Chapter II

A Buddhist Response To Development, Environmental And Modernism

2:1  A Buddhist Response to Environmental Development

In a time, when inequality and exploitation seem to dominate our society, there are now growing movements of across the world working for peace, social justice and ecology. There are inspiring stories of people applying their ingenuity to protect Nature. In Siam, Buddhist monks preserve forests by ordaining trees into the priesthood. In Thai culture, ordained persons are much respected, so their influence protects the tree. Such creative resistance is also seen in the struggles of native people against deforestation and the damming of rivers, in local farmers resisting biotechnology, and countless other examples of people making a stand, however small. These struggles are full of passion, but they need to be better integrated. There common agenda must be firmly placed on a non-overcome the violence and spiritual path. This is the only way they can overcome the violence and destructiveness of the dominant world order.

It is abundantly clear that the material benefits of modernization and Westernization are unfairly distributed to the people of our planet. Industrial capitalism has been built upon the violence of conquest, genocide, slavery, debt and bondage. This examination and issue related to continues to attend the attitude of making today, especially in the most vulnerable communities of the world’s indigenous peoples.

Inequality and exploitation lead to tension and conflict, and although many conflicts are expressed in ethnic, racial and religious terms, the underlying issues are often class based, rooted in the social structures of the environmental economic system. As social disparities add the inevitable resistance increase, people must, according to the
ruling elite, be managed with increasingly violent repression. Thus, we have a situation where the environmental economy is predominately a military-industrial economy where the world’s leading nations own the means of production and the increasingly profitable means of protecting and expanding that ownership. All of this perpetuates and worsens the situation for the majority of human beings.

To counteract these environmental forces, we need to walk a different path from the one offered by capitalism. Fortunately, the teaching we need in order to walk this path already exists. The challenge facing humanity is not the development of more and more technology, markets and systems of control, but the spiritual development of wisdom and compassion. From the Buddhist viewpoint, all suffering is directly or indirectly linked to the root causes of evil: greed, hatred and delusion\(^1\).

Today, greed is clearly personified in modern capitalism and consumerism. Human beings are taught to worship money, worldly sciences and technological advance at the expense of human development and the spiritual dimension of men and woman. The European Enlightenment philosopher Rene Descartes said "cogito ergo sum, ‘I think therefore I am’”. He fathered the Western concept that has become the core misconception of consumer culture that understands ‘I buy, therefore I am’. Without the power of purchasing, says the current interpretation of Descartes, modern people become nobodies.

There is different path. In Buddhism, we could say ‘I breathe therefore I am.’ We breathe in for the first time as we enter the world from mother life. Yet we do not have taken care of our daily breathing. Most of the time we breathe in suffering and anxiety. We breathe out hatred and greed. The cycle of evil continues out of control.

Through breathing exercises we can be mindful and synchronize our head and our heart. We can breathe in beauty and peace and we can breathe out compassion and loving-kindness. You don’t have to believe in Buddhism to do this. If you are a Christian, breathe in Christ and you can be happy and content.

With this practice we will have understanding and develop compassion rather than exhibit our arrogant intellectual knowledge. We can have to understand a personal transformation, become less selfish and care more for others. We can also develop critical self-awareness and awareness of social ills in order to find our true potential to face suffering both internally and socially.

The central teaching in Buddhism is enutially presuated in the Four Noble Truths and the first Truth is the truth of suffering (*dukkha*). If one fails to understand the impact of this Truth, one cannot really practice Buddhism. Environmental development today seems to be a celebration of a way of life, which not only leads away from this understanding of the Truth of Suffering, but even discourages people from believing that this Truth exists. Environmental development springs from a civilization that claims to adore life, but actually starves it of any real meaning, a civilization that endlessly speaks of making people ‘happy’, but in fact blocks their way to the source of real peace and happiness.

From Buddhist perspective, for human beings to live happily there must be freedom on three levels. The first freedom is the freedom to live

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2 The Pali word, *dukkha*, means "incapable of satisfying" or "not able to bear or withstand anything": always changing, incapable of truly fulfilling us or making us happy. The sensual world is like that, a vibration in nature. It would, in fact, be terrible if we did find satisfaction in the sensory world *dukkha* because then we wouldn't search beyond it; we'd just be bound to it. However, as we awaken to this we begin to find the way out so that we are no longer constantly trapped in sensory consciousness.
in the material or natural environment. We could generally call this 'physical freedom'. This is freedom from want and deprivation. It is freedom to access an adequate supply of the four basic necessities of life: goods, clothing, shelter and medicine. This also includes freedom from natural dangers and the ability to live safely in human society free of violence and exploitation by others.

These first two forms of freedom are essential to human development and well-being, but neither will be truly effective or appreciated if, they are not connected on a personal level to the third form of freedom, people must learn how to live independently, to be happy and contented within themselves. This sublime freedom could be called inner freedom.

Inner freedom leads to a happiness that is independent of externals; with it we are no longer dependent on exploiting our environment or our fellow beings. With inner freedom, we become more and more capable of finding contentment within our own minds and through our own wisdom, independent of natural or social conditions. With a more independent kind of happiness, social and physical freedom will be preserved and strengthened. Human beings will then have the best possible relationship with the natural environment, with human society and with themselves.

The Buddhist tradition contains a wealth of pertinent insight into exactly these issues. It is highly appropriate and indeed even crucial that Buddhist who are concerned with the spiritual, political, environmental and social welfare of humanity should join together to try and utilize the wisdom of the Buddha in a socially relevant way, primarily by initiating alternatives to the mainstream.

A Buddhist contribution to making our environmental society more peaceful and fair can draw on two main stands of its tradition. Firstly, it is
the analysis of structural violence using Buddhism’s rich tradition of exploring the roots of selfishness and violence within human individuals. Progressive Buddhists have been applying these teachings to social issues with increasing creativity, depth, and practical clarity. Secondly, the Buddhist ethical tradition has always challenged the status quo of economic, political, and cultural values and power structures. The Buddha actually never refereed to his teaching as being one that is entirely intellectual or entirely moral. He often referred to his teaching (Buddha-Dhamma) holistically as Ariya-Vinaya (Nobel Discipline). In this sense ‘noble’, but all- encompassing and applies both to the monastic lineage as well as lay people.

It is this kind of balanced approach that is emulated by the Engaged Buddhist movement. This movement is applying the intellect, inspiration and wisdom inherent in spirituality to tangible social issues. This includes solidarity founded in compassion and the appreciation of diversity arising from it will be used as a launching point to further investigate Ariya-Vinaya from the teachings of the Buddha.

One of our primary projects is inspired by “Noble ethical discipline”, an idea of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. With help from His Holiness, we are presently engaged in a progressive series of dialogues with Buddhist monistic from various traditions. These dialogues are expanding to Buddhist layperson and eventually will extend to other world wisdom traditions. This effort is appropriately called Ariya-Vinaya.

Another important impact in which we are working on is the ‘Spirit in Education Movement’ (SEM). In this desolate world in which spiritual and environmental diversity are being worn away, there is little time for education of the heart and soul. Mainstream education in the West concentrates on the intellect and is becoming more and more commercial,
business-like and competitive. As the Eastern countries jump happily onto the consumer bandwagon, their education systems are beginning to emulate the narrow, disconnected fields of Western education.

The Spirit in Education Movement was founded by several prominent alternative thinkers to counteract the negative trends of Western education. With humble roots in Siam’s rural communities, it is founded on the philosophy that education must be spiritually based, ecologically sound and offered with a holistic world-view. The philosophy is underpinned by Buddhist wisdom and Green principles, but also welcomes and advances other spiritual and ecological wisdom. We aspire to create an environment to awaken Buddha-nature and cultivate wisdom as well as the intellect. We aspire to benefit people by increasing individual and collective confidence in their own traditional wisdom, skills and heritage. We hope to move individuals from selfishness to compassion, from a meaningless life to one rich and fulfilling, and from negative to positive thinking. We link action, meditation, art and intellectual learning, with a friendly, nurturing, happy learning environment in spiritually alive places in beautifully nature settings.

Despite all the sufferings in the world, there are some words of encouragement. We know there is a way to transcend suffering. The tools and knowledge are already here within our spiritual systems, but a concerted effort in needed to bring them to bear on the social ills of our world. The course of such an effort will naturally need to bring together the entire global Buddhist community, compromising an immense diversity of people and traditions. This an important first step towards the eventual goal of establishing and furthering dialogue and unity among all of the world’s wisdom traditions, perhaps the best hope humanity has of establishing a peaceful and fair global society. Buddhism can be the path,
whereby we might engage ourselves in the process of liberation. The project of engaged Buddhism work towards the liberation of all others as well.

