LEADERSHIP IN BUDDHISM: AWAKENING TO COMPASSION

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I. The Awakened One as Model of the Buddhist Leader

Siddhārta Gautama (6th to 5th century BCE), known as Śākyamuni Buddha, or the Awakened One, is the model of the Buddhist leader. His experience of enlightenment, attained after six years of intense ascetic and meditative practice. This enabled him to arrive at the place of peace (santam padam), which opened him to the freedom to see all things "as they really are" (yathābhūtam), namely, as arising, existing, and falling in a vast cosmic web of mutual interdependence (pratītya-samutpāda). This vision of interconnectedness liberates a human being from the "three poisons" of delusion, greed, and ill will, which are generated by the illusory sense of a separate and autonomous Self. At the same time, it draws forth the attitude and virtue of compassion, in seeing all beings and all things as not separate from and intimately interconnected with one's own true self.

The telos, or ultimate end, of Buddhism as a religion then can be described as the realization of the liberating Wisdom of seeing things as they are, that is, as interconnected, and thereby generating Compassion as flowing from this wisdom.

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Śākyamuni Buddha was a reluctant leader. Various texts describe how, after his enlightenment experience, he remained seated for seven days under the Bodhi tree, until the deities had to appeal to his compassion in order to make him rise from his seat of deep bliss and return to the world. The movement away from the world in the search for enlightenment and the subsequent attainment of wisdom, and of return to the world in order to teach others the path to liberation, that is, the cultivation of compassion, is expressed in the respectful appellation of the Buddha as Tathāgata – the Thus-Gone and Thus-Come. Incidentally, in the course of history, the Buddha came to be regarded as a super-human or quasi-divine being and thereby became the object of veneration and devotion.

The ultimate goal of the Buddhist leader is nothing other than to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha in embodying the wisdom of awakening, characterized as a

movement away from the world (Thus-gone), which flows into boundless compassion, expressed through a return to the world (Thus-Come) in order to liberate sentient beings from suffering.

The ultimate goal of the Buddhist leader is to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha in order to liberate sentient beings from suffering

The cultivation of boundless compassion is the central theme of the Metta Sutta or Treatise on Loving Kindness, which clearly sets up the standard and goal, not only for the Buddhist leader but for all Buddhist followers and practitioners, as well; that is, to relate to all sentient beings with a mind endowed with "boundless compassion" and free of ill-will:

> *Let no one deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place.*
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> *In anger or ill will, let not one wish harm on any other.*
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> *As a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, let one cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings.*
>
> *Let one`s thoughts of boundless compassion pervade the whole world- above, below and across-without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.*
>
> *Whether one stands, walks, sits, or lies down, as long as one is awake, one should maintain this mindfulness. This, it is said, is the Sublime State in this life.*[1]

In this text, loving kindness (mettā) is emphasized as one of the four sublime states or divine attitudes (brahmavihāra) that characterize a person of awakening. The other three are compassion (karunā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā). As well, these characteristics of an awakened person can be taken as traits of an ideal Buddhist leader, based on the Buddha`s teaching (dhamma) and monastic discipline (vinaya), which "has but one taste, the taste of liberation."[2]

Liberation is understood in a two-fold sense as both liberation from one's own suffering (dukkha) and from inflicting suffering on others. This is made possible by destroying the roots of this two-fold suffering. In the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha gives 1) a diagnosis of the symptoms of suffering (aging, illness, death, likes and aversions, etc.), and 2) of the causes of suffering (tanhā – craving). He then proceeds to give 3) a prognosis (niṛvāna – the end of suffering) and 4) a therapy (the Noble Eightfold Path of insight, morality and meditation) to end suffering. Like the Buddha, who is praised as the "capable physician," the Buddhist leader in particular is someone expected to be able to address existential problems by:

1. Naming the symptoms,
2. Addressing the causes,
3. Giving a prognosis or solution and
4. Providing a therapy or way to reach the solution.

All of this is based on and included in the nature and scope of boundless compassion.

In the monastic Theravāda tradition, the ideal leader is the Arhat, literally the worthy one, who, on account of continuous practice through many lifetimes, has perfected the three disciplines of insight, morality, and meditation in this lifetime and will no longer be reborn in this world, because s/he has completely eradicated the roots of delusion, greed, and anger, which cause rebirth. In contrast, the ideal leader in the Mahāyāna Tradition is the Bodhisattva, an enlightened being who has made the compassionate vow[3] to postpone one's own full enlightenment until all beings are liberated from suffering. The Bodhisattva unites both wisdom (prajňā, the insight into emptiness) with the compassion (karunā,) manifesting itself in expedient means (upāya) to achieve this goal. Wisdom and compassion are thus intimately connected and form the two major components of enlightenment. Compassion deepens the understanding of No-Self or Selflessness, while the wisdom of No-Self includes the realization of interconnectedness which gives rise to genuine compassion.

Wisdom and compassion are the two major components of enlightenment

According to Mahāyāna Buddhist understanding, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, or Kuan-shih-yin in Chinese (Japanese: Kanzeon, Tibetan: Chenresig) is a figure embodying boundless compassion. Literally, Avalokiteśvara means "The One who listens to the cries of the world." As is well known, H.H. the Dalai Lama is held to be an embodiment of this Bodhisattva, and so are the Karmapa and Drugpa, the heads of the different lineages within in the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. The personal daily practice of H.H. the Dalai Lama includes Tonglen-meditation (literally, taking and giving), in which one takes in the suffering, pain or negative energies of others, including those of one's opponents or enemies, and transforms them into loving and compassionate energies, which are sent back to heal and transform the recipient.

One specific instance when a Buddhist leader ritually takes on the form of this Bodhisattva for all to behold is during the ritual of feeding the hungry ghosts – one of the major Buddhist mortuary rituals performed for the benefit of one's deceased relatives as well as sentient beings. During the ritual, the leader is transformed into Kuan-shih-yin and, as such, opens up the gates of hell to "feed" the hungry ghosts, purge their sins, and arouse their aspiration for enlightenment, so they will be reborn as human beings or in the Pure Land.

