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**TRANSFORMING CONFLICT, TRANSFORMING OURSELVES:
BUDDHISM AND SOCIAL LIBERATION**

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The world community has become increasingly interdependent. War in one region destabilizes not only neighbors, but the global commons as well. Problems of weapons proliferation, human trafficking, poverty, and disease know no boundaries. At the same time, concepts and practices of democracy, human rights, compassion, nonviolence, reconciliation and sustainable peace also cross borders. Karuna Center for Peacebuilding is part of a worldwide movement educating for creative peace initiatives, tolerant inter-communal relations, cooperative responses to conflict, and engagement in the peacebuilding process. This kind of change, much less visible than that which destroys, requires visionary leadership, sustained commitment, and conscious community participation.

I founded Karuna Center for Peacebuilding in 1993 in response to the growing global need to develop innovative, sustainable strategies to address ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflict. Our core mission is to pioneer efforts to promote dialogue, reconciliation, cooperative problem solving, and nonviolent solutions to conflict in troubled and war-torn regions. Karuna Center works by invitation and in partnership with in-country non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics, community groups, educational and religious institutions, local governments, and community peacebuilders. Through these partnerships, Karuna Center facilitates peacebuilding trainings and inter-communal dialogue workshops designed to foster trust and communication between conflicting parties, so that together these groups can effect positive social change. The core threads that I attempt to weave together in my work include psychological training, Buddhist meditation practice, and a long-standing passion for equality, social justice and nonviolent solutions to conflict and competing interests.

My journey as a peacebuilder began in the United States in the 1960's, before I knew myself well or had been introduced to the Dharma, and long before the word "peacebuilder" had become part of my vocabulary and identity. In recent decades, Dharma teaching, humanistic psychology, the women's movement, international relations, and inner awareness, combined with the original impulses that drew me to the civil rights and anti-war movements, led me to the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, and the formation of Karuna Center for Peacebuilding. Through Karuna Center and my

work as a professor at the School for International Training, I am able to act on my concern for the world, my solidarity with oppressed and war-ravaged peoples, and my values of interdependence and mutuality.

Although I no longer work solely in societies that are specifically Buddhist, as I did when Karuna Center first developed, the Dharma continues to inform my work. The teachings of the Buddha provide guidance in many situations that arise as I teach in war-recovering communities, and I utilize these understandings as I train practitioners of conflict transformation. Of special usefulness in my work is the concept of balancing wisdom with compassion, the deep recognition of interdependence, and the insight that conflict arises from greed, anger, and delusion. It is my experience that the teachings of Buddhism, introduced in secular language, can be applied in whatever religious or national tradition is struggling to transform conflict and rebuild community. In this chapter I will explore Buddhist teachings that particularly illuminate social action, and share examples of Buddhist perceptions applied to my work in conflict transformation and reconciliation.

Compassion, Nonviolence and Interdependence

A disciple once asked the Buddha, “Would it be true to say that a part of our training is for the development of love and compassion?” The Buddha replied, “No, it would not be true to say this. It would be true to say that the *whole* of our training is for the development of love and compassion.”

Each year I facilitate an international training program called CONTACT, or Conflict Transformation Across Cultures, at the School for International Training in Vermont. Participants come from all over the world, many carrying the wounds of war and the scars of hatred and separation. At the deepest level, the intention of our month together is experiential training in compassion and love. Along with the transmission of concepts, skills, and activities, we attempt to weave a global community, to rebuild understanding where ethnic and religious groups have violated each other, and to promote understanding where the human connection has failed. This program is compassion training in action, and it works. Inter-religious and inter-cultural differences diminish, replaced by actual experiences with others that defy inherited stereotypes. I remember an Armenian man previously taught to hate Muslims finding that his best friend at CONTACT was a Muslim man from Bosnia. The Bosnian man had also arrived hating Serbs, until he connected very deeply with a lawyer from Serbia who has remained his close friend and ally. Compassion opens hearts and breaks down walls built for protection. Compassion alone does not put an end to war or suffering, but is the foundation upon which peacebuilders can encourage mutual exploration and joint problem-solving. Without compassion, the work of restoring inter-communal

relations and promoting tolerance has less chance of success, for it is human relationship that provides the bonds of peace.

