

# Understanding the Engaged Buddhist Movement: Implications for Social Development Practice

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The fundamental Buddhist belief that “life is suffering” is applicable not only at the level of individual human existence but also applicable at the level of family, community and the larger society. For Buddhists, suffering is a result of unnecessary human delusion and ego manifested through such qualities as unrestrained desire and anger. Society’s institutions and policies can be understood as mutable entities that reflect this delusion, particularly in the form of human greed and materialism. Thus, because humans create institutions and policies through their actions, these institutions “like us, can be changed by our actions,” so writes Buddhist environmental scholar and activist, Joanna Macy (1991, p. 191).

Macy’s writings on Buddhist philosophy, deep ecology and social action are representative of the philosophical foundations of an international movement that has been growing in recent years. This movement is known as “Engaged Buddhism,” a term coined by the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, during the Vietnam War. The Engaged Buddhist Movement (EBM) recognizes that spiritual practice must be complemented by responses to injustice through various means, such as resistance, collective action and the creation of new cultural forms (Hunt-Perry & Fine, 2000). This approach helps the activist pay attention to the nuances of emotions, ideologies, communication and other aspects of social action.

Social development thinking and practice in the field of social welfare have offered significant avenues for addressing the economic and social injustices of society. These avenues focus on the ways in which the economic growth of society can be advanced while promoting the social well-being of everyone (Midgley, 1997). Practitioners mobilize individuals, communities and other resources to effect change in regional, national and international social and economic policies. These activities require a variety of practical skills (Gamble and Varma, 1999), in addition to philosophical mindsets that promote the ends of social development, such as egalitarian distribution of wealth and greater participation in democracy, in a manner that is congruent with these ends (Sharma, 1987).

While much of the social development literature focuses on the activities, objectives, concepts and skills needed for social development (Midgley, 2000; Gamble & Varma, 1999; Midgley, 1997), only a smaller body of literature specifically focuses on the human processes and means of social development (Imbrogno, 1993; Sharma, 1987). Process-oriented approaches to social development provide critical foundations for an innovative approach to social development based on insights from Engaged Buddhism. These insights can help bring attention to the interconnectedness of competing viewpoints and to an expanded notion of the self, which can transform false dichotomous constructions of “us” versus “them.”

This paper begins with a review of process-oriented approaches to social development and advocacy in the social work literature. Then, key philosophical principles of Buddhist

thought are introduced, followed by an inauguration into current social development activities in the EBM. Finally, the implications of these insights for social development practice are discussed.

## **Literature Review**

The developmental perspective in social welfare “seeks to promote the well-being of people through harmonizing economic and social policies within a dynamic process of development” (Midgley, 1997, p. 15). Several authors have written about the processes involved in implementing a social development perspective.

Meinert and Kohn (1987) propose a processual approach to social change and social development. Their proposal utilizes the metaphors of a military operation where the first two steps of the process are “reconnaissance,” whereby the “social developer engages in scanning behavior to locate and identify social units in need” and “engagement” (p. 12). The final step of the process is “disengagement” which occurs when the “social developer and the social unit consolidate previous gains and mutually terminate the relationship” (pp. 12-13). The authors describe these approaches as “peaceful.”

Other authors in the social development literature propose peaceful approaches to social development (Khinduka, 1987; Sharma, 1987 and Tan, 1987). Importantly, Tan (1987) recognizes that peaceful approaches to social development do not necessarily entail the absence of conflict. During the negotiation phase, he reminds us of the importance of a safe environment — “confidential, cooperative, non-violent, one of mutual respect and equity” (p. 49). Similarly, Imbrogno (1993) recognizes the presence of conflict and proposes an approach to social development based on critical theory. According to his position, with the use of dialectic discourse, social development activities can be enhanced through confrontation of inevitable adversarial positions.

Sharma (1987) advocates for approaches to development that are “holistic, non-exploitative, and which do not create win-lose situations” (p. 31). Gamble and Varma’s (1999) study reveals the skills needed (by women) to engage in social development activities such as coalition-building and political action. Some of these skills are patience, listening, facilitating, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. According to one participant in this study, “a coalition is not ‘home.’ In a coalition you are not at home so you won’t agree on everything” (p. 50).