### 2:2 A Buddhist Response to the “Age of Environmental Society”

Sometimes one feels that the age of environmental society is not really an accurate description of the age, we are said to be living in. The world environmental society is at best too socially neutral, at worse highly misleading and deceptive. Sometimes, the usage of phrases such as “free market fundamentalism” and “extreme modernism” to simple “environmental society”.

“Free market fundamentalism” is a more accurate term because environmental globalization, which preaches the interdependence of nations, the mutuality of their interests, and the shared benefits of their interactions, has triggered the very opposite consequences (e.g., increasing dependence of ‘developing’ states on ‘developed’ states, increasing inequalities of wealth within and between nation-states, etc.) as a result of this free market system, vast tracts of the world’s natural environment is in irreversible ruins, threatening ecological equilibrium and even human survival. Despite these obvious consequences, we are told that the free market system is still not free enough; there are still barriers to trade; economies have to be further deregulated or restructured at virtually any cost; and so on. All of this is done in the name of progress, prosperity, and development. If this faith in the emancipator power of the free market system is not fundamentalism, then I don’t know what is.

“Extreme modernism” is another more accurate description because our world can be characterized by the intensification, radicalization, and universal spread of Modernity. Modernism has
become hegemonic and it has so clearly become the aspiration of the “sane and normal” that embracing Modernity is now a test of sanity and normality. The implication is clearly that any other human aspirations are considered products of weal or abnormal minds. This is understandable since the development of the concept of modernization has always been racially coded. Its intellectual precursor is none other than “Europeanization”. The renowned American syndicate columnist Thomas Friedman has even labeled critics of environmental society “advocates of a flat earth”. According to Friedman, these critics are locked in the abnormal past, refusing to accept the unilateral of time. If my criticism of society makes me a flat-earth, so be it.

For all of us, who are interested in freedom, justice, non-violence, democracy, and environmental sustainability we should intensify our activism and analyses and not disengage ourselves from the sufferings in the world. We must keep working because luckily, and perhaps optimistically, the term “globalization” might just be an overstatement. We do not yet; live in a globalized world, a condition that would indeed invite resignation or fatalism. Rather we are living in a globalizing world. As such, we all still have a chance to define its contours and contents before the center is occupied without our participation. It is indeed empowering to feel that we all can still make difference.

As a Buddhist, I turn to the teachings of the Buddha in order to responsibly engage with the suffering in the world. Throughout the decades of my activism, I have been sustained and rejuvenated by a very smile magic the Buddha had to offer. And as I share it with you during this talk, I hope that embracing it, you will be natured and awakened.

Let me begin with the story of a monk who went to see the Buddha and who told the Awakened One that he had been meditating for many
years before he could obtain a magical power to walk on water across the river. The Buddha commented on how silly that monk was to waste so much time to achieve something that is not at all useful. If the monk wished to cross the river, the best way to do was to get a boatman and pay him two Annas\(^3\). In Buddhism, it is not magical to walk on water or to fly in the air, but it is indeed miraculous to walk on earth mindfully and to attribute what Mother Earth contributes the welfare of all. The virtue of mindfulness is one of Buddhism’s great contributions to the world. Once the human consciousness is restructured, the world may be perceived non-judgmentally, without division or conflict.

Consider a flower when we look at a flower mindfully, we will realize that it is indeed a very simple magic, for what we see as “flower” also has “non-flower” elements. Right now it is fresh and beautiful, but soon it will become compost and may be reborn as a tree or a mushroom or again as a flower, which will once more produce blossoms for all those who appreciate beauty and goodness.

Likewise, each of us too will one day die, and our dead bodies will unite with the earth and rebirth will place miraculously or magically for those who wish to understand the interconnectedness or inter-being of all things. You and I inter-act is how the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh puts it. In each of us, there are also non-human elements. We are the sun, the moon, the earth, the river, the ocean, the trees, etc. without trees, we human beings cannot survive. Without you, I could not be me.

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\(^3\) An Ann (Hindi: ānā) was a currency unit formerly used in India, equal to 1/16 rupee. It was sub-divided into 4 Paise or 12 Pies (thus there were 64 paise in a rupee and 192 pies). The term belonged to the Muslim monetary system. The ānā is not commonly used since India decimalised its currency in 1957.
Scientific knowledge conditions human to be behave machines and we perceive the world and the universe as composed simply of matter. Matter is merely natural things. Naturally things have no life or feeling, the Earth consists of inanimate matter, therefore when our mindset in turned such a material perspective, we destroy Mother Earth and cut down trees merely for financial gain or in the name of economic development, feeling none of the loss of that part of ourselves.

All of this started with the Age of Enlightenment, which hold at its center Descartes’ idea that I ‘think therefore I exist’. Any being which cannot think is regarded as inferior and can therefore be exploited by those who can think. Even among thinking beings, the clever ones are those who can think better and faster are in a position to exploit the weaker ones in accordance with the often-quoted Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest.

Internally, the more we concentrate on thinking, and the more we intellectualize and conceptualize our thoughts, the more our thinking becomes compartmentalized. The deeper we think the more we bury our thoughts and ourselves. We are unable to perceive the world holistically. Hence, the products of this type of thinking and our methodology with which we approach matter, science and technology become unquestionable. Our very way of thinking has been defined in an “Enlightenment” way.

An even greater problem is that when we reach the age of economics and consumerism, which assumes the name of environmental society or globalization, we change the phrase “I think therefore I am “I buy therefore I am”. This limits human beings to only two functions of life; to earn money and to consume whatever we are brainwashed to purchase. Transnational corporations, which have become more
influential than any single nation state have a single objective: to exploit natural resources and motivate human beings in the relentless pursuit of economic gain. If one was up to go to the Buddha to ask if a very simple magic word from him to rid us of our modern predicaments, he would most likely suggest the following phrase: “I breathe, therefore I am”. Breathing is the most important element in our life. Indeed in the life of any living being breathing is ultimately important for without breathing very quickly we die. Breathing goes on day and night, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It never stops. Yet most of us do not take good care of our breathing. But, if we did take good care of our breathing, the most simple and important thing in our life, that would indeed be a simple magic.

“Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out I smile. Dwelling in the present moment, I know this is wonderful moment! Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know that, as the in-breath grows deep, the out-breath grows slow. Breathing in makes me calm. Breathing out makes me feel at ease. With the in-breath, I smile. With the out-breath, I release. With the in-breath, I smile. With the out-breath, I release. Breathing in, there is only the present moment. Breathing out, it is a wonderful moment.”

These verses are part of a technique called tranquility mediation or samatha bhāvanā, here that Meditation (bhāvanā) is of two kinds: meditation for tranquility, samatha bhāvanā, and meditation for development of insight, vipassanā bhāvanā.

Samatha is a state of mind characterized by concentration, onepointedness and distractedness. It is a practice of mental concentration leading to tranquility through ridding of mental defilements (desire, ill-

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4 Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, Ānāpānasati (Mindfulness of Breathing), p103
will, etc.). It is one of the two branches of mental development (bhāvanā) and it ultimately leads to mind absorptions (jhāna).

Samatha meditation employs concentration on objects, ideas, images things that are external to the body, and so is concerned with the universe outside, made for us through name-calling, designation, conceptualization (concepts, pannatta).

Vipassana, on the other hand, is the penetrative understanding by direct meditative experience of the three basic characteristics (ti-lakkhana) of all phenomena of existence (that is of all living beings) … namely,

Impermanence: (anicca), Unpleasantness: (dukkha) and Selflessness (anatta).

Vipassanā meditation uses the power of concentration (samādhi) on sensations within the body and so is concerned with the universe within as it is in their essentiality beyond the realm of concept. It purifies the mind to enable it to gain insight (pannā) leading to knowledge of the way (magga). It is the main branch of mental development (bhāvanā) to attain Nibbana.

Vipassanā is the application of mind (nāma) over matter (rūpa) using the two legs of concentration (samādhi) and sensation (vedanā), whereas samatha uses concentration as its main support.

The first essential equipment of the yogi is a concentrated mind. For only a concentrated mind is a cleansed mind. And only the mind which is cleansed of the five elements (nīvarana)⁵ of sensual lust, ill-will, torpor, agitation and doubt can function properly to realize vipassanā insight.

