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ETHICS AND INTEGRATION IN AMERICAN BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT

This article identifies and explicates several of the most difficult and problematic issues facing the North American Buddhist movement today. It considers not only the obvious conflict between Asian-American and Euro-American Buddhism, but also those concerns that most directly impact on the ethical dilemmas facing modern American Buddhists. The article considers the tension that exists in American Buddhism's struggle to find the ideal community for Buddhist practice in its Western environment, as well as some potentially creative solutions.

TEXT

It has been fifteen years since my book _American Buddhism_ was published, and almost a quarter-century since the research that produced it was begun. At the time of publication, only a few pioneering works had appeared: Louise Hunter's _Buddhism in Hawaii_, Emma McCloy Layman's _Buddhism in America_, Louis Nordstrom's _Namu Dai Bosa: A Transmission of Zen Buddhism to America_ (based on the works of Nyoogen Senzaki, Nakagawa Sooen, Rooshi, and Eidoo Tai Shimano, Rooshi), Tetsuden Kashima's _Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution_, and perhaps one or two other books. There were a few secondary but related books too: Van Meter Ames' _Zen and American Thought_, Lit-sen Chang's _Zen Existentialism_ (subtitled "The Spiritual Decline of the West"), and Elsie Mitchell's _Sun Buddhas Moon Buddhas_ being fair examples. There were also some genuinely scholarly books that also touched on issues germane to the development of Buddhism in America like Robert S. Ellwood's _Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America_ or _The

Eagle and the Rising Sun_. Even Jacob Needleman's timely _The New Religions_ and its follow-up volume _Understanding the New Religions_, which grew out of a major conference at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, offered some help. Just prior to the close of the decade of the 1970s, eminent Harvard theologian Harvey Cox published _Turning East_, furnishing a rather wide readership with an arousing bit of reading, showcasing Cox's exuberant style, but offering little genuine understanding of Asian tradition and religion. There were virtually no journals devoted to the Buddhist movement in America, apart from a few modest (and not very widely circulated) periodicals published by individual Buddhist groups, and unfortunately, most of the individual periodical articles that did appear were largely intellectual trash.

Following the issue of _American Buddhism_, a profusion of scholarly publications began to appear in the literature, primarily documenting the history and acculturation of the Buddhist tradition in America. While some of the information was anecdotal, the vast majority of this new literature was both erudite and sophisticated. Within a decade, the study of Buddhism in America had developed into a sub-discipline of Buddhist Studies. As such, it became the focus of panels at professional meetings, doctoral dissertations, and even university courses. The publication of Professor Thomas Tweed's _The American Encounter with Buddhism: 1844-1912_ (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) demonstrated precisely how far research in this area has advanced in the intervening years. The change in the literature on American Buddhism was a keen reflection of how much the movement itself had changed in the intervening years. Having experienced a period of rather explosive growth, the Buddhist movement in America had settled down to a more modest, and to my way of thinking, //reasonable// period of development and acculturation.

It is correct, I think, to emphasize the word //acculturation//. Regarding my emphasis on acculturation, Priscilla Pedersen, in a review article says,

> Prebish does not undertake any sustained discussion of American religion, but confines himself to a series of specific, connected observations...In the present situation, Prebish says, "With the task of finding its American identity, the question of the specifics of lifestyle was to become the chief concern for American Buddhists in the 1970s." Answers to this question depend on finding workable ways to do two things: preserve the authenticity of tradition and at the same time make appropriate adaptations to the needs of a new clientele in a new cultural setting. If these things are not done, Buddhism cannot flourish as both truly "Buddhist" and truly "American." [1]

The final quotation in _American Buddhism_ was from Harvey Cox's article, later included in _Turning East_, entitled "Why Young Americans are Buying Oriental Religions." It's one of his few statements that I can agree with:

> Eventually the spiritual disciplines of the Orient will make a profound contribution to our own consciousness and our way of life. Some day, somewhere, we will hear the message the East has for us. But we can only begin to know the real Orient when we are willing to let go of the mythical one. [2]

Perhaps the initial question remains: Why do Buddhist teachers and groups come to America in the first place? How do the Asian teachers themselves view their work in America? I think the Venerable Tripi.taka Master Hsuan-hua said it best when he proclaimed, "I have come to America to create Patriarchs, to create Buddhas, to create //Bodhisattvas//." [3] Given the above, I looked for signs of Buddhist acculturation in //five essential areas//: (1) Buddhism as an urban movement, (2) Buddhism's response to American economics, (3) Buddhism's approach to education in America, (4) Buddhism's suggestion(s) for everyday American life, and (5) modes of Buddhist practice in America. In other words, Buddhism is a practicing art, and it is on these terms that it should be measured (initially and now).

