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**Socially Engaged and Meditating:
 The Theravāda Buddhist Model of Vipassana Hawai'i**

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Christopher Queen's argument that intention is the *sine qua non* of any definition of engaged Buddhism is at once pragmatic and substantial. That is to say, we can regard as authentically Buddhist social action in which principles and techniques are practiced in the name of the Awakened One, in accord with the teachings of wisdom and compassion, and in the spirit of an unbroken community working in harmony with the Three Refuges. Ajarn Buddhadasa's suggestion that what quenches *dukkha* is Buddhist similarly directs us to both intention and its manifestations in consequence. In these forms, nomenclature does not separate the life of action from that of the spiritual path. Rather, they are seen as complementary.(1)

The purpose of this paper is to describe a model now in the process of implementation by Vipassana Hawai'i, an organization based in Honolulu and founded in 1984 by Steven Smith and Michelle McDonald-Smith. The model has evolved as part of and in response to the founders' more than twenty years of experience in the Insight Meditation Society.(2) In addition, the model reflects their work with the environmental movement in North America, and their active engagement with an ongoing series of developmental projects located in the Sagaing Hills of Central Burma, which has long been a center of Burmese Theravādin practice.

With respect to Theravāda communities and practices in the West, Paul Numrich's "parallel worlds thesis" offers a suggestive approach that complements the pragmatic definitions offered by Queen and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Inhabited by immigrant Theravādins, on the one hand, and what Gil Fronsdal dubbed the Vipassanā Community—a largely European American contingent—on the other, Numrich's image of a Thai temple invites a study of changing processes of interaction between the communities he describes, those of immigrant and convert, which in his thesis coexist amiably and interact to a limited degree, but with little sustained contact.(3)

The unique structure of the model being implemented by Vipassana Hawai'i, I shall argue, offers us a significant possibility of situating Numrich's parallel worlds on the same plain, not within a Thai immigrant temple, but by bringing a Burmese monastery and a Hawai'ian American retreat center together in common endeavors. These involve training in *sīla* and *dāna*, as well as cross-cultural experiences for Burmese and North Americans. The North American preoccupation with the teaching and practice of meditation thus functions in conjunction with MettaDana, a well-established organization devoted to socially engaged Buddhist development aid, carried out with the direct involvement of an innovative abbot, Sayadaw U Lakkhana, Abbot of Kyaswa Monastery in central Burma.

The twin foundations of the model, which integrates engaged social action with the teaching and practice of meditation, were present at its inception. Steven Smith, in conjunction with his teacher Sayadaw U Pandita, developed it during a sabbatical

devoted to returning to his Buddhist roots in the Burmese monastic reform tradition. Eventually it led him to the Sagaing Hills, where Smith recognized a possibility for his Western students to express the practice of loving-kindness through a concrete practice of generosity, carried out by, given, and received reciprocally by peoples who live half a world away. That insight, as well as the hard work that it entailed to bring MettaDana into being, has borne rich fruit.

Because the topic on this occasion is that of Engaged Buddhism, I shall begin with that pillar of the foundation. The link between Vipassana Hawai'i and the Kyaswa Monastery began, when Mr. Smith returned from sabbatical in Burma to found the MettaDana Project, a development aid project designed to bring medical, educational, and developmental assistance to a particular monastic community and its surrounding villages. Its overall goal is to "help the people of the Sagaing Hills face the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, while maintaining its role as an ancient center of wisdom and nurturing the relationship between lay community, monasteries, and nunneries that has been its strength for centuries." To that end, the project's mandates focus on public health; education, especially primary school; improving local infrastructure, especially roads and the water supply; and preserving Buddhist monuments.(4)

Kyaswa Monastery itself already had an innovative Abbot, Sayadaw U Lakkhana, who had founded the Wachet Hospital in 1984, as well as a tradition of providing services for the villagers who supported them. MettaDana has thus entered upon and helped to extend that existing tradition both with funding and the transfer of expertise. At present, the officers of MettaDana include Steven Smith, president; Susan Usitalo, vice-president; Alan Jassby, vice-president; and Roy Awakuni, treasurer. The board of advisors includes Sayadaw U Pandita Bhivamsa, Mirabai Bush, Michelle McDonald Smith, Bruce Lockhart (M.D.), and Kathryn L. Braun (University of Hawai'i). Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the democracy movement in Burma and Nobel laureate, also serves as a friend and adviser to this project. Donations to it are channeled through the Kyaswa Monastery directly to health, education, and related activities in the immediate vicinity of the monastery. No government agencies are involved, and the operating expenses of MettaDana are met by volunteer staff.