In summary: The ultimate goal and self-understanding of the Buddhist leader is not based on divine revelation but on the enlightenment experience, teaching, and personal example of the historical Buddha Siddhārta Gautama, also known as The Wise and Compassionate One. The Mahayāna Bodhisattva ideal highlights the effectiveness of the compassionate vow to save all beings towards the realization of this goal. In the esoteric tradition, the spiritual goal of the leader is union with the compassionate ground of all existence, Buddha Mahāvairocana, and mediating the Buddha's compassion in thoughts, words, and actions.

These, in broad strokes, are the ideals which continue to form the self-awareness of Buddhist practitioners and leaders in the different strands of the tradition, and the ultimate standard against which all performance is measured.

II. Ambivalence of the Notion of Leader in Buddhist Traditions

The Buddha did not consider himself as the leader of the Buddhist monastic order, which he brought into existence, and he firmly rejected the notion of authoritarian rule. Rather, he enjoined his followers to listen to the Dhamma, liberating truth, as their guide on the path of enlightenment. This stance brought about a sense of ambivalence in the role of the religious leader in this tradition.

This ambivalent attitude is clearly expressed in number of early texts, as for example the Kalama Sutra, in which the Buddha admonishes his listeners not to be led by the authority of religious texts and tradition….nor by the idea: this is our teacher…When you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and wrong and bad, then give them up…And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them.[4]

The Buddha went even further by saying that a disciple should even examine the Tathāgata himself, so that the may be fully convinced of the qualifications of the teacher they follow. In the Mahāpārinīrvāna Sutra, which records the final instructions of the Buddha to his disciple, Ānanda, the Buddha makes it clear that he had no intention to give the Buddhist order to anyone for ruling, but pointed to the universal and particular law, the dhamma and vinaya, as the monks`s ruler, supervisor, and even master after his passing away:

> *It may be, Ānanda, that in some of you the thought may arise, "The word of the master is ended, we have no teacher more." But it is not thus, Ānanda, that you should regard it. The truths and the rules of the Order which I have set forth and laid down for you all, let them, after I am gone, be the Teacher to you… Be ye lamps unto yourselves, be you refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge…Hold forth to the truth (dhamma) as a refuge.*[5]

> Question:
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> Despite the Buddha's ambivalence, diverse forms of leadrship arose in Buddhism. What does this suggest regarding the need for religious leadership?

The Notion of the Buddhist Monarch (Cakravārtin).

Because the historical Buddha did not appoint a successor or ruler over the order but warned against it, leadership categories in Buddhism are not clearly cut out by the tradition and, as described below, in many cases are dependant on the relationship between the Sangha and the state.

Being of royal descent himself, the Buddha gave advice to the rulers of the day,

and the Buddhist Sangha was supported by social, economic, and political elites for social, political, and religious reasons – a system of relationships that is still in place today in most Therāvāda Buddhist countries. Under the rule of King Aśoka (268 B.C), who converted to Buddhism after his forces killed great numbers of opponents in battle, Buddhism became a state-religion, under which the freedom of all other religious practices was protected. Aśoka is considered an exemplary Buddhist Monarch, whom later rulers emulate to lend authority to their reign and become part of the Buddhist history.[6] He is also a model of a leader who teaches forgiveness, as a concrete expression of the spirit of the Metta Sutta, not to bear "anger or ill will" upon one other and not to "wish harm on any other." This attitude is expressed in edict 13 of the rock edicts which are meant to provide the principles of enlightened rule:

> *The Kalinga country was conquered by King Priyardarsi in the eight year of his reign…One hundred fifty thousand persons were carried away captive, one hundred thousand were slain, and many times that number died. Immediately after the Kalingas had been conquered, King Priyardarsi became intensely devoted to the study of the Dharma, the love of the Dharma, and to the inculcation of the Dharma. The beloved of the Gods, conqueror of the Kalingas, is moved to remorse now, for he has felt profound sorrow and regret because of the conquest of a people previously unconquered involved in death, slaughter, and deportation… Thus all men share in this misfortune, and this weighs on King Priyardarsi`s mind. King Priyardarsi now thinks that even a person who wrongs him must be forgiven for sins that can be forgiven…and seeks to induce even the forest people who have come under his dominion to adopt this way of life and this ideal…*[7]

The notion of the Buddhist Monarch is embedded in scriptures both of the Theravāda and Mahāyāna Traditions. The King is described as the Wheel-turning Monarch (cakravārtin) – a universal ruler who is also a Dharma-king, a just and righteous ruler who honors the dharma and manages the affairs of his state in accordance with it. Just as the Buddha bears prime responsibility for the well-being of the religious sphere, the Dharma-King is responsible for the well-being of the worldly sphere. The king is the only layperson who has the right to admonish or chastise the Sangha and to appoint Buddhist leaders.

In turn, the coronation of a Buddhist king traditionally takes place in the monastery or temple. In a Theravāda Buddhist country like Thailand, for example, some kings have lived as monks before assuming royal office. To this day, it is the king who formally appoints the Supreme Patriarch, who is the head of the order of the monks and has the legal authority to oversee the orders.

Question:

Does the close relationship between the Sangha (community) and the state compromise Buddhist teaching? Is it a necessary corollary of leadership?

The Sutra of the Golden Light and the Sutra for the Human Kings – two scriptures that had been especially influential in China,

Korea and Japan – promise that honoring the Dharma and Sangha will be the best way for the king to protect his state against all calamities. Moreover, the king is accorded the state of a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being on the way to Buddha-hood. As the case of Empress Wu Tse-tien (625-705), China's only female emperor, demonstrates, these scriptures could be used to garner the support of the Sangha for the choice of a ruler. In Tibet, the complete fusion of Buddhism and politics under the 5th Dalai Lama resulted in putting the worldly rule entirely into the hands of a monk. As mentioned above, the Dalai Lamas are believed to be embodiments of Avalokiteśvara, who leads the Tibetan people both spiritually and politically. The implications of the notion of the Buddhist ruler for contemporary times will be further addressed below in sections 3 and 4.

