results; I have moved house; more recently, the attacks on the judiciary by the right-wing press; and by the time you read this, the United States will have a new president. The theme of “Socially Engaged Buddhism” seems even more relevant now than when I first thought of it.

We are very lucky in this issue to have articles by three esteemed Buddhist teachers. Dharmavidya has written about a Buddhist approach to economics and offers an alternative to the neo-liberal economics of the contemporary world. In a reprinted article, Sangharakshita offers his perspectives on the problems of our world and suggests how we might be able to change them. Finally, in a posthumous article reprinted from his website, Ken Jones gives his thoughts on popularising the Dharma. Ken Jones passed away in August 2015 and is lovingly remembered by all who knew him. We are grateful to Stuart McLeod for giving us permission to reprint this article.

These articles are joined by writing from Modgala and Satyavani. Modgala has worked on socially engaged projects around the world and writes here about her memories of Order member Amrita. Satya responds to Sangharakshita’s article and gives a Pureland flavour to Sangharakshita’s suggestions.

Thank you to all of the contributors, to John Croxon for finding the wonderful pictures, and to Aida Nakanwagi Lubega and Satya for proofreading the magazine.

I hope you enjoy this issue and I wish you a peaceful autumn. Namo Amida Bu.

—Sanghamitra Adrian Thompson

GARDENING THE JUNGLE: TOWARDS A BUDDHIST ECONOMICS

Dharmaviyda

THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL ATTEMPTS TO develop a Buddhist Economics. The best known is that of Schumacher, popularised by his book *Small is Beautiful*. None of these attempts appear yet to have arrived at a complete system. I do not think that I can arrive there either, but it is interesting to pursue some lines of thought that may point us in a useful direction eventually. The subject is tantalising but also often frustrating and the basic reason is human nature. There is always a tension between the ideal and the actual. It is very easy to say that when everybody is completely unselfish and fully community minded; has very few wants and is happy to share what they have; and lives a simple life and makes few demands then things will be very different from how they are today. Well, for sure! But this reckons without real people.

I think, for instance, of a Buddhist movement that I know of that experimented in its early days with an idealistic approach. Most of its members lived in communities. Living in community they had few individual economic needs. They supported the communities by starting up enterprises. These enterprises sold goods to the general public and did a good job. To the ordinary customer these shops appeared no different from any other in the high street, except, perhaps, that the staff were distinctly friendly and evidently on good terms with one another. Everybody in these enterprises was paid the same. It did not matter whether one was the manager or the cleaner, one took the same amount of money. So far so good.

However, over time, more and more members of the movement got married and had babies and did not want to live in community any more. Their family economic needs escalated and they could not manage on the standard wage. Also, there was a certain kind

of unfairness in people getting the same pay for different work. Bit by bit the original ideals got eroded. The enterprises continued, but they gradually gravitated to the same condition and modus operandi of other capitalistic ventures. There was a reversion to the norm and the norm is shaped by conventional economics for understandable reasons that have to do with human needs and desires.

I have also seen other kinds of utopian alternative communities. In the sixties and seventies there was a wave of such developments broadly following what we can call hippie principles. These communities were interesting experiences, but the vast majority of them were very short lived. They tried to do everything by consensus and consensus was very difficult to achieve so they often spent all their time in unproductive meetings. There was a revolt against the “Protestant work ethic” and so, often enough, very little work got done. A collection of people in which there is no authority can become rather insanitary. Those who were most sensitive to this problem soon found that they were the ones—the only ones—doing the most unpleasant cleaning jobs. So it went on. Not many people stayed.

Of this latter type of community, the ones that lasted longest were ones that had one or more charismatic leader figures who stayed with the project and had some strong ideological foundation. It did not seem to matter too much what the ideology was. It could be ecology and permaculture, or it could be Christian fundamentalism, or some worked-out form of anti-capitalism, or whatever. These two factors point us back to principles that seem to emerge from all of the literature on alternative communities. The ones that endure longest are those that approximate most closely to monasteries. A monastery has a strong ideology, order, hierarchy, division of labour and responsibility, and established ways for resolving issues of dispute and discipline. This list sounds like the very antithesis of a hippie community. However, monastic communities

have sometimes endured for centuries and been home to people for most of their lifetime.

In pre-communist China there were Buddhist monastic communities with several thousand inhabitants. By no means all of these people were monks. Most people were engaged in one or other of the various departments that regulated the economic life of the community—the farm, the guest department, trading activities, building and repairs, catering, and so on. The community revolved around the spiritual activity, the calendar of festivals, the religious services, and Dharma teachings. Some people lived in collective dormitories, some in family dwellings. Some meals were taken together in large refectories, others individually or in family. This was the kind of community where a person could live their whole life if they so chose. It was child friendly, economically productive, and gently disciplined. Also, as with Plato's Republic, the people who held the most responsible roles were those with fewest

personal possessions, most public lives and most demanding ethical discipline.

Another interesting feature of the old Chinese system was the fact that monks in the system could always go on walk-about. Even if one were a high ranking personage, it was possible to drop out for a while. You could adopt a new name and go wandering. As a monk, one could show up at any monastery and present oneself at the guest department. One would not be asked for a passport or papers, one would be shown to the visiting monk's hall and given a place, which meant an area where one could sleep and meditate. In the hall there was a tan, a raised platform, behind which was a cupboard. In the cupboard was one's bedding. At night one slept on a futon and in the day time one meditated in the same spot with the bedding packed away behind. And one was expected to work. It might begin with sweeping and polishing, keeping the hall clean. Then one might be moved on to more



Isolation, courtesy of Garrant M [Flickr] under CC BY-NC 2.0

exacting jobs or allocated to a work team in the fields or buildings.

In this way, a monk could become completely incognito. Nobody knew whether a visiting monk was a peasant who had put on the robe or an archbishop who was taking time out. You were a monk if you could get up at three thirty in the morning and sing the scriptures. It was soon apparent whether you were the real thing or not. If a visiting monk showed promise he might, after a while, be offered a post with more responsibility and might thereby become a member of the new community if he chose to stay. All roles of responsibility were reallocated every year. You might get reappointed to the same job, but there was certainly flexibility within the system and room for a person to progress through a range of roles and experience. The monks who left could wander the roads, retreat in the mountains, or go to another monastic community.

