

BUDDHIST RESPONSES TO MODERN VIOLENCE STORYTELLING – STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS – ETHICAL PRAXIS

Published in *ReVision* (A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation)
Fall 2003, Volume 26 Number 2

by Jonathan S. Watts

Introduction

While religion is often associated today with flashes from the mass media of fundamentalist groups' extreme acts of politically driven violence, there have been for the greater part of the modern period significant peace movements initiated and led by religious organizations. When we do associate religion with peace, however, we often think of the simplistic platitudes offered by religious teachers, such as "turn the other cheek" or "peace is the only way." Buddhism often appears like this with its ancient commandment to harm not even the smallest insect and the more contemporary face of the Dalai Lama waging a seemingly naive campaign of non-violence against the Chinese control of Tibet. If we examine more deeply religious teachings, and in this case Buddhist ones, concerning peace and non-violence, is it possible to discover something more muscular, more sophisticated, and more pro-active than these surface images?

From February 5-9, 2003, a small group of socially engaged Buddhists assembled in Chiang Mai, Thailand to work on this question. The result of our investigations was that Buddhism, at least, has a compelling form of praxis by which to confront the problem of violence in the contemporary world. This praxis does not simply touch on the more politicized work of confronting forms of direct violence with non-violent direct action. This five-day workshop actually spent more time looking into methods by which to confront the roots of such direct violence through instigating non-violent direct action at the structural and cultural levels of violence. At these levels, the marginalization of certain groups of people is typically a primary foundation for the legitimization of acts of violence directed against them. In this way, our group discovered that a dialectical process of story telling and structural analysis was significant in creating the conditions for a community or society to resolve its problems and negotiate its relationships in an ethical manner. The numerous practices of Buddhism become an integral aspect in the development of such ethical community, which in Buddhist terms can be called *sangha*.

It is the assertion of socially engaged Buddhism, and other forms of socially engaged spirituality, that the emphasis on inner transformation forms an essential part of developing ethical community, because such personal practice helps to develop morality as a tool of critical insight rather than blind dogma. In this way, the modernistic split between private morality and public dialogue can be healed and the two integrated into a powerful social praxis which can not only evaluate whether our goals are "good" and "right" but also provide the means by which to realize these goals in a mutually beneficial and non-harmful way.

Background of the Meeting

The five-day meeting was actually the third such kind in the last six years initiated by Think Sangha, a socially engaged Buddhist think tank coordinated by the author and affiliated with the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) in the United States and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). Think Sangha's core activities since its inception in 1995 have been networking with other thinker-activists, producing Buddhist critiques of social structures and alternative social models, and providing materials and resource people for trainings, conferences, and research on social issues and grassroots activism. In this way, the Buddha posited community (*sangha*) as an essential part of the Buddhist practice. Traditionally, the understanding of *sangha* has often been

limited to the monastic order. This has created a kind of ritualistic devotionalism reminiscent of Brahmanism in which lay followers gain spiritual blessing through making ritual offerings to the monastics. We have taken a broader understanding of the Buddhist term for community (*sangha*) beyond the male monastic community to mean a community of practitioners, and even more widely as any community of beings. *Sangha* represents more the method of community as an ethical praxis rooted in interpersonal and social interaction. In this way, the model for Think Sangha has been based in friendship and Buddhist practice as much as in theory and thought. As such, we have felt that the membership of our *sangha* needs to be equally balanced between practitioners who are teachers and thinkers and ones who are activists. What we have learned from numerous years of convening INEB conferences is that participants have important things to learn from each other no matter their background. For example, highly educated western Buddhists still have much to learn from their fellow Asian practitioners steeped in generations of tradition. Further, monks highly educated in textual matters or highly developed in meditative insight have much to learn about modern perspectives on gender and other issues. As such, there are only relative experts depending on the context and content of a particular issue.

In this way, our third international meeting necessitated a recommitment to these ideals. Although our *sangha* has been and still is nurtured by close personal relationships maintained across great distance through frequent gatherings, more often than not it has been tenuously held together by a small internet user group. Furthermore, our *sangha* has become more and more a magnet for western Caucasian males, exemplified by the four male, white Americans who formed the central core of the *sangha*. Increasingly, it became evident that something important was missing in the way the group was going about things. Although the members of the group have been employing the essential approach of inner transformation through spiritual practice, the dominant approach to the work had begun to follow a more typical modernist approach of abstracting Buddhist principles and perspectives and then applying them to various contexts. Our activities were mostly oriented to the intellectual work of producing papers and publications. While Think Sangha itself consciously did not establish itself as an activist group but rather as a group to support activists, it was becoming too disconnected from the essential composting matter of daily suffering which informs meaningful social analysis. Specifically, this meant that Think Sangha was becoming disconnected from social justice issues *from the perspective of the marginalized*.

This realization was the basis for a decision to move the next meeting, and the context for the next round of Think Sangha projects, to the south. This decision immediately facilitated a change in leadership in the group. Three out of four of the core, white, male American members, who had nurtured the group from the beginning, decided to step back from this next stage of the work due to new challenges within their own smaller *sanghas*. Two other core members, a Thai monk and a Thai woman, became the principal leaders preparing for the meeting. The Thai woman, Ouyporn Khuankaew, who had attended the first Think Sangha meeting in Japan, became the host organizer for the meeting, held at her own center on the outskirts of Chiang Mai city in Thailand. She was also empowered to recruit half of the members of the meeting from her international network of women, Buddhist social activists. With the further assistance of the Thai monk, Phra Phaisan Visalo, we assembled a group of sixteen participants: nine were women, ten came from the South, and only three were Caucasian males.