In addition to rooting our work in the development and expression of compassion, we uphold a firm commitment to exploring nonviolent solutions to conflict. Nonviolence can be practiced as a strategic response to conflict and as a way of life, both of which we embrace. In the conflict resolution movement, we have come to see that communities engage in endless and ultimately futile cycles of revenge and counter-violence that lead to interminable instability and suffering. Encouraging nonviolent methods of replacing the cycles of revenge with cycles of reconciliation is a central element in our work. For me, the deep commitment to nonviolence is part of my attraction to Buddhism; this philosophy resonates with my own life experience and is consistently reinforced by my witness as a conflict resolution professional.

Buddhist thinking, from the beginning to the present day, has maintained a deep commitment to nonviolence and to caring for others. For followers of the Buddhist way, meditation is the foundational discipline, through which the nature of suffering is perceived and understood. Practitioners come to understand that war does not end by war, nor can anger be overcome by anger. Nonviolent responses to violence hold the potential for true transformation, and kindness holds out the possibility of redemption and reconciliation. Recently the Dalai Lama responded to a question about basic Buddhist practice, saying, "My true religion is kindness." The fullness of this belief was exemplified by the Dalai Lama's acceptance speech at the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony: "I speak not with a feeling of anger or hatred towards those who are responsible for the immense suffering of our people and the destruction of our land, homes, and culture. They too are human beings who struggle to find happiness and deserve our compassion."

One of Buddhism's unique contributions to today's nonviolence and social change movement is its emphasis on spiritual training, which can develop the open heart, self-knowledge, and awareness that facilitates skillful responses in a violent world. Spiritual practice has an unseen beneficent influence on one's actions in the world. Buddhist practitioners who participate in social action come to understand that to heal self and society is one and the same, that inner and outer work are imperative and interrelated. As one engages in confronting society's violence, one must simultaneously acknowledge and tame the violence within oneself. Personal and world peace are linked by the thoughts and actions of every human being; in myriad ways, we each contribute daily to a violent or a peaceful world.

Violent and nonviolent behaviors arise according to the conditions of the mind and the society. Purifying and strengthening the mind, cultivating consciousness, acting from awareness, developing abundant compassion and loving kindness, and understanding the interdependent nature of being and acting

in the world, can all contribute to nonviolence within the self and in the global community. Perhaps the earliest spokesperson for this current fusion of Buddhism and activism was Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, who coined the term “Engaged Buddhism” to describe social action based on Buddhist principles. His practices were developed by necessity in the heat of the Vietnam War, where, as a monk, he developed nonviolent social service derived from Buddhist philosophy. Thich Nhat Hanh observed that meditation leads to insight, and insight leads to skillful behavior and action that can help liberate everyone involved in the war or conflict. In the past several decades, the movement of Engaged Buddhists has grown significantly and worldwide, with leading spokespersons in Asia, Europe, and North America.

In the heat of confrontation between opposing ideologies or behaviors, nonviolent behavior requires discipline. Several years ago I participated in a women’s march for peace in New York State led by a Buddhist nun. As our nonviolent peace walk approached the military base to express our opposition to their preparations for war, we were met with jeering neighborhood residents expressing particularly hurtful obscenities about our group. It took great presence of mind to respond with kindness, and we were grateful for the exemplary behavior of our leader, the nun Jun Yasuda, who bowed and smiled to each jeering citizen. Whatever the onlookers learned from this, at least they observed our nonviolent behavior and our refusal to turn them into enemies.

