Seventh Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture

ENGAGED BUDDHISM AND THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

Delivered by

CHRISTOPHER S. QUEEN

Harvard University, U.S.A.

Dr. Ambedkar Chair in Sociology

Centre for the Study of Social Systems

School of Social Sciences

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi-110 067

Seventh Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture

ENGAGED BUDDHISM AND THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

Delivered by
CHRISTOPHER S. QUEEN
Harvard University, U.S.A.

Dr. Ambedkar Chair in Sociology
Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110 067

Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture

First Edition, 2004

Copies 300

© Dr.Ambedkar Chair, J.N.U., New Delhi.

Published by
Prof. Nandu Ram for Dr. Ambedkar Chair in Sociology
Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi -110 067.

Laser Typeset by
Muskan Art & Graphics
Delhi

Printed at
Nice Printing Press, Delhi

PREFACE

After the Buddha attained his Nirvana, his teachings and philosophy got institutionalized, sometimes during the sixth and eighth century A.D., by his disciples and followers who named it Buddhism after the name of the Buddha. When, how and why it got crystallised *vis-à-vis* institutionalized is not important here; instead, what is important to know is that, after its centuries-long journey, his followers and scholars produced interpretations which again got institutionalized into two types—Heenayan and Mahayan , both trying to establish the superiority of one over the other. More precisely, one is termed orthodox and the other obviously progressive. It is also interesting to note that the Buddha's followers hailed both from the better-off as well as modest family—even castes—background. Hence, their interpretations of the Buddha's thought and philosophy varied accordingly.

In the modern time, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has also provided a new interpretation of the Buddha and his dhamma which, in his understanding, is qualitatively different from religion in the sense of the ritual ingredients of the latter. He has interpreted Buddhism not for the purpose of scholarly discourse but for the laymen and women to become aware of and stick to the adherence to the universal principles namely equality, liberty and fraternity—three basic tenets of Buddhism. In fact, he has put forth the core of the thoughts and philosophy of the Buddha in a scientific yet simplistic manner for the knowledge and practice of the common men and women. In doing so, he was in noway moved by the

political vendetta of any sort nor he intended to indulge exclusively in academic discourse, as noted above. His interpretation of Buddhism also did not address to its earlier existed two schools of thought namely the Heenayan and the Mahayan. It was not done even with the intention of evolving a new school of thought being termed as Navayan—new Buddhism. It is a different matter that his version of Buddhism is more acceptable to the toiling and marginalized masses.

The Seventh Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Annual Lecture was delivered on 8th January 2004 by Dr. Christopher S. Queen of U.S.A. on the topic *Engaged Buddhism and the Roots of Violence.* The Engaged Buddhism—a theme researched by Dr. Queen over past few years, is timely and relevant not only for tracing the roots of violence any sort but also providing remedies for that. In a simple way, the Engaged Buddhism is to be understood in terms of its being associated with the everyday life of a human being. The text of this lecture in published form is presented here for the wider readership. I hope the readers will like it.

26 January, 2005

Nandu Ram
Dr. Ambedkar Chair
Professor of Sociology
Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067

ENGAGED BUDDHISM AND THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE

Christopher S. Queen

I would like to begin by thanking Professor Singh, Professor Kumar and the School of Social Sciences for making this lecture possible, and for your kind hospitality during my stay at Jawaharlal Nehru University. I would also like to express thanks to Professor Sukhadeo Thorat, a friend of many years, for guiding my research during previous visits to India and for exemplifying the Buddhist virtues of wisdom and compassion which are at the heart of my remarks today. Many of you know that Professor Thorat draws his inspiration as a scholar and an activist from the life and teachings of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in whose memory today's lecture is given. I can tell you that I, too, have been a deep admirer of Dr. Ambedkar since the nineteen eighties, when I first met Professor Thorat and other voices for a just and progressive society. Suffice it to say, it is my belief that, in addition to his towering contributions to the fields of politics, economics, and history, Dr. Ambedkar pointed ahead to the next era, in the 2500 year history of Buddhism, calling it the *Navayana* or "New Vehicle" which we know today as Socially Engaged Buddhism or simply Engaged Buddhism.

I

One of the benefits of teaching and studying at a great university like JNU or Harvard—or of living nearby—is the opportunity to hear visiting speakers and to consider ideas that are challenging and new. At Harvard, as a result of our large faculty in Buddhist Studies and because many of our students are drawn to the teachings and practices of Buddhism, we have recently had some world-famous Buddhist visitors. The Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, the exiled Vietnamese Zen Master, who coined the expression "engaged Buddhism" during the war in Vietnam, spoke to us in March 2002, six months after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. His topic was mindfulness and peacemaking in a world of violence. And on the first day of classes this past September, His Holiness The Dalai Lama addressed the Harvard students body on the subject of terrorism, hatred, love, and reconciliation.

Both events drew standing-room audiences, and both talks and question-and-answer periods reminded me of the highly-charged political meetings on college campuses in the U.S. during the nineteen sixties and seventies. It is not that the Buddhist teachers used heated language or exhorted students to protest or to strike to end the war or racial discrimination. Quite the contrary, both Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama are elderly monks whose gentle demeanor had a calming effect on their audiences. Rather, it was the circumstances in the larger world and the obvious hunger of college students and faculty for answers and guidance that created a sense of urgency at these meetings—thirty years ago and again today. In both periods, we see American wars bitterly dividing the world into allies and adversaries; we fear the existence of weapons of mass destruction that can easily penetrate our borders and our cities; and we hear the extreme rhetoric of good-verses-evil, of retaliation, preemption, and a global struggle for the survival of democracy and civil society. These issues formed the emotional backdrop of the Cold War, and they are alive again in the post 9-11 era.