⁵ five elements: 1. lustful desires (kamacchanda), 2. Ill- will, hatred or ager (vyapada), 3. torpor and languor (thina-middha), 4. restlessness and worry (uddhacc-kukkucca), 5. Sceptical doubts (vicikiccha)
For the initiation of the cleansing process, the normal everyday mind requires an object to grasp. These objects can be of two types: external to the body-mind system of the yogi (that is outside of the yogi’s body) or belonging to it. Those objects, which are external to the yogi belong to the environment, the universe, such as kasina discs, corpses, or the food which he eats daily. Those objects which belong to the body-mind organization of the yogi are his body and his thoughts. Any of these can be taken as an object of meditation to establish concentration. It sets the seed of peace within; it helps us to be calm. With calmness one would the develop insight meditation or vipassanā bhāvanā in order to development critical awareness of the self. We must learn not to take so-called self too seriously. Through this practice we become lee and less selfish in order to look for peace and justice in the world because we will gain a real understanding of ourselves biased views of love, hatred, fear or delusion. Our magical formula could be like this:

*Let us pray for world peace, social justice, and environmental balance, which begin with our own breathing.*

*I breathe in calmly and breathe out mindfully.*

*Once I have seeds of peace and happiness within me, I try to reduce my selfish desire and reconstitute my consciousness.*

*With less attachment to myself, I try to understand the structural violent world.*

*Linking my heart with my head, I perceive the world holistically, a sphere full of living beings who are all related to me.*

*I try to expand my understanding with love to help build a more non-violent world.*

*O vow to live simply and offer myself to the oppressed.*

*By the grace of the Compassionate Ones and with the help of good friends, may I be a partner in lessening the suffering of the world so that it may be a proper habitat for all sentient beings to live in harmony during this millennium.*
Indeed the heart of Buddhist teaching has must essentially to do with social ills. The heart of the Buddha’s teachings transcends the notion of individual salvation and is concerned with the whole realm of sentient beings or the whole consciousness. Here lies the inescapable conclusion that Buddhism requires an engagement in social, economic, and political affairs. One cannot overcome the limits of the individual self in a selfish and hermetically sealed manner.

The Fourth Noble Truths, the suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path to that cessation, can be skillfully applied to social activism. Moreover, through deep breathing one can see the roots of social suffering on a basis of Buddhism’s Three Main Root Causes of Evil, namely lobha (Greed), Dosa (Hatred), and moha (Ignorance). In narrow terms of interpretation, the understanding of the Three Roots Causes can help us to get rid of pains and disturbance in our personal lives. But in the broader terms of a social context, they can help us to envisage the causes of social suffering and give us hints about the ways that these causes can be addressed and eventually ceased.

Consumerism and capitalism can be identified as the most important modern forms of greed. With them, our values are geared towards satisfying the gaps in our life by ever-increasing consumption and accumulation. By failing to understand the power of modern greed we are at its mercy. This inevitably leads to conflicts of interests and helps to justify tremendous exploitation as an unavoidable consequence of the invisible hand of the free market.

Hatred is also rampant in this age, and is most obviously present in expanding militarism that embodies hatred as its core meaning. The lust for power, which leads to widespread human rights abuses, is a prime example of how hatred can manipulate individual minds and lure them to
install unjust social structures in order to preserve and expand their power.

The root cause is ignorance and in our age it is caused mainly by centralized education. Students are taught not to think holistically but to compartmentalize their thinking, to memorize and to abide by the existing norms. This can help explain much of the reduction of student mobilizations as well as the weakening of other social movements. Often time students are trained and equipped just with skills to become employees for multinational companies; to exploit their own countrymen and nature. Children also get exposed to detrimental values through television, computer games, and other forms of mass media, which have been replacing more and more the traditional roles played by teachers.

All these suffering can be, in my Buddhist tradition, reduced or totally extinguished by a right understanding of the nature of things. Buddhism is unique because its approach is not a matter of faith, but rather a matter of practice. To attain understanding one has to experiment with the truths themselves. The practice of samatha bhāvanā (tranquility meditation) and vipassanā bhāvanā (insight meditation) also give a sense of inter-belonging. Through practice and understanding one can feel the inter-relatedness of all beings. It helps to internally affirm a common phrase among Buddhists that we all are all friends in common suffering.

The Buddhist model of development must begin with everyone truly practicing to understand himself or herself. In the Buddhist tradition, we call it citta sikkhā or the contemplation on mind. Mediation is important for us to attain insight, the qualities of which include alertness and critical self-awareness. This critical self-awareness is very important for it empowers the practitioner to understand and then mindfully and criticizes themselves. Such a critical understanding of one self, one can
then begin to critically understand our external world, starting with one’s local community and expanding to one’s nation and eventually one’s whole world. One can develop a critical awareness of society, governments and all sorts of institutions in order to understand how the mechanisms of greed, hatred and ignorance operate at the structural levels. With this critical understanding based in the self and expanding to the larger word one will feel hopeful about articulately using non-violent means to achieve a peaceful end.

Buddhist tenets also help one feel closer to and eventually be one with the majority. In Buddhist tradition, it is taught that every being embodies a Buddha nature; the potential to attain the highest understanding. Thinking this way, one can feel the equability among all of us regardless of rank, status or wealth. The poor are entitled to the same dignity that one is and have a right to struggle for what they should be given.

Buddhist teaching is the root that permeates all one’s activities. It is indeed a very simple magic that starts with proper breathing. Incorporated in that is the voice and wisdom of the people at the lowest levels of society, and of course monks in this country come mostly from the lowest background. But remember, beauty has to hand in hand with all activism. I have made all my efforts to preserve ancient artifacts and mural paintings, and I have used culture and the arts as a tool to achieve social and political goals. National borders do not restrict culture; we should reach out to our immediate neighbors and even farther than that. In this respect, one should have respect for other cultures, traditions, as well as religious precisely because with this tolerance society at large can survive in peace. Diversity and living culture must be at the heart of our struggle against the Mc World syndrome, the monoculture controlled by
transnational corporations. For me, my work grows out of a very simple magic ordered by the Buddha and it all starts with a single breath.

2:3 A Buddhist View of Development

During the past decades, indeed since the end of World War II, the world has remained divided and disunited. There is confrontation on all fronts: superpower confrontation, ideological confrontation and confrontation between the developed industrial countries of the North, and the third world countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa. Instead of growing internationalism, there is increasing nationalism and parochialism. We are witnessing a major assault on an already fragile structure of international cooperation. Instead of man being his brother’s keeper, there is widespread selfishness and cynicism. Regrettably, we are now in what has been described as the “Me Era” where a large and growing number of people and nations have abandoned themselves to a special kind of selfishness particularly at the international level. Nations, especially the wealthy and powerful ones, are busy inflicting of injury and hardships to other smaller nations, invariably the weak and helpless ones.

What kind of legacy will the twenty-first century inherit from the terribly troubled twentieth century? This century made normative the ideas that “might make right”, that the end invariably justifies the means and the weak are to be oppressed by the strong. Man’s inhumanity to follow man, particularly due to racial and religious differences, has reigned supreme. Not surprisingly, the first five decades of the twentieth century witnessed two savagely fought World Wars. The so-called civilized countries engaged in bloody combat against one another. There was a widely expressed hope that the Second World War was the war to end all wars (much as its predecessor the First World War had been
hailed) and that after it, a better world would be built. How far we have succeeded in building a better world is a moot point.

This determination to build a better world in the wake of the World Wars was a tacit admission by the European colonial powers that a better world was needed, in their own backyard and across the world. It was generally agreed that such a better world have to be built upon several foundations. The first was justice, particularly economic and social justice based on a new economic and social order. A second foundation was freedom, both political freedom resulting from the elimination of imperialism and colonialism as well as freedom from deprivation and hunger was central. Racial tolerance and the elimination of racism and racial prejudice and a general recognition of the oneness of humanity and dignity individual human being completes the vision of the new world imagined at the end of the Second World War. Sadly, so many decades after the conclusion of the war we are still very far from realizing these dreams. This chapter will examine this failure through exploring our inability to build trust through exploring our inability to build trust through economic and social development and ecological balance across the globe.

2:4 The Promise and Disappointment of Early Postwar Years

The immediate post-war years saw a vigorous pursuit of the objective of building a better world. The United Nations was established on 24 October 1945, and soon thereafter the Charter of Human Rights was adopted. It was the intention of all concerned that the UN should be a universal organization in all the ways that the League of Nations was not. Thanks to this organization, the decolonization process which had begun in 1947 with India’s independence was vigorously pursued. Thus the UN, which began in 1947 with an intention of making mankind a truly
universal world organization that provides forum for small and poor countries to address rich and powerful ones on an equal basis in matters of common concern. In those heady early post-war years, excitement about the emergence of a truly united world was so strong that leading thinkers and statesmen were talking about the need for a world government. The UN has been so successful in leveling the playing field that source of conflict, as the rich and powerful nations increasingly resent the dominance of the organization by smaller, poorer nations.

