



CONCERNS AND HOPE ON GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM:  
A THAI BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

by

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At any International Conference, there are usually many wise words-- and some not very wise words too. All these words however come mostly from our heads. We don't pay much attention to our hearts. May I therefore ask all of us to sit quietly for one minute --concentrating on our breath-- the most important function of our life. If you don't believe me, stop breathing for five minutes. Indeed we breathe in for the first time when we leave our mother's womb, and we breathe out the last time when we expire from this life. Yet we do not take care of our breath properly. So I would ask all of us to breathe mindfully, joyfully and peacefully for one minute. Through mindful breathing, you can synchronize your heart and your head. You can easily overcome anger, alienation and the like. You can link the mundane world with the supramundane.

-1 minute silence-

If you don't like the silence, you should try it again. If you like it, you can breathe mindfully more often.

Once we establish seeds of peace within, we can then develop critical self awareness. We can transform ourselves from a selfish being to be more and more selfless. We can then see our societies critically and meaningfully - with a non-violent approach and compassion. We can then transform societies to be peaceful and just, with environmental balance.

It is through breathing, that one can learn to become mindful. This could lead to the practice of mindful living in daily life. One can practise this at every moment of one's life--while breathing, eating, drinking, washing the dishes, gardening or driving a car.

Once one practices mindfulness, one has peace and happiness inside, and one can share that way of life with others. The present moment is a wonderful moment.

Traditionally, the first part of training the mind is to achieve tranquility (samatha). This will allow us to plant seeds of peace within. The second part is based on a technique for understanding the true nature of one's psychophysical constitution and of the world. This is called vipassana or insight meditation, which is an analytical method for exploring causal relations and problem-solving called yonisomanasikara (critical self-awareness), which leads to selflessness. Maintaining yonisomanasikara helps one to be earnest. It helps generate energetic effort and it helps reduce selfish desire.

The Buddha says that the foundation for real understanding or wisdom (panna) is equanimity for developing self-cultivation and critical self-awareness.

Wisdom or Understanding is different from intellectual knowledge, since it comes from both the head and the heart. It helps one to be aware, to be humble, to know one's limits. At the same time, it promotes loving-kindness and compassion, allowing us to share the suffering of others and to work to eliminate its causes.

Of course, when one tackles the causes of suffering, especially in an oppressive social system, one usually gets hit by those who wish to maintain the status quo. Here mindfulness again helps one to understand one's danger and to forgive one's enemy.

The important thing is to bring out the awareness of one's anger in order to surround it with mindfulness. Then the anger is transformed into compassion. Thich Nhat Hanh says that anger is like a closed flower. The flower will bloom when the sunlight penetrates itself and shows its heart to the sun. If one keeps breathing on one's anger, shining one's compassion and understanding on it, one's anger will soon crack and one will be able to look into the depths and see its roots.

One can deal similarly with greed, lust and delusion. Bhavana is a powerful tool to work against capitalism, consumerism, sexism, militarism and the like.

Critical self-awareness can also be used to examine our own society, nation-state, culture---even our own Buddhist tradition. With this attitude, one will not hate the oppressors, the capitalists or the dictators. Yet one must use one's understanding to dismantle.

H.H. the Dalai Lama has really inspired many of us to love our enemy by cultivating seeds of peace. I am positive that one day Tibet will be free from China's domination and destruction. Perhaps the Tibetans may even be able to offer us a new future by building a Buddhist democracy or practising Dhammic Socialism.

The Burmese military junta may be able to keep Aung San Suu Kyi under strict confinement, but the tremendous moral courage of that woman will one day free the peoples of Burma.

After more than 20 years of war and senseless killing, no one believed that peace could be re-established in Cambodia. When I first assisted Ven. Maha Ghosananda in the Khmer refugee camps, it was very hard. But the Venerable was very determined to plant seeds of peace with his thoughts, words and actions. He asked us to conduct reconciliation and mediation for rival Khmer monks and lay people. On quite a number of occasions that he led peace walks through war zones. All these efforts should really be known.