Because a large piece of what social development practitioners engage in is advocacy practice, some of the advocacy literature will be reviewed here as well. The conventional literature focuses on systematic and technical aspects of advocacy, in addition to emphasizing the knowledge needed of the systems in which one is advocating. There are two general themes that emerge from the conventional social work perspective on advocacy. First, the ontology of advocacy is essentially dichotomous and adversarial, reflecting an “us-them” approach. It reflects an individualized notion of the self (advocate) that separates itself from others (the system). Though there are serious problems with this approach, a virtue of this approach is that it emerges from a strong vision of social justice. Second, to counterbalance this dichotomous approach, the literature on consensus-building, conflict resolution and win-win solutions will be reviewed. A virtue of these latter approaches is that they tend to view all participants’ perspectives as important. However, these perspectives can potentially

minimize oppression, invalidate justified anger and fail to incorporate larger visions of social justice. These two themes will be considered in turn.

Much of the philosophy and language of advocacy reflects a dichotomous and confrontational worldview. Consider the combative imagery in these terms that appear frequently in the advocacy literature: “change target,” “opponent,” “attack,” “counteract,” “standing up for a cause,” “fighting for a cause,” “tactics” and “staking out a position,” to name a few (Malekoff, 2000; Jansson, 1998; Dear & Patti, 1981; Brager, 1964) Davidson and Rapp (cited in Kutchins & Kutchins, 1987) set forth a multi-layered strategy that is reminiscent of the mission of an army general. Their strategy entails assessing needs and resources; gaining control of desired and available resources; selecting a strategy and implementing the strategy. The League of Women Voters developed guidelines for advocacy that include such aspects as “identifying supporters and cultivating allies,” and “knowing what you are up against” (cited in Malekoff, 2000). Kutchins and Kutchins (1987) argue that social work advocacy is rooted in and should continue to look to the adversary system of law. They believe that setting up opponents, gathering information and persuading the opposition are essential elements of advocacy. It should be noted, however, that a strength of these approaches is that they come from a recognition of injustice and oppression and a strong vision of social justice that provides the impetus and the passion to act.

Consistent with peaceful social development approaches, some authors explicitly attempt to heal the bellicose attitude of these kinds of advocacy strategies. This is done by emphasizing the importance of coalition-building, gaining consensus, and building relationships with the opponent (Lens & Gibelman, 2000). Malekoff (2000) states that advocacy may involve presenting information “in a careful, calm, and strategic manner. Advocacy more often looks subdued and business-like than loud, aggressive, and in-your-face posturing” (p. 307). Brager (1964) calls this an integrative strategy and states that with this strategy, “the agent works together with the change target, solving problems, educating and negotiating. It is an assumption of this strategy that good relationships and heightened communication will promote change” (p. 457).

The literature on conflict resolution and win-win approaches also reveals useful insights about current approaches to advocacy. According to Keefe and Koch (1999), “by engaging in constructive conflict management, participants identify not only their own needs and interests, but also the needs and interests of others” (p. 36). The practice of conflict resolution espouses a “cooperative motivational orientation” that entails a concern for the welfare of the other as well as the self (Keefe & Koch, 1999, p. 36). In win-win approaches, in contradistinction to the Alinsky (1971) “organize to win” approach, the goal of the advocate is to reach an amicable solution by encouraging discussion and brainstorming (Jansson, 1998, p. 251). This theme in the advocacy literature holds promise for a future orientation to social development practice, for it addresses omissions in the conflict-oriented approaches. A notable problem with the “win-win” approaches is that concern for the welfare of the other, which can include ensuring the “success” of the oppressor, can mask over and minimize the reality of the oppressed. Furthermore, as these consensus-oriented approaches emphasize “win-win solution making...that will result in success” (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 205), the reality of the situation, which includes justified anger by advocates, may be minimized.

### **Key Philosophical Principles of Buddhist Thought**

Buddhism is based on the teachings of an Indian prince turned ascetic turned sage, Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in the sixth to fifth centuries BCE. “The Buddha,” meaning “one who is awakened,” was concerned with the nature of human suffering and the possibility of removing it. Having witnessed such human problems as sickness, old age and death, the Buddha was determined to understand the source of human suffering. After six years of diligent and diverse meditative practice, Buddha revealed what are known as the Four Noble Truths — life is suffering; the cause of suffering is desire and craving; the extinguishing of all craving and desire, and hence all suffering, is possible; and the Eightfold path is the road out of the realm of suffering (Canda, 2001). The eightfold path, as articulated by the Buddha, is right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration (Nielsen et al., 1993).