What do Buddhist teachers have to say in such a time?

Those who know Thich Nhat Hanh's writings—any of his 85 books of poetry, prayer, and commentary—or those who have attened his mindfulness retreates or visited Plum Village, his exile community in Southern France, might have anticipated his remarks. "Terrorism is located in the human heart", he said. "We can remove terrorism through the practice of deep listening. Deep listening can help remove wrong perceptions ... Many of us are peace activists. We want to serve the world. So we have to take care of ourselves. Every day, water the seeds of understanding and compassion. Breathe in, breathe out the energy of mindfulness. This energy helps us look deeply into the nature or our emotions, so we can gain insight into our suffering and the suffering of others. Insight always brings compassion".[1]

During the question period, a student asked what Thich Nhat Hanh would do to lesson the violence in the Middle East. He paused, smiled, and said, "Perhaps some of your faculty know Mr. Sharon and Mr. Arafat. Please invite them to join our community at Plum Village for a few months. Remind them that there is no talking for the first six weeks." The audience laughed at the improbability of such a retreat, but seemed to accept the premises on which the invitation was made: that deep listening, deep looking and mindful breathing—whatever these expressions mean to Buddhists or non-Buddhists—must have a transforming effect on those who have the time and commitment to carry them out.

For his part, the Dalai Lama began his Harvard talk by noting the high intelligence and meticulous planning that went into the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Having spent the weekend at MIT in an ongoing series of public seminars with scientists studying mediation and the brain, His Holiness continued, "One can be sure that in the planning of those attacks there were many calculations [and that] people used their brains in a very sophisticated way. [But in the end] it was modern technology guided by human hatred."[2] Elite education and raw intelligence are not enough to make a better world, he implied.

And what is to be done when the conditions for hatred are multiplied? The Tibetan leader told of monks who were examined by researchers after years in Chinese prisons. "They found that there were no sings of trauma in these monks. One monk said there were only a few occasions when he faced real danger. What kind of danger? He said, the danger of losing compassion for the Chinese."

In my remarks today, I would like to explore the insights that Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama brought to Harvard and to place these reflections in the context of the global emergence of socially engaged Buddhism, a subject I have been studying and writing about since my first visit to India in 1988. Specifically, I would like to offer three theses for your consideration:

> **First**, that Buddhism—the ancient spiritual tradition that was born and then declined in India, migrated and flourished throughout Asia, was carried to the West, and then reappeared in the land of its birth over the past century—that this tradition offers unique perspectives on global violence, terrorism, and peacemaking, by erasing distinctions between inner and outer violence and inner and outer peace, and by analyzing the roots of violence and peace that are sown, as Thich Nhat Hanh says, with each inbreath and outbreath.
>
> **Second**, that a new style of Buddhist thinking and practice, one that we call socially engaged Buddhism, or simply Engaged Buddhism, has begun to apply these perspectives to the collective conditions and the institutional and political structures that cause suffering or grant relief in the world today. And
>
> **Third**, that the practice of Engaged Buddhism entails both the cultivation of mental habits—such as the transformation of hatred, greed, and delusion to love, generosity, and wisdom—and the expression of these mind-states in specific patterns of behavior on the social and institutional stage.

Taken together, these propositions suggest that the traditional Buddhist ethics of kindness, compassion, equanimity and liberation have been extended to encompass not only those individuals who practice them in their daily lives, but also to family and ethnic kinfolk, to neighbors, colleagues, fellow

believers or countrymen, and finally to "all beings" (in the traditional Buddhist phrase, meaning both human and nonhuman, living and nonliving beings). Or, on the other hand, the ethics of kindness, compassion, equanimity, and liberation may be directed to those threatening or dangerous members of our community, to competitors, to those who despise us because of our gender, race, sexual orientation, religion or political views, to our nation's enemies, and to those who are seen as cursed by God or condemned in the court of world opinion.

Let us examine these ideas from three perspectives. First, let us sketch the spiritual teachings and practices that have marked Buddhism as a peace tradition among the world's religions. These include the Buddha's teachings on war and violence, and perhaps more critically, his analysis of the dynamics of hatred, greed, and delusion, which he called the "Three Posions" or the "Three Roots" (Pali *hetu*) and identified as the causes of suffering, violence, and social disfunction in the world.

Second, let us turn to what I call the "middle ground" in social ethics: not the subjective realm of consciousness, mental attitude, or feelings; and not the objective realm of physical action and overt behavior; but rather, the realm of speech language, discourse, rhetoric, information, and symbolization—the very essence of cultural activity. It is here that the work of meditation and analytical reflection are first embodied in action. For, make no mistake, speech is action just as much as physical gestures and the exchange of energy and matter are action, yet it is speech that shapes the quality and quantity of exchange and that forms the cultural universe in which we live.

In this section, we turn to a study I recently published on Buddhist notion of "Right Speech" (*Samaa vaacaa* in Pali). Here, we shall examine the contrast between the gentle, non-confrontational speech of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh—the traditional style of Buddhist "right-speech"—and the forceful, "prophetic" speech that Dr. Ambedkar used in his campaigns against colonialism and caste in India during

the first half of the last century. In asking the question, "Should speech be gentle or harsh in confronting violence", we shall refer to the ancient *Abhayarajkumara Sutta* for evidence that speech must be timely, true and beneficial—the traditional characteristics—but also, if necessary, in the presence of gross misconduct or danger—"unwelcome and disagreeable".

Finally, in closing, I should like to describe three brief scenes—snapshots, if you will, of the new Buddhism. These are taken from the lives of Dalit Buddhists I have met on visit to Bodh Gaya, Mumbai, and Nagpur, who are playing important roles in the revival of Buddhism in India. These tableaux illustrate the ways in which the roots of violence in a world divided by communal, caste, ethnic, and religious tensions may be transformed—from hatred to community building, from greed to public philanthropy, and from delusion to science and education.