This Chinese example does, I think, offer a number of suggestive features. We can envisage such a situation where there exist a goodly number of communities and a population of people who live within them but also, sometimes, move between them. Here at Eleusis, on a much smaller scale, there is scope for people to join the community and also for people to come and go. Those who come and go in present circumstances are generally coming from and going back into some niche in the conventional job market, but if there existed a much larger number of communities a new possibility would open up of people who spent periods in community and periods travelling who never needed to go back into the conventional system. It does seem to me that any serious attempt to develop a Buddhist economic system would have to be based largely on developing new forms of community drawing on age old experience. Through the centuries Buddhists have been quite good at developing such community life.

So let me now look at this problem from

a slightly different angle. A distinction that has impressed me in this regard comes from A.T.Ariyaratne, the pioneer of the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka, who points out that in a society there is a formal and an informal economy. The formal system consists of government and private institutions. The informal consists of families, communities, associations, co-operative efforts and networks of various kinds. In a modern state there is a tendency for the latter to be ignored and the former to be regarded as the main substance of economic life. The economy is thought to consist primarily of the activities of formal institutions. Ariyaratne suggests that this prioritisation should be reversed. I would like to try to develop this idea further.

Let us start by reflecting upon the origin of the modern, formal economy. The modern world can be seen as starting with the French Revolution. This was a pivotal event in which principles of Reason displaced those of Community. The pre-revolutionary situation had become chaotic and corrupt and the French state was near to bankruptcy and at this juncture the revolution occurred and ushered in a completely new way of thinking about the state, the economy, and the individual citizen. Of course, what I have just said is an over-simplification. Not every country followed the example of France and it was not only what happened in France that shaped the modern world, but the French Revolution is a sufficiently dramatic historical landmark for us to use it to get a simplified sense of what modernity is about and why modern economics is as it is.

The revolution swept away all the complex forms of community relationships that had persisted since feudal times. The feudal system essentially regarded human society as one big family, whereas the new approach regarded it as one big mechanism. There are pros and cons to both systems and what we should, perhaps, be looking for is a way to get the best of both. In a certain way, I think that is what



the application of Buddhism to economics does suggest to be possible. Buddhism values both community and enterprise and does not see them as being mutually exclusive options. It sees a role for the local group, and also for the ruler, generally with the latter facilitating the former.

Let's go back to the issue of the formal and informal. Ariyaratne's suggestion is that it is the informal that is the most important and that the *raison d'être* of the formal systems should be to support, supply, foster, and enhance the informal. Thinking about how this might actually work is quite a challenge. It would certainly demolish many of the rational ideologies that currently dominate politico-economic debate. Rationalism rests upon a style of thinking that seeks to achieve justice by considering members of social categories as equivalent with one another, whereas community views each person and each group as having unique features. The two sets of ideas are as different as a plantation and a jungle.

Community is like a jungle in which a huge number of different species organically work out some kind of *modus vivendi*, whereas rationally organised society is like a plantation in which only one species is grown and it is organised in straight lines. Buddhist economics is much more like the jungle than the plantation.

However, having said this, Buddhist economics would not be as completely wild as the jungle. Buddhism does value cultivation. So what is the middle way? Perhaps we can think of the gardener who takes over a wilderness and gradually works with nature, restraining a little here, encouraging a little there, occasionally introducing a new species, noticing what does and does not thrive naturally, and always seeking beauty, harmony and fruitfulness—but with a light touch. Modern rational ideas of gardening start in the drawing room with a plan. The design is probably nowadays done on a computer. Then the structure is built, then plants are introduced to decorate the structure. This is rational gardening; it is not

what I am talking about. What I am talking about is more like what happens here at La Ville au Roi (Eleusis) where most of the work is done by Nature. The human element works with Nature. She throws up a stand of blackthorn and the humans come along and see that with a bit of judicious pruning it will be possible to carve out a pathway or a glade. The end result is neither something that follows a master plan nor a complete anarchy, but something in between.

Ariyaratne works in this way. In Sri Lanka there already exist thousands of villages. He and his teams of people are community developers. They enlist villages and gradually, bit by bit, introduce elements of co-operation and mutual aid into the way that these communities function, so that they can meet their collective needs in harmonious ways. Now in Sri Lanka this is possible because the background economy is fairly simple. If a village needs an access road, the villagers can meet and a few days later they are all out working on the project. You cannot do that in New York or London. In the so-called economically developed parts of the world, the formal systems have taken over. The room for informal activity has narrowed. However, it has not entirely disappeared. It may be a challenge for us to find scope for it.

When we talk about economics we can think about models of ideal economic systems or we can think about processes. The former provide us with a sense of a possible goal. Such a goal if we are talking about Buddhist economics would involve more community spiritedness and sharing, a greater emphasis upon quality than quantity, a balance between collectivism and individual responsibility, and cohesion provided by loyalty to Buddhist ethical and religious principles. It probably would substantially follow the adage that “small is beautiful,” because only in relatively small groups can individuals be known well enough. When persons are not known as persons, they become numbers or units and rational principles take over. This would mean that any large scale Buddhistic

system would actually have to be a kind of federation of hamlets.

However, before we go too far in the direction of modelling a supposedly perfect utopian end result, it is probably better to go to the issue of process. How do we start from here? Even if one is not actually living in a community, one can start thinking in that direction. Of course, in certain ways, we are all already living in communities. We can try to enhance the communities that we are already part of, following the example of Ariyaratne, even though this might be more difficult in the modern West than it is in rural parts of the “Third World.” But we can also be open to the possibilities of forming and experimenting with deliberate alternative communities constructed on Buddhistic lines.

I have spent much of my life involved with such communities. Some worked better than others. All have problems, but then life always does. Different communities tackle the problems in different ways. In the process we learn a great deal about ourselves and about human nature. Our ideals are challenged, not least by our own failure to live up to them. “With the ideal comes the actual” as it says in the text *Sandokai*. In involving ourselves in such projects we should be willing to be experimental. We can have the Dharma as our guide, but we have to find out what that means in practice and it is only through real experience that we arrive at the necessary wisdom.

All of this does involve unhooking ourselves from many of the values that dominate the conventional world these days. If the majority of people lived in communities the gross national product would mean very little since the majority of the economic life of the nation would never show up in it. Most action would be based on a generosity of spirit or, at least, upon a non-specific expectation of reciprocity. This, however, does not mean that people would be completely left to their own devices.

When people come to stay at Eleusis, they are generally willing sorts. However, naturally, they

do not know their way around. They do not know what needs doing, nor what would be useful. “What can I do to help and what is the priority?” is in their mind, but they need guidance. After a while they will start to see for themselves, but work needs co-ordination. It also needs love. It is only by generating the kind of culture in which we all feel appreciated by one another that the Dharma becomes manifest and good things start to happen in a spontaneous way.