Unlike many traditional religions, Buddhism is not based on belief or faith in a deity or deities who created the world. Numerous movements of Buddhism have emerged historically and still are in existence today. Three major movements that are relevant to the Engaged Buddhist movement are the Theravada, the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. Within these traditions, Buddhism has both a written tradition, as exemplified in the sutras, the abhidharma and the vinaya, and a “mind to mind” transmission tradition. While there is a great deal of diversity within Buddhism that is beyond the scope of this paper, there are central components of Buddhism that transcend the many manifestation of the Buddhist religion. Several key aspects of Buddhism can help us to understand how it can be a useful tool for doing social development work. These aspects are dependent co-arising; the interconnected self; meditation and compassion.

### **Dependent Co-Arising**

The Buddhist concept of pratitya-samutpada (Sanskrit), or dependent co-arising, is the idea that all phenomena constituting individual existences are interdependent and mutually condition each other. This idea is summarized in the following ancient Buddhist passage:

*When this is, that is.*

*This arising, that arises.*

*When this is not, that is not.*

*This ceasing, that ceases (Nielsen et al., 1993, p. 171).*

Halifax (1993) describes the idea in this way: “We cannot exist without the presence and support of the interconnecting circles of creation — the geosphere, the biosphere, the hydrosphere, the atmosphere, and the sphere of our sun” (p. 137). Macy’s (1991) writings on the connection between dependent co-arising and general systems theory are useful in clarifying this concept even further and can be particularly helpful for the field of social work, which commonly employs systems theories. She writes:

*Within that mutual causal perception of reality one is not a self-existent being nor are the institutions of society eternally fixed. They are mutable and they mirror our greed, as does indeed the face of nature itself. Co-arising with our actions, they, like us, can be changed by our actions. As our own dynamic processes can be transformed, so can they (Macy, 1991, p. 191).*

Dependent co-arising is often illuminated by the image of Indra’s net, a net with a jewel at each node, each jewel reflecting in it all the other jewels, a metaphor for our universal

interconnectedness. Consider the example of a table. Within the table are the wood, which needs water, soil, air and sun and the carpenter who made it, which is dependent on his or her parents, the people he learned carpentry from, the food that sustains him ad infinitum. When the table appears, the sun and the rain and the carpenter are part of the table. Based on a view of dependent co-arising, or mutual causality, every act is seen to have an effect on the larger web of life.

### **The Interconnected Self**

The idea of a self that is interconnected emerges from the doctrine of dependent co-arising. According to Halifax (1993), “If we look deeply, we find that we do not have a separate self-identity, a self that does not include sun and wind, earth and water, creatures and plants, and one another” (p. 137). Thich Nhat Hanh calls this “interbeing” (1993).

A distinctive doctrine of Buddhism is anatman (Sanskrit), or no-self, the idea that what we normally think of as the self is really made up of the body, sense organs, feelings, etc. The idea of a permanent self, then, is the source of human suffering. Or, in the words of Jones (1985):

*Buddhism teaches that all suffering, whether it be anxiety, or more explicitly karmic, brought-upon-ourselves-suffering, or ‘external’ suffering, accidental and inevitable through war, disease, old age, and so on” arise ultimately from the deluded belief in a substantial and enduring self (p. 29).*

In the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, all things are regarded as without essence, i.e. empty of self-nature. All things are fundamentally devoid of independent lasting substance. This does not imply that things do not exist nor does it imply some kind of nihilism. It should also be noted that these ancient ideas are also compatible with recent findings in modern physics. For example, quantum physics has taught that material objects are not the isolated, solid entities they were once thought to be. Rather, matter or particles are concentrations of energy that come and go and are not separate from the quantum field. Thus, particles or matter lose their individual character and dissolve into the underlying field (Capra, 1991).