I have repeatedly and consistently argued that the Buddhist movement in America is essentially an urban movement. [4] In _American Buddhism_ I suggested, somewhat aggressively, that the city was perhaps the newest wilderness symbol in American religion generally, and as such, offered the same predicaments, and potential, as the biblical counterpart. In other words, the city symbolizes the pre-creation chaos which highlights the negative aspect of the wilderness, but also symbolizes, in positive fashion, its potential for taming and creativity. Consequently, settlement or establishment in the city is a mythic act of creation, and like all acts of beginning, it affords Buddhism a truly American base. Petersen, in her review article, was quick to pick up the model:

> The typical pattern for Buddhist groups seems to be an original, founding center in a city, followed by expansion into a network of city and suburban centers, and, when funds become available, establishment of a monastery-style retreat outside the city. The latter is not an escape; rather, city and country practice are seen as complementary, often alternating. [5]

Further, at least one noted modern theologian has suggested that the religion of //homo urbanitas// offers a unique circumstance in that, "any city person's religion begins to have more in common with that of other city people than it does with the faith of people of his own tradition who still live, either physically or spiritually, in the countryside or small towns." [6] In this fashion, city Buddhism has a unique commonality with city forms of other traditions, thus affording an inroad toward the sort of ecumenicity that profits Buddhism's general acculturation in its American environment. Beginning in the 1980s, there was a much clearer, and more valuable, dialogue between American Buddhism and other faiths than in any decade since Buddhism's appearance on the American scene. Although Buddhism's modern dialogue

with other traditions is not especially new, [7] formal mechanisms for discussion, such as the journal _Buddhist-Christian Studies_, gradually began to emerge.

Early in its history in America, the Buddhist approach to

American economics was simply manifested by the presence of a number of Asian-American merchants selling largely Asian product lines in the ethnic sections of major American cities. The approach was, for the most part, minimally organized and largely restrictive. Times have changed dramatically. Although the process of change was afoot when I conducted my initial research in the 1970s, yielding such curiosities as a Boulder Buddhist Businessman's Association composed of disciples of Chogyam Trungpa, or the Neighborhood Foundation sponsored by the San Francisco Zen Center, in the 1990s a far wider network of non-traditionally Buddhist businesses exists in America. By that I mean to say that Buddhist economics is not conspicuously Buddhist, except perhaps in the scrupulously honest approach to ethical business conduct and their commitment to reasonable price schedules. In most cases, the shopper can no more identify the business owner as Buddhist than one can as Catholic, Jewish, or whatever.

If Buddhism's approach to economics is gently American, its venture into education is radically opposite. And this does not mean to suggest that it is simply parochial. It is truly revolutionary in its approach. Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, for example, had processed over 15,000 students by the mid-1980s. Naropa Institute, the secular wing of Chogyam Trungpa's innovative educational enterprise, has achieved accreditation as an institution of higher learning, established permanent facilities for its endeavors, and grants graduate degrees. The Institute of Buddhist Studies, a Buddhist Churches of America affiliate, continues to thrive, publishing a most important, scholarly, Buddhist Studies journal called _Pacific World_. Other Buddhist educational ventures might be cited as well. What is so peculiar about all these educational institutions? They all seek to integrate traditional American education into a Buddhist worldview and lifestyle in a fashion that emphasizes a healing, restorative vision and approach to the now-assumed mind-body split. They respond to individual, personal psychological perplexity with non-verbal humanities. They attempt to restore freedom and space to the educational process, concomitantly fostering creativity and productivity. They attempt to demonstrate that graduate education and personal wholeness are not at all incompatible, that study and religious practice fit together clearly in the Buddhist sense.

When I wrote _American Buddhism_, I suggested that much of the future of Buddhism in the 1970s, or for that matter, in longer term perspective, would be dependent on the changing face of American religious life in general. This is especially important in examining Buddhism's situation with regard to everyday life. By the late 1970s, America was in the throes of severe social anomie, largely fueled by the vast ethical uncertainty that gripped the cultural //and// religious landscape. At that time, I maintained that Buddhism's traditional view of //Vinaya// and //"siila//, monastic and individual guidelines for everyday, institutional and ethical conduct, was

grossly ineffective and needed serious commentary and reform. I believe that significant reform is taking place in American Buddhist communities. Needless to say, in this short context, I cannot pursue the many, varied ways Hiinayaana, Mahaayaana, and Vajrayaana Buddhist groups in America are specifically engaging the ancient tradition in a new dialogue that elevates precepts beyond a facile understanding merely as //"sik.saa//, as rigid regulations. Such an exposition would require an elucidation of new approaches to the Pali //Ma"ngala-sutta//, //Metta-sutta//, and //Sigaalovaada-sutta//, and to the Sanskrit versions of the //Bodhicaryaavataara//, //"Sik.saasamuccaya//,

//Upaaliparip.rcchaa-suutra//, and the like so as to provide a result that is truly transtemporal and transcultural.