With the creation of the United Nations came also the establishment of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) know together as the Bretton Woods Institutions. The Bretton Woods system was originally intended to include an International Trade Organization, negotiated and agreed upon in Havana in 1948. Unfortunately, the US Congress never ratified its charter and in its place was established the less ambitious and more restricted General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT), also signed in 1948. GATT was attended as an interim arrangement, but it has become the principal forum for multinational trade negotiations. Given its limited mandate though, GATT has been unable to address many wider issues of international trade including organizing commodity markets, which, among other things, the International Trade Organization was well equipped to handle. Equally unfortunate is the fact that unlike the United Nations, the membership of these Bretton Woods institutions was not universal. Some important planned-economy countries of Eastern Europe, notably the former Soviet Union were not members of this situation.

Although Third World countries joined the World Banks and the IMF as they gained their independence, their impact on these institutions was very limited. Through a voting system based on the size of monetary
contribution, control of both organizations lay in the hands of the major industrial free-market economies. While the post-war years saw the arrival of Asia and America on the world political stage, they, along with the Latin American countries played very minor roles in shaping the international economic landscape of the post-war world.

With this exclusion, it was inevitable that the international economic system that emerged was Euro-cum-American centric. Instead of striving to achieve worldwide unity in addressing international economic problems, western and Socialist countries split ways soon after the war. By 1947, the US had initiated the Marshall Plan for the economic recovery of Weston Europe. This ambitious plan formed what would become the nucleus of what the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Socialist countries were busy in international development as well, establishing the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or Comecon) in 1949. But working in different directions, the opportunity was lost to establish a new world economic order that would cut across ideological differences. Not surprisingly, the world soon became divided into two unequal halves North and South. The North, which includes all the countries of Europe, North American and Austral-Asia, (especially Japan), today controls over 90 percent of the world’s manufacturing capacity. The Brandt Commission on International Development Issues stated:

*Most patents and new technologies are the property of multinational corporations in the North, which conduct a large share of world investment and world trade in raw materials and manufactures. Because of this economic power northern countries dominate the international economic system—its rules and regulations, and its international institutions of trade money and finance, The North, has a*
quarter of the world’s population and four-fifths of its income; the South, including China has three-quarters of the world’s population but living on one-fifth of the world’s income.⁶

The high hopes entertained in the 1950s and 1960s of a massive transfer of capital and technological expertise from the North to the South along the lines of the Marshall Plan, which had proved central to the European recover, did not materialize. The enthusiasm of the first United Nations Development Decade faded as it became clear that the will to bring about basic changes and reforms to the world economic system was non-existent. While no one disputes the fact that economic forces left entirely to themselves produce growing inequality, the rich North has shown remarkable reluctance in applying this basic principle to relations between nations. The few countries that have protected the weak and cultured justice within their own borders have offered half-hearted support if not downright opposition to the establishment of an international order based on justice, freedom, tolerance and humanity. The recognition of universal human solidarity in this emerging global age has eluded us because nationalism is fast becoming as omnivorous as it was during the inter-war years of 1914 to 1939. We remember all too well the disastrous consequences of the rampant nationalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century’s degenerated into the bogus concepts of racial purity of the Nazis.

2:5 The Regression to Nationalism and Isolation

There is no denying the fact that the world today is more interdependent than it has ever been. Politically, economically, culturally and socially, the scale and complexity of the links between countries and peoples of the world have risen sharply during the last forty years. In

⁶ Henry Schwarz, A Companion to Post Colonial Studies, 2005, p- 278.
particular, during the first two and a half decades after World War II era there developed a strong current of internationalism in societies across the world. The Eastern courtiers cooperated brilliantly to rebuild the war-devastated-economies of Europe, and throughout the world there was a unique advancement and the creation of wealth and income.

Unfortunately, this cooperative spirit of internationalism lasted only a generation. As the divide between the rich North and the poor South widened confrontation. Successive economic crises featuring low or negative growth rates followed by chronic unemployment bred parochialism in the industrialized countries of the North.

Unfortunately, in addressing problems in the international economy, Western democracies have shown that old habits die-hard. Protectionism became the rule of the day. Although not as in the inter-war years, economic antinationalism has returned in a climate of an interdependent international economy. Increasingly industrial countries are tightening restrictions upon the entry of actions have been (and continue to be) taken by the most powerful nations in the world, proving the adage that if there is any lesson that history teaches us it is that it teaches us nothing. Our world, particularly the developed world, seems to have learned nothing and forgotten everything.

The danger posed by the current crisis in international relations and the world economy are growing more serious every day. The present North-South divide is detrimental to (global) long-term interests. It is becoming clear that many domestic problems have solved with international implications and can only be solved with international cooperation. An already complicated world has become increasingly interdependent, where traditionally domestic issues (environmental, energy, money, trade and finance, and unemployment to name a few)
must be addressed through international cooperation. Economic growth and development in one country depends on the performance of others. As the Brandt Commission repeatedly remarked in its report North-South, “the South cannot grow adequately without the North. The North cannot prosper or improve its situation unless there is greater progress in the South.” Countries sharing borders and countries on opposite ends of the Earth have a stake in each other’s prosperity or failure, whether they like it or not.

2:6 Some Economic Obstacles

The gravity of the debt crisis cannot be overstated. After 1945 and beginning with the Marshall Plan, there was a one-way flow of resources from the advanced countries to the developing countries to promote their development. The more developed countries dumped vast resources into lesser-developed nations, investing in their own and the recipient countries future. Indeed, this was also the case in the nineteenth century and during the first decade and a half of the twentieth century.

The reason for the huge external debt that developing countries have accrued are not important, but since the debt crisis of 1982, the flow of resources have been reversed, these reverse flows, so that now resources are flowing from the lesser developed countries to the more developed countries. These reverse flows, as unnatural and inimical to the economic well-being of the world as they are, are being elevated into a necessary system of “adjustment” by the official policy of the industrial countries that are unwilling to assume responsibility for the healthy functioning of the world’s economy. Yet, as Lord Lever and Christopher Huhne stated in their book Debt and Danger:

[7 http://www.brandt21forum.info/Report_Negotiations.htm]
“...such abdication of responsibility is singularly misplaced. The world’s financial safety and economic health is balanced on a knife-edge. If defaults halt the reverse flow, many of the largest banks in the advanced countries will become insolvent. A crisis of the kind, which we have thankfully not experienced since the Great Crash of 1929, would once again be a terrible reality. But if the Third World’s debtors continue to generate the large trade surpluses required to make payment to the advanced countries, their economic development, already manifestly inadequate, will be hobbled for a generation. The effort to sustain the large trade surpluses required imposes enormous strains on the world’s trading system, as industries in the advanced countries have to make way for Third World exports and resist the adjustment by means of ever more strident appeals for protectionism. Moreover, the very uncertain type of continued payments in these circumstances of rising political pressures in both debtor and creditor countries causes the banks themselves to slow down their lending, adding a further depressive influence to world trade.”

It is only the monetary policy authorities of the creditor counties that can resolve the debt crisis. It is only they that have both the resources and the power to reconcile the interests of both debtors and bankers. In no small way, they hold the keys to the world economic system that they have themselves created. It is difficult to disagree with Lever and Huhne that:

“...debt needs our urgent attention for the threat it poses in its but also because it epitomizes a sickness in the West. It is a dramatic crystallization of the failure of Western democracies during the last twenty years to adapt to a world of economic interdependence... The

8 Christopher Huhne, Debt and Danger : The World Financial Crisis, Article- April 27, 1986.
leaders of the world, whether they may be politicians, civil servants or central bankers, have consistently failed to provide strategic thinking. Matters are handled piecemeal with no sense of overall design. The case-by-case approach, justified from one angle is elevated to high principles.\(^9\)

In reality, it is a sign of intellectual bankruptcy, a euphemism for abdicating responsibility for the aggregate results of our actions. “Leave it to the market”, we are told, as if financial markets operate in a vacuum and are not powerfully conditioned by the actions of our great institutions\(^10\)

It is in the mutual interest of all that a solution is found before the debt crisis degrades into an incalculable disaster. Imagine the situation that might suddenly develop were all the major debtor nations to follow the lead of Peru or even take more drastic unilateral actions.

I have mentioned a return to protectionist policy in recent years, a development of the post-war era. An early realization was that any early realization was that trade liberalization needed to be supported by stable exchange rates. An enormous cost of competitive devaluation was feared leading to the creation of the IMF to provide even-handed support in the periods of balance of payments adjustments. Yet three and a half decades after the Bretton Woods system was inaugurated the system used to stabilize exchange rates was abandoned. This new unregulated, free floating policy, contrary to early expectations, has intensified currency speculation and restricted domestic policy options by adversely impacting patterns of trade and production as well as having immense repercussions by way of inflation.