An equally important consideration was how the meeting would be organized. The overall theme "Buddhist Responses to Modern Violence" came through a consultation meeting in Thailand in February of 2002 with Phra Phaisan, Khuankaew, and the author. It was a fairly clear choice due to the domination of present global issues by the religious tenor of the present war on terrorism. In *The Nonduality of Good and Evil*, David Loy shows how the non-dual perspective inherent in Buddhism offers a new perspective for viewing the commonality of Bush and Bin Laden's "holy war" and the violent ramifications of such a view (Loy, 2003). In addition, increasingly subtle analyses of economic globalization, which expose the problems of structural violence on multifarious levels, show the relevance of the theme beyond the war on terrorism. Finally, Buddhism's complicity with violence in places like Sri Lanka and Burma made the topic directly relevant for all Buddhists to

confront.

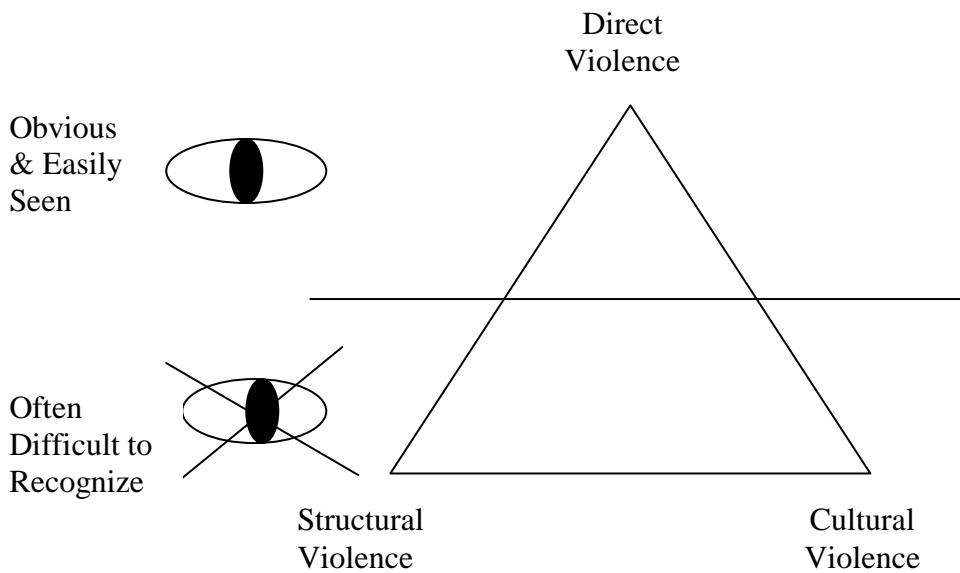
Day One - Personal Level: Buddhist Praxis for Responding to Violence

One of the benefits of the inside-outside approach of Buddhism is that it helped us to immediately confront the issue of creating a strong collective unity *within the actual conference program*. On the evening before Day 1 and during the morning of Day 1, we focused on a purely experiential, non-analytical process of reflecting on and sharing our identities with smaller groups of four and eventually with the whole group. In the evening session, the participants spent time by themselves drawing their own personal solar systems as reflections of their identities. In smaller groups, they shared their commonalities, their unique points, and their hopes and goals for the conference. The next morning, the participants engaged in a similar drawing and small group process focusing this time on their specific Buddhist identity. Sharing stories about their teachers, teachings, practices, and communities, the participants were asked to also talk about how their Buddhist identity has influenced, either as a support or as a hindrance, their social activism. At the conclusion of both sessions, all the drawings were put on walls and the whole group walked around briefly sharing what each group has discussed.

This type of activity turned out to be powerful. Firstly, it created strong interpersonal bonds in a short time, thereby establishing the conditions of mutual trust which is essential for ethical praxis (Brown, 1990). This approach is also far more efficient than formal presentations in generating a large amount of issue material in a short period of time. Instead of the monological approach that communicates information by presenting one paper after another, this latter approach creates a small contextualized universe from which the participants can draw experiences and engage in ethical dialogue over the course of the meeting. The limits of this report and of this type of written communication do not provide an adequate recounting of this material. However, throughout this report, we will encounter parts of it through the stories which were elaborated over the following days.

On the afternoon of Day 1, participants engaged in a third session of small group experiential sharing. The principal designer for the afternoon session was Yeshua Moser, Director of the Southeast Asia office of Nonviolence International in Bangkok, Thailand. In a very concise and clear presentation, Moser introduced the seminal concepts of Johan Galtung concerning direct, structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1996). In short, Galtung posits three different faces of violence: 1) direct violence which is the act of actual harming; 2) structural violence which is the systems, institutions and structures that may lead to direct violence yet also embody a whole process of violence; and 3) cultural violence which is the symbols, images and customs that legitimize structural and direct violence. Moser drew the following diagram to illustrate the dynamics of these three faces of violence.