For Engaged Buddhists, perhaps the most central insight that arises in meditation practice is the realization of the interconnectedness of all life. As in meditation, the concept of a strong, separate self-identity becomes more permeable. In Karuna Center’s inter-communal dialogue groups, a breakthrough to empathy and forgiveness becomes possible when adversaries are able to imagine the conditions of their opponent’s lives and to understand that, under those conditions, they might well have acted the same way. A clear awareness of interconnection may develop, in which everything is seen as mutually influenced and dependent upon everything else. Through this experience of interconnection, the practitioner may realize that violent behavior produces harm to the self as well as to others. According to Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy, “This law of dependent co-arising is such that every action we take, every word we speak, every thought we think is not only affected by the other elements in the vast web of being in which all things take part, but also has results so far-reaching that we cannot see or imagine them. We simply proceed with the act for its own worth, our sense of responsibility arising from our co-participation in all existence.” We understand that each ripple in the pond sends changes in all directions. If the intention of our words, deeds and thoughts are benevolent, compassionate, and clear, we have faith that the reverberations of this consciousness will add positively to the vast web of

interconnection, beyond our ability to discern or control.

Uprooting Poisons in the Mind

The Buddha devoted his life to the problems of the human mind. Through his own direct experience, he came to see both the causes of suffering and the path to end suffering. He identified three root sources of suffering and saw that, through meditation and principled conduct, the practitioner could develop behaviors to counterbalance each of them. The three root causes are greed, hatred, and delusion, and the antidotes for these poisons are generosity, loving kindness, and wisdom. Wholesome and unwholesome conditions of mind exist in all of us, and that which is unwholesome can be transformed through diligent practice and awareness.

From my years of experience studying and teaching conflict analysis and the causes of inter-personal and inter-communal conflict, I have not yet found any paradigm that describes the causes of conflict more succinctly and accurately. Professionals in the fields of mental health, conflict resolution, and political science have made many attempts to probe the unseen and largely inexplicable rise to violence that seems to live so closely below the surface in human beings. Through the lens of greed, anger, and delusion, and the fear that accompanies and fuels these three toxic conditions, the violence that erupts seems explicable. Thus, for me, these clear and direct Buddhist teachings on the causes of suffering, unhappiness, and violence are of great benefit, and useful to all people whatever their spiritual or political orientation.

Greed, the first of the toxic mind states, can also be described as desire, selfishness, or clinging. We have only to look at our imbalanced world to see the effects of greed on our economic, political, social, and environmental decisions. The deleterious effects of self-interest are evident in our impoverished inner cities and the countries of the Global South. Unfortunately, capitalism thrives on stimulating desire and continually increasing the appetite for more goods and services, and the capitalist system dominates the world. The Buddhist monk with his begging bowl contradicts the harmful economic misdeed of hoarding. In traditional Asian Buddhist society, the monk goes forth each morning with an empty bowl, making his alms rounds, trusting the people for his sustenance, and hoarding nothing for the next day. Whatever greed and fear arises in his mind must be managed and disciplined.

Whether in gross or subtle forms, most of us are addicted to our desires and preferences, which with commodities such as oil, may lead to war and domination. Greed becomes a spiritual prison and ultimately a cause of misery in both individual and communal life. Uprooting greed and selfishness stands at the very heart of Buddhism; through practice and insight, we can put an end to the

sufferings of unending desire, clinging, and craving. Transforming greed would radically alter our priorities, reduce our selfishness, and ultimately set the world on a much more peaceful course. Communities engaged in peacebuilding are often startled to experience the mirroring of needs on both sides. In my work, as people explore the roots of conflict and come to understand the needs of those with whom they are at war, it becomes clear that desire, greed, and hoarding have been connected with the struggle, and that more equitable distribution of resources such as land, water, and economic opportunity will help ameliorate the difficulties.

Loosening the grip of greed within the mind allows for generosity on an individual and communal level. Generosity can be consciously cultivated. Its practice can lead to an increasingly nonviolent way of life, a reduction in greed, and a greater sense of satisfaction and happiness. Meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein speaks frequently about the fruits of generosity and writes: “The karmic results of generosity are abundance and deep harmonious relationships with other people.” Some years ago I observed a monk who appeared to be completely and spontaneously generous. Whatever was given to him he immediately offered to someone else. I decided to follow this practice and for a number of years consciously practiced generosity as fully as I could, both materially and in terms of the spirit behind the act. I found it true that the fruits of that practice of generosity included internal happiness and harmonious relationships.