\(^9\). http://theeconomiccollapseblog.com/archives/the-seven-year-cycle-of-economic-crashes-that-everyone-is-talking-about
\(^10\). http://jiel.oxfordjournals.org/
Next, we come to the problems of trade deficits. From its founding, one of the primary functions of the IMF was to mitigate the injurious consequences of trade imbalances by protecting not only the trade-deficit countries, but also their trading partners through balance of payments support. Unfortunately, IMF operations are too limited and short-term to be of much help with trade deficits. IMF policies are designed to solve the problems of temporary deficits rather than the long-term deficits that are inevitable in the developing countries. Indeed, the IMF with its policy of conditionality is regularly the subjects of severe criticism in developing countries where the citizens have been tempted to think that IMF pills would gladly be swallowed by the industrialized counties if they ever fell on hard times. This is far from being the case. Thony Benn in his book Arguments for Democracy wrote the following:

“Two cabinets in which I served went to the IMF for bridging loans, one after the 1967 devaluation and the second in 1976. The IMF sent a team to examine Britain’s economic policy and laid down the most rigid prescription for corrective measures to be adopted before either installment of aid was made available. The humiliation that the IMF imperialism imposes upon colonial Britian is deepened, rather than lessened by the knowledge that our government has been compelled to pretend that it wished to follow policies that have in fact been imposed by the pressure of world bankers.’’ If Britian, one the center of world power, could be humiliated by the neocolonialism of economic powers what about small states in the Third World.”

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Fundamental Problems of Hunger, Malnutrition and Poverty

Susan George began her extremely readable frank and thought-provoking book “How the Other Half Dies the Real Reasons for World Hunger”12 with this incisive comparison;

“The present world political and economic order might be compared to that which reigned over social class relation in individual countries in nineteenth century Europe with the Third World now playing the role of the working class. All the varied horrors we look back upon with mingled disgust and incredulity have their equivalents, and worse, in the Asian, African and Latin American counties where well over 500 million people are living in what the World Bank has called absolute poverty. And just as the propertied classes of yesteryear opposed every reform and predicted imminent economic disaster if eight-year-olds could no longer work in the mill so today those groups that profit from the poverty that keeps people hungry are attempting to maintain the status quo between the rich and poor worlds.”13

Hunger is not a scourge, but a scandal.

Now twelve years after the publication of Susan George’s book, ‘The Hunger Project’, a group aiming to eliminate hunger and starvation, published a comprehensive book on hunger entitled “Ending Hunger; an Idea Whose Time Has Come”. The facts are so horrifying that they should have shocked the conscience of the rich world. For instance, in an age boasting great technical advances in agri-science that produces for the first time more food than the world needs, hunger and starvation still take the lives of 13 to 18 million people every year.

Nearly, one billion people, 20 per second of mankind, are chronically and seriously under-nourished. While, it would be comparatively easy to wipe out famine, the more pernicious consequences of malnutrition will be harder to tackle. They will only disappear when real development takes place in the Third World.

As the Hunger Project publication has also indicated, there is no disaster that compares to the devastation of hunger. Hunger has killed more people in the past two years than were killed in World War I and World War II combined. Compared with the disaster wrought by hunger every 48 hours, the Hiroshima bomb disaster was child’s play. The Great Hunger Belt stretches from South-East Asia, through the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East through the continent of Africa to the equatorial region of Latin America. About 50 per cent of the world’s hungry people live in just five countries- India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan and Indonesia. One cannot but agree with the Brandt Commission that “the idea of a community of nations has little meaning if hunger is regarded as a marginal problem which humanity can live with.\(^{14}\)”

2:8 Towards Ecological Balance and the Human Environment

It is evident that our world is caught up in a vicious cycle fueled by the fear of scarcity. The greater our quantitative, material and technological advances, the more problems appear. Technocrats and policy makers are not able to stop the cycle because they are afraid that if quantity of production is not increased everything will come to a standstill. For instance, they fear that if population increases there will be insufficient food leading to conflict, while in actuality there is sufficient

food for all if it were distributed equitably and used without waste. The problem is that those who have the surplus refuse to share it. The fear of scarcity leads policymakers to do all they can to maintain the status of the rich. Their hope is that by increasing production most of the poor will receive a portion of the increase. But our nature is such that once we ourselves have become more comfortably situated; we become callous to injustices if they do not affect us directly.

Is this not the reason that development has increased the gap between the rich and the poor, and Siam (Thailand), since development planning began; a few wealthy people in Bangkok have become continually wealthier, while the people of the northeast have become poorer. Till date, there has been no indication that any country is considering a change in its development policies from the blueprints provided by Western capitalist economists. If anyone raises objections to these methods, he is labeled a rabble-rouser, or a communist, or he is accused of disloyalty to the Nation Religion and the King. Is it not time that we should speak the truth, especially those who hold themselves to be religious?

We must be honest and if we are honest we must admit that this type of development has not added to the happiness of the people in any real sense. On the contrary, it has taken a form that is permeated with deception. Moreover we must not forget that the increase in production through modern industry cannot go on forever. Oil, coal and iron are non-renewable resources; once they are gone, cannot be brought back. As for the forests and many wild animals when they are depleted their restoration will not be in our time or our children’s time. Production for a grand scale not only uses up the raw materials, it also destroys the environment poisoning the air and the water, the fish and the fields, and
people are forced to ingest poison continually. We do not need to expand further on how man takes advantage of his fellow man.

Too many countries are wrecked with feelings of inferiority and consider themselves to be “developing” or “under-developed.” But, as we see, the costs of “development” are far greater than the so-called developed countries want to let on. Countries still not in the grips of development should see that they cannot and should not try to raise themselves up through the simple prescriptions of quantitative development. The world cannot survive with such continued development.

Everett Reimer has observed that, if every country was like the United States “the oil consumption would be increased fifty times, iron one hundred times and other metals two hundred times. And the United States itself would have to triple its use of these materials simply in the process of production itself. There are not enough raw materials in the world to do this, nor would the atmosphere be able to take the change. The world as we know it would come to an end."

One cannot not agree with development that emphasizes quantity over quality. One cannot even favor the form of development that has as its objective the improvement of the quality of human life, yet still stresses material things. In reality, material development itself too often diminishes the quality of human life.

It is not only that materialism fosters violence, but modern applied science also destroys the values of time and space. To a materialist civilization, time means only that which a clock can measure in terms of workdays, work-hours, and work-minutes. Space simply has three

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dimensions that are filled with material things. That is why Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a leading Thai monk, says development means confusion for it assumes things like the longer one’s life is, the better, with no thought of measuring the real value of a long evil life as against that of a short good life. The Buddha taught that the life of a good man, however short it may be, is more valuable than that of an evil one, no matter long he lives.

Religion is the only social force that puts material things in second place and keeps the ultimate goals of development view. Only religion can bring out the true value of human development, for even if the matter of judging the value of development from the point of view of ethics and morality, it is very difficult to keep material considerations from being the sole criteria.

From the Buddhist point of view, development must aim at the reduction of craving, the avoidance of violence, and the development of the spirit. With an individual progress, he increasingly helps others without waiting for a millennium or for an ideal socialist society. Cooperation is always better than competition, whether of the capitalist variety, which favors the capitalist or the socialist variety, which factors the laborer.

The secular and religious worlds recognize different definitions of development. From the worldly standpoint, development can proceed as desires are increased and these desires are satisfied. That defines development. From the religious standpoint, the more desires can be reduced the further development can proceed. Religion teaches that the goal of human development can be attained only as much as evil desires as overcome.

Western civilization erodes genuine Christian spiritual values and becomes merely capitalistic or socialistic striving to increase material
goods in order to satisfy craving. The capitalist impulse raises the material standard of living of other group only if the capitalists themselves can stay on top. The socialist impulse simply reverses this equation and wants the majority to oppress the minority, taking and redistributing the wealth of the few to the many.

The value system of Western-type of development emphasizes of extremes. The quicker and the bigger the better, the more knowledge the better and Capitalists apply this to the wealthy and the socialists to the laborer. Buddhism on the other hand, emphasizes the middle way between extremes, a moderation that strikes a balance akin to the balance of nature itself. Knowledge must be a complete knowledge of nature in order to be wisdom, otherwise knowledge is ignorance. Partial knowledge leads to delusion and encourages the growth of greed and hate. These are the root of evil that lead to ruin. This path leads to first sīla (morality), which emphasizes right speech, action and right relations to all sentient beings as well as the environment. The next is Samādhi (meditation), which is consideration of the inner truth of one’s own spirit ad of nature, which leads finally paññā (wisdom), the path to complete knowledge or enlightenment. Paññā is an awakening and a complete awareness of the world.