Hierarchy in Monastic Orders

While the decision-making process in the monastic order has been democratic, with much emphasis on the necessary consent of all members to pass a proposal, this does not mean that all members are equal in their ranks in the order. The Vinaya rules specify that senior members of the order ought to be treated with respect and given positions of authority in managing the affairs of the monastic community. Excellence in practice is another criterion for respect and authority.

Different levels of administrative leadership have come into existence in different Buddhist traditions, countries, and schools. An abbot may be the spiritual head of a community or monastic organization, or the position may be filled by an administrator who sees to the needs and functioning of the community, while the original founder of the community is considered its spiritual leader.

Ānanda and Mahākāśyapa as Models

In general, there are two different types of traditional leadership, harking back all the way to the example of the Buddha`s two main disciples Ānanda and Mahākāśyapa, who are often portrayed as standing on the right and left of the Buddha in sculpture. Ānanda was renowned for memorizing the teachings and sermons of the Buddha. Each Buddhist Sutra in the Theravāda and Mahāyāna starts with the introduction: "Thus I have heard," which refers to Ānanda as the one who heard. Mahākāśyapa, by contrast, was famous for his attainment of ascetic and meditative practices. Based on these two models, the Sangha includes two types of leaders. The first is the teachers who pass on the teachings of the "Three Baskets" (tripitaka) scripture, monastic rules (vinaya), and commentaries (śastras) in the city and village temples, Buddhist colleges, and universities. The second type consists of the ascetic recluses, the spiritual virtuosos who practice in the forests, exempt from daily exigencies such a running the monastery affairs, conducting rituals and teaching or counseling the lay members of the community. The recluses are revered for their spiritual attainments and the benefit that these attainments bring to the community at large. According to the Buddhist notion of "transference of merit," spiritual insights and powers attained through keeping the rules and practicing meditation are not an end in themselves but gifts and means that, in

accordance with the telos of boundless compassion, are directed towards the spiritual support for the living and the deceased of the community.

Master Disciple Roles

Mahākāśyapa is considered the first patriarch of the Zen (Ch'an) tradition. This tradition relies on a genealogy of patriarchs believed to have passed on the teachings by mind-to mind-transmission directly from Buddha Śakyamuni via Kāśyapa and Bodhidharma (the first patriarch in China) to the present age. The Zen-tradition, with its emphasis on "a transmission outside of the scriptures," most clearly fashions itself after the original admonishment of the Buddha to the Kalamas to not "hold on to the authority of scriptures." The Zen-tradition does not negate the importance of studying the scriptures, but the teachings therein are understood as "a finger pointing towards the moon." The master-disciple relationship in this tradition is considered the most important means for the proper transmission of the dharma. In other words, the master's guidance is considered essential in the disciple's break-through to enlightenment, because only the master has the ability to know the student's state of mind and therefore to know which teaching is needed by the student at a given moment.

Even greater importance is given to the Master-disciple relationship in the esoteric Shingon tradition and the Tibetan tradition. These later traditions have developed very complex systems of initiation rituals that create the specific spiritual bond between the master and the disciple. Especially in Tibetan forms of Buddhism, the disciple is taught to practice Guru-yoga, which means to unconditionally submit to the teacher. The reformer of Tibetan Buddhism, Atisa (11th century), who emphasized the ideal relationship between teacher and disciple, likened the disciple to a patient, the Dharma to medicine, and the teacher to the doctor who diagnoses the patient's illness and prescribes the correct medicine.[8] The challenges and problems that these forms of intimate relationships between teacher and disciple have created, especially in the practice of Buddhism in the West, will be addressed in section 4.

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Reincarnation of Leaders

Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism are the only forms of Buddhism that rely on a Tulku-system, i.e., on leadership that is based on the notion of reincarnation. When a high Lama has passed on, based on indication that he has given before his death, a search team will set out to find the new reincarnation, who is raised from a very young age to become a spiritual leader, whose main responsibility is transmission of the dharma. Transmission of

the dharma can include the founding of a new monastic community or taking over leadership duties in an existing one.

Lay-Leadership

Finally, lay-leadership in Buddhism, even though not a new phenomenon, rose to prominence especially in Japan and in Taiwan at the end of the 19th century.[9] Lay leadership is more common in Mahāyāna Buddhist countries than in Theravāda countries, because the enlightened and responsible lay-person who teaches others is an ideal upheld in important Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the Lotus Sutra and the Vimalakīrti Sutra. It is no co-incidence that women leaders are predominantly found in the Mahāyāna tradition, and that they are still very much the exception to the rule in Theravāda countries. While the factors behind the 20th-century movement of "engaged Buddhism," in which Buddhist monks and nuns have left behind the walls of the monastery and become involved in social issues, are very complex, the recognition of the importance of lay-leadership is one of them.

In summary

The historical Buddha did not appoint any successor and laid down rules for the monastic order that emphasized the democratic nature of the institution. However, in accord with cultural tradition, the principle of seniority was honored as a criterion for establishing positions of respect and authority within the community. The other principle was diligence in keeping the rules and excellence in memorizing and expounding the scriptures, and/or in the attainment of meditative powers. This eventually led to a separation between those monks who assumed responsibility in teaching and managing the daily affairs of the village-temples and those who lived as recluses in the forest. This division has persisted in Theravāda Buddhist countries into the 20th century, but is gradually changing.