Figure 1: The Iceberg of Violence



With direct violence as the apex of the iceberg poking out of the water, structural and cultural violence form its bases, and depending on the perceiver's social awareness, these latter two are often hidden from sight beneath the water. To confront the roots of direct violence in their structural and cultural forms also means to confront one's own unconscious patterns of belief, thought and action in daily life.⁴

Moser skillfully organized this session by avoiding a large group session discussing the aspects of Galtung's ideas which would have created a rupture with the previous two sessions of experiential sharing. Rather, he altered the experiential stream only slightly by introducing an analytical context to all the personal sharing that had gone on. Thus, in small groups, participants were again asked to share a personal experience, this time of a violent event directly witnessed or which had an indirect impact on the participant. Then participants shared how their understanding and practice of Buddhism helped them to respond or cope with the situation. Finally, for reporting back to the large group, the smaller groups were asked to consider the Galtung framework of direct, structural, and cultural violence in the events they discussed and to record the principles revealed by these stories. In this way, the inside-out approach worked to draw out the principles and key concepts from a rich dialogical interchange of personal experiences, in place of the relatively disembedded, individual, and monological work of individuals reading out loud their own analytical conference papers.

This approach actually brought out on the very first day the key issues which remained in the forefront of our discussions for the rest of the meeting. Based on the experiences of extreme suffering and victimization, especially from the conflict areas of Sri Lanka and Burma, questions of forgiveness, acceptance and justice were raised. In the Buddha's discourses, specifically the *Dhammapada*, violence and victimization are not to be met with anger but with compassion for those driven to engage in violence (Buddharakkhita, 1985). On a practical level, this raised serious questions about how to end such violence. Can violent perpetrators be brought to justice without using anger and retributive punishment? A typical Buddhist explanation would be that the law of *karma* exacts a form of perfect justice in the suffering that violent people bring upon themselves. This opened up a whole range of issues that were further developed throughout the meeting regarding the interpretation of *karma*, retributive *karmic* justice, and passivity in the face of oppression. In conclusion, we felt that we had already accomplished much by the end of this first day. A rich context for ethical dialogue had been created out of sharing personal experiences, the last discussion on experiences of violence being particularly powerful. Furthermore, we had already begun to identify key issues surrounding violence

and key Buddhist concepts for discussion and analysis.

Day Two - Familial Level: Gender and Domestic Violence

This day's sessions were organized by Ouyporn Khuankaew and some colleagues in her Buddhist women's activist network, the International Women's Partnership (IWP). The whole morning and part of the afternoon were devoted entirely to four women telling their personal stories in depth to the group, largely in monological form. When I realized this approach at the beginning, my analytical (and patriarchal?) mind immediately panicked. I wanted to go back to the interesting principles and issues that the previous day had uncovered. I was concerned that this monological approach make the other participants passive. However, I also knew I could trust Khuankaew and her colleagues, who had a vast base of experience in running workshops across Southeast and South Asia on women's leadership, empowerment and non-violence.

In her preparatory paper, Khuankaew wrote that the first step to solving the problems of patriarchy and gender violence is to break the silence concerning this violence by creating meetings and workshops where women are given the opportunity to share their stories (Khuankaew, 2003, p. 4). Perhaps the greatest injustice that marginalized groups like women experience is the fact that their histories go unrecorded and their voices unheard. Breaking the silence is therefore a basic step to overcoming the mentality of inferiority and passivity imposed by cultural and structural forms of gender violence. Therefore, it was quite consistent with her analysis to devote a major portion of the program to this endeavor. This approach taken by Khuankaew and her group established a pattern for the rest of the meeting. As the majority of the participants represented marginalized communities, it became important to begin each session by hearing their stories and understanding more deeply their histories. This process had begun on the first day, but it needed repetition and elaboration in such different contexts as familial, communal, and national. Khuankaew reaffirmed this point at the beginning of the session by noting that examining gender violence within a Buddhist perspective provides the potential for developing a deep analysis on that level. However, she felt that Buddhism does not exist alone as the problem or solution. Therefore, looking at structural systems, for example using Galtung's framework, can enhance a more holistic perspective on the problem.

In this way, Khuankaew foresaw the importance of Galtung's framework and the issue of *karma* and its interpretation for the meeting. In her preparatory paper, she used the term "structural *karma*" to refer to the way the teaching of *karma* in Buddhism has come to devalue women and create a structure (or more appropriately a culture) of patriarchy into which both women and men are inculcated (Khuankaew, 2003, p. 3). Buddhists have often not clearly understood the Buddha's emphasis on intention (*cetana*) as the basis for action (*karma*) and creating karmic results (*vipaka*) (Thanissaro, 2002, A.iii.415; Payutto, 1993, 6). Instead they often get caught in other Indian interpretations of *karma*, specifically the highly materialistic and deterministic one which equates present suffering directly with previous immoral action. In this way, the inferior status of women in Buddhist societies has been legitimized as the just result of immoral actions in previous lifetimes. Khuankaew noted in her paper that gender violence is further accepted by the way that abused women are often counseled by monks to develop the Buddhist virtue of equanimity (*upekkha*) and to "be patient and kind to her husband so that one day the *karmic* force will cease and everything will be fine" (Khuankaew, 2003, p. 3).