In a 1987 paper entitled "The Future of American Buddhism," Rick Fields commented to a conference on Buddhist- Christian dialogue that Buddhism's future in America was intimately tied up with its ability to develop a //Vinaya// for lay people, its concern for promoting a just and compassionate society, and its regard for identifying an ethical pattern for women. [8] Fields is by no means the first to say this [9], but he is absolutely correct in his assertion. Recently, in the "Introduction" to my edited 1992 volume _Buddhist Ethics: A Cross-Cultural Approach_, I suggested that Buddhists could look to the synthesis of two traditional ethical frameworks in fulfilling the suggestions noted by Fields: (1) the four //Brahmavihaaras// or "Divine Abodes," consisting of love (//maitrii//), compassion (//karu.naa//), sympathetic joy (//muditaa//), and equanimity (//upek.saa//), and (2) the six //paaramitaas// or "perfections," of giving (//daana//), morality (//"siila//), patience (//k.saanti//), vigor (//viirya//), meditation (//samaadhi//), and wisdom (//praj~naa//). Although the //Brahmavihaaras// are more generally applied to Hiinayaana thought, and the //paaramitaas// to Mahaayaana thought, they might be reinterpreted conjointly through //an entirely new commentarial literature// in reconfiguring a //modern// American Buddhist ethics. In so doing, American Buddhism will arrive at a wisdom that is grounded in equanimity, understanding properly that, "...although fully liberated beings have abandoned all the negative emotions of attachment, hatred, and delusion, they have not destroyed //all// emotion and feeling. They have the ability to develop a whole range of rich and satisfying emotions and are encouraged in scripture to do so." [10] Consequently, a powerful new ethical tool is developed that stands outside of time and culture.

Regarding modes of Buddhist practice in America, I think it is fortunate that the mad dash to meditation of all sorts, many of which may have been grossly fraudulent, is over. Yet more and more Buddhists continue to practice, and to meditate, in America. They have found a way to integrate perhaps an hour or more a day into their busy schedules as doctors, teachers, and so forth. They continue to identify with American culture as much as previously, but they //also// continue to make space in every day for religious practice. They play tennis, but they //also// go to their temples and/or do sesshins. They use word processors and sophisticated computers, but they also read the //Diamond Suutra// and //The Life of Milarepa//. They laugh at Ren and Stimpy, but visit the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. They eat at Pizza Hut, but still appreciate the Tea Ceremony.

In short, they have begun to engage in Buddhist practice in America in a positive fashion.

To return to the point from which this paper began, the treatment of American Buddhism as a topic worthy of producing an important literature, //both scholarly and popular//, it is critical to note that research on American Buddhism has expanded exponentially. What was once considered to be at the marginal fringe of the so-called "new religious movements" enterprise now occupies a place as a valid and important sub-discipline within Buddhist Studies. Nonetheless, in the quarter-century that passed, an accurate and adequate examination of American Buddhism requires an //entirely different overview and an entirely different set of questions//.

Peter W. Williams, in his (1990) book _American Religions_, identifies three categories to describe the way Asian religions impact on America: (1) "ethnic religions," or those practiced by Asian immigrants and, to an extent, by their descendants, (2) "export religions," or those popular among well-educated, generally intellectual Americans, and (3) "new religions," or those developing in consonance with the process outlined by Jacob Needleman and others, and often as revolutionary outgrowths of religions cited in the first two categories. This threefold designation is to some degree an extension of anthropologist Robert Redfield's categories of "great traditions" and "little traditions." The great traditions refer to the religions of the literate and elite. They are the religions of books and scholars. The little traditions are less historically grounded; they are popular expressions of the great traditions, transmitted less through books and scholars and more through family values and community practice. Williams's categorization is useful in understanding ethnic (i.e., largely Asian-American) Buddhist groups as "little tradition" manifestations of an "ethnic religion," while identifying non-ethnic (i.e., Euro-American) Buddhist groups as "export religions," part of the "great tradition", and representing an "elite Buddhism in America." To some extent, one may infer that Williams links the on-going success of ethnic religions to the degree to which they make the transition from past to present, to their ability to become //Americanized//. And he knows this is no simple task either: "To become American means more than to effect a geographic relocation to the horizontal midsection of the North American continent, or even to become a citizen of the United States. In the fuller sense, it means becoming acculturated, adopting a distinctively American way of living and looking at the world as its own." Additionally, acculturation generally proceeds far more slowly than one would prefer, is an arduous process, and resists the urgency of some individuals (especially in America) to force the proverbial square pegs through round holes.