II

A few years ago, I contributed a study of the Buddhist peacemaking tradition to a volume entitled *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions.*[3] Let me summarize, for you, some of my findings in that study.

In the legend of the Buddha's life, a sage predicted that the young prince, *Siddhartha Gautama,* would become a "wheel-turner" (*cakravartin*) in the Vedic tradition of Aryan princes. The wheel in question was associated with war in the Himalayan foothills of Northeast India in the 6th century BCE—that is, the sun-disk (or discus) of the sky-god Vishnu and the chariot wheels of a universal conqueror such as Indra, lord of gods. Yet in the *Sutta Nipata,* one of the earliest collections of Buddhist verse, Sela, a Brahmin well-versed in Vedic hymns, on meeting the Buddha for the first time and nothing that he has the thirty-two physical characteristics of a *cakravartin,* exclaims,

> You deserve to be a king, an emperor, the lord of chariots, whose conquests reach to the limits of the four seas, Lord of Jambu Grove [India].

> Warriors and wealthy kings are devoted to you;
> O Gotama, exercise your royal power as a king of kings, a chief of men!
>
> The Buddha replied: I am a king, O Sela, supreme king of the Teaching of Truth;
> [But] I turn the wheel by peaceful means—this wheel is irresistible.[4]

Thus the Buddha declares himself a *Dhammaraja*, or King of Truth, rather than a Lord of War. Accordingly, his first sermon came to be known as the "Turning of the Wheel of the Law" (*dharma-chakra-pravartana*).[5]

Three centuries later, the Buddhist king Asoka (fl. 270-232 BCE) erected stone pillars at the ends of his empire with prominant chariot wheels on their capitals, symbolizing not the rule of warfare which he had renounced after the bloody battle of Kalinga, but his policy of *Dharma-Vijaya*, "conquest by righteousness".[6] In Asoka's India, animals were spared from the Brahmanical sacrifice, trees were planted for shade along the roads, and the state's vast stockpile of war chariots was saved, with fireworks and elephants, for patriotic holiday parades in an era of prosperity and peace.

For centuries, the radical shift in social ideals wrought by the Buddha and Asoka—from violence to reconciliation—was symbolized in stone art and architecture by the image of the chariot wheel—or the Buddhist Peace Wheel, as I call it. Finally, in 1948, following India's independence from colonial rule, this image, now symbolizing democratic due process and the rule of law in a peaceful society, was placed on the Indian national flag on Dr. Ambedkar's suggestion.

Perhaps more important than the evolution of the ideal of nonviolence in the early Buddhist social thought, however, is its profound analysis of the roots of violence and the discovery of specific techniques for overcoming them. In the ancient world no less than today, the practice of noninjury to others—the first Buddhist precept—involved a complex calculus of intention and result. For example, not only was meat a dietary staple in most Buddhist countries, but the need for self-defense, law enforcement, national defense, and even

agriculture (as the Jain followers of Mahavira, Buddha's contemporary, were quick to point out) inevitably involved harm to living beings. One element in the Buddhist approach was to practice the Middle Way of moderation, avoiding professions involving killing (hunting, butchering, military service), i.e. practicing "right livelihood", on the one hand; and the Jain extreme of protecting insects by wearing a mask and sweeping the ground ahead when walking, on the other. Another element in the Buddhist approach to nonharming was to stress the *intention* or state of mind of the actor: monks could accept meat in their begging bowls as long as animals were not hunted or slaughtered expressly to feed them; similarly, a layperson might unintentionally harm another, say, in a household accident, without incurring the bad karma associated with premediated assault or homicide.[7]

The most significant contributions of early Buddhism to the practice of the nonviolence, in my view, are its techniques to counter the Three Poisons—hatred, greed, and delusion (*dosa, lobha, moha*)—the seeds or roots of violence itself.[8] Here, we learn that each of these reactions has its antidote: lovingkindness (*metta*) to counter hatred, generosity (*dana*) to counter greed, and wisdom (*panna*) to counter delusion. While it may be argued that greed and delusion are equal partners with hatred in the instigation of violence, it is irrational anger and hatred towards other individuals and groups that most often fuels the flare-up of violence and mayhem.

Accordingly, it is lovingkindness meditation (*metta bhavana*), cultivating goodwill towards oneself and others, that may be called the root practice in the Buddhist nonviolence.[9] As the first exercise in a series of training called the "Divine Abodes" (*brahma vihara*), lovingkindness is complemented by the practices of compassion (*karuna,*sympathy for those in pain), joy (*mudita,* appreciating the good fortune of others), and equanimity (*upekkha,* maintaining impartiality in times of gain and loss). To mediate on lovingkindness, the practitioner begins by directeing loving attention to his or her own state of being, repeating the formula in Pali or in one's own language:

Aham avero homi	May I be free from enmity
Abbyapajjho homi	May I be free from ill will
Anigho homi	May I be free from distress
Sukhi attanam pariharami	May I keep myself happy.

In a fashion similar to Christians' endeavor to love others as oneself, the Buddhist then extends the wish for freedom from enmity, ill will, and distress, and for happiness step-by-step to others—a beloved teacher or parent, a dear friend, a neutral or unknown person, and finally to a repellent or hostile person. "As one does this, one's mind becomes malleable in each case before passing on to the next".[10] Similar meditative training is recommended for the cultivation of compassion, joy, and equanimity.

