



**Christopher S. Queen**, ed. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. Boston: Wisdom Publishing, 2000, 544 pages, ISBN: 0-617-1159-9, US \$24.95.

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*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 8 (2001):1-6

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**E***ngaged Buddhism in the West* is a follow-up volume to *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, published in 1996 (Albany: State University of New York Press, ISBN: 0-7914-2843-5, US \$24.95) and edited by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King. That volume traced the development of movements such as the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, and examined the social vision and work of engaged Buddhist leaders such as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Although this volume follows that pattern to some extent, discussing important leaders and their movements, it differs from the former volume in several ways. Overall, it is more descriptive and less analytic than its predecessor. This is natural given that socially engaged Buddhist movements in the West have a more recent history than those in Asia. This volume also differs in its breadth, covering movements in the United States, Europe, Africa, and Australia. Finally, the volume itself is 'engaged.' As Queen notes in the Preface, "this book breathes a sense of appreciation for the persons, groups, and events that are shaping the new Buddhism" (p. ix).

The framework within which this wide variety of articles is set is laid by Queen's "Introduction." Having subtitled it "A New Buddhism," Queen argues that socially engaged Buddhism, defined as the application of Bud-

dhist teachings to solve social problems, is a new phenomenon that grows out of the globalization of conversation on human rights, distributive justice, and social progress (p. 1). This new *yāna* maintains many of the previous themes and techniques of its Buddhist precursors, but also absorbs and adapts to the values of the new host culture (p. 25).

I agree with Queen that engaged Buddhism *is* new in that the notion of justice it incorporates is one that focuses on social, institutional, and political oppression in ways that Buddhism has tended not to do historically, despite the existence of texts, such as the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda Sutta*, which appear to provide a basis for such social analysis. This new style of Buddhism is “directed to the creation of new social institutions and relationships” (p. 17). Although previous styles of Buddhist ethics—discipline and altruism—are undoubtedly productive of a better social order, it is this commitment to the creation of new institutions and relationships, Queen argues, that justifies its definition as a new style of Buddhist ethics.

The twenty essays in the volume address a wide variety of social concerns: war and violence, ecological degradation, race, human rights, ethnicity, health care, prisons, schools, sexual orientation, gender relations, and the workplace. Queen states that what unites these issues in their diversity is that they share three characteristics that he identifies as central to all engaged Buddhism: awareness, identification of the self and the world, and the imperative for action (p. 6). Some of the movements are fairly well-known in North America—the work of Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing, as well as Rōshi Bernie Glassman and the Peacemaker Order, for example. Others may be less well-known: the Aṅgulimālā prison ministries, engaged Buddhism in South Africa or Australia, and so forth. Exercising the reviewer’s prerogative, I will comment on only two of the articles, “A Survey of Engaged Buddhism in Britain” by Sandra Bell and “Social Action Among Toronto’s Asian Buddhists” by Janet McLellan.

Although billed as a survey, Bell’s article is one of the pieces that extends beyond description into analysis. She begins with the ever-problematic dilemma of “naming,” that is, who should “count” as British, and how to describe their “type” of Buddhism: “ethnic,” “export,” and so on. The forms of Buddhism in Britain, she states, are rather diverse and “prone to sectarianism” (p. 398). Further, there are many groups that do not adhere to any particular tradition. Though the notion of community is a central focus for all groups, their understanding of *sangha* varies from that of monastic association to friendly association.

Bell notes that the three largest Buddhist organizations in Britain, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), the New Kadampa Movement (NKT) and Sōka Gakkai International (SGI-UK) utilize the same orga-

nizational style: “closely bounded, hierarchical organizations with clearly delineated institutional structures and forms of membership and an undisguised commitment to recruitment and expansion” (p. 398). Others, like *Aṅgulimālā*, founded by the Ven. Khemadhammo, bring together Buddhists of all persuasions.

The complexity of the issue of defining engaged Buddhism is highlighted with the case of the Ven. Khemadhammo. Despite the fact that he conforms to Queen’s definition of an engaged Buddhist, he rejects the term as posing a false distinction between everyday practice and social engagement (p. 401). His discomfort with the term appears to be shared by numerous British Buddhists (p. 402).