In the peacebuilding field I am frequently privileged to meet people with great spiritual generosity, sometimes risking their lives to save others in an ultimate gift of generosity. To protest war, protect the environment, and rescue those in danger, activists frequently relinquish comfort and safety, or risk arrest or death. A Bosnian colleague who could have emigrated during the war, chose to stay in Sarajevo during the more than three years that Sarajevo was under siege, where he opened soup kitchens and established free pharmacies, distributing the only medicines available in that besieged city. When I asked Yakob why he took such a risk, he replied that 500 years before, his people had been saved by the citizens of Sarajevo. He believed he owed them the same response. His generosity brought great happiness to many and an undoubted sense of satisfaction to his own life.

Hatred and anger are difficult mind states that frequently give rise to thoughts of violence and revenge. The Buddha likened anger to a burning coal; in the process of picking it up to throw at another, anger burns one's own hand. In anger, the mind is contracted and tight, so that a person experiencing anger is already suffering very deeply. In the peace movement, righteous indignation and anger are often used to energize and propel action. Buddhists believe that this tempting reflex creates separation. An “us/them” mentality must be avoided, because it is a form of violence that, in the end, only begets more violence. “Anger

cannot be overcome with anger,” wrote the Dalai Lama, “and world problems cannot be challenged by anger or hatred. They must be faced with compassion, love, and true kindness.”

In my rural New England town, the Japanese monks of Nipponzan Myohoji were given land to build a peace pagoda – a Buddhist stupa or shrine. At a traditional town meeting, many residents expressed strong opposition, which was likely based on their fear of difference, their lack of knowledge about Buddhism and monks, and, perhaps, veiled racism. The head monk, Venerable Kato Shonin, stood in front of the townspeople, and after each vitriolic comment, offered a long, silent, respectful bow, nothing more – no words, no anger, no justification, or explanation. For me, this was a beautiful display of dignity, discipline, and management of whatever hurt or anger may have arisen in his mind. Through his many years of practice, he was free of vengeance or unskillful and angry retorts.

Compassion (*karuna*) and loving kindness (*metta*), the sweet fruits of meditation practice, are the antidotes to anger and hatred. Thich Nhat Hanh believes that anger has far-reaching social effects and that we should apply an antidote in the form of compensating behavior as soon as anger arises. Clearly, unskillfully expressed anger and hatred becloud the mind, poison the heart, and destroy relationships. On the world stage, inter-communal and international relations deteriorate through the hatred of prejudices and intolerance as well as through greed and selfishness. Uprooting these behaviors on a massive scale is extremely difficult and indeed has never succeeded, but we have reached a point in history where new approaches to survival must be tried. Applying the antidote of compassion to these toxic thought forms as they arise would, at the least, create a much safer and kinder world, one in which emotions could be tamed and hatreds disciplined. The Sri Lankan monk/activist Dr. Rewata Dhamma writes, “The cultivation of universal compassion by every possible means is essential, a compassion that has immediate, practical, and sustainable results in the alleviation of suffering.” Taking responsibility for one’s anger and the harm that it causes, and developing compassionate and calm mind states, serves the individual, the family, the community, and society.

The third and last toxic mind state is delusion, or ignorance. This arises and is maintained by an untrained, undisciplined mind that has not been penetrated by its “user,” one who has not directly experienced interdependence, the consequences of harm and anger, or the roots of alienation and violence within the self. Delusion is the state of mind that most human beings live with: confused, restless, and unhappy. Ignorance or delusion is based on a failure to penetrate the truth of *anatta*, the theory that there is no separate self. Ignorance thus the foundation of the poisonous delusions that we have something to protect from others, that we are apart.