The Buddhist approach to nonviolence, then, is grounded in a systematic "attitude adjustment" in which negative, reactive states such as hatred, greed, and delusion are transformed into positive social orientations through meditative self-training. But this reorientation to inner and outer peace entails other steps on the Eightfold Path: *right views* that establish a conceptual framework for meditative and ethical practice, *right aspiration* and *right effort* that motivate and sustain the practice; *right mindfulness* by which the new attitudes are applied to situations and relationships in moment-to-moment living; and *right concentration* by which the practitioner moves from merely "performing peace", as it were, to what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "being peace"—involuntarily exemplifying the enlightened mind of *nirvana*.[11]

The three "steps" on the traditional Eightfold Path that we have not mentioned are perhaps the most critical ones for the practice of Engaged Buddhism today, namely, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. Much has been written on the latter two which are associated with the cardinal Buddhist precept *ahimsa* or non-harm to living beings, and the lay precepts against stealing, sexual misconduct, and intoxication. But the precept that has received relatively little attention in the commentarial literature of Buddhism, including scholarly studies conduct on it since the nineteenth century, is Right Speech. Here, I should like to contrast the speech of our two

Buddhist venerables, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, and that of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar—surely one of history's most hair-raising orators. Here, I am extracting from an essay published this year in the volume, *Socially Engaged Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sulak Siviraksa on his 70th Birthday.*[12] (Sivaraksa, as you may know, is the leading Buddhist intellectual in Thailand, and founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, among many other organizations.)

III

In a heated passage in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, the author—Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956)—has stated the Buddha proclaim, "A bhikkhu must fight to spread virtue (dhamma)." Presented as a dialogue between the Buddha and his disciples, the text pictures an embattled leader in a quarrelsome world. "We wage war, O disciples, therefore we are called warriors... for lofty virtues, for high endeavor, for sublime wisdom ... Where virtue is in danger, do not avoid fighting, do not be mealy-mouthed".[13]

Followers of Ambedkar's Buddhism since the 1950s have never mistaken this passage as a call to violence in their struggle against the caste system, but rather as an invitation to "educate, agitate, and organize"—a popular solgan of the movement. Since its inception, the war for Dalit equality has been a war of words and gesutres—protest poetry and posters, book burning and book writing, marches and demonstrations—the rhetoric and ritual of political discourse. And, in spite of their differences with Gandhi over the future of caste, the new Buddhists in India have seldom strayed from the practice of nonviolence.[14]

Yet Ambedkar's speech has always seemed harsh, polarizing, and disturbing to traditional Buddhist, who believe that the Dhamma is a tradition of "right speech" (*sammaa vaacaa*)—not to mention those politicians who dared to question his logic or his commitment to India and its disinherited citizens. As the third step on the Noble Eightfold Path and the fourth injunction in the Five Precepts (*pa~ncha*

shiila)—both cardinal formulas in the practice of lay Buddhism—right speech is generally taken to mean the avoidance of lying, slander, and divisiveness; of "harsh, rude, impolite, malicious and abusive language"; and of "idle, useless and foolish babble and gossip."[15]

Few Buddhist leaders today, whether politically engaged or not, associate right speech with direct challenges to persons or groups that cause social suffering in the world. For the Dalai Lama, overcoming anger is the prerequisite to addressing the atrocities of the Chinese occupation, for the Chinese people have themselves been deprived of human rights.[16] For Thich Nhat Hanh, the "true names" of suffering encompass both oppressor and oppressed, predator and prey, while the practice of right speech entails the avoidance of "any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones" that may cause further discord.[17]

In examining the range of speech patterns in the practice and writings of engaged Buddhists, from Ambedkar's marching orders to the more calming calls-to-order of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, I follow Sulak Sivaraksa and ancient commentators in interpreting "speech" in the broadest sense—as oral and written expression and the symbol systems of mass communication, visual as well as verbal.[18] Let us examine some early Buddhist texts on right speech, beginning with the contrast between the *Kakacuupama Sutta*'s advocacy for speech that is "timely, true, gentle, beneficial, and friendly" (*Majjhima Nikaaya* 21.11) and that of the *Abhayaraajakumaara Sutta*, for speech that is timely, true, and beneficial—but possibly "unwelcome and disagreeable" (M 58.8). Later, I shall propose a formulation of "prophetic speech" for engaged Buddhism that avoids the psychic violence of interpersonal vilification and inter-group polarization, as well as the harmonizing, potentially narcotizing, non-dualistic speech that always finds the cause of suffering in the sufferer's habits of mind.

Professor Sallie King of James Medison University has studied the themes and dynamics in the Buddhist Liberation Movements of Asia. She identifies what she calls the modalities of "love" and "prophetic voice" in the struggle for social

change.[19] The voice of the love recongnizes no enemies—except the greed, hatred, and delusion within each person—and is exemplified in the speeches and writings of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. The prophetic voice, King writes, "maintains a separation between self and other and does not hesitate to denounce what it sees as error and those whose actions are in error". Among the prophetic Buddhists, in her terms, are Ambedkar, Sulak, and the Soka Gakkai lay movement from Japan. Let us consider examples from the Ambedkar movement.