Primary education is a central goal for MettaDana. Its projects to date have included improving the facility of the Wachet Primary School in a village nearby the Monastery, initially by putting up bamboo walls and a roof. In 1998, MettaDana began to provide all supplies, texts, and fees for all students who wish to attend school. The number of students has since increased from about 250 to 300 students. With this increase, the school has reached capacity, although the number of children eligible to attend it is 450. Because the school, in the past, has often been closed because of flooding in the rainy season, MettaDana has this year funded the construction of one of two planned new school buildings on a higher site. In addition to participating in its construction, the villagers themselves have insisted on funding the second building as circumstances permit. Immediate MettaDana plans include building a teachers' residence to save the teachers from making long commutes on bicycle. The estimated cost for the school program, including the residence, is \$15,000.

The focus of MettaDana's efforts in health care use the Wachet Jivitadana Sangha Hospital as a base. Founded in 1984 by Sayadaw U Lakkhana, the fifty-bed hospital functions mainly as an outpatient clinic for monks, nuns, and villagers, although in the rainy season, many require hospitalization for acute gastrointestinal and other illnesses. To support the resident staff of the hospital, MettaDana has provided a dental x-ray machine, medicines, bandages, and other supplies. In addition, the project

funded a program in which senior nurses from Rangoon trained fifteen local students to act as nurses aides. One of the surprise successes that MettaDana has brought to the hospital, now a branch of the Institute for Traditional Medicine in Mandalay, is acupuncture. When the presence of American acupuncturist Michael Zucker at the hospital was announced, he experienced an endless flow of patients from eight o'clock in the morning until five in the evening, seeing a total of ninety patients in five days. Future plans call for training local practitioners to deliver acupuncture.

A more long-term undertaking is the Wacht TB Control Project. The prevalence of HIV-AIDS in the area is as yet unknown, but tuberculosis remains a major cause of morbidity and mortality. The TB Control Project will target the 3000 villagers and 7000 monks and nuns in the area. The estimated cost for the first phase of this program—which will focus on strategies for controlling and preventing TB—is \$20,000. A public health education specialist and a physician with experience in Asia and with TB care have volunteered to work in this phase.

MettaDana's initial effort to improve local living conditions, the improvement of a road along the river, has been followed up by the construction of a water purification system. In 1998, a Burmese Buddhist association contributed a water purification system to the monastery that links up with a system put in place by MettaDana. In 1998, at the invitation of MettaDana, water-engineering expert, Susan Murcott of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), worked with a retired local physician, U Pe Thoe, to establish a water-testing laboratory at the hospital and tested samples of water from the river, storage reservoirs, and village wells. Armed with a much clearer understanding of the water contamination problems, MettaDana is now seeking public health professionals with expertise in surveying hygiene behavior to begin formulating the next phases of the water purification project.

The fourth item in the mandate of MettaDana is helping to preserve some of the many beautiful Buddhist monuments and buildings in the area. A recent project was restoration of the tomb of Mekin, a famous nun from the nineteenth century who taught meditation and scripture to thousands of students. Another project has been to restore access to the Lokamakaik pagoda, whose access was denied when a road was built that destroyed the steps necessary to reach the pagoda.

Viewed as a whole, the organizational structure and mandate of the MettaDana Project, as well as its careful approach to development aid, show a commendable emphasis both on low budget sustainable development undertaken by a dedicated group of individuals and the active participation of the Burmese community that it serves. The project thus combines local input with both Burmese and Western expertise in what amounts to a collaborative endeavor. From a Buddhist perspective, the model has an added attraction of engaging ordinary individuals, Burmese, North American, and European, in a context where each stands to learn from the others. Nor should we underestimate the ramifications of the dialogues that a common experience will initiate and enhance as it continues. To be sure, they often require a translator fluent in Burmese, English, and Pāli, but as a metaphor for this shared enterprise, that of translation has much to offer when compared with adaptation, acculturation, and baggage.