In 1987 a Conference on World Buddhism in North America was held at the University of Michigan during which a "Statement of Consensus" was promulgated (a) "to create the conditions necessary for tolerance and understanding among Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike," (b) "to initiate a dialogue among Buddhists in North America in order to further mutual understanding, growth in understanding, and

cooperation," (c) "to increase our sense of community by recognizing and understanding our differences as well as our common beliefs and practices," and (d) "to cultivate thoughts and actions of friendliness towards others, whether they accept our beliefs or not, and in so doing approach the world as the proper field of Dharma, not as a sphere of conduct irreconcilable with the practice of Dharma."

The "Statement of Consensus" of the Conference on World Buddhism in North America seems to imply a different operative model than the one outlined above, one best identified in terms of what Robert S. Ellwood (in _Introducing Religion from Inside and Outside_) has called //established religion// and //emergent religion//. Established religion doesn't appeal to a religious elite, arguing that ordinary folk can attain religious truth and experience. Further, established religion locates the pursuit of ultimate reality firmly within the context of one's traditional community, cognizant that religion as practiced by the "little tradition" is sufficiently devout for religious attainment. What makes it //established// is its constancy,

its rejection of what is radical, its //duration//. In Ellwood's words, it implements "the normative values of the community." He maintains that established religions are both international and intercultural. Emergent religion generally appears during changing times. It reflects an uncertainty about, but orientation toward, the future. It usually chooses and emphasizes something new and innovative from the established religion that serves as its foundation. It often focuses its attention around a charismatic leader who brings new members into the fold. Emergent religion can be further categorized into (1) "intensive" emergent religion and (2) "expansive" emergent religion. The former group tends to withdraw from the mainstream of society to intensify its religious practice (usually drawn from within the context of established religion). The latter group also withdraws from society, but unlike intensive religion, its intent is to establish //what it is//, to infuse established religion //with new ideas, new practices, new approaches// that make it applicable to a new setting. It is not at all unusual for emergent religions to become established religions within a couple of generations. This process reflects what Max Weber called the "routinization of charisma." It is quite possible to see Buddhism in America in this light. Some Buddhist groups clearly fit the description of established religion. The remainder of Buddhist groups could easily be referred to as emergent religions, moving at various speeds, governed by factors such as secularization, towards status as established religions.

To understand American Buddhism's development from emergent religion to established religion, a great deal of new data is necessary, data which reflects a paradigm shift in our inquiry from understanding, and then measuring, acculturation, to understanding, and then measuring sociological and demographic factors. To date, statistical source material on American Buddhism is virtually non-existent. Even such a basic issue as the //number// of Buddhists in America remains unclear. In 1979 Prebish put the estimate at several hundred thousand. By 1987, the American Buddhist Congress suggested the unrealistic figure of three to five million. More modestly, the fourth edition of John and Denise Carmody's _Ways to the

Center_ (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1993) estimates 560,000. Most recently, in May 1994, ABC National News suggested a figure of three to five million. The disparity of these figures emphasizes the need for carefully collected data. This deficiency is especially significant, for without such baseline data, future interpretive approaches will necessarily remain purely theoretical, yielding results that are at best problematic.

The collection and presentation of this data will provide for the first time a comprehensive picture of American Buddhism's resources, funding, key figures, administrative framework, long-range planning, publications, rituals and practices, doctrinal and ethical positions, and the like. Additionally, we will be able to comprehensively develop information on the backgrounds of American Buddhists and discover previously unknown information about their educational levels, occupations, former religious orientations, motivations for becoming Buddhist, earnings, value orientations, families, and a host of other questions critical for an accurate understanding of the American Buddhist movement. In other words, we will be able to provide, for the first time, a clear and reliable profile of the modern American Buddhist, institutionally and individually.