When one understands this, one understands the three characteristics of all things from the Buddhist point of view; their unsatisfactory nature (dukkha), their impermanence (anicca) and their lack of a permanent selfhood (anatta).

True development will arrange the rhythm of life to be in accordance with these facts, while maintaining the awareness that man is but a part of the universe and ways must be found to integrate him with laws of nature. There must be no boasting, no prod self-centered attempts
to master nature. No emphasis is placed on the creation of material things that so often gets to the point where people become slaves to their things and have no time left for themselves to search after a truth beyond the realm of material things.

In 1929 Max Scheler remarked:

“we have never before seriously faced the question whether the entire development of Western civilization, that one-sided and over active process of expansion outward might not ultimately be an attempt using unsuitable means if we lose sight of the complementary art of inner self-control over our entire underdeveloped and otherwise involuntary psychological life, an art of meditation, search of soul and forbearance. We must learn anew to envisage the great, invisible solidarity of all living beings in universal life of all minds in the eternal spirit and at the same time the mutual solidarity of the world process and the destiny of its supreme principle, and we must not just accept this world unity as a mere doctrine but practice and promote it in our inner and outer lives.”

This is indeed the spirit of Buddhist development. Inner strength must be cultivated, then compassing and living-kindness towards others becomes possible. Work and play are to be made interchangeable. Work becomes something that does not have to be done, does not have to be bargained for inner to get more wages or in order to get more leisure time. The ethic of work becomes to enjoy one’s work and to work in harmony with others. Materially, there may not be too much to boast about, but the simple life is comfortable enough and simple food is less...

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harmful to the body and mind than rich food and can be produced without exploiting nature.

‘In Small Is Beautiful’, EF Schumacher reminds us that Western economists emphasize on the maximization of material developmental goals so much that they seem to hardly care for people. Schumacher defines Buddhist economics as a study of economics as if people mattered. He says that in the Buddhist concept of development, we should avoid gigantism in all forms, but especially giant machines that tend to control rather than to serve man. With gigantism, men are driven by an extremes (bigness and greed) could be avoided; the Middle Path of Buddhist development could be achieved. The world of industry and agriculture could be converted into a meaningful habitat for man.

One would agree with Schumacher that small is beautiful in the Buddhist concept of development, but he has failed to stress is that this idea must first be cultivated within the individual. From the Buddhist standpoint, man must cultivate his awareness or mindfulness of himself in order not to exploit himself. Unfortunately, most of us exploit ourselves in the name of fame, success, development or even social justice.

Only, when one is less egocentric can one become humble and natural. Being such, one would be capable of being respectful to our environment and trying not to exploit not only humans, but all sentient beings. The concept of sīla in Buddhism does not only mean an ethical precept for man’s personal behavior, but refers to meaningful social as well as environmental relations.

Improving the quality of life through environmental consciousness came along with changes in attitude toward industrial and technological progress. The 1970 report “Toward Balanced Growth: Quantity with Quality” addressed issues of potential consequences of new technologies.
Specifically, it was the development of supersonic transport, which became one of the first successful challenges by environmentalists. Additionally, the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant incident of 1979 confirmed a growing public suspicion that developments in science and technology required public scrutiny and control.

The complex development problems of the 1970s were attributed to factors such as limited resources, environmental concerns, the pursuit of material sufficiency and a shift from individual to social responsibility. Most of the problems associated with development and the environment have not changed over the past decades and many environmental aspects have become more pressing.

Supporting conservation, the President of the World Bank issued a statement that the bank was committed to the principle of sustainable development and pointed out that “…economic growth on the careless pattern of the past century poses an undeniable threat to the environment and ultimately to the very ecological foundations of development itself” this marriage of consecration and development has been characterized as a response to the desperate human needs of the poor Third World by abandoning ‘the elitist Western mold”. ¹⁷

Although man is an adaptive creature constantly evolving with the ability to cope with environmental change, the rate of this change is so great that the coping ability of human beings is being tested. The essentially worldwide shortage of resources has become increasingly serious and there is no longer the possibility of choosing dumpsites for our mountains of waste without deteriorating the ecosystem. The negative effects of the biosphere are profound and may be irreversible.

Since the 1960s, there have been considerable efforts to manage environmental problems. These efforts may be summarized as a conservation strategy of international cooperation. Have we succeeded? Despite this strategy our senses tell us that we have increasingly serious environmental problems today. It certainly appears as if our approaches to the problem of the past thirty years will not fend off eventual extermination.

Therefore, one should talk about what must be done to implement the recommendations of the past three decades. First of all, we must admit the inherent difficulty of the environmental problem itself. This is especially important in a growing industrial society where approaching environmental problems involves the natural and social sciences, technology, economics, politics and religion. However, the present approach is great primarily toward engineering. Given these facts, discussion on human environmental problems should be pursued as a multidisciplinary problem. We have to learn that many of the mistakes have arisen from an overtly narrow assessment of technological change in society.

Secondly, the efforts to solve environmental problems should be carried out by both the public and private sectors with international cooperation. The particular importance of this insistence is obvious from bitter experience. Individual attempts to maximize each country’s own benefit can only lead to disaster in the end for all of us.

Thirdly, people of the great religious traditions should be aware of the great environmental problems that we face. We should also learn from indigenous spiritualism and animism in their approaches to nature as well. Having a deep commitment to ecological balance in all aspects of
our lives is essential to building trust through all forms of economic and social development.

One of recent development which gives a serve of satisfaction is that there is a joint-Thai-Tibetan project under the patronage of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama on the Buddhist perception of nature. The project has distributed thousands of books and teachings drawn from Buddhist Scriptures that relate to the environment. These were followed by copies to Thai monasteries, many of which are still vital centers of education and social life in rural areas.

Similarly, literature is being distributed to schools in the Tibetan refugee camps of North India. The books, believed to be the first compilation of environmental themes in Buddhism, include vivid tales of monks and lay people who chopped down trees and killed animals. There are also parables in which the Buddha used nature to illustrate how life should be lived and how humans and animals are part of same continuum.

It is hoped that this project can soon expand to countries like Japan and South Korea that have strong Buddhist roots and considerable resources for fighting environmental problems. They also have a much-criticized conservation record, especially in their economic expansion to Southeast Asia and their parts of the Pacific Rim.

One member of the project explains, “It’s going to work in the long run. But it must be inculcated into our children so when they grow up they feel close to nature. Once you love nature you don’t even have to teach about conservation, you nourish it naturally.”

18. Pankoj Kanti Sarkar “Saving Earth: An Environmental Ethical Perspective”
The worldview that informs this inquiry includes an awareness of the interrelatedness of all beings as expressed in Buddhism. This theme is found in the spiritual traditions of many indigenous peoples of America, Australia and New Zealand. For instance, the Native Americans teach that humans are products of natural or spiritual forces that created and continue to govern the world. As such, nature does not exist simply for human manipulation. The Native American teach that one cannot separate politics from personal life, spirituality from politics, the animal world from the human, or art from the crafts necessary for survival. The traditional Native American Lives with an awareness of the sacredness of all life that guides each step he takes, each decision he makes. Some native group send their prayers with the words Mitakoyasin meaning; all my relations acknowledge that every being in the world is part of my family.

Buddhism, insisting on the interrelatedness of all life, teaching compassion for all beings, stressing on non-violence and caring for all form of existence has been leading some westerners to broader and deeper interpretations of the relationship between social, environmental, racial and sexual justice and peace. In this area, we are inspired by some examples of such movements as Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka and the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, who teaches us to pay close attention to the minute particulars in our actions as well as to the giant web of all life.

Buddhism (and of course the native spiritual tradition in any place) can lead us away from our anthropocentrism to caring for the natural world, and indeed there is a renewed emphasis on the interconnection of all life in modern Buddhism. Buddhism enough for interrelatedness of peace and justice, its inherent non-violence, its emphasis on compassion
and the interconnection of all beings as it is played out on American soil is presented. An organization called Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) is attempting to move on this awareness in confronting issues of building trust through economic and social development with an awareness of ecological balance.

The BPF consists of a national organization composed of independent local group in the United States, each working on its own projects. Now, there are also chapters in the United Kingdom and Australia. BPF members sponsored a demonstration in San Francisco for the monks, nuns and writers, who are prisoners of conscience in Vietnam and gathered more than 4500 signatures on a petition that was delivered to the UN Human Rights Commission. It also gathers funds to send support to hungry families in Vietnam. The most recent project is the attempt to stop the execution of two Buddhist monks, who were accused of associating with an anti-government group. To protest this unjust punishment, Buddhists and others concerned on human rights sent hundreds of telegrams of protest to the Secretary General of the Communist Part in Hanoi resulting in reduction in sentence from death to twenty years in prison!