Since “good things happening in a spontaneous way” is what we are looking for, it cannot be too much of a rational system. This means that a balance has to be struck between what seem like opposing rational principles. There has to be some authority, but with a lot of delegation. There has to be individual generosity and initiative with some direction and guidance. There needs to be appreciation and recognition without that becoming a competitively sought goal. All of this requires a certain wisdom from the more experienced members of the

community. There need to be gardeners in the jungle.

All the time we are working with the dynamic between the idealism of Buddhist principle and the reality of human nature, our own as much as that of the people who come attracted by the warmth and compassion that they experience in our communities, yet bringing with them all the attitudes that have been stamped into them by experience in the materialist world. Amida accepts foolish beings and it is by remembering this that we survive in the midst of this work of creating the Pure Land in the midst of greed, hate and delusion.

The fundamental principle for a Buddhist economics is to maintain the close connection between love and work, between generosity and effort, between saving all beings and walking the path, between faith in the Buddhas and willingness to be their hands and feet in the great work. Then we shall all become gardeners of the jungle. ■



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A BUDDHIST VIEW OF CURRENT WORLD PROBLEMS

Sangharakshita

I WAS POSTED TO INDIA AS A SIGNALS operator, and after the war I stayed on to spend the next twenty years in the East, seventeen of them as a Buddhist monk. During this time I had the opportunity—I might say I was under the obligation—of attending a large number of public meetings. It is probably fair to say that Indians have a positive weakness for public meetings. Very often these are open air meetings held late at night under the glare of arc-lights, and they go on and on. In fact, the bigger they are, and the longer they go on, the better. To be called a success a meeting needs to be distinguished by a long line of speakers, each speaking for at least an hour. I can remember on one of these occasions being enjoined, in an authoritative whisper from behind me as I rose to my feet, to “speak for at least two hours.”

People in India can be very generous with their time (and, it must be said, with other people's time as well), so I used to hear a lot of speeches. Some of the topics—and even their treatment—became very familiar to me indeed. For example, I got used to the idea that at some point during an evening of talks on Buddhist subjects you had a reasonable expectation of hearing a talk on Buddhism and world peace. This subject would come round regularly, and it didn't matter who was giving it, it was practically always the same talk.

First of all you would be treated to a graphic description of the terrible plight of mankind in the modern world, and the usual suspects would be rounded up. You would be reminded of the prevalence of flood, fire, pestilence, and war; then you would be led through the

various incontrovertible signs of a universal and unprecedented breakdown of moral and spiritual values, focusing in particular on the behaviour and attitudes of young people today. Then, when you were judged to be fully reconciled to an altogether bleak prospect culminating in nuclear holocaust and no solution in sight, Buddhism would be brought in to save the day. Buddhism, you would be told, teaches non-violence; it teaches peace, love, and compassion. If everybody in the world followed the teachings of the Buddha, you would have world peace and all our problems would be solved automatically. And that would be it—end of talk. Spontaneous applause would break out, the speaker would sit down, beaming with satisfaction, the audience would clap away, happy in the knowledge that there was hope for the world after all. And, of course, the world would go on just as before.

The problem with this sort of analysis of our situation is not that it isn't true. If everybody in the world meditated every day; tried to develop kindness, love, compassion, and joy; worked at the precepts; and followed the Noble Eightfold Path then—well, we wouldn't just have peace, we'd have heaven on earth. No, the problem with this line of argument is that it's an over-simplification of both problem and solution. In the abstract, it's beautiful, but that is where it remains: in the abstract.

Another big difficulty with talking about Buddhism and world peace is that Buddhists are not the only people with values that support world peace. If everyone in the world followed the teachings of Jainism, or Taoism, or certain forms of Hinduism, you would still get world peace, without any need to mention Buddhism. There's no need, in fact, to bring in any religion at all—religions don't have a monopoly on peaceful values. If everybody followed the teachings of Plato, or even Bertrand Russell, you would have world peace on the spot.

So if one is not simply going to offer Buddhism as a universal panacea for the world's ills, what does it offer? One cannot talk about the Buddhist view of world problems because there isn't an

Sangharakshita, “A Buddhist View of Current World Problems,” in *What is the Sangha? The Nature of Spiritual Community*. Copyright © 2000 by Sangharakshita. Reprinted by permission from Windhorse Publications.

official Buddhist party-line on these or any other issues. All one is left with is a Buddhist view of world problems. One can talk about world problems only from one's individual standpoint. And as a Buddhist standpoint, its validity can only be measured by how deeply one has been influenced by Buddhist teachings.

There is still, however, the question of what an individual Buddhist can have to say that is truly relevant to world problems. All I can say for myself is that the work I have engaged in as a Buddhist has arisen, to some considerable extent, out of the view I take of current world problems. This topic is not of academic or peripheral interest to me. In approaching it I am in some sense trying to make clear the *raison d'être* of my own existence as a practical working Buddhist: that is, as a Buddhist not just inwardly, in faith and conviction, but also as far as outward activities are concerned. My view of current world problems constitutes a sort of philosophical autobiography, even a confession of faith. It will, I hope, show where I stand and perhaps, to some extent, why I stand there.

We can probably all make our own list of world problems, and we hardly need reminding of them: most of them have been with us since the dawn of history, and the news industry keeps us abreast of those that are of more recent provenance. What is new about the problems of today is the very fact that we hear about them. They are global in character, world-scale problems. It really is as though we live in a global village, and although this is a matter of common knowledge, even a truism, it perhaps does not sink as decisively and deeply into our awareness as it should.

The result of "globalization" is that all world problems affect all of us in some way, either directly or indirectly, either potentially or in actuality. Not very long ago, the vast majority of people knew absolutely nothing about the problems of people who lived just a few valleys away, let alone people on the other side of the world. Catastrophic events hardly impinged at all on the lives of those who were not directly

and immediately involved. Even in a country ravaged by years of terrible warfare there would be peasants within its borders going about their everyday lives knowing nothing whatsoever about it.

But not any more. We have the world's problems at our fingertips. The real problem for us is how to respond to them personally. How do we ensure that every individual citizen in the world grows up healthy and sound in body and mind? What can be done about the apparently increasing incidence of mental illness in the West? What is the role of women—and what is the role of men—in modern society? How do people with jobs avoid making themselves ill through overwork? How do people without work make the best use of their enforced leisure? How do we ensure that people are not discriminated against or abused on account of their racial origin? How do we reconcile the claims of law and order with those of individual freedom? How do we reconcile the conflicting interests of sovereign nation states? How can we all get along with one another?