Through practicing one of the various forms of meditation, insight into the nature of reality can gradually replace ignorance. With devoted practice comes purification, which makes the mind less violent on increasingly subtle levels. Gross harm is avoided; awareness and self-control are increased; and, with time, wisdom develops. Ethical conduct, which is the foundation of Buddhist practice, becomes internalized, so that behavioral choices are made with great care and personal responsibility.

Applications of Dharma Principles to Peacebuilding–

For Buddhists involved in active nonviolence, Buddhism begins, but does not end, on the meditation cushion. The notion that Buddhism is passive is misinformed. As the Thai scholar/activist Sulak Sivaraksa writes, “Many people, particularly in the West, think that Buddhism is only for deep meditation and personal transformation, that it has nothing to do with society. This is not true. Particularly in South and Southeast Asia, for many centuries Buddhism has been a great strength for society.” In Tibet as well, a unique and highly principled society arose from centuries of devotion to the Buddhist path. For Engaged Buddhists, responding to the needs of others comes out of the practice and *becomes* the practice. One does not wait until personal enlightenment, or even full moral development, is attained before embarking on the path of Engaged Buddhism. Rather, one sees the reciprocal nature of practice in the meditation hall and service in the world.

In the past decade, I have had the privilege and challenge of serving as a peacebuilder in war-ravaged societies and in communities seeking to prevent the recurrence of violence. The Dharma travels with me, serving as a guide for the interventions I might suggest, the words I choose, and the particular ways that I respond as a facilitator of inter-ethnic dialogue. Early on, I selected the term *Conflict Transformation* for my work rather than *Conflict Resolution*, based on a belief, developed through meditation practice, that we must transform ourselves as we simultaneously set about transforming the unjust structures and violent behaviors in our society.

Thich Nhat Hanh’s poem, “Please Call Me by My True Names,” repeatedly comes to mind when I engage with war victims and transgressors, reminding me that we are all capable of extremes of innocence and treachery, kindness and cruelty. One verse from his poem is especially illustrative of the illusion of blame and separation:

I am the 12 year-old girl, refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean

after being raped by a sea pirate,
and I am the pirate,
my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.

The knowledge that we are all capable of inflicting great harm helps me monitor self-righteousness and separation. The Buddhist insight that, at the deepest level, there is no separation between self and other is crucial, albeit difficult to experience. Groups in conflict instinctively separate and sort, identifying themselves as fully good and others as completely evil. Utilizing these Buddhist teachings about interdependence and non-separation helps me stay related to all sides and guides my encouragement of community rebuilding after war.

Post-conflict dialogue groups attempt to cut through this separation and identification. Working with the same people over many years, I can observe the gradual relinquishment of separateness and the acknowledgement of commonality and binding ties. Participants come to recognize and own the tendency toward violence inside themselves, as well as the gifts of altruism and compassion that exist among their opponents. I have seen this occur among group members in Bosnia and Rwanda who have been wrenched apart by ethnic warfare and now face the task of rebuilding their communities. Difficult as this task is, they are able to retract their projections of evil, own their own aggression, and re-humanize the other.

When I express my compassion, group members experience my care for them, which serves as a model and also gives them psychological permission to express their own compassion and loving kindness. Through this process of opening to others, group members often discover their mutual needs and interests, which becomes an important bridge in resolving the underlying conflicts causing the violence. In the process of post-conflict reconciliation, it is essential to recognize that all sides suffer during and after conflict, and that all parties have unmet needs. In the end, there are no winners in these wars, only damaged and hurting communities and individuals.

Although I do not talk about Buddhism or give Dharma talks during international workshops, the Buddhist concepts and beliefs that I have been taught are apparent to participants in my workshops and classes. In times of anxiety or danger, I remember to breathe and smile. I encourage silence and self-reflection, attention to thought processes, and deep listening. When we hear the stories of suffering, I invite participants to take in the pain of the speaker and then breathe it out. I may speak about impermanence and about the great turning of the wheel that carries all of us through time and brings us measures of both joy and suffering, which reminds those suffering from the wounds of war that joy will again be possible. In non-Buddhist regions, such as Africa, the Middle East, and the

Balkans, we avoid specifically Buddhist language, but workshop participants recognize the value of interdependence and the need for compassionate social engagement.