In the discussions that followed the stories by these four women, this issue was prominent. Ven. Dhammananda, a Thai nun, argued eloquently that there is an important difference between *upekkha* and indifference to suffering. She said that everyone has a right not to suffer; and if we don't help someone in a situation when we could have, then we transgress our own commitment to the Buddhist precept of non-harming. She felt that it is really only appropriate to employ *upekkha* in a situation when a person refuses to help her/himself. Yeshua Moser noted that complicity issues become apparent when looking at structural and cultural violence. Ven. Dhammananda further commented that when one realizes one's complicity and interconnection, it doesn't mean ending activism but opening another front within oneself as a kind of internal activism. In this way, the group enlarged the perspective on *karma* from the popular interpretation - "what you did" - to include

the issue of complicity and passivity - "what you didn't do" - and finally to one also imbued with intention - "what you can do."

In this way, the participants were led into an afternoon and evening process similar to the afternoon session of the previous day. Using the Galtung framework of the three types of violence, all the men in one group and all the women in another shared experiences of how they had resisted gender violence on personal, community, and societal levels. Such discussions of gender violence within structural and cultural frameworks are an essential aspect of IWP's workshops. Khuankaew notes:

Particularly for women, a structural analysis helps to explain that the suffering women face is not a product of individual *karma*, action, or misfortune. Recognizing suffering as a result of societal structures empowers women to see the possibility to end it because it is not their fault. They are able to move beyond blaming themselves to identifying violence, understanding root causes, looking for solutions, then working for change. (IWP, 2003)

As we can see here, structural analysis can be a powerful emancipatory tool when it takes in the particularities of historical and social context. On the other hand, we can see the problems that arise when moral values become too general and abstract, as in the way equanimity (*upekkha*) and *karma* have often been taught in Buddhism. When morality loses its social and historical context, it can be used in the service of oppressive power rather than as a reminder to respect others regardless of background. Such social and historical amnesia prevents a systematic social analysis of power, wealth, and influence while falling back on personalistic and individualistic explanations of poverty and other forms of marginalization (West, 1999, p. 358). In this way, it is paramount that structural analysis be first grounded and contextualized.

Once such structural and cultural analysis has been performed, the next challenge is generating the type of ethical praxis found in healthy communities. The emphasis on story telling as a first step creates a social and historical context for ethical dialogue as well as structural analysis. It also serves as a form of inner practice in that the story tellers may experience a type of healing and the listeners may awaken to a new sense of compassion in this act. Khuankaew further commented that in order to empower not only women but also men in this process, it is important to find male allies willing to take part in such meetings. In this way, the issue does not remain a "woman's problem" but is seen in larger terms as also a man's problem and more fundamentally a human problem (Khuankaew, 2003, p. 4). In the evening discussions, a certain amount of tension arose within the group as some of the men expressed anxiety engaging in gender issue discussions. Out of their own insecurity regarding this issue and the increasing assertiveness by women, men experience their own sense of disempowerment in confronting ingrained gender values which also taint their experience of the world. IWP has attempted to confront the combative nature of gender dialogue by engaging in these issues "nonviolently with assertiveness" (IWP, 2003). They see their work as not antagonistic in the sense that women must take the power of men. Rather, they define a unique style of feminine leadership as "power sharing, seeing community power as collective. This involves trust building, and collective leadership and decision making" (IWP, 2003), which are also characteristics of a morally critical and empowered ethical praxis (Brown, 1990).

In these three sessions on gender, we could briefly experience a powerful approach to confronting coercive power. First, story telling helps redefine contexts and expose where social boundaries are drawn. Secondly, structural analysis more deeply examines the issues which arise and acts to critique social boundaries. Thirdly, these first two acts set the stage for the establishment of a new kind of critically empowered ethical praxis within a dialogical community. From a Buddhist standpoint, these sessions showed us more about ways of confronting coercive power situations using non-violent means. Non-violence has often been understood too simplistically as responding to acts of physical, direct violence through political campaigning and civil disobedience. However, non-violence must also work at the roots of coercive power structures by reorganizing power into a non-violent structure which is critically moral and ethically empowered.

Day Three - Communal and Regional Level: Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Violence

As mentioned in the previous section, we continued the process of story telling as the first act of our ethical praxis, because 1) it helped to reveal the key issues and key Buddhist principles *within a social-historical context* in which a meaningful structural analysis and engaged response can be made, and 2) it became an important means for empowering all the participants and creating conditions of collective trust.

A group of stories from Indonesia, reasserted the need to move from story telling into structural analysis and the problems of not developing an adequate structural analysis. Through the thirty year rule of Suharto and continuing into today, those in power in Indonesia, including religious elites, have used the smoke screen of cultural violence - ethnic-religious conflict between Christians and Muslims and between Chinese and indigenous Indonesians - to hide the more fundamental structural violence committed by those seeking and defending their economic and political power. For example, violent Christian-Muslim conflict on the peripheries of the archipelago is created by rival political cliques at the center who are competing for the power to control Indonesian society. Buddhists in Indonesia are largely of Chinese descent. Although they have significant economic power, they are political and culturally marginalized from the kind of social activism in which Muslims regularly engage; for example, the strong influence and very public profile of Islamic based political parties, think tanks and boarding schools (*pesanteren*). While this hinders the development amongst Buddhists of the kind of divisive political activism which is rife in Indonesia, it also hinders the kind of structural analysis and awareness and creates its own problems. Indonesian Buddhists engage in the typical type of social welfare activities seen amongst Buddhists in many countries. Although an important service to those in need, these activities can almost be regarded as acts of complicity with oppressive power, because they clean up the results of direct violence created by structural violence and injustice while never confronting the root structural causes. As in the case of overcoming gender violence, we can see that the Buddhist principles of non-violence and compassionate action need to go much deeper than the surface level of peace and welfare activities.