If, as I have suggested, MettaDana functions as both an expression and a mirror of loving-kindness, the construction of the Hawai'i Insight Meditation Center (HIMC), now underway, will complement this by teaching the practices of mindfulness and loving-kindness. The Hawai'ian center, which will be located on the big island, Hawai'i, is still in the planning stages. As stated in its "Vision," or mission statement, when completed, HIMC "will be an international retreat center bridging East and

West, tradition and innovation. The great forest monastery tradition of Southeast Asia merged with the spiritual geography of the Hawai'ian Islands will provide a unique environment in which to offer these accessible contemplative practices of Mindfulness and Loving-Kindness." In addition to those in North America who have traditionally sought out Buddhist teachings, the center plans to offer retreats tailored for young adults and families; as well as environmental, medical, educational, and corporate leaders; the latter of which is a result of the HIMC teachers' experience with the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society.(5)

The broad model that the Smiths and their associates are currently working to bring to fruition thus rests on complementary foundations, both fundamental to the teaching and practice of Buddhism. In it the teaching and practice of meditation take place in conjunction with socially engaged Buddhism in the form of MettaDana, an ongoing aid project in which Burmese and North Americans work together. Fronsdal's article on the Vipassanā Community accurately linked the teaching of generosity, as it exists in that community, to the IMS-IMW effort to continue the tradition of offering the teachings freely, and hence depending on voluntary donations by students to sustain the teachers. As he reported, the verdict on the success of that effort is still out.

Like its sister institutions, Vipassana Hawai'i will depend on *dāna* in this form. The innovation in its model, however, is to give the practice of generosity a clear and direct focus outside the immediate needs of sustaining the organization itself. MettaDana and its work in Burma with a Burmese monastic community and its lay supporters provide a basic foundation of the model, which is an integral part of the teaching of Buddhist practice as it will be given at HIMC.

Smith's model also actively involves Asian and Western teachers who offer retreats jointly; these retreats are now given annually both in Hawai'i and at the Kyaswa monastery in the Sagaing Hills on the western bank of the Ayeyarwady River in central Burma opposite the city of Mandalay. Here, in hills that have been a center of Buddhist practice for 2000 years, Western yogis practice alongside Asians who themselves experience the teachings as given by Western teachers. These retreats are already oversubscribed, with far more applicants than places. A retreat for older students is planned for January 2000.

To this point, I have emphasized the international and collaborative dimensions of the Vipassana Hawai'i model, but the organization also acts locally, primarily in community-building and the teaching of meditation. Its guiding teachers, Steven Smith and Michelle McDonald-Smith, sponsor weekly sittings and give daylong, as well as residential, retreats at the Palolo Zen Center. The organization publishes a newsletter as well as reports on the MettaDana project, and maintains a website. Furthermore, as their focus shifts to the plans for constructing HIMC, the guiding teachers continue to maintain teaching schedules on the mainland. In addition, Steven Smith is a guiding teacher of the Blue Mountains Meditation Center in Australia, and his work with the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society involves him in developing programs for those who attend CMIS functions. He is thus actively involved internationally and in extending the reach of *Dhamma* teaching in America to those active in environmental causes, business, journalism, and philanthropy. Despite all this, both guiding teachers find time to consult planners, architects, and other professionals who are helping to formulate and design the plans for HIMC.

These plans, as they have developed so far, have a distinct Hawai'ian as well as Buddhist flavor. The site purchased, on Hapu'u Bay, consists of 180 acres. Extending from an elevation of 300 feet to the sea front, the land was chosen with an eye to the traditional Hawai'ian concept of *ahupua'a*, a place of nurture and refuge, "rich in

cultural history & ancient Hawaiian sites. ... a place of mana (spiritual power).”(6)

“Extending between ocean and mountain, and inclusive of diverse bioregions of flora and fauna, streams and valley, the *ahupua’ua* models an intimate interrelatedness between people and their surround ... Our planned mini *ahupua’ua* includes projects such as preservation and protection of the land, reforestation of rare and endangered native species and restoration of traditional agriculture. In all of our activities we are guided by the traditional Hawai’ian values: malama—to care for and preserve (resources, values); to serve, honor (what is worthy of honor); and pono—the sum total of all human virtues and the foundation of moral leadership in goodness. ... Incorporating sustainable tropical design elements, our retreat facility will reflect both Eastern and Western influences while resting gently on the land.”(7)

Plans call, in due course, for the usual facilities of a Western retreat center: meditation hall; residence building for sixty participants; kitchen and dining hall; multi-purpose building for administration; library; interview rooms for students and teachers; and individual cottages for long-term retreatants and teachers in residence. In addition to weekend and somewhat longer brief retreats, plans include offering two and three-month retreats for experienced students as well as a “hermitage-like setting” for more extended individual retreats.