Because the empirical data is so critical in understanding

Buddhism's development in America, the results of such an inquiry will break new scholarly ground in the study of American Buddhism. An important additional benefit of the data collected will be our ability to substantiate the fashion in which American Buddhism has begun to emphasize a keen new concern for what some researchers have called "socially engaged Buddhism." It is in this category that American Buddhists are currently making a vital, unique contribution to the human concerns emphasized by their Asian counterparts. A fresh and innovative emphasis on Buddhist ethical problems and dilemmas in a post-modern world is emerging today, and this issue will be one of the primary areas of interpretive concern in this project. It is an emphasis, however, that is not without serious obstacles. Concomitant to the consideration of interest in the human predicament is a growing chasm between ethnic American Buddhists and American Buddhists of primarily European ancestry. At a time when what one writer has called "cross-lineage and cross-cultural borrowing" might be heralded as a means for establishing continuity in the pursuit of the eradication of human suffering, much discontinuity is apparent in the American Buddhist movement. This issue will be an important focus of the investigation. We also are especially interested in investigating the question of gender roles in American Buddhism, and will give considerable attention to the status of women in the various American Buddhist communities, as well as the alarming and disturbing problem involving the abuse of power, and particularly with regard to sexual matters, on the part of American Buddhist teachers. We can only consider some of these issues here.

One of the great challenges facing the American Buddhism of today encompasses finding a means of reconciling the vastly different emphases of ethnic Buddhist and exported Buddhist groups. No doubt the circumstance is complicated by enormous misunderstandings on both

sides of the issue. In the August 1991 issue of _Dharma Gate_, a newspaper publication of the One Mind Zen Center in Crestone, Colorado, editor Hye Shim (Sarah Grayson) Se Nim wrote: [11]

> Buddhism is coming to us from many cultures. Each comes with their own understanding mixed with indigenous elements from that culture. We can be Buddhist, but we cannot be Tibetans, Japanese, Korean, Sri Lankan, Burmese, etc. For us as Westerners to create a Buddhist culture at this time, it has to resonate with our experiences as Western people. So, what does apply here? The earliest Buddhists here maintained Buddhism strictly as an ethnic bonding and did not expect or make it possible for Westerners to become a part of it. That can't work for Americans.

Such an approach is both inaccurate and frightening. It also reflects a serious misunderstanding of the early Asian-American Buddhist endeavor. Worse yet, based on her assumption that shamanism and Buddhism have been linked in a variety as cultures, including Asia and America, the editor makes a rather passionate plea for endorsing shamanism as the vehicle to "create a rich and integrated Buddhist culture in the West." [12] The problem is significantly more complicated than she imagines. Because she believes that "The authoritarian and hierarchical systems that were imported with Japanese Buddhism have never meshed very well with Americans and in a very short time began to seem obsolete," [13] she has effectively eliminated the possibility of ethnic Japanese-American Buddhist

groups from participating in her vision of a thriving American Buddhism. Ryo Imamura, however, points out that things are equally problematic in non-ethnic American Buddhism. He notes that [14]

> White Buddhists treat their teachers like gurus or living Buddhas whereas we Asians regard ours to be fallible human beings who represent an honored tradition and not themselves. White Buddhist centers rise and fall dramatically like ocean waves whereas Asian temples seem to persist uneventfully and quietly through generations. White practitioners practice intensive psychotherapy on their cushions in a life-or-death struggle with the ego whereas Asian Buddhists just seem to smile and eat together. It is clear that, although they may adopt Asian Buddhist names, dress and mannerisms, white Buddhists cannot help but drag their Judeo-Christian identities and shadows with them wherever they go.

Rather than presenting a negative verdict, Imamura stresses positive prospects for the future: "This certainly makes for an exciting and dramatic new form of Buddhism." [15]

There are other predicaments too. Don Morreale published more than 300 pages of (essays and) listings of American Buddhist groups in his _Buddhist America: Centers, Retreats, Practices_, [16] yet every single listing is of a //meditation group or temple//. Does this

emphasis reveal a subtle, unspoken prejudice which inherently presumes non-meditative groups to be, at best, unworthy of citation in an American Buddhist compendium, and at worst, not even really //Buddhist//? Morreale even notes that many of the ethnic meditation temples didn't respond to his questionnaire, and he ponders whether it was motivated by "conviction that their principal duty is to their own ethnic constituencies." [17] The introductory essay to Morreale's book, "Is Buddhism Changing in North America?" was written by Jack Kornfield, well-known co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society, identified by Rick Fields as one of "men who care." Near the end of his essay, Kornfield says something extraordinary: [18]

> As Buddhism comes to North America, a wonderful new process is happening. All of us, as lay people, as householders, want what was mostly the special dispensation of monks in Asia: the real practice of the Buddha. American lay people are not content to go and hear a sermon once a week or to make merit by leaving gifts at a meditation center. We, too, want to //live// the realizations of the Buddha and bring them into our hearts, our lives, and our times. This is why so many Americans have been drawn to the purity of intensive //Vipassana// retreats, or to the power of Zen //sesshin//, or even to the one hundred thousand prostrations and three-year retreats of the Vajrayana tradition. Somehow we have an intuitive sense of the potential of human freedom and the heart of basic goodness, the timeless discovery of the Buddha.