With the adoption of Buddhism as a state religion under King Aśoka, the notion of the enlightened Buddhist ruler changed the power dynamics. Now the king could create new administrative offices (such as that of the supreme patriarch, for example) and appoint candidates to them or combine both spiritual and political functions in one person, as in the case of the Dalai Lamas. The flourishing of certain schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism and their leaders over others always depended in no uncertain measure on the support of the rulers of the day. The Buddha was revered as a "teacher of gods and men," not as a politician; and in the same way, the ideal of the Buddhist leader is that of a teacher who, based on "compassionate thoughts for all creatures and looking out at the suffering of the world"[10] skillfully transmits the dharma, which is the ultimate authority in Buddhism. In this context, the teacher-disciple relationship is of utmost importance, especially in those schools of Buddhism that emphasize the dynamics of mind-to-mind transmission. The Buddhist tradition recognizes the value of lay teachers, which is one of the reasons why Buddhism has been able to adjust to new conditions in the 19th and 20th centuries and to spread to the West.

III. Systemic Challenges to Buddhist Leadership and Institutions

The notion that Buddhism will face an extended period of crisis and decline after the initial 500 years of the Buddha`s entry into Nirvāna is found in a number of texts and has shaped the Buddhist view of history of both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, but with different consequences. In Theravāda Buddhist thinking, holding on to tradition has been seen as the way to slow the decline, but Mahāyāna thinkers have developed the opposite view, namely that new and innovative ways of passing on the teachings are needed in this period of the "latter days of the law" (Chinese mo-fa, Japanese mappō) to prevent the eventual disappearance of the Dharma. Therefore, the monastic institutions and leaders in the Theravāda Tradition generally tend to be more conservative than those in the Mahāyāna Tradition.

The external factors that are listed in the texts as indicative of crisis are invasions from outside and state-control. Central among the internal factors of decline and relevant for our discussion are:

1. Lack of diligence in the practice of meditation,
2. Lack of diligence in transmitting the teachings,
3. Excessive involvement of the monks in secular society, and
4. Lack of respect for the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha).[11]

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In a recent panel on challenges of Buddhist practice and education which was held at the 2nd World Buddhist Forum in Wuxi, China this past February, speakers overwhelmingly addressed issues related to a) and b), also noting that they are especially important in this present age of the "latter days of the law." During the conference, the education of young monks and nuns, which needs to put equal emphasis on the study of the texts and the practice of meditation, was highlighted as the preeminent responsibility of the religious leaders in order to ensure the continuous transmission and propagation of the Dharma. The conclusion of the panel could have been summarized aptly by Chan Master Wuzu Fayan, a Sung-Dynasty Zen-Master who is prominently cited in a work of the same period entitled Zen-lessons. The Art of Leadership: "Although Buddhism has flourished and declined repeatedly since ancient times, the reason for its thriving or degeneration has always come from its teaching activity."[12] The same work gives ample insight into the challenges faced by the leaders of the community, which can be largely summarized under external, internal, and personal challenges:

External Challenges –

1. Development of a system of large public monasteries under government control.
2. Government control over appointments to higher echelons of administrative and leadership duties.

Internal Challenges –

1. Influx of insincere followers with wrong aspirations who are attracted by the fame of a tradition, institution or teacher.
2. Usurpation of the teaching function by imitators without genuine enlightenment and knowledge of human psychology.
3. Lack of sufficient training of adepts and shortening of the period of apprenticeship.
4. Usurpation of the rules by the students, leading to ruin of the community.

Personal Challenges –

1. Holding on to authoritarian power, using compulsion rather than personal example.
2. Lack of discernment of students ability and lack of careful guidance.
3. Losing the community through lack of heart-to-heart communication; lack of knowing people, of the ability to listen, going against wishes of the community, lack of adaptation of teachings to their level of understanding.
4. Indulging in personal feelings and favoritism towards certain students while rejecting others.
5. Loss of integrity of monks who take bribes from and curry favor with ruling authorities.

These categories, derived from historical texts, are still applicable to the situation of Buddhism and the systemic challenges faced by its leaders today.

> Question:
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> Is there anything particularly Buddhist in these challenges or can they readily be applied to other religions?

External Challenges of Government Control

The systematic destruction of Buddhism that accompanied communist regimes in countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, China, and Tibet has resulted in a lack of qualified teachers and teaching institutions to form leaders, and this remains a major challenge for leadership today. Many students from these countries study at Buddhist universities in Thailand, because no comparable institutions are available in their own countries. The saffron revolution of Burmese monks in 2007 and the trial of Aung San Suu Kyii have brought the world's attention to the oppression of Buddhism by the Burmese Junta. In like manner, Tibet received much attention during the 2004 Olympics. H.H. the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political leader of the Tibetan people, still resides in exile in Dharamsala, and the second highest leader, the Panchen Lama, was installed by the Chinese Communist government after the abduction of the

candidate chosen by the Tibetans in 1995. The candidate chosen by the Chinese government is a son of a party member and an advocate of government policies relating to Tibet.

The education of young monks and nuns needs to put equal emphasis on the study of the texts and the practice of meditation

Even though government control of religion in communist and socialist systems is common, one has to bear in mind that the notion of the Cakravārtin – the enlightened ruler – has historically paved the way for the use and acceptance of state-control and interference in Buddhist contexts. On the other hand, Buddhism has also often profited from its proximity to state power. As David Loy writes:

> *Buddhist religious structures in Asia have usually been, and for the most part remain, hierarchical, patriarchal and complicit with state power. Although Buddhist teachings have sometimes been used to challenge state power, more often than not Buddhist institutions have been implied in justifying and therefore helping to preserve oppressive relationships. The sacred canopy can be quite a comfortable place for those with privileged positions in religious hierarchies allied with political parties. This suggests that Buddhism needs the contribution of Western modernity – such as democracy, feminism and the separation of church and state – to challenge institutional complacency and liberate its own teachings from such traditional constraints.*[13]