The debate about just what constitutes the “engaged” aspect of engaged Buddhism is also a matter of debate in the U.K. Ken Jones, a prominent member of the Network of Engaged Buddhists, provides a continuum definition running from a “soft” to “hard” end. Although Jones accepts the importance of personal responsibility in the social arena as an outcome of Buddhist practice (soft end), for him and other hard enders, in order to be clear and meaningful, the term “engaged Buddhism” “has to entail wholesale critique of current social and political realities using Buddhist concepts and teachings” (p. 405).

Bell notes that, although this model cannot act as a sociological model because it fails to take in the whole spectrum of Buddhist groups in the U.K., it does give us an insight into how some engaged Buddhists see themselves in relation to others (p. 406). It also highlights the sectarian nature of British Buddhism, revealed as well in Bell’s account of a 1991 meeting in Leeds at which tension between groups became quite evident (p. 403).

One of the newer groups mentioned is the *Buddhist Social Activist Network*, several members of whom are also members of groups such as Earth First! or Radical Roots (p. 407). It will be interesting to see how the British Buddhist community responds to this group as their work becomes better known.

Questions concerning the nature of engaged Buddhism arise again in Bell’s discussion of British Buddhist educational initiatives, the Dharma School for children ages three to eleven, and the adult Sharpham College. Stephen Batchelor, director of studies for the Sharpham College for Buddhist Studies and Contemporary Enquiry, discusses his concern over privileging one dimension of Buddhist practice over another—in this case, social engagement—because it reduces Buddhism to one aspect of the whole (p. 414). Practice has always operated within the context of the classic tension between the “wings” of insight and understanding on the one hand and compassion and response to the world on the other (p. 413).

Bell concludes the article with a discussion of the sociopolitical and economic ideas of Ken Jones, Christopher Titmuss, and economist Simon Zadek. Although differences between the ideas of Jones and Titmuss do exist, both strive to develop “a political philosophy that connects economic and social justice to ecological factors across the global system” (p. 416). Because humans develop their humanity only within the social context, it cannot be ignored. And, as humans develop their humanity, they recognize the delusory nature of any notion of “self-liberation.” Zadek is interested in bridging Buddhism and economics on a scale suitable to a modern economy. That this may be possible Zadek sees in the growth of the “fair-trade” movement; social auditing in commercial, governmental, and voluntary sectors; and in the notion of sustainable consumption (p. 417). This thinking, Bell notes, is widely accepted in general Buddhist circles and may account for the suspicion with which Sōka Gakkai is greeted by other groups.

Buddhism in Britain, Bell concludes, has moved beyond the initial period of transmission and institutionalization and now strives to integrate into the mainstream and exert its presence as a moral force. She manages to, at once, provide us with both description and insight into the wide variety of Buddhist groups in the U.K. Further, her analysis is thought-provoking and forward-looking. I eagerly await her next update.

Janet McLellan’s article “Social Action Among Toronto’s Asian Buddhists” appealed to me for a variety of reasons. To date, there has been little published on Buddhism in Canada, and this article and her recent book, *Many Petals of the Lotus* (U of Toronto, 1999, ISBN: 0–8020–8225–4, US \$24.95), are most welcome additions (as is her appendix, which identifies many of the Toronto organizations). Second, McLellan deals with Asian Buddhists. Many people assume that ‘engaged’ Buddhism in the North American context means primarily non-Asian Buddhism. Finally, like Bell’s article, McLellan’s contains analysis as well as description.

Toronto is the country’s largest city and its most ethnically diverse. As with other ethnic groups, Asian immigrants have used religious institutions to help them adapt to a new society. McLellan states that, although these groups reflect a wide variety of ethnic, national, and linguistic groups, their engaged practice reflects “three different spheres of action: an ethnic community orientation; a homeland orientation; and an external orientation, beyond ethnic or national identities” (p. 280).

Canada’s history with Japanese Canadians parallels that of the U.S. The first Buddhist organization in Toronto was the Toronto Buddhist Church founded in the late 1940s by Japanese who, after being subject to massive human rights violations, had either to leave British Columbia or be faced with repatriation to Japan. As in the United States, a change in Canada’s

immigration laws in 1967 allowed for more Asian immigration. The greatest growth, however, has been within the last ten years, which has seen the establishment of over thirty groups due primarily to immigration from Hong Kong and Canada's family sponsorship and reunification programs. Chinese Buddhists now represent one third of all Buddhist groups in Toronto (p. 281).