Fresh outbreaks of hostilities between rival factions in some former European colony, food-shortages and unrest in some ex-communist state, inner-city deprivation and crime, drug-dependency and alcoholism, child-labour, racial violence, industrial pollution, nuclear accidents, disease, drought, famine, starvation, "ethnic cleansing"—these are just a few of the problems and crises that confront us, or at least pluck at our sleeves every now and then, and are recorded for us on the television and analysed for us in the newspapers. No doubt there are many others, equally pressing, which I have failed to mention. We all have our own pet world problems which seem more crucial than others. But the central problem for all of us is: how do we ourselves, individually, react to whatever we perceive to be the world's problems?

Sometimes our initial reaction will be very strong. For a while we may get quite carried away by our indignation: we are outraged; this should never be allowed to happen; something

must be done; those responsible—if particular perpetrators can be identified—should be brought to justice; and so on. And we may be anxious on our own account, if the problem seems likely to affect us directly at some point. In the end, however, when that initial reaction has exhausted itself, we are overtaken overpowered—by a different kind of reaction: helplessness. The problem is too big, too involved, for us to do anything about it. So we try to forget about it and get on with our own personal lives, and deal with our own personal problems. We are very sorry that others suffer, but at least we can try to enjoy our own lives.

This is, I suspect, how many people react to world problems. However, my own view is that such an attitude of withdrawal from public concerns into purely personal ones is one that is not worthy of a human being—not worthy, at least, of someone who is trying to be a human being in the full sense of the term. It represents an abdication of responsibility. So, given that one is helpless to effect any kind of solution to these large issues, and given too that one can't turn aside and ignore them either, what is one to do?

World problems, by their very nature, are essentially group problems, as they always have been. What is new today is the size of the groups involved and the destructive power available to them. But whatever their size, the problems arising from these groups cannot be solved on the group level. All that can be achieved on the level of the group is a precarious balance of power between conflicting interests. And that balance, as we know only too well, can be disturbed at any moment.

The only hope for humanity is therefore necessarily a long-term solution, involving more people becoming clearer about how they need to develop as individuals and co-operating in the context of spiritual communities in order to make, in their various ways, a significant impact on the world, or on “the group.” The alternatives before us are, in my opinion, evolution—that is, the higher evolution of the individual—or extinction. That would be my overall diagnosis

of the situation facing us. As for practical ways to effect a remedy, I would prescribe four courses of action for the individual to undertake:

1. Self-Development

This means essentially the development of the mind, the raising of consciousness to ever higher levels of awareness. Human development essentially consists in this, and for most people the route to achieving it is through meditation. The practice of meditation essentially involves three things. Firstly, it involves concentration, the integration of all our energies, conscious and unconscious. Secondly, it involves the raising of consciousness to supra-personal states, leaving the ego-realm for higher, wider, even cosmic dimensions. And thirdly, it involves contemplation: the direct insight of the uncluttered mind—the mind in a state of higher consciousness—into the ultimate depths of existence, the seeing of reality face to face.



Crowd, courtesy of James Crowland [Flickr] under CC BY 2.0

Meditation is concerned with achieving all this. There are many different methods; you just need to find a teacher who will introduce you to one or two of them. After that, you stick with the methods and practise them regularly. That's all there is to it, really.

The more demanding aspect of self-development consists in what one does with the rest of one's life in order to support one's meditation practice. One will look after one's health. One will simplify one's life as far as possible, dropping all those activities, interests, and social contacts which one knows to be a waste of time. One will try to base one's life, and in particular one's livelihood, on ethical principles. One will make time—perhaps by working part-time—for study; for study of the Dharma, of course, but also for study of other subjects of general human interest: philosophy, history, science, comparative religion. Finally, one will find opportunities to refine and develop one's emotions, especially through the fine arts.



Self-development always comes first. However active you might be in all sorts of external areas—political, social, educational, or whatever—if you are not trying to develop yourself, you are not going to be able to make any truly positive contribution to anything or anyone.

2. Join a Spiritual Community

This does not necessarily mean joining some kind of organized body or living under the same roof as other aspiring individuals. It simply means being in personal, regular, and substantial contact with others who are trying to develop as individuals. It means being able to enjoy, and seeking out, not just the psychological warmth of the herd, but the challenge of real communication, genuine spiritual exchange.

3. Withdraw Support from All Groups or Agencies that Actually Discourage, Directly or Indirectly, the Development of the Individual

Groups derive their strength from their members, so it is a basic first step to weaken the power of the group by removing yourself from among its contributing members. Otherwise you are pulling in two directions at once: on the one hand trying to be an individual, and on the other lending your support to the very forces that hinder this process. If you wanted to take this principle to its ultimate conclusion you would withdraw support from the state, as the ultimate group of groups, though this would clearly be extremely difficult, however desirable.

4. Encourage the Development of Individuality within All the Groups to Which One Unavoidably Belongs

It may be that one cannot help having a circle of friends or acquaintances, whether at home or at work, who are not interested in any kind of self-development. One may have to remain very nominally a member of a group. Still, one



can stand up for what one believes in, and speak up whenever it is appropriate to do so. It is always possible to act in accordance with one's ideals even when others cannot—or do not appear to—understand what one is doing. The way to disrupt a group is simply to encourage people within it to think for themselves, develop minds of their own. So in the context of the group, one can still work to undermine it. Even in the enemy camp, so to speak, one need not surrender one's individuality.

These, then, are the four strategies to get under way in order to begin to make a meaningful impact on world problems. A network of spiritual communities of all kinds, many of whose members would be in contact with one another, could exert a significant degree of influence, such as might—just possibly—shift the centre of gravity in world affairs. Spiritual communities have had a crucial impact in the past, and they may, with sufficient vitality, do so again.

It doesn't matter how humble a level we are operating at, or how undramatic our work may be. The true individual is not so much the king of the jungle as the indefatigable earthworm. If enough earthworms burrow away under the foundations of even the most substantial building, the soil begins to loosen, it starts to crumble away, the foundations subside, and the whole building is liable to crack and collapse. Likewise, however powerful the existing order may seem, it is not invulnerable to the undermining influence of enough individuals working—whether directly or indirectly—in co-operation.

