

## ■ Taking Care of OTHERS

During 2008, we became aware of Hazel's involvement in the chaplaincy course. This requires registration with the Buddhist Council of New South Wales. Hazel then undertook, of her own volition, completion of the Clinical Pastoral Education course, specializing in Mental Health. All her studies have been completed on a volunteer basis, receiving minimal financial support for her work. The center encouraged Hazel to complete the course as we knew from previous students that it was extremely challenging to get recognition as a *Buddhist* chaplain. We admire what Hazel and the Buddhist Council have achieved in this area.

As soon as the Liberation Box became available through the FPMT Foundation Store, Hazel purchased one

and encouraged the center to also have one in stock. Within a week of receiving it, Hazel had a call from a family who had been referred by Gosford Hospital. Hazel went to a dying lady. Her children were very grateful they were able to offer their dying mother Buddhist prayers. Hazel also felt very satisfied that she was able to offer the family comfort at such a difficult time. We really felt at the time that the purchase of the Liberation Box really created the cause for Hazel to be called, and Hazel felt the box was a great asset in assisting her with her first call to help. ♦

*Liberation Box, Tools for a Fortunate Rebirth* contains powerful methods for ensuring a fortunate rebirth for those who have died or are in the process of dying. The box has everything you need to assist others at the time of death and is available through the Foundation Store ([shop.fpmt.org](http://shop.fpmt.org)).

## ENGAGED BUDDHISM

### Compassion in Action

By James Blumenthal, Ph.D.

Engaged Buddhism, the application of the teachings of the Buddha to the assortment of sufferings and problems in the world, is quintessentially Buddhist.



Photo by Leticia Bertin

It sets its target on the sufferings of sentient beings. Though the term is relatively recent, having been coined during the Vietnam War by the master, Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, its practice dates back to the Buddha himself. When the Buddha took steps to help prevent his native Shakya

people from entering a war over water rights, he was acting in ways we describe today as engaged Buddhist. In the 3rd century BCE, when Ashoka, the great Buddhist king, set up the first animal clinics and the first homes for the elderly who were without families, he was acting as an engaged Buddhist. Engaged Buddhism is often conceived as referring to social and political activism in the name of Buddhism and that is certainly a critical component of it. But when I think of engaged Buddhism, I think of everything from Free Tibet demonstrations to hospice care, from anti-war protests to solitary retreats, from soup kitchens to all the intellectual and practical activities people engage in to undermine the structures of violence in society that cause so much harm and hamper movements toward personal and collective peace. Because all Buddhism is about reducing suffering and

producing peace, all Buddhism is engaged Buddhism.

And yet to say that all of Buddhism is engaged Buddhism obscures many dimensions of engaged Buddhism's meaning. If it is true that all of Buddhism is engaged Buddhism, then what does the term signify? Why do we need the term "engaged Buddhism" if it is all just Buddhism? We need it because it is informative and because it can be an effective tool in teaching and motivating compassionate action. It helps us see that when the Buddha taught about compassion, it meant more than sitting on a cushion and thinking about being compassionate towards others. It means engaging in compassionate action in the world. It means striving to create a situation that engenders Buddhism's highest ideals and nurtures the cultivation of enlightened beings. I believe this is, in part, why Lama Zopa Rinpoche has supported so many charitable projects to help alleviate some of the more extreme forms of suffering in the world. These include MAITRI Charitable Trust to help in the eradication of leprosy and treatment of tuberculosis, the Amdo Eye Center, the Shakya-muni Buddha Community Health Care Centre in Bodhgaya, among many others.

Many of us grew up with fantasies about Buddhists being those people that meditate in solitude for decades in Himalayan caves or Southeast Asian forests. Of course there are spectacular examples of great Buddhist yogis who have done such things, and we all benefit from their activities and accomplishments. They are great examples of engaged Buddhism too! What they do benefits society in tangible and many intangible ways. But the vast majority of

Buddhists, from His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the newest beginners, live in the world. His Holiness' body of work that is clearly identifiable as "engaged Buddhism," from his advocacy for Tibet and support of religious pluralism and interfaith dialog, to his widespread promotion of non-violent conflict resolution around the world, are but a few examples of his seemingly endless efforts to transform the world in which we all live.

The motivation behind engaged Buddhism – to help alleviate suffering and help change the structures in society that perpetuate suffering and hamper the cultivation of peace – is fundamentally virtuous. Not only do the activities of engaged Buddhists in the world benefit others, but engaging in these kinds of activities with a virtuous motivation helps to transform our own minds, to strengthen our own compassion. When we are in the trenches working face-to-face with the immense sufferings of the world rather than trying to hide from them, we cannot help but increase our own compassion. It is, among other things, a kind of practice.

As Buddhists whose most fundamental aspiration is the peace and happiness of all living beings, it only makes sense

that our efforts be dedicated in this direction. This will certainly take different forms for different individuals. Some may make the most of this time in their lives in solitary retreat. Others may create the greatest benefit from their lives by volunteering at a soup kitchen, in hospice care, or at prisons. Others will teach the Dharma. Supporting engaged Buddhism does not mean everybody has to attend political rallies. It means that we recognize our place in a co-created, interdependent world, and we do the best we can to make a positive difference. ♦

Before returning to graduate school for Buddhist Studies, James Blumenthal, Ph.D. was a full-time activist and staff member with Greenpeace. He is currently an associate professor of Buddhist philosophy at Oregon State University and professor of Buddhist Studies at Maitripa College where he teaches courses on engaged Buddhism. He is the author of *The Ornament of The Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Shantarakshita* along with dozens of articles in scholarly journals and popular periodicals on various aspects of Buddhist thought and practice. He is currently finishing work with Geshe Lhundup Sopa on *Steps on the Path: Vol. IV*, a commentary on the "Calm-Abiding" chapter of *Lam-rim Chenmo* by Tsongkhapa.

For a list of resources about engaged Buddhism, please visit [www.mandalamagazine.org](http://www.mandalamagazine.org)

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