Long before Dr. Ambedkar revealed his intention to convert to Buddhism, he was famous in India for his stinging editorials and speeches on the British colonialism and the Hindu caste system. He excoriated the British and Brahmins alike in his doctoral dissertation on Indian provincial finance, submitted to the Columbia Graduate School in 1923. In 1930, addressing the first Indian Round Table Conference in London—meetings that laid the groundwork for Indian independence—he likened the British Raj to "the Chinese tailor who, when given an old coat as a pattern, reproduced with pride an exact replica, rents, patches and all": Speaking for the 43,000,000 Untouchables of India ("as large as the populations of England or France"), he concluded, "our wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been righted, although 150 years of British rule have rolled away".[20]

Perhaps more significant than Ambedkar's rhetoric is the interpretation it received at the hand of a Dalit Buddhist author in 1968, a dozen years after Ambedkar's conversion and untimely death. D.C. Ahir, the lay historian of the new Buddhist movement, presents Ambedkar's political tirades as models of the Buddhist right speech, and Ambedkar as an epitome of the "modern bodhisattva" who exemplifies the saintly virtues of traditional Buddhism. "Dr. Ambedkar always spoke without any reservations and with clarity of mind," Ahir claims. "He always adhered to the truth, no matter whether it pleased or annoyed others. His theses were always full of free and frank opinion and sometimes ended with

strong condemnation of the existing procedures and practices."[21]

The final example of what Ahir calls "the right speech at the right moment" was Ambedkar's impromptu remarks at the fourth conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, held in Kathmandu in November 1956. While the bulk of his speech compared Marxism and Buddhism as programs for social change—Ambedkar came out for Buddhism as the nonviolent option. The ailing leader, speaking only two weeks before this death, addressed the question of leadership in the Buddhist world:

> If I may say so in conclusion, if any peril arises to the Dhamma in a Buddhist country, the blame shall have to be cast upon the Bhikkhus, because I personally think that they are not wholly discharging the duty which devolves on them. Where is the preaching?
>
> The Bhikkhu is living in his cloister taking his meal no doubt and sitting quietly; probably he is reading, and most probably I find [him] sleeping, and in the evening having a little music. That is not the way of propagating religion.
>
> My friends, I want to tell you, I do not want to criticize anybody, but for religion to be a moral force for the regeneration of society, you must constantly din it into the ears of the people.[22]

In the years since Kathmandu, Ambedkar's followers have attempted to carry on his version of right speech. The 1970s saw the rise of the Dalit Panther Party, modeled on the Black Panthers in the U.S., and a kind of Buddhist "beat literature" or *Dalit Sahitya* (the word *dalit*, meaning "broken", perpahs not so far from "beat"). While the Dalit Panthers and poets were not always focusing on religion, there are notable exceptions. In the spirit of the twenty-two vows—Ambedkar wrote to accompany the traditional Three Refuges and Five Precepts at the massive Buddhist conversion ceremony in October 1956—vows that repudiate the beliefs and practices of Hinduism and pledge allegiance to the new faith. Dalit poets like Daya Pawar and Namdeo Dhasal imagine the Buddha walking through the Untouchable's slums, and they identify (others responsible for poor's living in slums) with the

notorious mass killer, Angulimala, whose madness was transformed to humility in his encounter with the Buddha.[23]

Among the protest posters I have collected in India are three that cry out from the wall. In one, the slogan "Educate, Agitate, Organize" is illustrated by three children—a girl in academic cap-and-gown and two boys in dhotis, one with a fist raised and the other holding a torch aloft—standing before a giant image of Ambedkar. In the second, Ambedkar holds the torch in one hand and a copy of the *Dhammapada* in the other, as masses of pilgrims file through the gateways at the Sanchi Stupa—and, by implication, into Buddhism. In the third poster, probably used for Panther recruiting, Ambedkar stands approvingly behind a child holding a military rifle and bayonet, a bandolier slung across his chest, with a necklace reading *jai Bhim*, "Victory to Ambedkar". In fact, the Hindi slogan at the top of the poster, "He who tolerates oppression is worse than the oppressor", as well as the poster's violent image, would have been repugnant to Ambedkar, who drafted the Indian Constitution and supported nonviolent, democratic social change throughout his life.[24]

IV

In contrast to this tradition of outspokenness and prophetic judgement, we have seen a brief example of the kind of Buddhist "right speech" exemplified by the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh in their speeches at Harvard—both of which addressed the trauma and paralysis that follows a terrorist attack on one's community. I wish there were time this afternoon to share more examples from the writings of these and other engaged Buddhist leaders, but I think you can see the contrast between gentle and judgmental speech that Professor King has offered to us. The question arises, "Which of these seemingly incompatible interpretations of right speech in the face of social violence is recommended by the canonical tradition of Buddhism?"

The historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, was often addressed as "teacher" or *Sattha* by his followers. Unlike *rabbi*, the generic

title used to address Jesus of Nazareth and other Jewish leaders in Biblical times, *Sattha* was reversed for the Buddha alone in the Pali scriptures. Unlike *acariya* and *upajjhaya* (Skt. *acarya, upadhyaya*), common terms for techer used to describe "those in the monastic community who carried out instruction of young monks and nsun in 'doctrines and ordinances", the term *sattha*, according to Willis Stoesz, is descended from the Vedic root *sas*, which means "to chastise, restrain, administer, order, instruct, announce, and predict".[25]

What interests us here, of course, are the "chastise and restrain". Certainly, all of these terms suggest a person of authority who directs as well as teaches. As Stoesz writes, the Buddha was "an authoritative figure who wished his disciples to discover truth (*dhamma*) for themselves, and who was able to arrange matters so that this indeed happened....

> He became the founder of a community growing from his teaching which made a point of its inner cohesiveness, involving both monastics and laity, specialists in human excellence and admirers of that excellence, in interrelated roles. In this setting the Buddha as teacher combined authority and flexibility, order and freedom, in a way that insures his enduring interest to us".[26]

It is in this context that the early tradition offers a series of teachings on the practice of right speech that take up our question, namely, under what circumstances may a practitioner of the *dhamma* chastise and restrain others, or otherwise utter words of judgment or condemnation?