A spiritual community is necessarily small, so the best we can hope for is a multiplicity of spiritual communities, forming a sort of network through personal contact between their members. A silent, unseen influence is exerted in this way, which we must hope will be able, at some point, to shift the centre of gravity in world affairs from the conflict of groups to the co-operation of communities. If this were achieved, if the influence of the spiritual community were to outweigh that of the group, then humanity as a whole would have passed into a new, higher stage of development, a kind of higher evolution as I like to call it—into what we might even describe as a fifth period of human history.

Such a shift in the governing values of the world is probably all that can save us from extinction as a species in the not very distant future. There are certainly signs of hope, but there is also perhaps little time left. In this situation it becomes the duty of every thinking human being to take stock of his or her position, and the responsibilities that it throws up. We have to appreciate that it is, without exception, the most important issue we shall ever face, either individually or collectively. It is certainly more important than any merely religious question, anything that concerns Buddhism in the sense of a formal or established religion. It concerns both the purpose and the very survival of human life. ■

RESPONSE TO SANGHARAKSHITA'S “A BUDDHIST VIEW OF CURRENT WORLD PROBLEMS”

Satyavani Robyn

IN THE PREVIOUS ARTICLE, SANGHARAKSHITA lists a few of the problems that are facing humanity today and his suggestions for solving them.

The focus of these suggestions, especially in the “self-development” category, tends towards “self-power” (at least to this “other-power” trained Buddhist!) Sangharakshita is saying, “Try really hard in your meditation practice, and you will become a better person who is then more able to do good.”

What is a more Pureland perspective on how we can approach current world problems, both as individuals and as a sangha? What a huge question! The size of the question mirrors the size and complexity of the problem—and, as Quan Shi Yin discovered when she attempted to answer the cries of the world, we all may become overwhelmed when we truly engage with the scope and depth of the world’s troubles. Having said that, we need to start somewhere . . . and so, as a foolish and limited being, here are my tentative alternative suggestions:

Take Refuge in Amida: Say the Nembutsu

When we say *Namo Amida Bu*, we are connecting with a power much greater than us that will give us the courage, the wisdom and the heart to do whatever little things we are able to do. Most of us are only able to take little actions, but little actions do make a difference. Small loving acts can have large consequences: for instance, a smile might stop someone in the middle of their plans to harm themselves or others. Small actions also add up over time and may inspire others to join us and contribute their own little actions. The nembutsu infuses us with faith and this helps us to be less selfish and less afraid as we act. The nembutsu offers

us a source of nourishment, so we don’t have to worry about shattering into pieces—Amida has our back. The nembutsu reminds us that we are foolish beings, especially when things are going well and we start to think we’ve got the hang of something! The nembutsu points towards a permanence that exists underneath the chaos and impermanence—a thread of faith that holds us steady (or at least steady-ish).

Strengthen Your Connection with Sangha

There is power in numbers. Taking refuge in our sangha can keep us on the right path when we’re in danger of wandering off. It also means that we can join together and take action as a group—a silent sitting protest on your own in the middle of a city may go unnoticed, but if you take twenty of your friends. . . . I would like to include strengthening the connections between various sanghas of all Buddhists, and the interfaith sangha of those of all faiths. Sangharakshita agrees, and says: “A spiritual community is necessarily small, so the best we can hope for is a multiplicity of spiritual communities, forming a sort of network through personal contact between their members.” We won’t always agree about everything, but hopefully we can find some common ground. It’s easy to underestimate the effect that a small group of faith-filled people can have on the world.

Be as Honest As You Can

We are foolish beings. Even when we think we are doing things purely for the sake of others, if we look more closely we will often be caught up in unconscious selfish motivations. Maybe it’s really important that we look virtuous to others, or maybe we make ourselves feel safe by spending time around people who are more chaotic than we are. Maybe we are so busy making donations, or helping refugees that we become blind to all the damage we’re causing in other areas of our lives. Sangha



can help us to be honest with ourselves, as we speak openly with our trusted friends and listen to their feedback, especially when we don't like what they're saying. Taking refuge in Amida also helps—knowing that we are loved just as we are can give us the courage to have a more honest look at our shortcomings. We might not be able to do very much about these shortcomings, but having them out in the light is much safer than letting them rumble away out of our sight where they are likely to cause more damage.

Don't Wait until You Are Enlightened
Before You Start Acting Compassionately

After some brutal self-honesty, we might think it safer that we rub off a few of our rougher edges before we offer our help. Maybe it's best to finish this course first, or read that book, or do another five years of therapy. . . . As Dharmavidya warns in part nine of his commentary on Summary of Faith and Practice,

“If one puts personal healing ahead of refuge one is, in a certain way, indulging in self-idolatry.”¹ He points out that we are unlikely to ever reach the end of our karma, and to be overly distracted by the project of “sorting ourselves out” simply takes our energy away from the world where it might be more usefully employed. We need to find a way of coming to terms with our imperfections, and choose to do things that we are more or less capable of doing right now.

Don't Feel Responsible for the Whole
World

We can easily become overwhelmed by the huge amount of suffering in the world, even if we are taking refuge in Amida. It is important to remember that we are not Amida! We are only foolish beings, each doing our little bit. Nobody expects us to do it singlehandedly. I remember Dharmavidya talking about doing the washing up one day because “it was there

and it needed to be done”, but when I asked him how we know when to stop he admitted to leaving the porridge saucepan for someone else. We can also leave the porridge pan when we are tired, or when we run out of time.

I also find the Bodhisattva vows helpful when it comes to tackling impossible tasks:

Innumerable are sentient beings, we vow to save them all.

Inexhaustible are deluded passions, we vow to transform them all.

Immeasurable are the Dharma teachings, we vow to master them all.

Infinite is the Buddha’s way, we vow to fulfil it completely.²

Each line is a paradox—both an impossibility (we can’t count sentient beings, we can’t measure the Buddha’s way) and a vow to smash this impossibility into bits (we will keep going until we save every being; we will travel to the very end of the measureless way of the Buddha). These lines help me to somehow simultaneously orient towards myself towards infinite suffering, whilst acknowledging the enormity of the task and not beating myself up when I realise I haven’t quite transformed all my passions just yet!

Open Yourself up To Love

The essential nature of all Bodhisattvas is a great loving heart and all sentient beings constitute the object of its love

. . . Therefore, all Bodhisattvas, in order to emancipate sentient beings from misery, are inspired with great spiritual energy and mingle themselves in the filth of birth and death.

—Nagarjuna

We’ve gone in a circle back to my first suggestion—say the nembutsu, and open yourself to Amida’s love. If you can let go of

ego bit by bit, you will become a funnel and Amida’s love will stream out of you and keep on streaming.