Women's Leadership in Social Transformation

Women in the Buddhist community and beyond have a decisive role to play in the immense tasks of personal and social transformation. Sidelined from the halls of power for too long, women manage inter-personal and familial peacemaking, but rarely serve as policy makers. While we cannot assume that all women in powerful positions will advocate nonviolent conflict resolution, we can hypothesize that sufficient numbers of female decision-makers will change the worldwide culture of war and edge humanity closer to a global culture of peace. Thus women must become educated and empowered visionaries, full partners in creating a new political paradigm based on women's strengths of connection, collaboration, and interdependence.

In Buddhist contexts in North America, Europe, and Asia, many accomplished women are engaged as intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social leaders within the Sangha and the academy. The authors represented in this volume are among them. Their influence on the future of Buddhism is not in doubt. Hopefully, gender struggles in the Buddhist community will eventually move forward to allow full ordination, equality for nuns, and equivalent educational opportunities for women. The gradual resolution of these issues will influence laywomen in Asia and the West, who will be taught the Dharma by ordained women who value their contributions and are sensitive to their priorities, fears, and cultural restrictions.

Women in leadership roles within and beyond Buddhist circles are challenged by the difficulties of maintaining core values of connection and relationship while negotiating in the halls of power, whether academic, political, corporate, or religious. Dharma inculcates an understanding of interdependence and mutuality, and there is much in women's lived experiences that echoes this theme. Contemporary life pulls in the other direction, toward individualism, self-centered fulfillment of one's personal needs, and competition for power and privilege. How women negotiate these opposing poles may determine the depth of women's abilities to change society and to nurture nonviolent responses to the conflicts that inevitably arise in human interaction.

Women have always been the indirect victims of war. In current warfare, women and children are direct victims, with extremely high casualty and refugee rates. In WW I, 10 percent of war casualties occurred among civilian populations; in the 1990s, that figure has jumped to 90 percent of war casualties occurring

among civilian populations, most of them women and children. While many women perceive that cycles of revenge and retaliation only create more suffering, women in most circumstances have little control over their situations. Women are often pressured by their own desperation and destitution to support violence in a futile effort to restore stability to their lives. Offered skillful leadership, however, most women in war zones would opt for negotiation over more warfare, and for just distribution of resources over greed. How to mobilize these voices, silenced by deprivation, isolation, guns, tribal loyalties, and fear, remains a challenge for women in leadership generally, and for Buddhism women committed to nonviolent social liberation.

Within and beyond Buddhism, women have the power to put forward an alternative vision, mobilize their allies, and use their skills to change the course of history. Or, on the contrary, women can be seduced by the mind-numbing lures of contemporary life, lose the threads of connection, and imitate the worst of our social norms. The choices are clear. Without the moderating voices of women and women's values of connection and mutuality worldwide, the global community will likely slide into further conflict and chaos. As natural resources become progressively scarcer, as nations vie for power and supremacy, as populations increase and migrate, humanity will need wise and visionary leaders with a deep understanding of interconnection and dependent co-arising. To manage these multiple crises and prevent catastrophe from consuming the global commons, the relational and nonviolent values traditionally held by women in most parts of the world will be needed by both men and women to solve global problems and ensure human survival. Women trained in the Dharma have much to contribute to this necessary change of direction. It is of critical importance that their voices become part of a new paradigm of gender-inclusive, spiritually based social activism.

Buddhism and Social Liberation: The Challenges Before Us

Buddhism rests on the two foundations of wisdom and compassion. Without wisdom and insight, human beings cannot know how to act skillfully, and our behavior may be unwholesome. Without compassion, our actions may be dry and distant, lacking sufficient heart. One puzzling aspect of applying Buddhism to social transformation is the understanding that wisdom and compassion arise from long years of disciplined practice and cannot be instantly attained, simply taught through texts, or transmitted through Dharma talks. Wisdom and compassion are the fruits of great effort. We see the results of great effort and discipline exemplified in such leaders as the Dalai Lama of Tibet and Aung San Su Kyi from Burma, and we are automatically drawn to their light. We recognize the benefits of enlightened leadership in its service to all humanity, and we know its depth and

solidity.