Central to the concept of HIMC, moreover, is the principle of retreats taught and sat jointly by Asian and Western teachers and students. Sayadaw U Pandita and Sayadaw U Lakkhana, both renowned Burmese masters, have offered to teach in the center. In the summer of 1999 each of the two Burmese Sayadaws taught a retreat jointly with Stephen Smith in Hawai’i. Michelle McDonald-Smith has taught three retreats with Sayadaw U Lakkhana—the first at IMS in Barre and two subsequent retreats in Burma. Together, they will teach a retreat for older students in January, 2000. Senior Western teachers will also be invited to teach at HIMC from time to time. Insofar as the model of Vipassana Hawai’i combines socially engaged Buddhism with a unique model of the Western retreat center, it represents a departure from existing models in the Vipassanā Community. Because the model also implies an altered version of this form of American Buddhist identity, its ramifications for the processes of defining that identity warrant brief consideration.

Queen’s pragmatic approach to defining the term “engaged Buddhism” as it applies to post Victorian liberation movements in Asia finds an echo in Thomas Tweed’s recent essay on convert or “new” Buddhists in the United States. Tweed’s similarly pragmatic approach to questions about scholarly definitions of religious identity as they apply to the amorphous category that has come to be called American Buddhists is useful. For some, his proposed term, “sympathizer,” comes with unhappy associations, but Tweed’s definition is capacious and flexible enough to be useful: “Sympathizers are those who have some sympathy for a religion but do not embrace it exclusively or fully” (p. 74). Abandoning an essentialist/normative route to include self-identification as a Buddhist (or as a member of any tradition) need not, as Martin Baumann fears, necessarily entail its opposite, mere nominalism. An epistemological and methodological stance that allows for give and take, in which an author is aware of both normative and nominalist issues but is bound wholly to neither, is arguably a valuable perspective from which to view protean diversity, that rich tapestry called “American Buddhism.”(8)

Vipassana Hawai’i describes its American affiliation as “IMS”; it will also belong to the worldwide network of teaching institutions that derive from and continue the lineage of Mahasi Sayadaw. I need not tell scholars of Buddhism how rare it is for a Western Buddhist organization to seek active affiliation with an Asian parent.

It would be premature to speculate what the effects of the Vipassana Hawai'i model will have in the years to come as its vision becomes reality. I would argue, however, that the model represents an important opportunity for the "parallel worlds" posited in Numrich's thesis to become a synergy in which Tweed's "night-stand Buddhists" begin to know more directly and respect ancient traditions, even perhaps to add classical Buddhist texts to the books piled on the night-stand, and begin to ground their practice not only in texts about Buddhism written by Western writers, but also in Buddhist texts, perhaps even the *Suttapiṭaka* and the *Visuddhimagga*.

Nor will the synergy work in only one direction. As actively engaged Buddhists know too well, Western ideology and social visions have no corner on the issues of modernity that face the entire planet. Still less does Western ideology have solutions to problems that we, in large measure, have created. The attempt to respond to modernity in all its protean forms affects us all, West and East alike. Indeed, socially engaged Buddhism as it exists in the West at present seeks either to act locally (somewhere on the planet) within a Buddhist framework and/or to bring Buddhist perspectives to bear on the problems created by a predominantly Western ideology of technology and secularism. Seen from this perspective, Vipassana Hawai'i is addressing both sets of issues in interdependent and creative ways.

To my mind, the Vipassana Hawai'i model has the potential to help prepare a ground in which processes of mutual education and exchange can flourish between and across cultures. The MettaDana projects in the Sagaing Hills of Burma speak for themselves. The understanding and respect for Asian traditions that the project has engendered in Western students is less quantifiable, but equally important. Even those who have not been to Burma know about the steps to the pagoda; a young woman who became a weaver; the x-ray machine; and suitcases filled to overflowing with chalk, crayons, and textbooks for the Wachuset Primary School.

Some evidence, however slender, exists that indicates other small ways in which the parallel worlds of Asian traditions and Western converts may be converging, however nascent that process is to date. As many North American Buddhist organizations reassess their traditionally restricted focus on meditation, Buddhist leaders in Asia meet publicly to consider new directions for Buddhism in Asia as they struggle to adapt and respond to pressures of modernity as well as militant forms of Christian evangelism. Both, in different ways, threaten to undermine the cultures that traditionally supported Asian monasticism.