In his preparatory paper, Yeshua Moser investigated the problems of complicity and how a structural analysis can lead to a much more engaged form of Buddhist practice and non-violent action. Moser noted that:

Nonviolence is an active term, and it means meeting threats to peace and security, at the personal, communal or ‘national’ level, with methods which are not violent, but directly engage the threat at either the direct, structural or cultural level. *Buddhism* is also an active term, not just a system of belief but a path in which the goal, and the method for reaching that goal, are indivisible. (Yaso, 2003, p. 1)

This understanding is congruent with the notion of *karma* as intentional, moral action and not passively accepting the results of past acts. Such action empowered by a critical structural analysis leads to a more robust engagement which examines all personal connections with systems of killing and takes measures to remove complicity with them. The examples he cited include adopting a vegetarian diet, since there is a connection with killing for a living on all levels; refusing to pay taxes, much of which go towards military expenditure; and, more controversially, property destruction which disrupts the functioning or production of weapons (Yaso, 2003, p. 1).

One example of this last approach is the Ploughshares movement in the United States, where a small group of individuals have broken into military installations and destroyed weapons in ways that brought no physical harm to others, such as covering the hi-tech components in sand. This example walks a delicate line around the concept of intentional, moral action. As property is inanimate, there is no killing or direct harm involved in its destruction. However, is the act of destruction itself tinged with hateful or angry feeling and intention? There is obviously an important distinction between more systematic destruction of property in which no one is harmed and more anarchic destruction of property where others are put in danger and livelihoods are threatened. On

this point, universal statements on the nature of what is and what is not violent are not only elusive but also do a disservice to the fundamental principle of the Buddha's teaching as a path of intentional action. On this path, present reality and moral norms create a tension that challenges committed practitioners to avoid the easy way and to continue to challenge themselves to reach higher levels of awakened being.

This challenge was no better embodied than in the stories of suffering which came from the Shan participants of upper Burma. The Shan people share a common Buddhist heritage with the majority Burmans who dominate the military government. Most monks in the region are Burmese with links to the military. Not unlike the aforementioned monastic preaching given to women, these monks tend to emphasize patience or equanimity (*upekkha*) towards the trouble in this region, and also teach *karma* as the reason for present sufferings. Some Shan monks have supported the resistance to the military government. However, there is a prevalent view among the Shan people that to recruit soldiers for resisting the Burmese military is evil, because it means taking part in killing and the creation of more bad *karma* in the future. In turn, they have developed a sense of fatalism that their suffering is due to bad *karma* from a past life. The idea of past *karma* has been used to make the people submissive and unable to liberate themselves, so they are waiting for a savior (Jaiyen, 2003). This distorted understanding of *karma* is the very opposite of Moser's conclusions on non-violence. It has been interpreted here as passivity, so instead of fighting for their rights, the Shan people are fleeing into Thailand.

During this session, a Shan Buddhist scholar, Khuensai Jaiyen, attempted to explore the full import of the meaning of *karma* as intentional, moral action in terms of empowering his pacified people to resist the Burmese military. He drew on a version of one of the mythical stories of the Buddha's previous lives, the *Mahosatta Jataka*, which appears to have been previously altered towards a more militaristic bent. In this story, the Buddha-to-be as King Mahosatta of Videha engages in a defensive counter-attack and conquers King Culani of Kapila. Mahosatta does not punish Culani. Instead he makes friends with him and is able to liberate the entire region by forming a federation of states. Khuensai asked the question, "If the Buddha-to-be as Mahosatta could engage in violent warfare and kill people, how could he have not created bad *karma* and become the Buddha in a future incarnation?" For Khuensai, the answer lies in intention (*cetana*). Mahosatta did not engage in warfare with selfish or evil intent but simply to protect the people under his care (Jaiyen, 2003). In this interpretation, *karma* as inseparable from intention is stretched to its furthest limits. One obviously has to ask what the difference is between a righteous warlord and one who holds a deluded vision of sacred war. Ven. Dhammananda pointed out that one can intentionally engage in a violent, defensive reaction to safeguard others under one's care with a knowledge that negative *karma* is being created. In the spirit of a bodhisattva who sacrifices his/her good for the benefit of others, one may voluntarily take on the bad *karma* of killing someone to avoid the death of many.