In the *Abhayarajakumara Sutta*, the young prince Abhaya attempts to trick the Buddha with the question, "Would the Tathagata utter speech that would be unwelcome and disagreeable to others?" He believed that a negative answer would belie the Buddha's condemnation of his murderous cousin, Devadatta, while a positive answer would deny the conventional wisdom that right speech is gentle and agreeable.[27] For in the standard formula, the Buddha teaches that "Abstaining from false speech, abstaining from malicious speech, abstaining from harsh speech, and abstaining from idle chatter—this is called right speech".[28] Elsewhere, the Buddha praises one who "speaks such words as are gentle,

pleasing to the ear, and loveable, as go to the heart, are courteous, desired by many and agreeable to many".[29] On another occasion we hear that right speech is "timely, true, gentle, beneficial, and spoken with loving-kindness".[30]

The drama of the Abhay Sutta is established at the outset, for the prince, by a famous rival of the Buddha—Nagantha Nataputta—the Jain founder and leader better known as Mahavira. In sending Abhaya to trick the Buddha, Nataputta illustrates all of the no-no's of the Buddhist the right speech: his instructions are deceptive, malicious, harshly stated, and, in light of his standing as a respected teacher (unlike Devadatta, the black sheep of the Sakya clan), idle and pointless.[31]

After exposing the naivete of the question—"There is no one-sided answer to that, prince"—the Buddha, in typical fashion, poses his own question. Seeing that the young prince is cradling an infant in his lap (a vivid detail that would seem to anchor the story in a real encounter), the Buddha asks what he would do if the child suddenly choked on a stick or pebble. The prince immediately replies, "I would take it out...even if it meant drawing blood. Why is that? Because I have compassion for the child." (The imagery is graphic because Nataputta had promised that the original dilemma would be, to the Buddha, like an iron spike stuck in a man's throat which he could neither gulp down nor throw up!)

Now, the genius of the Buddha is revealed as he compares a life-saving but possibly painful operation to the use of right speech which is truthful and beneficial but possibly unwelcome and disagreeable. Unlike speech which is untruthful or unbeneficial but welcome and agreeable—such as empty flattery or cunning manipulation, the unwanted truth may be spoken if (and this is a *big if*) the message is beneficial and timely. "The Tathagata knows the time to use such speech... Why is that? Beacuse the Tathagata [like a skillful doctor or loving parent] has compassion for beings."[32]

As if the monks then ask for clarification of the circumstances in which unwelcome and disagreeable speech is permissible, the Buddha continues his exposition in the *Kinti Sutta*, also collected in the Middle-Length Sayings of the *Sutta*

Pitaka.[33] The setting is the life of the monastic community, when the monks "are training in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing". Yet if someone commits an offence or a transgression of monastic code, the question is posed, what, if anything, should be said to the offender?

Here, the Buddha formulates a moral calculus with five variables: (1) I shall/shall not be troubled by admonishing the person, (2) the other person will/will not be hurt by my admonishment, (3) the other person is/is not given to anger and revenge, (4) the other person is/is not firmly attached to his view and relinquishes it easily, and (5) I can/cannot make that person emerge from the unwholesome and establish him in the wholesome. In the end, the only variable that counts is the last one—that the corrective speech is beneficial to the offender and will reestablish wholeness in his or her life:

> Then it may occur to you, bhikkhus: 'I shall be troubled and the other person will be hurt; for the other person is given to anger and revenge, and his is firmly attached to his view and he relinquishes with difficulty; yet I can make that person emerge from the unwholesome and establish him in the wholesome. It is a mere trifle that I shall be troubled and the other person hurt, but it is a much greater thing that I can make that person emerge from the unwholesome and establish him in the wholesome'. If such occurs to you, bhikkhus, it is proper to speak.[34]

And in the event that the other person is hopelessly resistant to correction, the Buddha prudently concludes, "One should not underrate equanimity towards such a person". In other words, it is time to practice the Buddha's noble silence.

V

In planning this talk, I wanted to show how engaged Buddhists are struggling to find a "middle ground between holy withdrawal and holy war." I had the Dalai Lama in mind as I wrote that phrase, as his recent visit reminded us all of his heroic mastery of anger in the face of continued Chinese tyranny in Tibet. His practice, as many of you know, involves the use of the lovingkindness mediation and other rituals

unique to the Tibetan tradition—every day, beginning at four o'clock in the morning and lasting four or five hours. For most of us, I suspect, this much meditation at daybreak would result in the firm resolve to go back to bed, to take the day off, or at least to spend most of it smiling silently at anything that moved. But you also know that His Holiness is one of the most energetic and outspoken human rights activists alive today. When not serving as the political head of the Tibetan government in exile, calling for the Chinese government to negotiate the future of Tibet, overseeing the drafting of Tibet's first democratic constitution, leading religious rituals for his own community and for Diaspora and covert communities worldwide, he is putting the final touches on another book. The word "indefatigable" comes to mind. Thus, we have a figure who illustrates the middle ground between holy withdrawal and holy war.

In my remarks today, I have used the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Dr. Ambedkar, and the records of the Buddhist history and literature to suggest a Buddhist interpretation of the roots of violence and specific techniques for countering them. These include our choice of words for personal communication and in public discourse. It turns out that Buddhism has a good deal to say about this "middle path" between subjective thoughts and objective deeds. For, it is the words and their interpretations that should constitute the true battle ground in the world today. As Dr. Ambedkar opined throughout his life, it is in the public square—in the halls of government and courts of law, on the front page and the op-ed page of the newspaper, and, we might add today, through the miracles of telecommunication, the Internet, e-mail, and cell phones—that we must discover new pictures of the world, find new friends, allies, and associates, and, most importantly, resolve our differences or learn to live with them in mutual respect and understanding.

I should like now to end my remarks by describing three scenes of the Buddhist revival in India in the year 2004. These are scenes that I hope to develop into stories for a book tentatively titled *The Fourth Yana: Buddhist Liberation Stories from*

India. These scenes, like postcards or freeze-frames of a moving picture, may help us to visualize the ideas we have discussed today.