I myself have been privileged to work for peace in Siam as well as to work with good friends in the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). The network is linked to the Buddhist Peace Fellowship in the U.S.A. and with similar organizations in Europe and Japan--working to free ourselves from the root causes of suffering and to challenge the oppressive systems.

Despite social and political oppression and the destruction of the environment in Asia, my vision for renewing society and for human liberation is realisable because many of us work together as good friends or kalayanamitta.

The Buddha says kalayanamitta is important for everyone. We need to have good friends, good companions and good friendships. We can learn from others to develop ourselves and to help our society to be peaceful and just, starting with ourselves.

Once we can transform our consciousness to be less selfish, then with help from good friends we can transform our societies to be free from human oppression and exploitation. It may not be easy, but it is possible.

With critical self awareness which helps us to change ourselves to be less selfish and non-violent, then with good friends, one can look at our society and the environment with hope and encouragement to overcome social ills and environmental degradation.

To generate peace and to bring about liberation requires eliminating, or at least reducing, violence. The problem is that there are several kinds of violence. The clearest is direct violence as described in the first precept, which states that five factors are involved in killing---not only life, but the perception of life, not only the thought of murder, but also carrying it out and the resulting death.

There is also structural violence, violence which kills slowly and is built into a social structure. Of the five factors noted, only three apply here: there is life and the perception of life, but there is no thought of murder and hence no follow through. Death, however, is the end result. But the result of what? Death does not result from direct violence but from a desperately unjust social structure that gives too much to the few and too little to the many. How does a modern Buddhist deal with this form of violence?

The second precept, abstaining from taking what does not belong to one, seems relevant here. Again the five elements are involved : someone else's belonging, and awareness of the fact, the thought of theft and the act of carrying it out, with theft as the outcome. However, theft is not quite the

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same as structural violence. Something is taken, but there is no awareness of a theft having taken place.

A landowner has land, but the landless have only their ability to till the land. The landowner says "You may till my land, but you have to give me 70% of the harvest." (A figure fairly typical in most SEA countries.) The landowner may feel he is being generous, since the alternative is to use a tractor to till the fields. Or he may sell the land for a golf course at a tremendous profit. The peasant may feel grateful, for the alternative may be starvation or selling his daughter as a prostitute or migrating to a city to work as a cheap labourer.

Surely there is something morally wrong in this arrangement. To maintain an oppressive structure of this kind, something else is needed. The usual capital "B" Buddhist explanation of the law of karma is that the peasants are now reaping the results of their bad deeds committed in the past while the landlord obviously cultivated much merit by building temples and Buddha images. Hence both the rich and the poor must support the material aggrandisement of the monkhood for the future welfare of each other.

Buddhism with a small "b" is certainly against this kind of wrong teaching. If the landlord practises *dana* (charity or generosity), he will feel it is wrong to get 70% out of the land, while the landless labourers lack enough to live on. Buddhadasa's Dhammic Socialism is an approach that emphasizes not taking more than is needed and at the same time is in accordance with the laws of Nature, since people would share whatever extra they had out of compassion and loving-kindness. People would set aside for themselves only what they needed anything.



A third type of violence, cultural violence, is any element in the culture, particularly religion or ideology, that legitimizes direct and/or structural violence. One can see it very clearly in the mass media, especially in advertising. Of course, there are Buddhists past and present, and there will be some in the future, who commit direct violence and participate in structural violence. They will not, however, find any support for this in the Buddhist scriptures. To claim this support would be a violation of the fourth precept which is against false speech. Although that precept is more concerned with lying in the conventional sense than in legitimizing violence, if Buddhism is invoked in defense of violence, it constitutes an act of lying.