Although most beings do not, will not, and often cannot engage in such a profound commitment to developing realization, their efforts must be harnessed in the service of planetary change. Thus, questions abound. If there is no instant access to wisdom and compassion, and if the world is in as precarious a moment as it appears to be, how do we utilize Dharma wisdom in global change? How do we increase the capacity for enlightened leadership? Can the voices of highly developed spiritual leaders be suitably amplified to lead countries and communities toward peace and reconciliation? Can such voices of wisdom arise in the U.S., currently a source of so much suffering for many of the world's peoples? Without the personal experiences of transformational insight on the part of community members, is skillful leadership sufficient?

One small answer emerges from our experiments in dialogue between people caught in extremities of conflict and stress. When the facilitators are able to create a safe environment, the highest wisdom and compassion can emerge, wounds will heal and individuals engaged in this healing process can bring along their communities. People and communities can and do change, frequently for the better. These changes can be maximized and amplified with cooperation from the world's media and political bodies. Even without ultimate wisdom, much can be preserved and much violence can be prevented. The nascent movements of Engaged Buddhism and conflict transformation are worthy of more investment, as are other burgeoning non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose rapid rise is indeed transforming societies.

For people familiar with Buddhism and searching for peaceful conflict resolution, these questions are the puzzles and perhaps the *koans* for our time. Despite the spread of Dharma study and practice in the U.S., for example, we do not find Buddhists at the forefront of movements that oppose war. Nor do we necessarily find a consistent flowering of generosity, compassion, and nonviolence in countries with predominately Buddhist populations. We have only to look at the repressive government of Burma, the auto-genocide in Cambodia or the role of the Buddhist clergy in opposing the Sri Lankan peace process to remember that Buddhist countries also experience communal violence and a lack of compassion. We might wonder whether the nature of Buddhism or the particular style of teaching Dharma creates a quiescent population focused on inner change and personal relations. Can the teachings of Buddhism be made more relevant to social, economic, and political concerns, given the level of suffering they cause? Would such an effort weaken Dharma, as some may fear, or would it extend the gifts of insight and compassion to more populations and conditions, thus serving the whole even more fully?

The teachings of mindfulness and skillful means, of kindness and

compassion, of change and impermanence, of silence and stillness, are taught with great richness and depth in Buddhism. Young people raised with peace, altruism, and compassion are shaped by those ideals, which seem especially relevant for our scattered, high-speed, over-stimulated, and self-absorbed modern societies. When leaders value and model generosity and concern, people modify their behavior and inculcate ethics that are less opportunistic and self-serving. The clear and forthright practice of generosity, loving kindness, and wisdom – the antidotes for greed, anger and delusion – would have a healing effect globally. Daily reports of altruistic behavior and attitudes coming from political, religious, social, or academic leaders could stimulate our imagination and encourage new methods for responding to conflict and differences.

Engaged Buddhist leader Joanna Macy wrote: “It is my experience that the world itself has a role to play in our liberation. Its very pressures, pains, and risks can wake us up, release us from the bonds of ego and guide us home to our vast true nature.” Through engagement with the world and its concerns, we practice generosity, increase wisdom, deepen our understanding of suffering, and experience our interconnection. Whether as women, Buddhists, leaders, followers, or simply citizens of this planet, we are bound together in what the people of South African call *ubuntu*, described by Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “We belong in a bundle of life. My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, with others.” For Buddhists, this is what Thich Nhat Hanh refers to as “inter-being.”

Inter-being, or *ubuntu*, is the human condition. How we use this profound insight to guide our actions, shape our decisions, influence our steps toward relieving human oppression and pursuing a nonviolent path of peacebuilding is up to us. The way seems clear when we remember again the wisdom of the Buddha that the whole of our training is for the development of love and compassion.

NOTES