Aside from a rather restrictive definition of the term //American//, which I don't share, and the presumption that //all American Buddhists are lay disciples//, which I equally don't share, Kornfield seems to be rather clearly excluding anything non-meditational from the //real

practice of the Buddha//. In so doing, he seriously underestimates the nature, import, and efficacy of Pure Land Buddhism, for example, in a cavalier fashion.

One would be wrong to presume the above to be a one-sided argument. In a recent letter to the editor of _Tricycle_, Venerable Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara, Executive President of the American Buddhist Congress in Los Angeles wrote: [19]

> About "The Changing of the Guard," this article doesn't really hit the mark for me. The impression I get is that the author wants the reader to believe that the conclusion (that American Buddhism puts an emphasis on householder instead of monk, and the community instead of monastery) is representative of all or most of what is going on in American Buddhism. This is not so, even among the Western-born. . .The criticism made about the Buddhist order of monks in general is inaccurate and impolite. It tends to include, by association, //all// the //Sangha//, while overlooking the contributions made by the //Bhikkus// [sic] and their monasteries.

When questioned about the above letter, in a telephone conversation of 12 January 1993, Dr. Ratanasara indicated to me that Mr. Fields not only had a limited understanding of the Buddhist tradition, but that his book on American Buddhism presented a prejudiced viewpoint in not recognizing the importance of the Theravaada tradition in America. More specifically, he maintained that "secularization will not work" in American Buddhism. He argued for Buddhist communities to work under the guidance of monks, and that the //Vinaya// need not be altered at all, or new commentaries constructed, in order to confront ethical circumstances in changing times and cultures, but decisions of the "//sangha// as a community of monks" would be offered to adjust and introduce new accommodations in the traditional manner of //katikaavatas// or codes of conduct for the communities so that they live in conformity with the //Vinaya//. When queried as to whether non-ethnic American Buddhists were currently joining the monastic community in significant numbers, he mentioned that //one// person in Virginia had recently become a //bhikkhu//! Regarding the relationship between ethnic and non-ethnic American Buddhists, he said the issue was "irrelevant," that acculturation would "happen automatically" as American Buddhism matured. He also said that White Buddhists needed more time to study and understand the core teachings of Buddhist cultures and traditions, and to stop coming to "hasty" conclusions. Dr. Ratanasara concluded by telling me that Los Angeles was the most important Buddhist Center in the United States, and that additional American urban areas were now modeling themselves on the //Sangha// Council of Southern California.

In the nearly two decades that I have been writing about Buddhism in America, I have consistently argued that since the vast majority of Buddhists in this country were members of the laity, for Buddhism to be truly American, it would need to address the dilemma of tailoring the //major emphasis// of Buddhist practice to lay rather than monastic life. Initially, the suggestion was rather widely and aggressively attacked by what seemed to me like most of the Buddhists groups in America. The substance of the critique presumed that I ignored the monastic //sangha//, the very basis and foundation of Buddhist community life. Of course I did nothing of the kind. I simply

acknowledged what Buddhists in Asia have recognized for more than two millennia. Most practitioners, for an enormous variety of entirely valid reasons, cannot make the full and complete commitment to the rigorous practice associated with monastic life. That doesn't mean we should //ignore// the monastic tradition, or //exclude it from American Buddhist life//, but rather that we provide the context for all Buddhists in America to practice in a fashion appropriate to their choice of approach. In so doing, we would simply be following, and perhaps adapting, an Asian Buddhist model predicated on the notion that there have always been more members of the laity than members of the monastic tradition, but that both endeavors needed to be affirmed and endorsed for the successful development of Buddhist religious life. Such an approach has not always been clear in the popular literature.