From the above arguments, one can conclude that Buddhism contains a very strict ethical system supportive of peace. Its precepts against violence represent a liberative impulse. But there is a weakness : strength in personal commitment is combined with the silent mechanisms of evil. The larger a structure is, such as a nation state or a large corporation, or a merging of the two, the more we become accustomed to it, the more violent it becomes. Can a Buddhist fulfill the obligations of military service? Should Buddhists remain silent when the government continues to increase the national budget for military armaments at the expense of basic health and education? Some might argue these issues are more political than moral. Of course, they are both. The major question is exactly how the ethical inspiration of Buddhism might enlighten politics by being courageous enough to question a socially unjust society---not merely the individual acts of people or their government.

If Buddhists understand structural violence and its roots in hatred (dosa) and learn how to eliminate it mindfully and nonviolently,

Buddhism will not only be relevant to the modern world but could be a source for its liberation. Similarly, consumerism is linked directly or indirectly to greed (lobha) and lust (raga). One can see this clearly in advertisements and the mass media, which exploit women's bodies to artificially created needs.

Modern education deals almost exclusively with the heads, not the hearts, of students. The clever ones are recognized and rewarded materially and financially, although they need not be generous or aware of social ills. Most of the rich and powerful are not happy either. Their exalted positions rest directly or indirectly on mass poverty and ecological destruction. This is indeed ignorance (avijja) or delusion (moha)

If Buddhists are to make a meaningful contribution to world peace or the liberation of the modern world from violence and oppression, they must confront the three root causes, which are found not only in the individual but also in the social structure. Therefore, these roots of evil must be dealt with by Buddhists. The moral precepts must exist not only for moralists. All practising Buddhists must develop right-mindfulness.

Right-mindfulness leads to wisdom, or understanding i.e. one see things as they really are. They are not seen from our prejudicial views or are they compartmented. They are not seen from logical viewpoint only. That is social engineering alone could not solve real problems --as all problems are inter-related.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains in this way, "In one sheet of paper, we see everything else, the cloud, the forest, the logger. I am, therefore you are. You are, therefore I am. We inter-are."

He went on to say, "I know that in our previous life we were trees, and even in this life we continue to be trees. Without trees, we cannot have people; therefore, trees and people inter-are. We are trees and air, bushes and clouds. If trees cannot survive, humankind is not going to survive either. We get sick because we have damaged our own environment, and we are in mental anguish because we are so far away from our true mother, Mother Nature."

Buddhist teachings provide a means of evaluating the nature and direction of global development. The significance of the approach is that it entails a consideration of the extent to which social and economic policies tend to contribute to or diminish human suffering. This aspect is often obscured in the quest for modernization and westernization.

The present course of economic development has enhanced disparities in wealth, depleted natural resources, devastated the environment and alienated people from their culture. It is directed by the profit motive embodied in the corporate culture and is oblivious to the extent of the discontentment of people.

Buddhism teaches that the causes of suffering are linked directly with greed, hatred and delusion. These conditions remain unbridged in contemporary society and have produced a consumer culture in which the dominant value is the acquisition of goods. The earth vision of the new millennium requires that we rediscover the spiritual values.

The despair that characterizes our civilization is a product of our having forgotten the interrelatedness of our being. For the future to be possible, we need an individual recognition of freedom and

responsibility as well as a bottom-up kind of development.

I am aware that healing through the pathway of local and indigenous wisdom is very difficult, yet I was encouraged when I read President Vaclav Havel's writing, especially when he said:

"We must not be afraid of dreaming the seemingly impossible, if we want the seemingly impossible to become a reality. He want to say "it is well known, for instance, that enormous private multinational corporations are curiously like socialist states; with industrialization, centralization, specialization, monopolization, and finally with automaiton and computerization, the elements of depersonalization and the loss of meaning in work become more and more profound eveywhere. Along with that goes the general manipulaiton may be, compared with that of the totalitarian state."

Kirpatrick Sales said in his book, Rebel Against the Future, that the Industrial Revolution in England during the last century destroyed the British farmers for the benefit of the landlords and the industrialists, for the growth of capitalism and the expansion of the empire. He also said that the new empire of globalization run by the transnational corporations and their megatechnology and computers will make more members of the middle class jobless within two decades.