Sangharakshita ends his article with a warning:

Such a shift in the governing values of the world is probably all that can save us from extinction as a species in the not very distant future. There are certainly signs of hope, but there is also perhaps little time left. In this situation it becomes the duty of every thinking human being to take stock of his or her position, and the responsibilities that it throws up.

As Pureland Buddhists we are well-suited to living in such a degenerate age: the time of Mappo. When we take a good look at the world around us and we reflect on our own fallibilities and our own part in what is unfolding, what are our responsibilities?

By the grace that I receive through Amitabha’s vows

May I be moved to deeds for the benefit of all.⁴

It’s as simple and as complicated as that. ■

NOTES

1. Dharmavidya, “Summary of Faith and Practice: Commentary Part Nine,” La Ville au Roi (Eleusis), 21 March 2016, <http://eleusis.ning.com/group/buddhism/forum/topics/summary-of-faith-practice-commentary-part-nine>.

2. “Bodhisattva Vow,” *Nien Fo Book* (Order of Amida Buddha, 2015), 14.

3. Nagarjuna, *A Treaty on the Transcendentality of Bodhicitta* (Nanjo No. 1304), quoted and translated in Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, (London: Luzac and Company, 1907), 292–293.

4. “Inspiration by Grace” *Nien Fo Book* (Order of Amida Buddha, 2015), 13.

AN ACTIVIST'S TOOL BOX FOR POPULARISING THE SOCIAL DHARMA

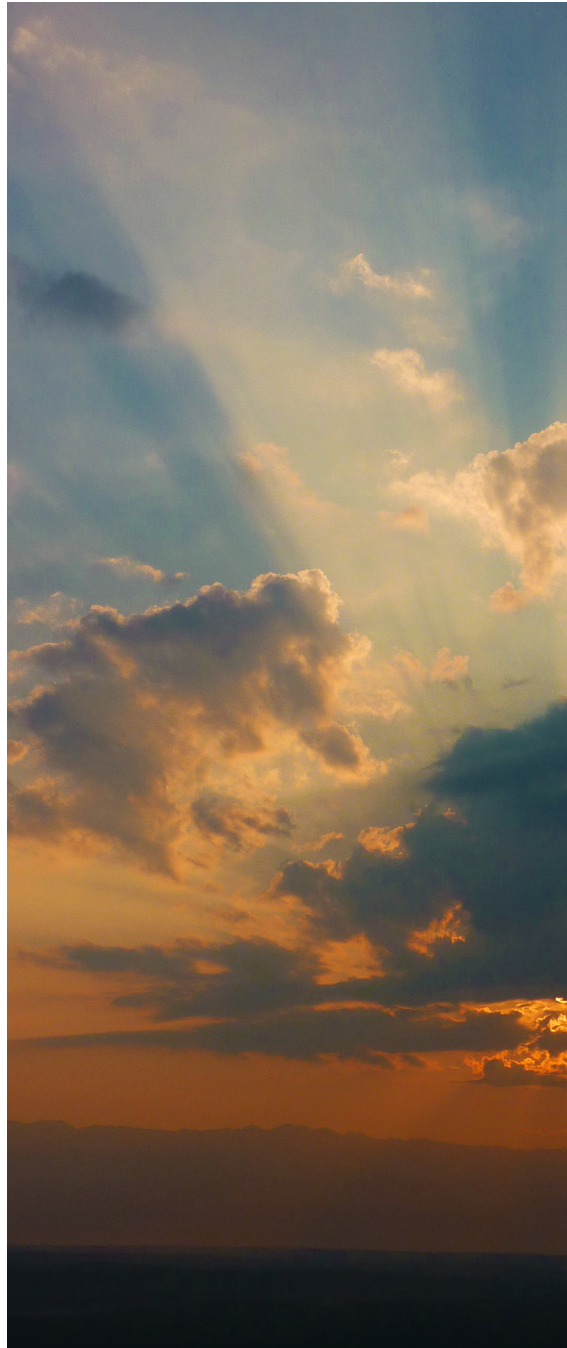
Ken Jones

THIS IS AN ATTEMPT TO COMPILE A resource for use in drafting street leaflets, press releases, media interviews and the like. I have attempted to isolate for convenience a number of “themes”—though they are, of course, all interconnected. This is intended as an ongoing project and my hope is that this will give our drafters at least a start in preparing material on whatever issue might confront them.

We need to express our Dharma in brief, attractive, and interesting ways that are readily comprehensible in terms of readers’ and listeners’ own common experience. This was the method originally used by the Buddha. So often in the sutras he begins by finding out his questioner’s background and adjusting his response accordingly. Subsequently a vast abstract and codified edifice was built out of his response. It is of little value for us to proclaim Buddhist principles like non-violence or compassion as if their value was self-evident to all. For the “outsider” this is no more than well-worn religious dogma or, at best, the kind of impractical and unrealistic idealism to be expected from the likes of us. On the other hand we also need to go beyond the hackneyed phraseology of the general run of left-wing, pacifist, or environmentalist leaflets. We need to strike a different chord.

Our problem as political popularisers is that both our diagnosis and remedy for the world’s ills are so breathtakingly radical that many who do sympathise with them may find them too unrealistic. And again and again we need

Reprinted with permission from Ken Jones, “An Activist’s Tool Box for Popularising the Social Dharma,” on *Ken Jones Zen*, www.kenjoneszen.com/buddhism-and-social-engagement/an_activists_tool_box.



Sunrise, courtesy of Sean MacEntree [Flickr] under CC BY3.0



both to give due prominence to social issues, whilst at the same time going back to their profound delusive origins. In short, we have to have a distinctively Buddhist message whilst at the same time retaining popular credibility. The encouraging thing is that at least we are endeavouring to obtain for the very first time a public hearing for a Buddhism which does not stop short at personal problems, which embraces the whole of suffering, and for which the political is personal and the personal political.

The Four Noble Political Truths: “Thus have I heard...”

First is the truth that individual suffering and delusion are socially supercharged. Collectively we commit immense follies that, if committed individually, would be pathological.

Secondly is the truth that the forces that drive history and politics are ultimately—but not the same as—those that characteristically drive the individual person. The latter experiences a profound sense of lack arising from the impermanence and insubstantiality of this flimsy self. Part of the social response to this has been to bond with other individuals to create a belongingness identity. It may be our race, our nation, our religion, our social class or whatever.