In Spring 1992, the _Tricycle_ editorial observed that "Just now,

ours is not predominantly a Buddhism of removed monasticism. It is out of robes, in the streets, in institutions, workplaces, and homes." [20] The editorial closed with this remark: "While Buddhist history is steeped in monasticism, our own democratic traditions compel us to share the burden of social problems." [21] For some Buddhists in this country, monastic and otherwise, the above comments may be perceived as highly inflammatory, possibly even reflective of a rejection of the entire monastic vocation. To be sure, American Buddhism might redefine somewhat the nature of the symbiosis between the two main component groups of the Buddhist //sangha//, but neither enterprise would ever be disparaged by the other. In Morreale's 1988 volume, Jack Kornfield called the same process //integration//, and along with democratization and feminism, considered it one of three major themes in North American Buddhism. [22] So, within a decade, many writers, mostly identified with non-ethnic American Buddhism, had begun to echo my own sentiment. No one, however, has made the argument so eloquently, and with such awareness of the complexity of the task, as Rita Gross, in her important book _Buddhism After Patriarchy_. [23] Gross recognizes that what she refers to as "monasticism after patriarchy," while understanding that new and vital archetypes must replace Buddhism's current "very weak models for meaningful lay life," must forge new monastic paradigms that are androgynous and free of prejudice or discrimination. [24] The movement to a truly post-patriarchal monastic tradition is at least as threatening to traditional Buddhism in Asia as to the conflict between the "Two Buddhisms" in America, as outlined above; and of course Gross argues persuasively for an androgynous lay Buddhism as well. Additionally, Gross identifies, addresses, //and validates// the emphasis of those Buddhists who are trying to work out an intermediary lifestyle that incorporates //both monastic and lay features// into serious, rigorous Buddhist practice.

Associated with the struggle to redefine community life in American Buddhism, accommodating both ethnic and largely non-ethnic groups, is a new emphasis on active expressions of compassion as perhaps the major component of a revitalized Buddhist ethics that has been called "socially engaged Buddhism." In an interesting recent book titled _Inner Peace, World Peace_, [25] edited by Kenneth Kraft, the editor provides an interesting survey chapter in which he chronicles many of the activities collected under the above rubric, such as the founding of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship in 1978, Thich Nhat Hanh's many significant endeavors in North America, the Dalai Lama's efforts, and, most importantly, the growing body of literature that has

accompanied the effort. Kraft shows how socially engaged Buddhism in America has utilized well-known methods of social action in this culture: voter mobilization, letter writing campaigns, volunteer charity work, tax resistance, product boycotts, and so forth. What is most puzzling here is that one of the major foci of socially engaged Buddhists in the West consists of providing aid and support to //ethnic Buddhist groups//, both here and in Asia, while, with few exceptions, ethnic Buddhists in America seem not to be especially active in the movement.

A creative commentary on Buddhism's attempt to renew its

commitment to generating and practicing a revitalized, value-oriented ethical life is the development of Thich Nhat Hanh's "Order of Interbeing," the successor to Vietnam's Tiep Hien Order. It tries to provide a creative (even experimental) individual and collective methodology for the application of Buddhist principles to today's world. The major thrust of the group is to practice the traditional five vows of the laity, in conjunction with fourteen additional precepts that amplify and augment the values underlying the original five. Moreover, Nhat Hanh has struck a careful balance between meditational training and political activism, emphasizing each activity as mutually influencing. In so doing, both ethnic and non-ethnic American Buddhist groups are provided with an agenda for activism that benefits all Buddhists. Despite its clever use of what Fields calls "cross-cultural borrowing" and genuine potential for an honorable rather than politically correct multiculturalism in American Buddhism, this approach has not been uniformly accepted.

One of the most fruitful approaches to understanding the attitudinal differences between ethnic and non-ethnic American Buddhists can be extracted from Kenneth Kraft's work in _Inner Peace, World Peace_. He suggests that Buddhists in Asian and Third World countries are often engaged in serious struggle for political and cultural survival. He notes that "Those involved in such conflicts typically have little interest in the theoretical implications of nonviolence or the latest innovations in spiritual/activist practice." [26] Most Western Buddhists have never shared that tragic experience; it's a form of suffering they've never experienced. Yet their teachers have. Chogyam Trungpa's _Born in Tibet_ remains a chilling testament to the fallout of a world filled with suffering. Thich Thien-an's work with Vietnamese refugees both before and after the fall of Saigon documents how suffering sometimes fosters what one writer called "the exigencies of a major transplantation of human beings to a totally new environment." [27] Irrespective of whether the individual teacher is Jiyu Kennett or Maezumi Rooshi, Shinzen Young or Havanpola Gunaratana, Karuna Dharma or Ryo Imamura, Sharon Salzberg or Tarthang Tulku, they all might come to manifest the most creative sort of eclectic ecumenicism that provides the potential for understanding and growth rather than misunderstanding and divisiveness in American Buddhism. It is their legacy that provides the hope and potential for the main themes presented in these two overviews to coalesce, to grow and mature into an "American Buddhism" valorizing the notion that, in Helen Tworkov's words, "There is no one way to be a Buddhist." [28]