Personal Challenges of Corruption and Revitalization

Corruption of members of the order (point 11) is directly related to "loss of respect for the Triple Gem," especially for the Sangha among the laity and an important factor in the rise of lay movements today. Just to give one of the many examples: The Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, a Korean lay Buddhist organization consisting of more than 40 lay Buddhist organizations, was formed in 2001 as an emergency response to violent clashes among monks and evidence of corruption during the elections for general assembly in the Chogye Order headquarters. Deeply distressed about the Sangha's inability to bring about peaceful transmissions of monastic authority during the elections, lay leaders and members of concerned Buddhist organizations demanded that the trouble-makers – some very senior monks – withdraw or face excommunications.14 This is one example of lay leadership challenging the established institutions. It is interesting to note in this context that the Chogye order has a very developed system of training for its clergy, which requires 25 years of training and the passing of a monastic examination as the requirement for a head district temple abbot, and 40 years of training to join the Council of Elders.[15] What is important to understand in this context is that the main motivation of the Lay Buddhist Solidarity for Reform movement, as well as that of several other reform movements in Korean Buddhism, is not to undermine the existing orders, but to revitalize them, to transform Korean society, which is now predominantly Christian, into one that is more receptive to Buddhist

teaching and the Mahayana goal of extending compassion to others.[16]

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Challenge of Engaged Buddhism

While training in precepts and meditation and the study of texts are primary reasons for having monastic orders, founders of the Engaged Buddhism movement in the 20th century have criticized this dual focus as too limited and as preventing the order of having a socially transformative impact. Buddhadasa (1906-93), a major reinterpreter of Theravāda Buddhism and founder of the movement in Thailand, decided to withdraw from the Thai Sangha's monastic system of educational advancement based on the rigid system of Pali language examinations and instead to devote himself to his own studies of Pali scriptures in a forest hermitage. While in Mahāyāna Buddhist countries the professed ideal has been a balance between study and practice, the norm in Theravāda Buddhist countries for at least a thousand years had been the strict separation between city monks and forest monks. Buddhadhasa integrated both of these strands of monastic life in the community he founded, but did not stop there. His encounters with Christianity instilled in him the sense that Buddhism had to become more socially involved and moved him to extend its analysis of the origin and ending of dukkha (suffering) to include social, political, economic and ecological structures that perpetuate suffering.[17] This continues to be the task of religious leaders today.

The great reformer of Chinese Buddhism, T`ai-hsu (1889-1947), who like many of the other proponents of engaged Buddhism had been exposed to Christianity, combined his own critique of the systemic shortcomings of monastic orders in China with the appeal to the monks and nuns to leave behind the walls of the monastery and practice compassion by getting involved in social issues.[18] Their work is being continued and expanded by other prominent proponents of the Engaged Buddhism Movement today, such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa, the Buddhist Peace fellowship and Bernie Glassman Roshi, to name a few.

The Challenge of the Role of Women

One major systemic challenge posed to leadership especially in the Theravāda and Tibetan traditions is the position of women, which is to this day affected by the fact that the direct line of transmission of the precepts for nuns was discontinued in Sri Lanka in the 11th century. Even though there have been many concerted efforts from Buddhist women to address and amend this situation, the Buddhist patriarchal establishment in these two traditions has not yet agreed to reinstate full ordination of women.

For the Engaged Buddhism movement, Buddhism had to become more socially involved and moved him to extend its analysis of the origin and ending of suffering to include social, political, economic and ecological structures that perpetuate suffering

In summary

The systemic challenges to Buddhist leadership must be understood in light of the wide-spread notion that this period is characterized by a decline of the Dharma. The interrelated factors characterizing this decline are both external – situations of persecution, state-control, and complicity with state power, as well as internal – ranging from educational and training issues, balance between study, meditation, and social engagement, and personal – exercise of authority, relationship with students, followers and the wider community. The movement of Engaged Buddhism, which is also very active in the West, is a major reform movement within Buddhism addressing these issues. It speaks out against situations of corruption and injustice in its many forms – political, institutional, racial, gender, economic, and ecological – and serves as a critical voice against abuses of state control as practiced in Tibet through the Chinese government and in Myanmar through the military Junta. As mentioned above, leaders of the Engaged Buddhism movement often work closely with and empower lay-leadership to address all of these issues that cannot be taken care of by only the monastics themselves.

IV. Contemporary Challenges

It must first be stated here that the systemic challenges described above are as relevant in our times, as they have been throughout Buddhist history. Let us now focus more specifically on contemporary challenges.

The peace researcher Johann Galtung has described the two defining characteristics of today's social decay as anomie, the loss of norms and values, and atomie, the breakdown of social structures. He sees the resulting loss of culture and structure as leading to eruptions of violence, hate, terror, and civil war, along with the natural catastrophes that are partly self-inflicted.[19] What can Buddhist leaders and teachings offer to help us understand and address these hosts of problems, many of which are unique to our times? Are leaders in a position to work with these problems based on the fourfold approach inherent in the teaching of the Four Noble truths: Diagnosing the symptoms, addressing the causes, giving a prognosis, and recommending a therapy or way to reach the solution? Do leaders consider this task as falling under their vow of compassionate action? Are Buddhist institutions prepared to provide solutions, or are they part of the problems? The numerous writings of Buddhist scholars and intellectuals that are part of the engaged Buddhism movement address these questions from many different angles and provide new perspectives on leadership from the contribution of

Western modernity, i.e., democracy, human rights, separation of church and state, gender relations, and ecology.[20]

Dynamics between Teacher, Student, and Community

One of the specific questions that arises in the spreading of Buddhism to the West is the role and position of the teacher, and more specifically, the relationship and dynamics between the teacher, the student, and the community. Issues that need to be looked at in this context are: How can proper boundaries be safeguarded in a cultural context that is unfamiliar with the notion and practice of mind-to-mind transmission and the intimate relationship between student and teacher that this presupposes? How can problems of the troubled teacher and his community be addressed? How is genuine practice affected by a culture that expects instant gratification and quick fixes?

Even though patriarchal structures remain in religion, including Buddhism, women in the West (but to a much lesser degree in Asia) have assumed leadership roles in various Buddhist lineages. This is especially true in the Zen-tradition, where fully authorized women teachers offer spiritual guidance and leadership to their sanghas. This is significant numerically and also in the qualitative difference that women can make in their teaching.