This collective identity is reinforced by emphasizing the difference of other comparable groupings—and, better still, our superiority—and, better still, the threat that they pose to us. Ideologies add a gutsy righteousness to this black-and-white picture. Well researched hates enable us ethically to project all our rancour and frustration onto them. Hence the savage warfare, heartless economic exploitation and ravaged environment which occupy such a large part of human history. Hence the ease with which former neighbours and schoolmates have slaughtered one another in the Balkans and countless other killing fields. And this is also an easy way to win elections.

The above process I call antithetical bonding—the heart of social delusion and the Buddhist

building block of history and society. These two long words are easy to understand; every citizen disgusted with conventional politics knows what they mean.

The third political truth is that there is a way out of social suffering. Reformers, radicals and revolutionaries have been telling us this for centuries. But the results have at best been mixed and at worst disastrous. We now have all the material resources to provide every citizen of our planet with a decent basic standard of living, but we are unable to do this. The latest ideology, free market free-for-all capitalism, is actually making the majority of the world's people poorer, but it provides a rationale for the greedy consumerism of a minority which is wrecking the planet. In short there must be something else, something indispensable, to finding our way out of social suffering.

Fourthly, there is the truth that we need cut the roots of our social problem, the roots of aggressiveness, acquisitiveness, and ignorance as to

what we are really up to and why. We need to expose and wither those roots by creating a radical culture of awakening. This would be a culture in which the work of contemplative enquiry, alone and with others, is no less important than earning a living, raising a family, and keeping physically healthy. This would not heal our divisions overnight, but it would begin to dissolve the underlying bloody mindedness that makes them so intractable. It would nurture wisdom and compassion, and a host of skilful means. Without these resources we cannot build the socially just and ecologically sustainable global commonwealth, which is the collective expression of enlightenment, and which, in turn, would provide for all a positive environment for spiritual growth.

A Tool Box of Socially Engaged Buddhist Themes

1. Buddhism is about getting to the roots of the world's problems, going much deeper



Frost, courtesy of Conal Gallagher [Plick] under CC BY 2.0

than the politicians of all parties. Most ordinary people would probably agree that, at bottom, it is deep seated rancour, greed, and ignorance that fire up the world's follies (that is, "The Three Fires" of traditional Buddhist teaching).

2. The origins of the greed and aggressiveness in the world can be traced back, in the final analysis, to insecurity and fear, in both individuals and in whole cultures and societies, which may feel threatened and exploited, and lash out in rage and frustration. It could be an individual playground bully, or it could be a whole culture of desperate terrorism. Instead of just labelling individuals or societies or religions as "evil" it is more helpful to search for the origins of that so-called "evil" and do something to remedy them. In fact, you don't need to be a Buddhist to understand this. This is what historian Richard Overy had to say, in the Guardian of 20th March:

It is a profound irony that Blair has helped to defuse the Ulster crisis by the very means he has abandoned in his crusading zeal against the world enemy. Terrorists do not blow people up just because they are nihilistic thugs. Terrorism is born of fear, resentment and powerlessness in the face of the massive power and cultural expansion of the west; it is about real issues for those who perpetrate its acts of violence. Palestinians dies because they want to free Palestine. Understanding those issues on their own terms and adjusting our politics in order to do so does not mean that we endorse violence. ¹

We can never win a "war" against international terrorism. What we can do is to gradually eliminate its breeding grounds, reducing its irreconcilable core to a policing and civil justice problem.







Natural Patterns courtesy of Rosmarie Voegtli [500px] under CC BY3.0

3. We need to expose the destructive futility of simplistic black-and-white views of world problems. It might be the Bush's "Evil Empire" versus the "Axis of Evil" of Osama bin Laden, or a Tory or Labour spokesperson being absolutely right about everything and claiming the other side to be comprehensively wrong. No wonder so many voters are disillusioned with party politicians' childish opportunism and deceitful spinning of the truth. The deeply corrupting effects of "spin" offer an excellent illustration of why we should uphold the precept on truthfulness. And any issue of any of the popular tabloids vividly illustrates how readily bloody minded prejudice can be whipped up (as against asylum seekers, for example). However, it is of course important also not to give credence to the common view "that one is as bad as the other—they're all tarred with the same brush". The foregoing is not to imply that we should not choose to lend support to one party in a conflict (whatever its flaws) and not just sit on the fence. The Israel/Palestine conflict is an obvious example.

4. The black-versus-white, us-versus-them mentality leads all too readily to violence. It is not effective simply to preach non-violence as a self-evident truth. Many decent people may be opposed to violence, but may feel that there is no alternative. We need to explain that not only does violence kill a lot of people, it is also stupid. After years of tit-for-tat terrorism and wars of attrition, adversaries usually have to sit down and negotiate how they can best live together. Northern Ireland is a well known case in point. And almost everyone is agreed that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict will eventually have to be resolved by negotiating a settlement which establishes a viable Palestinian State with guarantees for Israel's security. Finally, in my view preaching absolute pacifism will certainly reduce our credibility (as will any such ideological stance). Thus, in Network of Engaged Buddhist's Iraq War press release I wrote that, "We need policies and resources to support

and enable people of the growing number of collapsed and anarchic states—mediation, empowerment, aid, and the judicious and protective use of force if needs be.”

5. In place of the “us-against-them” mentality we need a bridge-building mentality. The majority of the world’s peoples are crying out for social justice. We need to turn round existing free-for-all economics, in which those that already have are given even more, and the poor grow poorer.

6. Above all, we have to raise the question that no conventional politician dare touch. First, the whole of the world’s population cannot enjoy the living standards of the richest countries, because planetary resources simply cannot sustain such a scenario. Secondly, seemingly endless economic growth in a finite planet is a nonsense. Time is running out. How do we dismantle consumerism and the growth economics that sustains it? This is the political agenda which we need to set. Not only is it the fundamental social question, but it also engages deeply with questions of craving, suffering, lack, and what our lives should be about.

7. Fundamental to our message is the argument that our social problems are ultimately human ones, requiring a regime of inner work, of meditative exploration and resolution. At the same time—and not least to retain credibility—we need to argue also that

radical structural and institutional changes are no less essential to secure world peace, social justice, and planetary sustainability. However, in our work with fellow activists it is the “inner-work” argument that must be won, to which the above third political truth refers. For example, we can open up many different kinds of discussion pointing in that direction; we can explore with fellow activists the inner difficulties they experience in terms of frustration, alienation, and burn-out; and we can explain why Buddhist activists meditate.

