



THE IDEA: Explaining the notion of Socially Engaged Buddhism

One of the problems with any interpretation and discussion of Socially Engaged Buddhism is that of definition. [*] Scholars and practitioners are divided as to where, when and how a politically or Socially Engaged Buddhism actually first began but unanimous on what it involves. [*] It required Buddhists to become involved and committed in exceptional times of confrontation, injustice and violence. [*] The primary Buddhist position on social action is one of total activism, an unswerving commitment to complete self-transformation and complete world transformation. [*] The primary goal of Buddhism is not a stable order or a just society but the discovery of genuine freedom (or awakening) by each person. [*] For Buddhists to lose this distinction is to transform their tradition into something discontinuous with its original and historic essence.

Quotes

- On 11 June 1963, the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc (1897–1963) burned himself to death in Saigon surrounded by 350 Buddhist monks and nuns. The photograph of what happened received huge media coverage. **(Heap, Webber-Davies and Gray, *Buddhism, Illuminate* 2019)**
- The essence of nonviolence is love. Out of love and the willingness to act selflessly, strategies, tactics, and techniques for a nonviolent struggle arise naturally . . . Nonviolent action, born of the awareness of suffering and nurtured by love, is the most effective way to confront adversity. **(Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* (Berkeley, CA.: Parallax Press, 1993))**
- The vitality of Buddhism today is most clearly reflected in the way it is being brought to bear on social, economic, political, and environmental issues. **(Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991))**
- Engaged Buddhism is a path of social action in the world—as opposed to the paths of ritual, knowledge, and devotion that characterize other, perhaps better known expressions of Buddhism. (Christopher Queen, “Introduction: From Altruism to Activism,” in Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish, and Damien Keown (Eds.), *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003))



- Following civil war which was aided and abetted by world powers, in 1954 Vietnam split into two countries: North and South. The leader of North Vietnam was the communist Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969) and the leader of South Vietnam was the Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem (1901–1963). (**Heap, Webber-Davies and Gray, Buddhism, Illuminate 2019**)
- These days, I am thinking that socially engaged Buddhism is to be found in those with a solid Dhamma practice — not just fuzzy, nice intentions — who can bring it to bear on social issues in real live situations. (**Santikaro Bhikkhu, cited in Ken Jones, The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003)**)

References, Further Explanations and Examples

- In particular Buddhists were confronted with human suffering on a huge and often personal level and a response was necessary.
- This is explained by Phil Henry in his Adaptations and Developments in Western Buddhism (2013): ‘scholars and practitioners alike are divided as to where, when and how a politically or Socially Engaged Buddhism actually first began....’.
- It has never been asserted that the conditions of society are unimportant or unrelated to this more important goal, but it is critical to stress the distinction between what is primary and what is not.
- Some recent scholarship tends to see what might be termed ‘engaged Buddhism’ as having its roots in Vietnam.