Indeed globalization is a new demonic religion. It uses the media to create a sense of lack. Hence we are driven to earn more in order to acquire more, yet we can never reach a point of contentment. Since globalization is under the control of the big corporations, the media is used to direct us blindly toward the monoculture of more and more technology, of the McWorld of fast food, junk food, the cola and jean syndrome.

But if we follow the First World lifestyles, there will not be sufficient natural resources for all of us. Most of us will not be happy with this style of life which is harmful to ourselves, our family, our society and our natural environment.

I want to stress on the indigineous people, like the Roma in Europe, the Native Americans, the Aborigines in Australia, the Maori in New Zealand and the many minority ethnics in Asia, whose members are not usually represented at any International Conference.

Indeed the indigenous peoples still suffer a great deal, yet they can teach us that we need to opt for local and indigenous wisdom and not the monoculture of globalization. Our decision making must invoke more than the rationalism and pragmatism that have caused us to become more and more compartmentalized.

We should learn from the indigenous people about the wholeness of life and about the sanctity of the natural order. We should learn to be alone with nature, to live with birds and deer, to appreciate nature, to respect nature. We can then realize that intellectualism and social engineering cannot liberate us from suffering.

We need to return to the best of our spiritual tradition, to shamanism, to mythology, to traditional rituals, songs and dances--to experience life as it is still available and alive in many indigenous communities which are being threatened by big corporate entities which are supported by states in the G8 and elsewhere in derogation of the interests of their own people and natural resources.

For the corporations natural resources are only a source of economic gain. When one area has been exhausted they will move to another. The people are relevant only to the extent that serve to generate income either as laborers or consumers. For the indigenous people money is less important. Of greater significance to them and for us is to live happily, with dignity, with a sense of the sacred and with a spiritual dimension to our lives, in harmony with the earth and with reverence for our ancestors and respect for our communities and with a commitment to the generations to come.

If we care for our survival, we must not only question the G8 economic policies but the policies structure that has emerged which is no longer accountable to the people. We must also question the legal and judicial systems which serve to maintain the status quo.

We need alternative economic and political strategies designed, as E.F. Schumacher says, as if human beings matter. Indeed, we need alternative educational programs which encourage us to integrate the manifold aspects of our being. We must be able to link our head with our heart so that we escape compartmentalization and develop the capacity to grow seeds of peace, seeds of joy within ourselves. And from this we bring about change. Not by hating the oppressors, but by challenging the structural violence. Through non-violence means we can seek a transformation to a just and peaceful world.

We must also challenge Scientism (not Science) which refers to the narrow minded and dogmatic application of scientific methods to all fields of knowledge. Scientism has developed out of the Enlightenment period in Europe of the 17th and 18th centuries. Scientism has based itself in a reliance upon the "rational human mind to observe and understand all aspects of reality. As such, there has been a great focus on the material

and quantitative, for what is spiritual and qualitative is irrational. What is irrational is out of the bounds of scientific inquiry, private to the individual and ultimately of little value to the organization of society. Such a focus has given birth to the "idea" of machine which measures and produced material quantities. Beginning with the Industrial Revolution, this mechanization process has not only transformed the way we produce and consume material goods but also in the way we view our begins, organize our societies, and inter-relate. Scientism is thus a misuse of scientific methods in the realm of human relationship such as psychology, politics and economics.

The machine has transformed our understanding in each of these areas. Man's essential nature has become the sum of his appetites. Man's society has become the state, a political machine which collects quantitative duties (taxes) and distributes quantitative needs (housing, roads, utilities). Thirdly, man's marketplace has been stripped of its place and thus differing qualities and has become pure principle, the trading of material desires. With market values such as acting in one's own interests, competitive behavior, the subordination of personal relationships, and anonymity being unleashed into society as a whole, the individual becomes free to pursue appetites and competition amongst such individuals for greater shares has become a social norm. This mechanization of man, his society and his relationships in the pursuit of material security has produced an all encompassing ethic of "progress" during the colonial period and "development." in the post World WarII period. These terms are always expressed in quantities such as GNP, literacy rate, doctors per square kilometer, etc. Yet the nature of such a system is to disregard diversity and the particular in the search for universal principles upon which to organize the whole. The whole becomes greater than its parts (organicism).