However, the road to the leadership positions that women hold in Buddhism in the West today was not always smooth. The problem here is not only coming to terms with traditional patriarchal structures and misogynist statements but with the inherent difficulty of having a hierarchical master-disciple relationship, common in traditional Asian societies, transferred to a Western context, particularly when accompanied by the ambiguity in the very personal relationship between teacher and student, especially when the teacher is a man and the student a woman or vice-versa.

The training of most teachers and gurus in monasteries and ashrams is a mystical and inner training that almost never touches upon the difficult issues of power and its potential abuse

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In the Zen and Tibetan traditions, a teacher who has transmission, meaning the full authorization to teach, is seen as a fully enlightened being in historical succession of the Buddha, and therefore the teacher's behavior is usually beyond question. But this uncritical attitude changed after the sexual and financial scandals that troubled some American Buddhist centers in the 70's and 80's. On one hand, many students felt attracted to Buddhism precisely because they took as their guiding motto the Buddha's parting words to his disciples, encouraging them to be a lamp unto themselves and not to trust any teachers, teachings, or customs unless proved valid through their own experiences. On the other hand, they often accepted a teacher's behavior without question, believing that the enlightened status somehow exempted the teacher from any

objectionable standard of behavior. A lifestyle involving misappropriation of funds, luxury cars, frequently changing sexual relationships with students, and substance abuse would most likely be regarded as self-indulgent or destructive in the case of anyone else, but in the case of an enlightened teacher, these kinds of behaviors were sometimes interpreted as an expression of self-realization.[21]

Problems with teachers are addressed in detail in the writings of Jack Kornfield, a prominent Vipassana (Insight meditation) teacher. He describes four major areas where teachers and communities most easily get into difficulties. The first centers on misuse of power[the second is money. The third area is harm through sexuality; the fourth, addiction to alcohol or drugs.

In his analysis of the roots of these problems, Kornfield points out a lack of training in these complicated areas that relate to use of power, money, and sex: "the training of most teachers and gurus in monasteries and ashrams in Asia or the United States is a mystical and inner training that almost never touches upon the difficult issues of power and its potential abuse. Teachers are thrown into the role of administrator, minister, guide and confidant, in which they have tremendous responsibility and power. Yet, many of their spiritual systems and practices explicitly exclude the human areas of sexuality, money and power from what is considered spiritual. This compartmentalization can produce teachers who are awakened and skillful in certain areas (meditation skills, kōan practice, prayers, studies, blessings and even powerful loving-kindness) but are underdeveloped in great areas of their personal lives."[22]

In Asia, the vows and precepts against harm by stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, or abuse of alcohol have traditionally provided a protection to students, especially since the strict cultural norms for the behavior of teachers are generally known and understood. This is different in modern America, where strict rules of dress and behavior are often dispensed with. Without clear monastic guidelines, the questions of a teacher's personal behavior and the interactions in a community are not easily settled. To return once more to the Buddhist panel on training and education during the second World Buddhist Forum, the administering, teaching and keeping of precepts was highlighted by a number of speakers as foundational for all other teachings and practices.

Question:

Do some traditions cope with problems of power abuse better than others? Why?

The abuse of power described above brings up the question of forgiveness. How can a student or community forgive wounds that are caused by their very own leaders, often the people they have trusted most in their lives? What is necessary for the healing of wounds, and what safe-guards can prevent similar problems from occurring in the future?

In summary:

The systemic challenges that have existed throughout the history of Buddhism and were described in the previous section remain in our contemporary world. These

challenges to leadership in Buddhist communities call for first a return to the wellsprings of the tradition, in short, to the telos of Buddhism as a religion, and to a way of envisioning a future that is reconnected to these wellsprings. To this we will now turn in our final segment.

V. Leadership for the Future

Contemporary Buddhism finds itself in a globalized context where inter-religious dialogue and cooperation have become crucial tasks for potential leaders of the Buddhist communities spread throughout the world, and it is necessary to include the study of other religions in the formation of Buddhist leaders. The UNESCO declaration on the Role of Religions in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace can be a valuable guide for Buddhists and for all leaders of the world's religious traditions.[23] In 23 paragraphs, it describes the situation of the contemporary world, gives a definition of peace, details the necessary actions of commitment and highlights the religious responsibility of the communities of faith. While the document should be read in its entirety, I would like to quote here the paragraphs listed under Religious Responsibility:

19. Our communities of faith have a responsibility to encourage conduct imbued with wisdom, compassion, sharing, charity, solidarity and love; inspiring one and all to choose the path of freedom and responsibility. Religions must be a source of helpful energy.
20. We will be mindful that our religions must not identify themselves with political, economic, or social powers, so as to remain free to work for peace and justice. We will not forget that confessional political regimes may do serious harm to religious values as well as to society. We should distinguish fanaticism from religious zeal.
21. We will favour peace by countering the tendencies of individuals and communities to assume or even teach that they are inherently superior to others. We recognize and praise the non-violent peace-makers. We disown killing in the name of religion.
22. We will promote dialogue and harmony between and within religions, recognizing and respecting the search for truth and wisdom that is outside our religion. We will establish dialogue with all, striving for sincere fellowship on our earthly pilgrimage.

If, as religious leaders, we agree with these responsibilities, where do we begin our work in the face of the many specific challenges that confront ur communities and our world in the 21st century? In his ground-breaking work, Theory U. Leading form the Future as It Emerges, C. Otto Sharmer sees accessing our source of creativity, the "greatest of all human invention," as key not only to addressing the multiple unfolding crises of our time but to shaping the future course of human history. The crucial questions to be asked here are: What are the sources of creativity from which present and future leaders are drawing? And how can they be accessed, not only on the individual level, but on the collective level?