The first scene is of Mr. Rajeshkumar Bauddh of Bodh Gaya, making his rounds to villages in rural Bihar, speaking to small groups of Dalit Buddhists. Rajesh is a young man who invited me, four years ago, to become a founding members, with him and several friends, of the Dharma Chakka Mission. Rajesh lives with his wife and son in Siddharth Nagar, the Dalit neighbourhood of Bodh Gaya. I met him at the Maha Bodhi Society, where I was staying, when he offered to serve as my interpreter for meetings with members of the Temple Management Committee of the Maha Bodhi Temple, the central pilgrimage site for world Buddhism. Rajesh speaks fluent English and was eager to assist me, free of charge, believing that a scholar's interest in his hometown might help to resolve some of the political and religious tensions that have festered there since the Singhalese missionary, Anagarika Dharmapala, demanded the return of the temple of Buddhist control more than a hundred years ago.

The Dhamma Chakka Mission represents Rajesh Bauddh's vision of the Buddhist social and educational outreach to nearby villages, offering free talks to families who have taken refuge in Buddhism but who know very little about its teachings and history, or of Ambedkar's social interpretation of the Dhamma. I will be visiting Rajesh again this weekend and hope to travel with him to some of the mission sites that he has opened since my last visit. This grassroots religious work undoubtedly has a social and political dimension, as the Mission discovers unmet economic needs and instances of social injustuce in the field. In the terms of our analysis today, I would call this grassroots community-building a social extrapolation of the kindness meditation the Buddha prescribed to overcome hatred. The sermonizing and encouragement that Rajesh offers to his small audiences—like his gift of free Hindi-English translation services to a visiting scholar—is a fitting example of the Buddhist "right speech", in that it is timely, truthful, beneficial, and we will assume,

contructive. Surely it is not his style to castigate his political adversaries—but neither is it his custom to keep silence in the face of injustice.

Our second scene is the Mumbai offices of Srimati Sulekha Kumbhare, the Water Resources Commissioner for the State of Maharashtra and the daughter of first Dalit Member of Parliament. As some of you know, Mrs. Kumbhare grew up in Kamptee, near Nagpur, and was the inspiration for the building of the Dragon Palace Temple there by the Japanese business woman, Mrs. Nichiro Ogawa. After receiving her law degree, Mrs. Kumbhare served as Kamptee's mayor for a time before accepting the water resources portfolio for the state government—surely a critical position for the uplift of the poor. On a business trip to Japan some years ago, the two women met and compared notes as practioners of Buddhism. Noting the Indian woman's verbal and political talents, Mrs. Ogawa was reminded of the brilliance of the 8-year-old Dragon Princess depicted in the Lotus Sutra which her Buddhist sect venerates. She suggested a visit to Kamptee (surely the Southern Kingdom to which the Dragon Princess was sent by the Buddha) and once there, proposed building a temple, general hospital and comprehensive public school in honor of Mrs. Kumbhare. Today, the Dragon Palace Temple complex is a tourist attraction as well as a place of worship, bringing needed revenue to Kamptee, as well as medical and educational services for the poor. It is also a dramatic example of public philanthropy and generosity—the antidote to greed and economic inequality, one of the root causes of violence and suffering in the world. Certainly, a Japanese Buddhist woman is to be praised for her practice of *dana-paramita*, but credit must also be given to the Dalit Buddhist woman in India who has the vision and the "right speech" to succeed in the rough-and-tumble of Indian politics.

Finally, we pay a visit to the University of Nagpur where Professors Bhao Lokhande and V.N. Dhoke are arguing about the benefits of Vipassana Meditation for social activists. Both men are Dalit Buddhist who teach in the Ambedkar Graduate faculty, and they have been friends for may years. Professor

Lokhande, a noted scholar of Pali and Buddhist Studies, has participated in several 10-day retreats at S.N. Goenka's Vipassana Mediation Center in Nasik. He insists that the mental focus and insight he has achieved through meditation has made him a better teacher and department head, by helping him to see his students, colleagues, and superiors as fellow suffering beings deserving of kindness and compassion. Professor Dhoke, an instructor in Physics and Engineering strongly disagrees, insisting that mediation softens the spirit, making the practitioner more pliable at the hands of the power elite and leading to confusion and victimhood. "Dr. Ambedkar didn't mediate and wouldn't approve of his followers engaging in such a passive activity. 'Educate, Agitate, and Organize' was his clarion call, not 'Mediate, Cooperate, and Equivocate". Now, I will have to check my tape recorder to make sure that these were Professor Dhoke's exact words, but they are pretty colse to his sentiments.

I like this scene because Drs. Dhoke and Lokhande have the highest regard for one another and are deeply committed to the Buddhist Dharma as they understand it, and to their careers as scholars and university professors. Both of them represent, in my analysis, the triumph of wisdom over higher eduation—for the uplift of the poor. Likewise, both engaged Buddhists would agree, eduaction is the key to reducing violence and terrorism in the world today. Whatever one believes about the efficacy of silent mediatation, surely Professors Lokhande and Dhoke embody a core definition of Buddhist "right speech" and of the middle path between holy withdrawal and holy war.

In leaving you with these scenes of socially engaged Buddhism in India, I hope that you may join me in recognizing and honoring the contribution that your own countrymen and women are making in the global struggle against economic injustice, political terrorism and social violence today. Certainly, their efforts to adapt ancient Buddhism to these new circumstances deserve our attention in the coming years.

Thank you very much.