### **Compassion**

Buddhism aims at Great Love (mahamaitri, Sanskrit) and Great Compassion (mahakaruna, Sanskrit). With an understanding of dependent co-arising, interconnectedness, and an understanding of the source of suffering, compassion naturally appears, that is, compassion for all beings. True compassion (literally, “to suffer with”), or empathy, has been aptly distinguished from pity. Brandon (1976), a social worker writing about Buddhist approaches to social work, writes:

*Pity is one part arrogance and one part sympathy. Unlike compassion it sees others as unequal, inferior. Its intent is a mission to help others who are perceived as ‘less adequate.’ The echoes of smugness and complacency can drown the genuine giving and hinder people (p. 51).*

Brandon (1976) believes that helpers are often misdirected, that in the “Helping Game” giving often comes with strings attached. In the context of social development, it is fairly easy to advocate for the oppressed, for the victim, but what is much more difficult is for true

compassion to appear and to advocate for everyone, including the “oppressors” and the “perpetrators.” We all have oppressors and perpetrators inside of us and as we begin to see the way that we oppress, then we will have more compassion for all beings. As Hanh (1993) writes:

*When we protest against a war, we may assume that we are a peaceful person, a representative of peace, but this might not be the case. If we look deeply we will observe that the roots of war are in the unmindful ways we have been living. We have not sown enough seeds of peace in ourselves and others, therefore we are co-responsible (p. 66).*

It should be noted that Buddhism does not necessarily promote a particular political, economic or social ideology. However, contemporary thinkers have argued that Buddhism is compatible with progressive democratic ideas, as well as an economics based on sharing resources and controlled consumption. Though somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, these ideas ought to be explored in more depth as a way to contribute to the substantive literature on social development.

## **Meditation**

Learning about the self and the nature of mind and its delusions are of central importance to the Buddhist endeavor. Meditation is nothing else but working with what one has, or “starting where you are,” also a mantra of the social work profession. For example, Macy has practiced what she calls “despair work” with activists in the anti-nuclear and environmental movements. She writes:

*...Skillful meditation, that journey into the wilderness where we confront our own tricks and delusions, can empower social action, freeing us to respond in simplicity and immediacy to our fellow beings...The grip of ego is weakened not only in meditation, but also in acting on behalf of others. The risk-taking and courage which moral action often requires can catapult us beyond constructs of individual self-interest. We are shot into a larger space where the old boundaries of self dissolve and the interdependence of all life-forms is brought into vivid focus (Macy, 1991, p. 217).*

From the perspective of Chan (or Zen) Buddhism, meditation helps the practitioner to understand his or her True Self, which is also called True Nature or Big Mind. The True Self is beyond the “stuff” of our gender, theories, opinions and personal dramas, and yet it is not separate from these things. This “stuff,” or the small self or small mind, can often manifest in dichotomous thinking and selfishness (as well as violence and war). Meditative practices can help individuals distinguish the True Self from the small self, recognize that the self is constantly changing and impermanent and cut through the illusory separation between self and others.

## **Buddhism in the Social Work Literature**

Buddhism has appeared sparingly in the social work and social development literature (Canda, 2001; Brenner, 1997; Canda, Shin & Canda, 1993). A brief review of some of these writings follow. Canda (2001) offers the image of the bodhisattva (literally, enlightenment being) of compassion (called, Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit and Kuan Yin in Chinese) as an image for social work. A cultural figure with a thousand eyes and hands, it symbolizes the ability to perceive suffering and respond appropriately. Also, Canda & Furman (1999) have

suggested that the Buddhist notion of inter-connectedness offers a new extension of social work's person-and-environment conception. Regin (2001) uses the Buddhist concept of shunyata (emptiness) to reflect the situation that social workers are in — a constantly changing reality that has no true boundaries and develops what she calls a “non-attachment practice stance.” This stance includes acceptance and openness to difference, the readiness to let go and the appreciation of changes as opportunities for new possibilities. Finally, Brandon (1976) observes that our egos often trap us into defined roles, precluding the possibility for authentic connection between people. He breaks down the illusion of a dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed or between the individual and the institution, advocating for a different approach to community work.

### **The Engaged Buddhist Movement (EBM)**

Thich Nhat Hanh founded the School of Youth for Social Service that trained people to provide direct help and relief to victims of the war in Vietnam (Hunt-Perry & Fine, 2000). He advocated a third way approach that emphasized Vietnamese self-determination. So, Buddhist collective action emerged which was aimed at directly influencing public policy and establishing new institutional forms. As Thich Nhat Hanh brought his message to the United States, he saw how much anger there was in the anti-war movement. He came to emphasize being peace as an essential element of peacemakers and peacemaking.