The consequence is that local particularities and the diversity of the whole system is broken down. All constituent are stripped down to common sets of quantifiable properties under this homogenizing power. What we are faced with today are the smaller communities, regions, ethnicities and countries stripped of their own powers and made dependent on needs and technologies spelled out by the "scientists" of larger states and markets.

Buddhist teaching offer a radically different approach to understanding humanity (as opposed to organizing him). The overall concept may be called Dharma which has a deep and wide range of meanings. Strictly, Dharma is Nature -its laws, duties, and fruits. It is not a system for streamlining, organizing or managing reality as Scientism is but rather an organic Truth with its own organizing systems which humans come to understand. In certain respects, Dharma is a true science of observing and discovering the laws and properties of an object. However, it encompasses not only physical and biological laws but also psychic and karmic (causality) laws. In this sense, it opposes Scientism by working with the spiritual as well as the material. Further, the spiritual is not reduced to measurable quantities but rather directly experienceable qualities. As such, the emphasis is not upon machine but on sentience, on the living quality of any phenomenon. This sense for quality is also a sense for value and meaning which contrasts the pure quantification of Scientism. In Scientism, man moves forward for knowledge of all phenomena. Much of this knowledge, however, may have little meaning or digestibility for most people. Dharma, however, moves man forward for knowledge in the service of wisdom. Knowledge fits into a search for meaning and relevance, and only certain kinds of knowledge are acquired at certain times as the individual or group may find use for them. Scientism is as much as you can at once. Dharma is timely, using each piece of knowledge as a step towards greater understanding of self, society and Nature.



Dharma thus has a unique quality for each person and place. It respects the law of natural diversity in which forms find their highest possible development through access to a fantastic array of sources. In this way, Dharma fits into the concept of ecology where the parts form an equally important part of a larger whole. Further, Nature or Dharma is not just the nature of the woods or ocean but the nature of all phenomena, such as the diverse properties of the mind as well. Understanding and harnessing these properties of Dharma provides a freedom with meaning. This is a freedom not to pursue what you want but to discover one's full potential. Knowledge of this freedom, however, also bequeaths a sense of duty and responsibility. Duty and responsibility to those forces which enable one's freedom. This is duty to oneself, to one's supporting to follow the Truths of Nature which bequeath true freedom. Within such an order, the mass of artificial needs dictated by state and market transform into a clear, simple group of requirements for achieving this qualitative freedom. Dependence upon technology is replaced by the independence of free-inquiry and the interdependence of self, society and Nature.

Scientism stands in opposition to the established religion with rigid institutions and dogmas but there is now a new scientific approach to the living universe which produces a new kind of scientist who is humble and relies upon his or her heart as well as head. This science links beautifully with the best in spiritual endeavor and can help us appreciate the wholeness of being.

I have attempted to approach this new trend of development through projects which redirect us to a consideration of the spiritual dimension of existence.

Alternatives to consumerism is a project which recognizes that we must confront the new demonic religion and strive to reestablish standards of value derived from the community. Gatherings are organized which afford people from diverse communities. The opportunity to exchange stories and share experiences.

Spirit in education movement is an educational project that seeks to integrate spiritual teachings into our understanding of the world. It offers an alternative to the narrow unconnected approach of modern education. These projects are informed by the fundamental wisdom of the noble truths. They demonstrate the manner in which the application of this wisdom to social condition can generate justice, peace and ecological balance.

I hope that we are together in this venture. We need a movement against globalization by the transnational corporations and toward the reliance upon the local culture and the communities if we are to live happily together, with wisdom, understanding and love.

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