“On one Sunday each month, the BPF goes to meditate on the railroad tracks at the Concord Naval Weapons Station in Northern California from which weapon are sent to Central America to be used against the people of Nicaragua. Here, BPF members join the brave and persistent members of the Nuremberg Action. One member said, ‘Sitting to meditate between the road and the chain link fence we register a silent protest to the imperialist violence of our government and the loud horns
of passing hostile cars remind us of the noise of our own minds, the violence and carelessness in ourselves.”

“Thich Nhat Hanh is a leading inspirational figure for members of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. He stresses non-dualism in his teaching and speaks of being peace as a central part of making peace in the world. He teaches about the community of the inner and the outer, calling the world our “large self”. He asks us to become our “large self” actively and to care for it lovingly.”

“His Tiep Hien Order, created in Vietnam during the war, is in the lineage of the Zen school of Lin Chi. It is a form of engaged Buddhism in the daily life of society. The best translation of Tiep Hien, according to Thich Nhat Hanh, is the “Order of Inter-being”. The order is based on his reformulation of the Buddhist precepts into fourteen guiding statements designed to explicitly address social justice and peace issues. This reformulation calls the participant to test his behavior in relation to the needs of the larger community while freeing him from limiting patterns. These precepts address issues of mind, speech and body and create a consciousness of social justice and peace work grounded firmly in Buddhist principles, in our individual beings and in our practice of mindfulness.”

These guiding statements achieve an integration of the traditional five precepts with elements of the Noble Eightfold Path, and one can believe Thich Nhat Hah’s decision to elaborate on the traditional precepts came from his observation that one can interpret these to encourage a withdrawal from the world, a passivity in the face of war and injustice, a separation of oneself from the common lot of humanity. In rewriting the

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21. ibid, p-2015, p-87.
precepts, he is countering that tendency. In directs us to focus on our interconnection with other beings, he is asking us to experience the continuity between the inner and the outer world, to act in collaboration in mutuality with others in the dynamic unfolding of the truth that nurtures justice and creates peace.

Some of us are trying to meet this challenge. I hope that mind fully trying to connect our being peace within to the larger world outside we will contribute to a better world with social justice, non-violence and with ecological balance. This is the Middle Way for each and for the society at large and through it, we may live in harmony with one another and with all of nature.

2:9 Buddhism and the Challenge of 21st Century Modernism

A major problem that the post-colonial world has long faced is how to be “modern” yet non-Western. The discourse of Modernity (in the context of development) often smacks of imperialism. Developmental modernity is deeply rooted in old-fashioned, racially defined Europeanization, implying racial hierarchies. As such, the threat of alienation looms over those who unequivocally adopt such modernism. For the bulk of humanity, which is non-Western (and non-whit), this major problem they have long been confronting.

The capitalist promise of emancipation through continuous economic growth and technological advancement has also been a vain hope. On one hand, it is vain hope because with a lack of proper perspective, one’s economy can never grow large enough; our state can never be strong enough; we can never have enough wealth and so on.

On the other hand, growth brings with it great danger. In many countries, economic growth has brought with it ecological disaster.
Rising GDP per capita is usually accompanied by widening income inequalities. In New York City, the so-called financial capital of the world, the America intellectual Noam Chomsky reports that nearly 60 percent of black youth lack economic and educational opportunity or access to even the most basic social services or sense of security. Their plight is not significantly different from the inhabitants of Bangladesh even though the latter is considered the poorest country in Asia. Similar situation are present in Europe. The BBC has recently reported that the living conditions of some poor children in London are similar to those that Charles Dickens wrote of in the 19th century.

With this understanding, my vision of the future in not rooted in the capitalist myth of emancipation. For everyone, the future must be built on traditional wisdom and culture. As Helena Norberg-Hodge has argued in her book 'Ancient Futures', the future of the world cannot be found in New York, London or any other Western metropolis. Rather our future is found in communities like we find in the Indian states of Ladakh and Kerala and grassroots movements like the Assembly of the Poor in Siam.

The future of the world must not neglect the spiritual domain. There is a wealth of wisdom that can be garnered from religious traditions if we do not relegate them to the dustbin of history as the discourse of Modernity wants us to. The counter-modernity spirit advocated and practiced by Mahatma Gandi is illustrative. As Gyan Prakash observes,

“It was by rescuing the pre-modern from its assigned space as history, from its designation as colonialism’s self-confirming other, and by inserting it in the same time as the modern that Gandhi was able to

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22. Helena Norberg-Hodge is founder and director of Local Futures/International Society for Ecology and Culture and producer and co-director of the award-winning documentary The Economics of Happiness
formulate his concept of the non-modern. By such a reinterpretation of the pre-modern as the non-modern, by realigning categories aligned by colonialism, Gandhi was able to produce a post-colonial text that made the violent critique of the colonial discourse speak with non-violent meanings.

As a Buddhist, one feels that the teachings of the Buddha have much to offer to mitigate the suffering in the world. Everyone would like to share what I feel Easterners and Westerners could discover in the Buddha. One does believe that there are differences between the East and West; we do not treat them as binary oppositions or hierarchical relationships where there is one privileged pole. Seeing the world in terms of binary oppositions is a source of intolerance, bigotry, fundamentalism and racism. The line that divides Eastern and Western civilizations is at best a blurry one and we do not want to be another Samuel Huntington, who propagated the clash of civilization thesis by delineating the world along the racial fault-line of the West versus the Rest. Once you say “I am”, the terms ”you are” and “we and they” naturally follow, leading to conflict and fragmentation, threatening the cultivation of the whole unit at the individual and collective levels.

In the current phase of trans-nationalism, there may be similarities between the fate of Easterners and Westerners. For instance, there seems to be emerging a powerful capitalist class of elites in nations across the globe who engages in similar patterns of capital accumulation, consuming, and thinking. We are living in a world characterized by the intensification, radicalization, and universal spread of Modernity.

24 Samuel Phillips Huntington (April 18, 1927 – December 24, 2008) was an influential American conservative political scientist, adviser and academic.
25 See leslie Sklair, The transnational Capitalist Class (black well Publishers, 2001)
Thai scholar Vira Somboon has called this” the age of extreme modernism,” whereby Modernity now relies simply on its own justification and devours all other forms of actualization of human beings.”

In the post-Cold War world, East and West, a spirit of capitalist triumphalism is breeding hubris, delusion, and arrogance, overwhelming many leaders. This spirit is particularly strong in the Western the wake of the apparent victory over the Communist monster. The aggressive promotion of free-market capitalism preached by the neoliberal school of economics is a stark manifestation of this capitalist triumphalism. As John Ralston Saul has noted, a new Holy Trinity has been discovered, with competition as the Father, efficiency as the Son, and market place as the Holy Spirit.26

Tolerance for socio-economic diversity and alternative models of development is low to the point of being non-existent. Refusal to accept a global, capitalist future has become a sign of weakness, immaturity, and inferiority. It is argued that we are now at the highest point of human development and civilization. This belief prevents the people of the world from pursuing other aspirations and from thinking about alternative ways to improve or maintain their livelihood. The global economy does not cherish a diversity of ideas, cultures, aspirations, and views-only a diversity of products. Formerly diverse ways of life worldwide are increasingly dancing to the tune of consumer culture-identity, which insists that ultimate happiness is achieved only through the never-ending consumption of goods and services. This oppressive environment is like a noose tightening around the world’s neck that is strangling meaningful freedom, democracy, and human rights.

There are so many pervasive and disturbing developments in transnational organization and the growing capitalist triumphalism, but one would humbly and sincerely insist that these negative trends may be overcome by discovering the teachings of the Buddha. I want people worldwide, especially the ones, who are indoctrinated into capitalist and consumer culture to see the Buddha simultaneously as the Enlightened One and as a simple and humble monk. In fact, simplicity and humility enabled the Buddha to achieve enlightenment. This is the anti-dote we need.