There are several important concepts in the EBM. First, there is the idea that all beings are worthy of our attention; there is no separation. Or, as Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche (1985) writes: “True compassion is utterly neutral and is moved by suffering of every sort, not tied to right and wrong, attachment and aversion” (p. 40). This implies that making distinctions between “us” and “them” or the “haves” and the “have-nots” or anything else that is going to spiritually separate us from others is a trap. Second, self-transformation and social transformation are mutually necessary. If you are going to change the world, then you have to change yourself, too, because we are the world. We created the systems and institutions. Third, the EBM is committed to combining social justice and democracy with meditative practice.

Engaged Buddhist activities worldwide include working with the dying in hospices, teaching meditation to prisoners and cancer survivors, providing support for victims of AIDS, advocating for a clean environment and supporting a free Tibet (Socially Engaged Buddhism Resources, 2001). Social development has always been one of the primary activities of Engaged Buddhist practitioners.

A prime example of the possibilities offered by Engaged Buddhism for social development work is the work of the Greyston Foundation in New York City, which was founded by Bernard Glassman and the Zen Peacemaker Order. This network of businesses and non-profits is engaged in housing and entrepreneurial activities for the homeless (Glassman, 1998; Glassman & Fields, 1996). As an economic development venture, this group chose to start a bakery that was to provide employment for low-income and homeless individuals in New York. As the group was confronted with various choices to be made about the functioning of the organization, one such choice concerned how to manage the bakery. Would they choose traditional, hierarchical models under which many businesses and social welfare agencies operate, or would they choose something different, something based on the basic tenets of Buddhism, including interconnectedness, compassion and human empowerment? Their response was self-directed management teams which involve workers choosing who enters

the organization, workers training each other and eventually all workers having the opportunity to own shares in the business.

The Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE), headquartered in San Francisco, provides an educational, supportive network for individuals working in social development. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship has a program called the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) that is located in the San Francisco Bay Area. BASE provides a structured, supportive environment for individuals who are working or volunteering in social services or activism. One of the BASE programs called HOME BASE involves participants who work in direct service or advocacy for the homeless. All of the BASE programs are six-months and include five basic program components. These five components are based on the Buddhist concepts (Pali) of *seva* (Service/Social Action), *panna* (Wisdom/Training), *samadhi* (Dharma Practice), *sangha* (Community), and *adhitthana* (Commitment).

The Sarvodaya Shramadan Movement was founded in Sri Lanka in 1958 (Macy, 1983). The Sarvodaya Movement is a Buddhist-inspired self-help movement that involves young pioneers working alongside extremely poor individuals, operating programs for health, education, agriculture and local industry. The four cornerstones of Sarvodaya are respect for all life, compassionate action, dispassionate joy, and equanimity. It was founded by a high school teacher, A.T. Ariyaratna, who named his movement after the term that Gandhi had used in his movement — *sarvodaya*, meaning “everybody wakes up.”

Emphasizing the interdependence of life, the Sarvodaya Movement is premised on the belief that through local action, and more specifically through social, economic and political interaction, spiritual awakening can simultaneously take place (Macy, 1983). Based on a view of mutual causality, every act is seen to have an effect on the larger web of life. Joanna Macy, a Buddhist practitioner and activist, who spent a year working in and studying the Sarvodaya Movement describes it:

*One's personal awakening (purushodaya) is integral to the awakening of one's village (gramodaya), and both play integral roles in deshodaya and vishvodaya, the awakening of one's country and one's world. Being interdependent, these developments do not occur sequentially, in a linear fashion, but synchronously, each abetting and reinforcing the other through multiplicities of contacts and current, each subtly altering the context in which other events occur (1983, p. 33).*

### **Implications for Social Development Practise**

What exactly does the Engaged Buddhist Movement have to offer social development practice? Some Buddhist thinkers argue for a “radical culture of awakening” (Batchelor, 2004; Jones, 2003). This is the idea that social development could be seen as no longer equated with endless material growth achieved through competitive means. Rather, simplicity, egalitarianism and diversity become central values in a culture of awakening.