Finally, Phra Phaisan not only challenged Khuensai's version of the *Mahosatta Jataka* but more deeply challenged his approach for arriving at his conclusions. We can see that Khuensai focused his legitimization on textual resources (the *Mahosatta Jataka*) and reapplying core Buddhist concepts (*karma* as *cetana*). Phra Phaisan found this inadequate and incomplete, stating, "You may choose to fight and kill, but you cannot justify it by calling your action a Buddhist teaching" (Visalo, 2003). Phaisan further commented that out of respect for the Buddha, we must not twist the teachings to fit our agenda but rather use them to constantly challenge ourselves to grow and develop new perspectives and practices. In this way, he drew on an approach of radical creativity. Radical creativity refers to action taken not on the basis of textual or doctrinal authority but on the basis of the authority of a deeply informed experiential practice. Radical creativity takes the Buddha's emphasis on intention (*cetana*) and the imperative of compassionate action (*karuna*) as the foundation for doing all that can be done to relieve the suffering of others. However, the realization of the most fundamental Buddhist teaching of not-self (*anatta*) leads one beyond the anxious search for quick answers towards a constantly expanding perspective which makes resources out of perceived threats (to identity).

This renunciation of such a restrictive identity was further reaffirmed from outside the

Buddhist tradition by the German Christian participant, Gerhard Koberlin. Koberlin shared his story of an interfaith group working for peace in Bosnia called Abraham. Their powerful and progressive work is rooted in the vision which their name embodies. Abraham refers to the common heritage which unites all the monotheistic faiths in Bosnia. The story of Abraham himself was one of a journey into a new territory in which his old identity had to be given up. Such a journey required openness to the new in a way that transformed fear into trust and faith. In this way, when intention is purified and compassion made deep through spiritual practice then the source of the methods, be they Buddhist, non-Buddhist, spiritual, secular, or material, become irrelevant.

In a story from Australia, Jill Jameson, a local leader of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, spoke of just this kind of endeavor to transform fear and despair into empowerment and moral action. Drawing on the work of Joanna Macy, her group has used *vipassana* meditation techniques with labor unions to discover where the trigger points are within individuals that lead them in negative directions. A number of Think Sangha participants have used various Buddhist methods to do conflict resolution work. Their approach has been to recreate the fundamental conditions for ethical dialogue by creating new moral orientations. Engendering experiences of key Buddhist teachings of not-self, interrelatedness and compassion through meditative exercises, the moral orientation which sees the other as different, fearful, and even evil is transformed into an orientation of connection and trust. For Jameson, expressing fears at the beginning of a workshop serves as a form of emotional disarmament. Admitting fear is a total act of courage and becomes a point of strength. She related that Tibetan master Chogyam Trungpa said that fearlessness is not the absence of fear but the willingness to face it.

Day Four - National and Global Violence: Economic and Political Violence, and Militarism

The third day had been another one of moving stories leading to an investigation of key issues. Thanks to Gerhard Koberlin, we were actually able to name the kind of process that we not only saw as effective amongst various groups in transforming the roots of violence, but that also was empowering us as a group to investigate these issues. From his own work in the monotheistic tradition, he shared with us the concept of "ecumenical learning" which he defined as "the power of personal interaction and communication for group and social transformation" (Koberlin, 2003). As the meeting entered its final day, Koberlin's ideas and the work that had been revealed through story telling affirmed the approach of critical, ethical praxis which I have outlined in this report.

On this final day, it was now time to turn this praxis back inward onto ourselves as our own practice of ecumenical learning. As active participants in these issues, rather than as scholars analyzing them from the outside, we needed to do our own work of transforming fear into trust and deepening our interconnectedness with the world. The last two sessions drew on Joanna Macy's powerful Buddhist-based practices for transforming fear into empowerment (Macy & Brown, 1998). The final set of stories were of the "popular" marginalization that individuals living in the highly modernized North experience. We heard stories from Japan and the United States where instrumental reason has so deeply alienated society that most individuals have become deeply distrustful of their own emotions, abilities and power to create meaningful lives for themselves. As noticed above in Jill Jameson's work in Australia, Buddhist practice directly confronts these feelings, and through meditation and other techniques which Macy has developed, it can transform them into their polar opposites. This type of moral reorientation transforms alienation into a sense of interconnection that creates a form of natural compassion to act out of concern for others.

Phra Phaisan commented on the previous day that the renunciation of self creates a commitment to investigating all that has been perceived as different. From a systemic standpoint, this means perceiving everything that we encounter as a resource for ethical praxis. The concept of not-self (*anatta*) conforms to a thoroughly pluralistic standpoint where no person or group is marginalized as unworthy, dangerous or evil. Arjuna Krishnaratne of Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka gave us a practical illustration of this approach. In Sarvodaya's work to overcome factionalization and distrust amidst Sri Lanka's ethnic war, they have learned the need to look at the resource potentials of every single actor in their sphere of action. If antagonists cannot be transformed in some way into

resources, they at least need to be transformed into neutral forces. In Sarvodaya's case, Krishnaratne noted that providing services that the government did not or could not help them when the government opposed them. Through such endeavors, they have gained the respect of the government who can no longer ignore them. In this way, Sarvodaya has been able to integrate local police and government officials in their development activities. At present, they even run a meditation program with the police (Krishnaratne, 2003). The Sarvodaya movement stands out as the most successful, mass endeavors to use Buddhist praxis to confront coercive power, principally through its community self-reliance schemes (Macy, 1985; Queen & King, 1996).