The two basic types of Asian Buddhist organizations are the "temple-focused" and the "lay organization." Although the "temple-focused" organizations—including a monastic group (*sangha*) and a congregational group—may function to maintain particularistic Buddhist beliefs and practices, they all show evidence of transformation in, for example, modified rituals, the role and choice of symbols, and expectations that the *sangha* incorporate counseling roles; gender egalitarianism (if only in theory); increased involvement in social activities such as cultural presentations, political protests, or interfaith forums; and an increasing involvement of laity in temple affairs (p. 283). Engaged Buddhist action in this context has an ethnic orientation in which the temple serves not only as a means of transmitting cultural identity, but also as a system of support with links to other support systems concerned with both individual and community health (pp. 286–287).

The second orientation is that of homeland. Engaged Buddhism here expresses itself in concern for social justice and response to environmental disasters such as floods and earthquakes. Refugee communities are particularly associated with social and political activism. McLellan notes the activities of the Vietnamese Buddhist Association, which speaks out against human rights violations in Vietnam, particularly those against the *sangha*, and the Vietnamese Zen Meditation Group, which contributes to a number of sponsorship and social service initiatives (food and medical supplies, skills training, and orphanages, for example). The most visible group is the Tibetan community whose demonstration on March 10 every year, coinciding with others worldwide, gets good media attention, and which regularly protests against any Chinese leaders who visit Toronto (p. 291). The group also sponsors an annual New Year's celebration for non-Tibetans that includes a traditional dinner, religious ceremonies, consciousness raising presentations, and fundraising for a variety of health and educational initiatives in Nepal and India among the refugee communities there. As well as such public commemorations, they also have been active in sponsoring visiting monks who have performed devotional music, dance, and sand paintings in public forums such as the Royal Ontario Museum.

The final orientation noted by McLellan is that of external orientation. Both *sangha* and lay members participate in a wide variety of interfaith forums that have been active in protesting current social policies that have caused

increased suffering among all marginalized groups and individuals. They have become active participants in fundraising activities and organizations like the United Way. They have participated in group marches and have provided money and supplies to Project Warmth, which collects sleeping bags, food, and winter clothes for the homeless, as well as food for food banks. The Hong Fa Temple and the Buddhist Association of Canada regularly donate funds to Christian-oriented World Vision.

According to McLellan, however, only two organizations are actively committed to ongoing social activism beyond local or homeland needs: the Tzu Chi and Buddha's Light International Society, each of which belongs to a Taiwanese-based Buddhist organization that focuses on providing world aid regardless of race, ethnicity, politics, or religion (p. 294). Both groups are quite active in Toronto.

For the future, McLellan sees the expansion of engaged Buddhism outward from the orientations of ethnic and homeland and more involvement with external orientation as the needs of first-generation immigrants and refugees are met. Currently, a time of rising unemployment and reduced services demonstrates the need for increased social activism and ethnic community engagement (p. 295).

*Engaged Buddhism in the West* concludes with a reflection by Kenneth Kraft entitled "New Voices in Engaged Buddhism," which rounds out the volume by revisiting in a systematic manner the many issues raised by the twenty articles. He examines the parameters of engaged Buddhist Studies, the role of the participant-observer, and the issue upon which this review has briefly touched, that is, the issue of defining. Of major interest to me was the section entitled "Methodological Issues," which dealt with questions such as uses of Buddhist tradition (At what point does a reinterpretation become a distortion?), room for criticism (Are assessments of leaders too restrained?), and openness to new methods (Re-inventing the tetralemma) (pp. 503–506). Kraft has set this last piece up as a way of moving toward a new beginning, that is, a new set of discussions on these issues and towards an analysis of this new *yāna*.

*Engaged Buddhism in the West* provides the reader with information on an amazing array of engaged Buddhist groups, their leadership, ideologies, and practices. As with all volumes of essays, there were some that I liked more than others. And, although it is of interest to both practitioners and scholars, scholars will be most engaged by the issues raised by the book.