8. Finally, just as traditional individual practice has been inspired by the ideal of enlightenment, we also need to offer a comparable social perspective—a Bodhisattva road map to the future. In my *New Social Face of Buddhism* I have proposed the development of a radical culture of awakening as an essential underpinning to the global green commonwealth to which so many now aspire. I do not think it is difficult to engage people’s imagination with this—the idea, for example, of a daily inner-work workout is comparable to yoga or other keep-fit session, as a means of keeping socially “fit” for the ethically-motivated work of building a better world. ■

NOTES

1. Riahcrd Overy, “History will damn them,” *Guardian*, Saturday 20 March, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2004/mar/20/iraq.iraqi>.



A SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHIST'S JOURNEY

Modgala Duguid

This article is dedicated in loving memory of my Dharma sister Amrita Dhammika, who died in Zambia ten years ago, and to Ken Jones, who died last year, a friend on the path of Socially Engaged Buddhism.

MY JOURNEY IN SOCIALLY ENGAGED Buddhism began in my early forties when I was rethinking my life and turning towards Buddhism. In the early 1990s, I was deeply saddened by the war in Bosnia. To this one-time flower child of the sixties, who had been utterly opposed to the Vietnam war and conscious of the nuclear threats, this war in Europe led me to sad disillusionment with the world and in humanity. There was no humanity in the stories coming out of Bosnia.

I was an Amida psychology student when

the first chair of Amida's Trustees and one of my fellow students went out to Sarajevo in 1996 to see if Amida Trust could offer any help. Because of this, I started to become deeply involved with Amida Trust and, as I did so, my Buddhist consciousness deepened too. Within a couple of years, I ordained with Dharmavidya in the Amida Order and gave my life to doing the Buddha's work, which to me means social engagement.

In 1998, apart from Ken Jones' "Network of Engaged Buddhists," most Buddhist groups in the UK did not focus on social engagement. The Amida Trust was formed to bring together Buddhists who were concerned about the suffering in the world about them. In 1998, Dharmavidya initiated a training in his French retreat centre for Buddhists looking for an "activist life" and the first ever Activist Week took place in Amida France (which has since been renamed Eleusis). During the Activist Week there were many discussions, exercises, and finally a chance to formally ordain in the

Amida Order. One of my fellow travellers was Linda Dhammika, soon to be renamed Amrita. I would like to share some reflections on this Activist Week from my forthcoming book:

. . . We are joined by several other aspirants who are intrigued by this retreat; want to help, or be helped; or who want to learn more about the possibilities of an activist lifestyle. We all are looking for something that takes us beyond sitting on our cushions in meditation and to offer practical help to people suffering in this world. Embodying all our hopes is Linda. The Linda whose letter I had uncovered earlier in the year asking for help from Amida Trust for her project in Zambia. Fortunately the timing was right for her: firstly to meet with David to discuss possibilities and now to come to this retreat. She is looking for support for her project.

Linda is tall, thin, and very angular. She fizzes with a powerful, driving energy keen to push people into supporting her project. She is an evangelist, telling, at every opportunity, the story of HIV and AIDS in Africa. She wants money. She wants medicines. She wants people. She is an ardent letter writer seeking help especially money and medicines from every possible source. She is also a devoted Buddhist . . .

. . . We have some wonderful and challenging group sessions discussing various aspects of activism. We share many of our hopes and fears and limitations. Privately, in a pair, or in a small group, I can share my aspirations deeply, but still I have great difficulty speaking in full group sessions. All too often, fear overcomes me and I cannot interact much. And when I do my voice often comes out quiet and slurred or disappears off the register as I try to share.

I know I must be able to speak out



about poverty and oppression and give a voice to those who are unheard. My heart goes out to the disposed and beleaguered. I know how it feels to suffer loss, fear, and violence. But this is a double-edged sword. These are the things that hinder my speaking out. My compatriots on this Activist Week see and sympathise with my struggles.

I have to find a voice . . .

. . . It is the night before the vow taking ceremonies. I know I will take the Bodhisattva vows. My heart has led me here and I am determined to be a force for good. However, making such vows in front of others is scary for me. These vows are all encompassing. They will rule my life.

Although we can't speak to people from other groups during this exercise, we are allowed to talk to our companion. Linda and I talk nearly all night, sharing about our lives, hopes and fears.



A deep bond is forged that night between Linda and myself. Our friendship will only be severed by her death . . .

. . . We discuss the deep implications of the Bodhisattva precepts.

My decision regarding the Bodhisattva vows has been made already. The vows address the challenges that could limit me. I see that these vows explain why I had left home and taken up this path with Amida. Each of the vows holds deep meaning for me. Linda also sees how they can help her face up to her limitations, the implications of them, and the challenges they offer her. We have both gone through refuge ceremonies, so we understand the power of making public our vows. We know these Bodhisattva precepts are right for us to take.

At the ordination ceremony I was given the name Modgala which means “to sing out with spiritual joy.” Everyone laughed. They had seen

my struggles to find a voice. This name would be a resource and reminder to help me on my journey.

After these intense months of Buddhist training in Amida France and afterwards in Newcastle, my first posting was to Zambia where, together with Amrita, I worked and learnt and tried to help the people suffering from the ravages of AIDS and the other diseases that plagued them.

It was through Amrita I met Ken Jones. I went with her to Buddhafield, the Triratna tradition’s summer festival, and linked up with Ken Jones and The Network of Engaged Buddhists. Here I found more social activist Buddhists and friends with whom I shared my stories of my work within Amida Trust, offered workshops, and learnt together. I always enjoyed working with Ken. Ken was another inspiration for my life, offering another view of social engagement. Ken shared his experience and inspiration in workshops for our India volunteers before we went back to Delhi and Tamil Nadu in the wake of the Boxing Day Tsunami.

In the ensuing years, my travels eventually took me to Sarajevo and then on to India where we set up the India project—Sahishnu developed the project that is now led by members of the local community overseen by with support from members of the Amida Order. I spent many years going to demonstrations, supporting organisations trying to bring peace, running a chaplaincy tent at music festivals, and finally hosting Amida London events in Sukhavati, our London centre which was sold to buy Amida Mandala in Malvern. Nowadays, I take back the experience and understandings gained from the different roles I have had into many Buddhist, Interfaith and Governmental organisations. ■

You can read more about the Zambia project in Modgala Duguid’s book *You Might As Well Die Here As Anywhere*.

Lake Suwa

Shinano Province



The original and sacred vows,
Are the unique and essential grace,
By which to enter the Pure Land;
Therefore, with body, speech and mind,
We are devoted to the teaching,
that all may attain the state of bliss.