NOTES

1. See Harvard University Gazette online for March 14, 2002, at *http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2002/03.14/31-thich.html.*
2. See Harvard University Gazette online for September 18, 2003, at *http://www.hno.harvard.edu/gazette/2003/09.18/01-dalailama.html.*
3. *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*, edited by Daniel L. Smith-Christopher (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).
4. Sutta Nipata III.7.5-7. See *The Sutta-Nipata*, H. Saddhatissa, trans. (London: Curzon Press, 1985), p. 65.
5. The transformation of the war chariot to a peace chariot in ancient Buddhism makes an interesting counterpoint to the events in the Hindu poem, *Bhagavad Gita* (an episode in the Indian national war epic, *Mahabharata*). Here the protagonist, young general Arjuna, attempts to prevent a war from his place in the lead chariot, only to be reminded by his charioteer, the divine Lord Krishna, that his caste duty is to fight. See *The Bhagavad Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War*, Barbara Stoler Miller, trans. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986). The contrast between the two traditions is heightened by the fact that the historical Buddha and the legendary Arjuna are of the same caste, the *kshatriya* or military/administrative caste.
6. See Robert E. Fisher, *Buddhist Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 20.
7. See discussion in Hammalawa Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics* (Boston: Wisdom, 1997), p. 60.
8. These mental factors are perhaps more tellingly called *asavas*, emotional "secretions".
9. See Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1997).
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-64.
11. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987). While a rich literature on Buddhist psychology and self-transformation is easily obtained—I would recommend three recent, non-scholarly books: Sharon Salzberg's *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002) and two by the Dalai Lama: *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* (New York: Riverhead, 1998), and *How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Atria Books, 2002).

12. Christopher S. Queen, "Gentle or Harsh? The Practice of Right Speech in Engaged Buddhism" in *Socially Engaged Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sulak Sivarakṣa on His 70th Birthday*, edited by David, W. Chappell (Bangkok: Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 2003), pp. 2-19.
13. B.R. Ambdekar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Third Edition (Bombay: Siddharth Publication, 1984), pp. 326-327.
14. Insofar as violence has marred the Dalit movement in recent decades, it has been the violence of backlash, perpetrated by persons and parties with a vested interest in the perpetuation of caste privilege and social injustice. For extensive documentation of this violence, see *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's "Untouchables"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999).
15. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Revised Edition (New York: Grove Press, 1974), p. 47.
16. Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 261; and *Kindness, Clarity and Insight* (eds.) J. Hopkins and E. Napper (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 1984), p. 62; cited by Jose Ignacio Cabezon in his "Buddhist Principles in the Tibetan Liberation Movement" in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, (eds.) Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 304-305.
17. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1987), p. 89; also see his *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993), pp. 107-112.
18. Sivaraksa speaks of all "patterns of information that condition our understanding of the world". See Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Reviewing Society* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992), p. 77. Peter Harvey finds support for this broad definition of "speech" in traditional Buddhist prohibition of "non-verbal deception by gesture or other indication" in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharma-kosa-basyam IV.75*; Buddhaghosa's *Atthasalini 99*; and the canonical *Khuddaka-patha, Anguttara Nikaya 26*. See Peter Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 75.
19. Sallie B. King, "Conclusion" in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, (eds.) Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 430-434.

20. Quoted by D.C. Ahir in his *Buddhism and Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Dalit Sahitya Prakashan, 1968, 1990), pp. 53-56.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
23. Cited by Eleanor Zelliot in her, "India's Ex-Untouchables: New Past, New Future and the New Poetry" in her book *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992), pp. 293-316.
24. The latter two posters are produced by "Shant Studio"; all three are distributed by Samyak Sahitya Sadan, Ambedkar Bhawan, New Delhi—110055.
25. Willis Stoesz, "The Buddha as Teacher", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (1978), pp. 140-141.
26. Ibid.
27. *Abhayarajakumara Sutta*, "To Prince Abhaya", *Majjima Nikaya 58*; English translation by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 498-501.
28. E.g. *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, "The Exposition of the Truths", *Majjhima Nikaya 141*; English translation by Bhikkhu Nanomoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 1100.
29. *Sevitabbaasevitabba Sutta*, "To Be Cultivated and Not To Be Cultivated", *Majjhima Nikaya 114*; English translation by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), p. 916.
30. Kakacupama Sutta, "The Simile of the Saw", *Majjhima Nikaya 21*; English translation by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 220-215.
31. Nataputta's speech is deceptive in suggesting that Abhaya will earn public respect by refuting the Buddha's teaching (or even that such an outcome were possible); malicious in wishing to see the Buddha squirm ("If an iron spike were stuck in a man's throat, he would not be able either to gulp it down or to throw it up; so too, prince, when the recluse Gotama is posed this two-horned question by you, he will not be able either to gulp it down or to throw it up"); harsh in

recalling that "Devadatta was angry and dissatisfied with that speech of yours"; and idle in failing to offer any justification for his attack on a rival teacher.

32. *Abhayarajakumara Sutta,* p. 500.
33. *Kinti Sutta,* "What Do You Think of Me?", *Majjhima Nikaya 103;* English tranlsation by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 847-852. I would like to thank Andrew Olendzki for suggesting this text.
34. *Abhayarajakumara Sutta,* pp. 500-501.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Christopher S. Queen, presently Lecturer on the Study of Religion at Harvard University, U.S.A., completed his Ph.D. on the thesis *Systems Theory in Religious Studies: A Methodological Critique* from the Boston University in 1986 where he also taught for sometimes. Having grasp on Sanskrit language and Buddhist Studies, Dr. Queen has presented scholarly papers in numerous seminars and conferences both in India and U.S.A. He has jointly edited half a dozen books and published a dozen articles on Engaged Buddhism in edited books on Buddhism as practiced in both India and U.S.A. His book - *The Fourth Yana: B.R. Ambedkar and the Dawn of Engaged Buddhism* is being published shortly.