From this basis, we returned to the more intimate and creative approach of the first day of the meeting. Participants were asked to make a drawing of their own work as a web of interconnection between their activities and their partners', and then further outward towards other like-minded groups. This exercise was to develop a deep sense of interconnection and solidarity among the participants, many of whom often feel isolated in their own work to overcome the marginalization of their communities. To spin these webs and to link them with other participants' webs gave us all a strong sense of an alternative globalization of peoples working for transformative awareness and social justice. At the same time, participants were instructed to split the circle of each node in the web and to fill in the other half with the groups who oppose the work of each of the participant's partner groups. Finally, the participants were asked to choose two or three of these "antagonists" and explore ways in which they could be transformed into allies, for example, the case of Sarvodaya's integration of the police into their work. The power of Sarvodaya's experience was immediately translated into the group-sharing process of this activity. Krishnaratne ended up working closely with two of the Indonesian participants, Bhikkhuni Santini and Acaw, on an empowered program of lay education regarding women's status in Buddhism, specifically the growing movement for the full ordination of nuns (*bhikkhuni*) in the southern, Theravada Buddhist tradition. In general, this approach to confronting "enemies" as resources reflects back on our original Buddhist foundation for the meeting in the non-dual perspective of emptiness (*sunnata*) and not-self (*anatta*).

In this way, the processes of the fourth day became an integral part of the last session in which we created various commitments to work with one another. They consist of 1) visiting each other's communities and projects to offer encouragement and expertise; 2) two writing projects to record the stories of many of the participants and to confront the interpretation of *karma* and its meaning for social justice; 3) supporting of each other's activist campaigns; and 4) participating in each other's workshops and other meetings over the next year.

Conclusions on Buddhist Responses to Modern Violence

In examining the processes of this third Think Sangha meeting, I sense a great continuity between *the way we worked together* over the days and *the ideas we developed* concerning confronting violence. Over these days, we developed an experiential process which began with story telling and the sharing of personal experiences, and then moved into deeper structural analyses of the issues which emerged from these stories. Along the way, we found ourselves deeply engaged in "ethical praxis," that is, working as a dialogical community to explore and negotiate acts of personal-social transformation. As we, the participants, have been directly involved in communities confronting violence, we became indistinguishable from the subject matter we were examining. In this way, the process of coming together to build a (short-term) community to respond to violence did not differ from the creation of a Buddhist model for confronting violence. We were for this period a social transformation community, and our experiences served as a real life experiment in attempting to respond to violence.

In this way, I believe our group process presents one model, however incomplete, of a Buddhist response to modern violence. Thus, the first act in confronting violence is the one of story telling. As I have discussed, story telling is an essential first act, because it exposes the topology of power through articulation of historical and social contexts. When every participant is given time to express her- and his-story, we can begin to become aware of where margins are drawn in a community or society and where different actors reside in the expression of power in the community

or society. Such an exposure of power dynamics immediately sensitizes us to issues of justice and injustice. It also creates a foundation in the reality of lived experience where espoused values and principles are transformed or deformed into customs and traditions. For example, during the meeting, we learned directly from numerous women about the topology of power within Buddhist institutions and within Buddhist society, and further about how such principles as *upekha* and *karma* are deformed under this system of power into aspects of cultural violence as passivity and fatalism respectively.

This act of story telling, however, provides not only an instrumental purpose of exposing such injustices, but also acts therapeutically. For the speaker, it serves as an act of bearing witness and of gaining recognition after a long period of existing in silence and marginalization. For the listener, it can wake up feelings of remorse and compassion in being witness to the real pain of others. In this way, the act of story telling serves as a first step in this overall ethical praxis, because when every participant is given equal time to share his/her experience and feelings, a bond of trust and collectively can be created by which the difficult work of critical dialogical communication can begin.

Structural analysis as a second act is precisely that difficult form of dialogical communication which is the essential step after story telling. Structural analysis provides a deeper examination and critique of the topology and dynamics of power, which have been presented in the first stage of story telling. It is here that analytical tools can be of great service. To begin with structural analysis before a meaningful social and historical context has been set in story telling risks the danger of becoming merely a discussion of ideas. Further, it may marginalize individuals not adept at analytical thinking from the beginning by denying them the power of their voice and perspective which is provided through story telling. In addition, structural analysis without a socio-historical context can become not a further examination of the topology and dynamics of power but rather the cloaking of such topology and dynamics through abstract and analytical rationalizing. If the conditions for trust and collectively are not established in the first act of story telling, then structural analysis will not be embedded in an ethical praxis of dialogical communication.

However, when structural analysis is embedded in such an ethical praxis it sharpens the critical nature of the dialogue. As we saw in the sessions on gender at the meeting, story telling served as a therapeutic device in breaking the silence on suffering and injustice. However, as we also saw, structural analysis goes one step further as a curative device in enabling victims of such injustice to attain liberative insight into the structural causes of their suffering, thereby freeing them from the types of personalistic explanations of their suffering which have been used to keep them imprisoned in self-loathing, fear and passivity. The power of this liberative insight helps to embolden all participants to engage in action to end complicity with the structures of coercive power. As we saw in Yeshua Moser's ideas concerning complicity, the movement to a structural analysis also helps to transform Buddhist teachings into more dynamic and action oriented practices.