In 1970 I worried seriously about American Buddhism's apparent movement in the direction of what Agehananda Bharati called the "aloha-amigo" syndrome which he viewed as "pathological eclecticism." [29] In the intervening years, I learned that I worried needlessly. Lest we be too optimistic, what I also learned is that in 1995 we have

a whole new set of problems to consider.

NOTES

[1]. Priscilla Pedersen, "Feature Book Review," _Philosophy East and West_ 34, 1 (January 1984): 97.

[2]. Harvey Cox, "Why Young Americans are Buying Oriental Religions," _Psychology Today_ 1977 (July): 42.

[3]. Charles Prebish, _American Buddhism_ (North Scituate, Massachusetts: Duxbury Press, 1979), 112, citing Bhik.su.nii Heng Yin's _Records of the Life of the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua_: xiii.

[4]. See for example, Charles S. Prebish, "Karma and Rebirth in the Land of the Earth Eaters," in Ronald W. Neufeldt (ed.), _Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments_ (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986): 327-328.

[5]. Petersen: 98.

[6]. Harvey Cox, _The Seduction of the Spirit_ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973): 56.

[7]. See, for example, Winston King's _Buddhism and Christianity: Some Bridges of Understanding_, published in London in 1963.

[8]. For the published version of this paper, see Rick Fields, "The Future of American Buddhism," _The Vajradhatu Sun_ 9, 1 (October-November, 1987): 1, 22, 24-26.

[9]. See, for example, Robert Aitken, _The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethics_ (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), or Prebish, "Karma and Rebirth in the Land of the Earth Eaters."

[10]. Harvey Aronson, _Love and Sympathy in Theravaada Buddhism_ (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980): 95.

[11]. See: _Dharma Gate_ 1, 2 (August, 1991): 2.

[12]. Ibid.

[13]. Ibid.

[14]. Imamura, unpublished letter to _Tricycle_.

[15]. Ibid.

[16]. See: Don Morreale (ed.), _Buddhist America: Centers, Retreats, Practices_ (Santa Fe, New Mexico: John Muir Publications, 1988).

[17]. Ibid.: xxxi.

[18]. Ibid.: xxv.

[19]. See: "Letters to the Editor," _Tricycle_ 1, 4 (Summer 1992): 77.

[20]. See: Helen Tworkov, "The Formless Field of Buddhism," _Tricycle_ 1, 3 (Spring 1992): 4.

[21]. Ibid.

[22]. Kornfield, in _Buddhist America_: xv.

[23]. See: Rita M. Gross, _Buddhism After Patriarchy_ (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[24]. Ibid.: 240-249.

[25]. See: Kenneth Kraft (ed.), _Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence_ (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), especially: 1-30.

[26]. Ibid.: 24.

[27]. This statement was made by Lenore Friedman.

[28]. Tworkov, "Many is More," _Tricycle_ 1,2 (Winter 1991): 4.

[29]. Agehananda Bharati, _The Light at the Center_ (Santa Barbara, California: Ross-Erikson, 1976): 11.

Writings about Buddhist ethics and Mahayana Buddhist ethics in particular cannot escape two basic problems. The first problem is that the often-misunderstood soteriological aim of Mahayana, achieving Nirvana, conflicts with the tradition's normative ethics because Nirvana is posited as transcending worldly conventions.Â Thaddeus Metz in Meaning in Life centers his research within western philosophical thought. I will engage early Buddhism to see whether its thinking about meaning is compatible with Metz's fundamentality theory of what makes life meaningful. My thesis is: Early Buddhist thinking generally supports a fundamentality reading of meaning but in the ethical state of nibbÄna (nirvana) the Arahant Buddhism and Christianity are starkly different religions that offer almost wholly opposite views of the world. They differ on pretty much every essential doctrine. Some will argue, however, that behind all of this, both religions hold to very similar ethics. They are very close, we are told, in their ideas of what is right and wrong, and this is common ground on which to build a dialogue and perhaps even work toward a shared goal of human goodness. Not only is this flawed because neither Buddhism nor Christianity hold mere "human goodness" as their ultimate goal, but the problem in