By simplicity, one means the freedom from attachment to material and sensual pleasures. We have to understand that gain, honor sensual happiness, and praise ultimately lead to loss; ignominy, suffering, and praise ultimately lead to loss, ignominy, suffering and denunciation, respectively. The Buddha, who wandered as a monk for six years before achieving enlightenment called these the eight worldly conditions and stated that whoever is bound by any of these shackles will never be free from the cycles of birth and death. Simplicity contributes to the realization of a noble life because it guides us down the Noble Eight-fold Path.27 Where consumerism holds personal material success in highest esteem, one learns from the Buddha to constantly reduce one’s attachments and to envision success as overcoming attachment to personal gains and possessions. Free from these attachments, one is endowed with sufficient time and energy to nurture the seeds of peace within. From the Buddhist perspective, a prosperous person is (1) self-reliant, (2) has self-dignity and is proud of his or her culture, (3) is content (humble and valuing simplicity) (4) is generous, and (5) is ever

mindful. Income and wealth are not indicators of prosperity in Buddhism, much to the chagrin of advocates of global capitalism.

With the right understanding of simplicity one can leads a peaceful life and relates harmonically with all sentient beings and the natural environment. One does not abuse them in one’s thoughts, speech, and action to indulge the five senses. For example, if one upholds simplicity, one will understand that consumerism, among other things, endangers the earth’s biosphere and strengthens the hands of transnational corporations and institutions that give primacy to the accumulation of profits over the wellbeing of people. Simplicity guides one to be mindful of how to create wealth and how to make use of it. One learns to give more than, they take from others. One’s simple yet harmonic lifestyle merges with goodness, engendering a pure form of beauty that paves the way towards enlightenment.

Like simplicity, humility implies the respect for all sentient beings. If we are humble, we co-exist with each other as equals. Believing that one is exceptional or superior to others is a barrier hindering meaningful and compassionate human relations. Blinded by exceptionalism, one sees the world in absolute terms. If one is always right or good, then the others are always wrong or evil which, eventually can justify nearly any measure to right perceived wrongs. Only, when the wall of exceptionalism is torn down by humility will we really begin to see the consequences of our actions, opening our eyes so that we will not treat the suffering of those walking on the borders of society with callous equanimity. Rather, we will struggle for greater social justice and equality.

Equality is an often misunderstood concept. It does not mean sameness, for some people need more than others. A sick person requires more resources than a healthy person, a baby or pregnant woman more
than a young man, and an educated person requires not more, but different things than an uneducated person and so on. Equality also tends to denote a leveling up process, often it is equated with striving to be like the rich and powerful. But, there are other ways of achieving equality. We seem to forget that equality can also be attained if, the rich make a sharp turn towards simplicity and share their wealth with the poor. Mahatma Gandhi is often quoted as stating, “There is enough in the world for everyone’s need, but not for some people’s greed”\(^{28}\).

With humility, we can transcend both real and imagined racial, national, cultural, and religious boundaries and form a circle of the virtuous, what Buddhists called \textit{kalyānamittata}. This is tremendously important because some of the greatest threats to human wellbeing and environmental sustainability are transnational in character. The circle of the virtuous must be extended to incorporate the elite members of the transnational capitalist class. They must be treated as friends and together we shall embark on a course of change, however incremental, which will awake the humanity, not the half-human of the economic man, the nationalist, the developer and such. The very same forces that lubricate the wheels of globalization facilitate transnational cooperation of the bottom-up kind as well.

Simplicity and humility speak deeply to the current transnational developmental trend. Buddhists would argue that small is beautiful.\(^{29}\) Environmental sustainability, social and economic justice are more conceivable when growth is moderated and when humility and simplicity are promoted. The insatiable quest for profits and shareholder returns, the anti-thesis of humility and simplicity, propels corporations to globalize


\(^{29}\) Sulak Siivaksa, \textit{A Social Engaged Buddhism}(Bankok: The Inter-religious Commission for Development, 1988), and \textit{A Buddhist vision for Renewing society} (1994).
their businesses at the expense of the environment and human beings. Moreover, globalizing corporations propagate the culture-ideology of consumerism, which has become the source of their prosperity and the very basis for their existence, further putting human beings and nature at risk of exploitation.

Transnational corporations often profess their concern for the natural environment and they insist that the root problem is not over-consumption itself. They tell us that the natural environment is sustainable if we all learn to consume differently. Environmental problems will be solved through “proper” the proper consumption of so-called “environmentally friendly” products. We are told we can buy our way out of an ecological crisis. This is not the answer. Curbing consumption of all products is a better start.

An increasing number of researchers are pointing out that consumerism and unlimited growth directly contradict with the concept of environmental sustainability. Some are even promoting the idea of post development, abandoning development as we know it. They are learning that at best technological disaster. As one scholar of transnational corporations directly questioned; “Is global consumerist capitalism, as represented by the practices as well as the policies of corporations, sustainable?” We have a broader charge, which is to ascertain whether or not the whole international capitalist system-from its agents, institutions, and structures to its basic culture and ideology-is inherently defective. From a Buddhist perspective, it definitely is.

The real meaning of the word Buddha is “to be awake”. Once we are awakened to the virtues of simplicity and humility, once we are aware

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30 For instance, see the essay in Wolfgang Sachs, end., The Developmental Dictionary, 1997.
31 Sklair, op., cit p.218.
of the suffering engendered by greed, hatred, and delusion, our consciousness is restructured. We become mindful internally and externally, about ourselves and others and we are naturally led to restructure human society. It is complementary to each other and both are desperately needed.

Buddha exemplified simplicity and humility, we must remember that his teachings are not primarily concerned with salvation of the individual. Buddhism repudiates the notion of the individual soul. The concern with individual salvation is a form of self-interest, an attachment, which ultimately limits compassion and love. Like all forms of self-interest or attachment, it narrows the thoughts and feelings. For instance, the preoccupation with private salvation leads to attachment to one’s belief, faith, master, hope and so on and may foster the intolerance of other’s faiths, beliefs, masters… Put differently, it breeds division and conflict not dissimilar to nationalism, racism, and other isms. A preoccupation with private salvation dulls and tethers the mind, making real liberation or freedom impossible. Rather, Buddhism requires engagement outside of the self in social, economic and political affairs.

Lamentably, the global economy props up the ego through aggrandizing the self by making a virtue of greed and consumerism. The wheels of the global economy are fueled by this insatiable greed. According to the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta in Tipitaka, the Buddha, on the other hand, taught that the wheel of righteousness (Sammaditti, dhammacakka or buddhacakka) must control the wheel of power (anacakka). In the modern world, the quest for greater profit ultimately determines the actions of the rich and powerful. As such, any top-down attempt to redress class and ecological problems is likely to fail. The teachings of the Buddha however, state that the rich and powerful,
especially the rulers, must have only one overriding concern; the upholding the law of Dhamma.\textsuperscript{32} For example, the virtues and duties of a ruler are enumerated in detail in the Pāli Canon as the following; generosity, high moral character, self-sacrifice, honesty and integrity, gentleness, self-control, patience and tolerance, forbearance, and conformity to the law. While these qualities are not written in stone, it is clear that there were expectations of exemplary behavior placed on the ruling class.

The qualities of leadership and all forms of rules about daily conduct are interwoven into the \textit{Vinaya} or Order of Discipline. As one author has perceptively noted, “Though submitting oneself to the \textit{Vinaya}, one is undergoing a process of purification; the \textit{Vinaya} rules leave little room for the impulse vanes of the ego and force one continually to rein one’s desire to seek gratification and aggrandizement in one’s actions. For monks truly devoted to the \textit{Vinaya}, the outcome is gentleness and humility, and a pure heart with plenty of room for care and concern for others. While following the \textit{Vinaya} puts one through purification through the \textit{Vinaya} puts one through reign in one’s body and speech (one’s external actions) the philosophical study of the monastic curriculum brings purification by addressing the mind both what one thinks about reality and how one goes about thinking. The end point of both following the \textit{Vinaya} and philosophical study, and the justification for the life of the monk, is the fruition of enlightenment.”\textsuperscript{33}

Equally important, the upholding of the \textit{Vinaya} provides an example for people, and may trigger a profound and long lasting social change. As the late Siamese monk Buddhadasa observed, “I won’t be

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\item \textsuperscript{32} Bangkok: \textit{The inter-religious Commission for Development}, 1994, p158 -211
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able to overturn the land [i.e., sweep up all the mess and begin with a clean slate]. I can only do it gradually as permitted by my intelligence and energy. However small the end result of my contribution, I am satisfied. But I am hoping that many people will think positively of my action, which reflects my dedication to Buddhism, and will emulate it. Soon individuals in powerful positions or people all round the overturning of the land. Even though I did not overturn the land myself, the end result would be the same. I still remain modest and humble and will not be overwhelmed by the feat ahead of me.”

The Buddha was a simple and humble monk. I want everyone, who is captivated by the culture and ideology of consumerism and indoctrinated into a belief in the linearity of history to see this simple truth. Then consider the truth that his simple and humble teachings provide a different way of seeing the world and if properly understood and practiced, and lead a way to a noble life. 