Within this second act of structural analysis, a critical morality, in this case Buddhist, acts as an essential guide to the examination of power, violence and injustice. Cultural violence as representative of values of violence operative in a society relates to the moral quality of a society. The problem in modern society is that the overemphasis on instrumental rationality takes us away from an examination of moral issues and cultural values while concentrating on structural ones like the performative efficiency of institutions. In this way, the whole issue of cultural violence is obscured and often overlooked. For the most part, moral issues have already been put to rest through the universal norms embedded in contractual law and the system of justice. This has deep significance for structural violence, because sensitivity to specific social and historical contexts is often ignored for the comprehensive, rational truth of these norms. In this way, the development of modern justice through the championing of universal equality has often devolved into the tyranny of modernistic homogenization which denies the social and historical particularities of persons and place. For example, in the United States, it has usually been seen that the political advances Afro-Americans have made in gaining full civil rights in the last 40 years are sufficient for gaining an equal stake in American society. However, as Martin Luther King became acutely aware of in his

final few years, the universalism of this political agenda was incomplete, and at times even naive, without a deep analysis of the economic inequalities that continued and still continue to hinder the development of Afro-American communities (Cone, 1991). In this way, the use of self-critical, moral examination during structural analysis leads one away from universalistic, cookie-cutter solutions to problems, such as in the case of the Shan where non-violence is interpreted absolutely and serves to perpetuate injustice through passivity. Instead, self-critical moral examination pushes one towards examining one's connections to systems of oppressive power and to applying the teachings in a way which *acts* non-violently by ending complicity and breaking down the culture and structure of coercive, violent power.

A critically moral, structural analysis feeds into the construction of dialogical communities engaged in ethical praxis. When individuals who have engaged in the first two acts of story telling and critically moral structural analysis go on to form organizations and communities, they have the basis for constructing transformative communities of ethical praxis. In this way, ethical praxis is a form of dialogical negotiation of non-harmful and just social contexts underpinned by critical morality and the practice of personal spiritual transformation. For example, Khuankaew's feminine leadership model confronts structural violence by focusing not on the domination of men but on power sharing, trust building, and collective leadership and decision making. In Buddhist terms, ethical praxis means reflecting on how Buddhist practice works to deconstruct cultural and structural violence and using this practice as a basis for critical moral reflection to build new structures and cultures of non-violence. From a socially engaged Buddhist standpoint, this would be the true meaning of *sangha*, and it would be essentially rooted in the integrated model of Buddhist learning, such as the "three trainings" of morality (*sila*), meditation (*Samadhi*), and wisdom (*panna*).

Consequently, I believe a Buddhist model of ethical praxis goes beyond the theorizing about dialogical community by some western thinkers such as Habermas. First of all, it integrates the non-argumentative but completely essential act of story telling, which has always been a key feature of indigenous peoples' approaches to ethical praxis. Secondly, it integrates the act of inner transformation as an essential foundation to ethical praxis. The integrated nature of Buddhist practice not only goes beyond the limits of argumentative, rational dialogue but also helps to transform the fundamental problem of the split between theory and practice which haunts most modernist approaches to ethical praxis.

References

Brown, M. T. (1990). *Working ethics*. Berkeley, CA: Regents Press.

Cone, J. (1991). *Martin & Malcolm & America: A dream or nightmare*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

The Dhammapada: The Buddha's path of wisdom. (1985). (Buddharakkhita, Trans.). Kandy, Sri Lanka : Buddhist Publication Society.

The "further-factored" discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Anguttara Nikaya. (2002). (Thanissaro, Trans.). Retrieved March 9, 2003 from <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/anguttara/index.html>.

Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

International Women's Partnership (IWP). (2003). *Empowering Asian grassroots activists to build just and peaceful communities* [Brochure].

Jaiyen, K. (2003, February). The struggle of the Shan people. In J. Jameson (Chair),

Responding to structural violence: economic and political, and militarism.
 Symposium conducted at the 4th international Think Sangha Meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Khuankaew, O. (2003, February). *Buddhism and domestic violence*. Paper presented at the 4th international Think Sangha Meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Koberlin, G. (2003, February). Transforming enemies into resources. In J. Watts (Chair), *Responding to global violence: political despair and disempowerment*.
 Symposium conducted at the 4th international Think Sangha Meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Loy, D. (2003). *The great awakening: A Buddhist social theory*. Boston: Wisdom Publications

Macy, J. & Brown, M.Y. (1998). *Coming back to life: Practices to reconnect our lives, our world*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada: New Society Publishers.

Payutto, P.A. (1993). *Good, evil and beyond: Karma in the Buddha's Teaching*. (B. Evans, Trans.). Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation.

Queen, C., & King. S. (Eds.) (1996). *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist liberation movements in Asia*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Visalo, P. (2003, February). The struggle of the Shan people. In J. Jameson (Chair), *Responding to structural violence: economic and political, and militarism*.
 Symposium conducted at the 4th international Think Sangha Meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

West, C. (1999). *The Cornel West reader*. New York: Basic Books.

Yaso. (2003, February). *Nonviolence: the result and practice of Buddhism*. Paper presented at the 4th international Think Sangha Meeting, Chiang Mai, Thailand.