Rather than being defenders of the status quo, innovative leaders must learn to adopt a strategy to be advocates of individual and collective transformational change:

> *In order to rise to the occasion, leaders often have to learn how to operate from the highest possible future, rather than being stuck in patterns of our past experiences. Incidentally, when I use the word "leader" I refer to all people who engage in creating change of shaping their future, regardless of their formal positions in institutional structures…I have often been struck by how creators and master practitioners operate from a deeper process, one I call the "U process. This process pulls us into an emerging possibility and allows us to operate from that altered state rather than simply reflecting on and reacting to past experiences.*[24]

Question:

In what way can each tradition contrast its negative past experiences with future potentiality? What are the inner theological options and resources that are available to each tradition in this process?

The key to achieving the needed changes is based on a radically different view of our collective capacity to "listen to the course of being in the world…and bring it to reality as it desires" (Martin Buber)"[25] Attentive Listening is a main tool of Buddhist enlightened practice (upāya), as symbolized by Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, the "Observer of the Cries of the World." I would therefore like to present here and in greater detail Sharmer's approach to paying attention and listening. Sharmer explains that we are usually not paying attention to the subtle forces shaping the "social field" (ranging from working teams to larger organizations such as corporations, churches, and temples), because we are too busy reacting to those forces. When problems arise, we take recourse to our established ways of thinking, based on the habitual ways in which we pay attention and listen. But does the thought occur to us that "I" and "we have to change in order to allow the larger system to change? Once we pay attention to the way in which we pay attention, or, in other words, when we "see our seeing," a deepened awareness and change become possible. Deepening awareness requires the intelligences of the 1) open mind, 2) open heart and 3) open will:

1. *Open mind* basically means that we start to realize our taken-for granted-assumptions and begin to hear and see things not evident before.
2. *Open heart* means that we are able to step outside traditional experience and see and feel_what the future could be. We "wake up" to the threats we face if the future continues the trends of the past.
3. With *open will* we set out towards the realization of the vision, based on a deepened awareness of connection. One example for this would be South Africa, where both white and black people felt a "sacred duty" to create a country that could survive and thrive in the future. The open will gives us the sense that "this is something I (or we) must do, even though the "how" may be far from clear."[26] It is similar to recognizing a calling, but if the

response to calling is not in tandem with open heart and mind, commitment can turn into fanatical obsession, and the creative process into a distorted exercise in power.

The key feature of Sharmer`s theory U is the inter-connectedness of all three openings: mind-heart-will as an inseparable whole. When all three levels of opening occur, a profound shift in the nature of learning occurs. All well-known theories of learning focus on the past, i.e., how we can learn from what has happened. But learning from the future as it emerges is different from of learning of the past, and it involves intuition.

Leaders have to learn how to operate from the highest possible future, rather than being stuck in patterns of our past experiences

Deepening the field of attention and learning to listen deeply correspond to the Buddhist practices of concentration and meditation, which open up the creative sources of compassion and wisdom and lead to the realization of interconnectedness, which corresponds to the expressions of "grace" or "communion" used by Sharmer. These methods are especially important skills (upāya) in the area of conflict-resolution, peace-making, and forgiveness, because they can help to clarify mental and emotional patterns of identifying with past wrongs, which make a process of healing and moving towards the future difficult.

In the concluding chapter of Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace,[27] the editor, David Chappell, analyzes Buddhist Peace Principles. For him, the crucial and urgent task for Buddhist leaders and practitioners today is to extend the new discovery of the Buddha, namely "the inner dialogue that constitutes mindfulness work," to include social dialogue and social mindfulness work (p. 200).

Chappell points out that, while the Buddha taught in a social setting that involved questions and answers but not dialogue – a setting in which the Buddha was presented as the authoritative teacher and the interchange was always unequal – he recommended different arrangements for his followers. His advice to his Sangha was to hold frequent assemblies, to be conducted in harmony, and to make decisions based on consensus, which implies transforming dialogue. In this context, Chappell describes a Buddhist mode of dialogue, and especially interfaith dialogue, based on sharing of the concerns of people, which

> *requires awareness and mindfulness that is mutually transforming and integrating, and is very different from discussion and debate. As the factors and relationships in personal reflections are revealed, absolutes are left behind, new interpersonal connections become possible and integration in the midst of diversity can arise" (p. 208).*

As practice of social mindfulness, dialogue is "a way to become aware of the different social factors involved in our shared world to develop a more inclusive understanding and to create new choices for action" (p. 208). In other words, mindful

dialogue leads to the awareness of the interconnected nature of life as it manifests itself in our individual experience, in the "social field" and in the world at large. Therefore, an essential component for the training of future leaders is the deepening of the field of awareness, of becoming familiar with the particular sources of suffering faced by their communities through the practice of mindful dialogue, and of developing the skills necessary to deal with the situation. In other words, just like leaders in the past, future Buddhist leaders need to be trained in learning to name the symptoms, address the causes, give a prognosis, and provide a therapy to attain the solution to the problems faced by their communities and disciples.

Attentive Listening is a main tool of Buddhist enlightened practice

As Sharmer also suggests, the old model of top-down management is not effective for bringing about much needed change in the system. This model has been replaced by an emphasis on team-work and nurturing horizontal relationships in small groups, in which the members learn to listen deeply to each other's experiences, concerns, and points of view.

Modeling Forgiveness

A suggested before, the sources from which Buddhist leaders are supposed to operate are Buddhist mindfulness and meditation practices which generate insight flowing into compassion and the spirit of forgiveness. In this context, the role of religious leaders in modeling forgiveness is a crucial aspect of Buddhist leadership. The pre-eminent example of a religious leader who models forgiveness is H.H. the Dalai Lama. A recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, he has maintained a consistent attitude vis-à-vis the Chinese, who have invaded his country and have brutalized his people. Based on his own practice of meditation and insight that flows into boundless compassion, the Dalai Lama has found alternative ways of responding to oppression and violence, and he serves as an inspiration to many. Even so, his peaceful approach to the resolution of conflict is criticized by segments of his own people, especially the young, and one of the many questions that can be posed here is whether there is a right timing for forgiveness, or whether forgiveness can possibly delay the course of dealing with injustice. In other words, we have to ask if there are outer circumstances that allow for the practice and expression of forgiveness, or if the inner attitude of forgiveness will eventually create them. A sharing among the religious leaders about this question will undoubtedly enlighten and enrich our understanding.