At this recent meeting in Sri Lanka attended by senior Asian monastic leaders of many traditions and lineages, the Dalai Lama reported on his experience of Western ways. He mentioned particularly that Western teachers teach what he called "the basics" more widely than is done currently in Asia, a practice that, if adopted, would presumably make these teachings more directly accessible beyond traditional monastic communities and enrich the devotional and ritual practices of Buddhist lay people. The BBC World Service, which reported on the meeting, did not report responses to the Dalai Lama's observation. Its importance, however, may well be that the topic was broached at all in a strategic meeting of key Asian Buddhist leaders.

The model of Vipassana Hawai'i bears watching. Its uniqueness lies partly in its willingness to mandate the development of *sīla* as part of the ongoing practice of meditation that involves both meditation and acting in the world. Its model actively incorporates the practices of *dāna* and *sīla* with that of *sati* and the *brahmavihāras* and strives to integrate Asian values with American ones in a context that also respects Hawai'ian traditions. It integrates an international socially engaged Buddhist

project with the teaching and practice of meditation as it has evolved in Western retreat centers. This international perspective provides a much-needed counterbalance to unrecognized forms of parochialism in what threatens to become a long series of self-conscious attempts to define an American Buddhism.

That these attempts so often occur solely within and are de facto limited to what Tweed calls the convert community is, in my opinion, shortsighted. These internal discussions are not irrelevant. They need to occur, if only because the convert community itself is so diverse, and include Theravāda, Zen, and Vajrayāna antecedents, to cite the most obvious. The danger is that defining “American Buddhism” in this context alone can only impoverish the exercise.

An equally serious difficulty exists for the “creatures” whom Tweed describes and for the scholars who try to study them: mostly the books on the nightstand are depictions of Buddhism seen through Western eyes and are usually tailored to fit an author’s vision and goals, to say nothing of the book-buying public. I do not say this dismissively; it helps to explain the proliferation of both confused “creatures” who meditate and the confusions that trying to study them in a scholarly context can entail. It is no small wonder that the scholar trying to contend with it all may throw up her hands in despair or that paradigms of nomenclature and taxonomy proposed to bring order to the study of this population now multiply annually.

My purpose in this paper has been to describe a new, and I believe, constructive model in the broad continuum that includes socially engaged Buddhism as well as the conundrums of defining Buddhist identity in its protean Western forms. My hope is that the model will bring us closer to a day when *Buddhism* is the key word, when Westerners and immigrant Buddhists alike perceive themselves as participants with distinctive roles to play in dialogues that are cross-cultural as well as ethnic, parts of an international community as well as a local one. To one who has sat retreats, as I have—organized by a Mexican-Canadian in which participants included Thais, Thai-Canadians, Indo-Canadians, and Euro-Canadians, all of whom heard the same teaching from Mahāthera Henepola Gunaratana, a Sri Lankan teacher who has long worked with immigrant Buddhist communities in the United States and Canada—the vision of parallel worlds converging, or at least interacting constructively, does not seem wholly removed: difficult certainly, but not impossible.

Charles Prebish’s decision to examine closely a range of particular communities in his chapter on Buddhist communities in the United States is telling.⁽⁹⁾ Whatever the forms “American Buddhism” takes, they will surely be pluralistic, as indeed that partly fictional monolith “traditional Asian Buddhism” is, and always has been. Scholars know, and have always known, that such phrases are misnomers. Many Western converts do not, especially perhaps those in Fronsdal’s “Vipassana Community.” The pervasive syncretism that Paul Numrich and others justifiably lament is at times a consequence of Western teachers’ own diverse experiences and/or whatever private synthesis is useful to them. As often, however, the night-stand sympathizer goes to a bookstore or library, chooses a title that appeals, and reads and interprets what she reads as “Buddhist” with little sense that the term alone is probably insufficient to describe the teachings as presented in the book that she chose.

Hence the importance, in the context of Western forms of Theravāda Buddhism, that Vipassana Hawai’i has decided to affiliate itself with the strong lineage that primarily shaped its guiding teachers. That decision in itself will give its Western students a framework and degree of coherence often lacking in teachings that mix and mingle bits of one tradition and another, a recipe known perhaps to the teacher, but not so clear to those who receive the teaching. My enthusiasm for the model being

implemented by Vipassana Hawai'i is thus partly that the model affirms a lineage. Its programs are designed to give Western students and their Burmese counterparts in the Saging Hills, many of whom are monks and nuns, a shared experience of working directly and together as well as sitting together in meditation retreats taught jointly by Western and Burmese teachers. It is hard to imagine an American state better placed—geographically and demographically—to carry forward a vision of Theravādin teachings at once socially engaged and cross-cultural. Hawai'i's long history of multiculturalism can only enhance the project as modeled.