What makes the EBM unique is not so much that it is grounded in a spiritual or religious tradition, but that it, in effect, views attention to the means or process of social change as of primary importance. There are several things that the EBM has to offer. First, it offers a theory and method for dealing with the confrontational mindsets in advocacy, community organizing and other forms of macro practice. This method is also compatible with current writings on peaceful resolutions to conflict and win-win solution-making. By recognizing



that confrontational mindsets (including one's own) are fundamentally based on a false notion of an enduring static self whereby one is completely identified with one's role, such as community developer, it is possible to gain deeper understanding of the total situation. Second, people working in the EBM say that meditation helps them to work with anger or to be in the presence of their own anger. Third, meditation helps to overcome fear and complacency that can prevent practitioners from dealing with formidable tasks. Fourth, the engaged Buddhist approach helps us to see our own isms, the ways in which we oppress those around us and ourselves, as the same kinds of mechanisms that cause violence or abuse; or our personal greed and selfishness as the same kind of mechanism that causes poverty in our society.

Because Western culture tends to promote competitive mindsets, practitioners interested in this proposed approach to social development will need the support of others who are like-minded. Small affinity groups linked to wider networks, like that of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's BASE program, could prove helpful in fostering an approach to social development based on an Engaged Buddhist practice. Such a supportive network could help individuals develop the practical skills necessary to conduct this challenging work. Within social work and social development circles, practitioners may be interested in forming alliances via such organizations as the Inter-University Consortium on International Social Development (IUCISD) that would support practitioners in their efforts around the world to conduct social development activities in a way that is mindful. Such groups need not be solely geared toward Buddhist practitioners, rather they could be based on the shared values of interconnectedness, the alleviation of global suffering and mindfulness.

There are multiple barriers that the social development professions would be faced with if it were to implement the philosophy and practice of the EBM. Because many social workers are licensed, operate under a code of ethics and/or consider themselves to be professionals, this brings with it certain constraints. To truly implement this practice, one may be faced with situations where one has to go above and beyond one's defined role. Practitioners tend to be obliged to advocate and/or work on behalf of only one particular client, i.e. an individual, a community, or an institution such as a local government. Given the precept of "save all beings from suffering," it is worth exploring how the community development professional might be able to see beyond the interests of his or her neighborhood to include the local government, businesses and other agencies as worthy of their attention. It is important to remind ourselves that true compassion is moved by suffering of every sort, including that of those we traditionally see as our enemies — perpetrators of violence, big business and social systems themselves. In addition, though the spiritual diversity in social work movement has been growing in recent years (See Van Hook et al., 2001; Canda & Furman, 1999), practitioners still struggle with truly embracing spiritual diversity. Buddhism may seem exotic, strange or in direct contradiction to one's own religious beliefs.

Overall, if principles of Engaged Buddhism were incorporated into social work and social development practice, more attention would be paid to individuals, communities, organizations and social policies themselves as holistic entities in a web of connections. In addition, confrontational mindsets that pit "us" against "them," that are common in social development practice, systems advocacy and other social change endeavors, could be transformed. Finally, the meditative approach of bearing witness (Glassman, 1998) to suffering can be applied and thus offer practitioners a better understanding of the dynamics of many types of agencies and organizations, including governmental and non-governmental agency dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

Engaged Buddhism is a practice concerned with changing consciousness as a necessary condition for social change. Not only is it necessary to change policies, procedures, and behaviors, but changing the frame of mind behind draconian social policies and practices is necessary. This entails paying attention to the entire situation and all of the players involved in a situation, particularly the egos of one's self and others. As advocates for systems change, we are not individual islands. Injustice is much more than a wrong that has been perpetrated against someone, it is an entire situation that involves interdependent phenomena to which one must attend in its entirety. Engaged Buddhism entails an intricate dialectic between personal consciousness-raising and helping the world.

Conceptualizing ideas in social work such as advocacy, social justice and social development is certainly challenging. Though there are exceptions, much of the writing in the social development and advocacy literature focuses on ends, rather than processes or means. Engaged Buddhist social development practice provides an opportunity to look into the process and most importantly to look into our interconnected selves. This can include looking into our blind spots, such as our subtly colonialist attitudes, and looking at the overt and subtle ways that we inappropriately use power with stakeholders, colleagues and within other institutions. According to Thurman (1985), "the primary Buddhist position on social action is one of total activism, an unswerving commitment to complete self-transformation and complete world transformation" (Thurman, 1985, p. 46).

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