In conclusion:

To speak of a "Buddhist leader" is to speak of what it means to be "Buddhist." For this, the very life and example of the Buddha, the Awakened One, serves as a reference point, and the religious practices and attitudes cultivated in the various traditions of Buddhism can be seen as concrete steps for followers to take in this direction. Other models for leaders to emulate are the great

teachers, reformers and saints who have transformed the Buddhist tradition in many innovative ways while holding on to the central vision, a life of compassion and service based on the wisdom of the enlightenment experience.

The manifold challenges and pitfalls for those who would be leaders in the different Buddhist communities have been noted above, and training for Buddhist leadership needs to take them into account. This training would need to activate the "skillful means" arising out of a compassionate heart, upheld and cherished throughout the entire tradition, in ways that address systemic and contemporary challenges as described above. This paper has offered suggestions for meeting those challenges and envisioning Buddhist leadership in a globalized society for the Future. Hopefully what is presented here may be of reference also for religious leadership in other traditions.

May all beings be happy.

May all beings be freed from suffering and pain.

May all beings realize the fullness of

enlightenment and boundless compassion!

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** Special thanks to Kurt G. Schreiber for his constructive suggestions and editorial assistance.

Notes

[1] *Sutta Nipata*; 146-150, quoted in Ruben Habito, *Experiencing Buddhism: Ways of Wisdom and Compassion* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005) p. 19.

[2] Anguttara Nikāya 8:19, in Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Understanding Buddhism* (Edinburg: Dunedin Academic Press, 2006) p. 30.

[3] The four vows of the Bodhisattva that continue to be chanted in the Ch`an/Zen School are: "Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to free them. Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them. The gates to the Dharma are countless; I vow to master them. The enlightened Way is unsurpassable; I vow to embody it." Quoted in Ruben Habito, *op.cit*, p. 81.

[4] The Kalama Sutta, Anguttara Nikāya 3, 65.

[5] Quoted in P. C. Khongchinda, *The Buddha`s Socio-Political Ideas*, Navrang: (New Delhi, 1993) pp. 118-119.

[6] Donald Swearer, *The Buddhist World of S.E. Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) pp. 64ff.

[7] Quoted in Robert A. Thurman, "The Edicts of Asoka", in Fred Eppsteiner (ed.), *The Path of Compassion* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1985, 1988) pp.111-112.

[8] Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism. Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 154.

[9] For details, see Michael v Brűck, Maria Reis Habito, "Buddhism," in *The Crisis of The Holy: Papers Presented by The Elijah Interfaith Think Tank in Preparation for the Second Meeting of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, Wu-Lai, Taiwan November 28-December 2, 2005*, pp. 46-50. German Edition: Maria Reis Habito, Alon Goshen-Gottstein (ed.), *Die Krise des Heiligen* (St. Ottilien: EOS. 2008) pp.61-68.

[10] Atisa, "A lamp for the path of awakening," in Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[11] For a complete list of factors listed in canonical scriptures as systemic problems leading to decline, see Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1999) pp. 120-129.

[12] Thomas Cleary, transl., *Zen-lessons: The Art of Leadership* (Boston: Shambala, 1993).

[13] David Loy, *The Great Awakening. Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003) p. 8.

[14] Frank M. Tedesco, "Social Engagement in South Korean Buddhism,"in Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish and D. Keown (ed.), *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism* (London: Routledge Curzon:,2003) pp. 154-182.

[15] Ven. Pupchin, "Monastic Training System of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism," in *The Establishment and Introspection of Buddhist Systems of Practices and Studies*, Handbook of World Buddhist Forum, Wuxi-Taipei, 2009.

[16] Tedesco, *op. cit*, p. 155.

[17] Santikaro Bhikkhu, "Buddhadhasa Bikkhu: Life and Society Through the Natural Eyes of Voidness," in Christopher Queen, Sallie King (eds.), *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

[18] Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism. Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

[19] C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009) p. 4.

[20] For examples, see the series on Engaged Buddhism edited by Christopher Queen and the writings by David Loy.

[21] For example, Michael Downing`s *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion and Excess at San Francisco Zen-Center* (Washington, 2002) gives an account about the scandals at that Center.Another example would be the "crazy wisdom" of Chögyam Trungpa.

[22] Quoted in Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart: A Guide Through The Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993) pp. 256-257.

[23] /www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/declarations/religion.pdf

[24] Sharmer, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[25] Quote in foreword by Peter Senge to Sharmer, *op.cit*, p. xiii

[26] Peter Senge, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

[27] Wisdom Publications, Boston, 1999.

Appendix: On Discerning Feelings

Caotang said:

There is essentially nothing to leadership but to carefully observe people`s conditions and know them all, in both upper and lower echelons.

When people`s inner conditions are thoroughly understood, then inside and outside are in harmony. When above and below communicate, all affairs are set in order. This is how leadership is made secure.

If the leader cannot minutely discern people`s psychological conditions, and the feelings of those below is not communicated above, then above and below oppose each other and matters are disordered. This is how leadership goes to ruin.

It may happen that a leader will presume upon intellectual brilliance and often hold to biased views, failing to comprehend people`s feelings, rejecting community counsel and giving importance to his own authority, neglecting public consideration and practicing private favoritism – all of this causes the road of advance in goodness to become narrower and narrower, and causes the path of responsibility for the community to become fainter and fainter.

Such leaders repudiate whatever they have never before seen or heard, and become set in their ways, to which they are habituated and by which they are veiled. To hope that leadership of people like this would be great and far-reaching, is like walking backward trying to go forward.[1]

[1] In *Zen Lessons: The Art of Leadership*, p. 155.