I conclude with an apology. What seems American and parochial in many discussions of the future of Buddhism in the United States may, in my perceptions, take on exaggerated and distorted significance, out of proportion to the whole. My view is that of a Westerner who has a nightstand piled high with books, who happens also to be an academic, and who lives fifty kilometers north of the 49th parallel. From this vantage point, it can seem that academics and non-academics alike emphasize “American” in the phrase “American Buddhism” and pay lip service—if they do not tacitly exclude—ethnic and other communities. Yet both congregations in Numrich's metaphorical temple struggle with problems of self-identification, whether as American, as Buddhist, or as an Other that the term “American” necessarily constructs.

It is hard to overestimate the positive possibilities implicit in a model like that taking form in the ongoing association between HIMC and Kyaswa Monastery, combining the MettaDana Project and retreats taught by Asian masters and Western teachers with Asian and Western students sitting side by side. The Western convert community, or at least Theravādin strands in it, stand to gain much from a teaching community that, although not narrowly sectarian, nevertheless is committed to remaining firmly grounded in a strong lineage, takes its lineage seriously, and thus stands at some distance from what has been called, rightly, the “*Dharma shopping mall approach*.” To end I began, when the sympathizer's pile of books on the nightstand includes at least some parts of the *Suttapiṭaka*, we will have achieved—if not some form of consensus—at least a body of teachings that the various relevant communities recognize in common.

Notes

1. Christopher S. Queen, “Introduction,” *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, ed. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996) passim, esp. pp. 28–33; Santikaro Bhikkhu, “Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Life and Society Through the Natural Eyes of Voidness,” in *Engaged Buddhism*, pp. 156–157. [Return to text](#)
2. For a fuller account of IMS, see Charles Prebish, *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), ch. 3. [Return to text](#)
3. See Paul David Numrich, “Local Inter-Buddhist Associations in North America” in *American Buddhism*, pp. 117–142; *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples* (University of Tennessee Press, 1996), and Gil Fronsdal, “Insight Meditation in the United States: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 163–180. [Return to text](#)
4. *The MettaDana Project Update*, May, 1999, “Guiding Principles.” [Return to text](#)
5. Both IMS and IMW, within this movement, offer retreats for young adults. The founders of Vipassana Hawai'i currently teach the Young Adults Retreats at

IMS. IMW is in the process of developing a strong family program as well.

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6. "Hapu'u Bay Refuge" in *Insight: A Joint Newsletter of the Insight Meditation Society and the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies*. Fall, 1999, p. 8. [Return to text](#)
7. "Our Vision"; <http://www.geocities.com/~viphawaii/> [Return to text](#)
8. Thomas A. Tweed, "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion" in Duncan Ryuuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen, *American Buddhism. Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999) 71–90; reviewed by Martin Baumann, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 1999, pp. 200–204. [Return to text](#)
9. Charles Prebish's chapter two, "Shaping the Sangha," in *Luminous Passage* offers a very helpful survey and analysis of the Herculean efforts required to fashion a working terminology that is consistent and comprehensible within the vocabulary of the academic study of religions; he also makes the points about the tacit exclusion of ethnic Buddhists well, and with tact (pp. 51–93). [Return to text](#)

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Vipassana Meditation is one of the oldest Buddhist meditation practices. The method comes directly from the Satipatthana Sutta (The basis of awareness), a speech attributed to Buddha. Vipassana Meditation allows you to cultivate attention and awareness directly and gradually. Vipassana Meditation is a fantastic journey. Through the process of full attention, little by little we realize that we are really living subjugated by our ego and do not take advantage of reality. Vipassana Meditation is a form of mental training that teaches us to experience the world in a completely new way. We will learn to see what really happens, both around us and within us. Therefore, this type of meditation is a process of self-discovery, a participatory research in which we observe our experiences as they occur. As the field of socially engaged Buddhism (SEB) has developed, there has never been a coherent or systematic attempt to create an authoritative basis for the work of SEB. Many of our elders, including Joanna Macy, Thich Nhat Hanh, Robert Aitken Roshi and others have all written movingly on the socially engaged imperative. Yet most have operated in isolation. The first and perhaps most obvious response would be to examine Buddhist texts for clues as to what the Buddha and other great Buddhist teachers recommended about society and politics. We can search within the Buddhist texts and finding canonical references to social action such as where suttas or sutras make recommendations for social welfare or provisions for the poor, and so forth.