

## Peace and Violence: A Comparison of Buddhist Ladakh and the United States

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"In traditional Ladakh, aggression of any sort is exceptionally rare: rare enough to say that it is virtually nonexistent.... I have hardly seen anything more than mild disagreement in the traditional villages."  
Norberg-Hodge

"Violence is as American as apple pie."  
Stokeley Carmichael

"Not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart."  
de Tocqueville

Psychologists such as Bonta (1997), Fromm (1973), and Gielen and Chirico-Rosenberg (1993) and the anthropologists Briggs (1970), Howell and Willis (1989), Montagu (1978), and Sponsel and Gregor (1994) have studied the nature of small-scale, traditional, nonviolent societies located in various parts of the globe. Examples of reputedly nonviolent societies include the Semai Senoi of Malaysia (Robarchek, 1977), certain Zapotec communities in Mexico (Fry, 1992), a group of Inuits (Eskimos) in Canada (Briggs, 1970), and the Zuñi Pueblo Indians of New Mexico (Benedict, 1934/1959; see Bonta [1993, 1997] for more information on peaceful societies). Students of these societies have tended to focus on worldviews, value systems, cognitive scripts, cooperative attitudes, the control of anger, and childrearing practices, holding various combinations of these responsible for the prevailing low rates of violent behavior.

Although some of the claims regarding the absence or near absence of violence in these societies have turned out to be premature (Edgerton, 1992; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1979; Fox, 1975), there remains little doubt that overall levels of violence vary dramatically from society to society. This is as true for nonliterate and folk societies as it is for nation states. Whereas, for instance, among the fierce Yanomamö of southern Venezuela and northern Brazil up to one third of all males die by the hands of other males (Chagnon, 1983, 1992), the chances for such a death are minuscule among the peaceful Ladakhis described below. Similarly, Japan's prevalence rates for homicide, assault, robbery, and many other forms of antisocial behavior remain far below those of the United States. The same holds true for other relatively harmonious, nonviolent nations such as Denmark, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland (Kinloch, 1990).

The anthropological study of peaceful societies took as one of its origins Ruth Benedict's famous book, *Patterns of Culture* (1934/1959). In it, Benedict contrasted the peaceful way of life of the Zuñi Pueblo Indians with the status and power oriented ethos of the Kwakiutl Indians on America's Northwest Coast and the prevailing attitudes of mistrust, paranoia, and treachery among the Dobu of Melanesia. Benedict's book became a monument to cultural relativism, that is, the idea that value systems, moralities, and worldviews differ radically from society to society. The book had a strong impact on the anthropological profession: cultural relativism became the reigning ideology of American anthropology under the influence of Boas, Benedict, Herskovits, and M. Mead, while also importantly influencing cross-cultural psychology (e.g., Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1990). It shaped the imagination of countless college students and the educated public, with more than one million copies of her book being sold over the years.

Benedict's book played an important role in the battle of cultural anthropologists, behaviorists, and social learning theorists against the "instinctivists." Instinctivists such as the psychoanalyst Freud, the hormic psychologist McDougall, and the ethologist Lorenz have claimed that there exists an innate, universal core of human characteristics among which aggression, hostility, readiness for anger, and self-seeking tendencies are prominent. By showing that peaceful societies do exist, the anthropologists also sought to demonstrate that there are no universal and innate aggressive drives or instincts. Although hardly conclusive, this argument was forcefully advanced by Montagu (1978) in his edited book, *Learning non-aggression: The experience of non-literate societies*. Similar but less ideologically oriented collections by Howell and Willis (1989) and by Sponsel and Gregor (1994) also contain studies of peaceful societies. The studies are based on the premise that sociality rather than aggression is the psychological basis upon which humans have built their societies and created satisfying religious and moral frameworks for living. However, neither Montagu nor Howell and Willis are fully prepared to recognize the contradictory nature of human beings, in whose souls opposing impulses and needs for selfishness and altruism, dominance and surrender, cooperation and resistance, aggression and nonviolence have always lived side by side. Potentialities for such impulses and needs are part of human nature although societies differentially channel, shape and reshape, reinforce, suppress, and sidetrack universal inclinations. Although psychologists have conducted numerous studies dealing with the prosocial, altruistic, and cooperative behavior of individuals, they have played only a limited role in the study of peaceful societies. One important exception is Fromm's (1973) survey of thirty "primitive" (nonliterate) tribes which he divided into life-affirmative, nondestructive-aggressive, and destructive societies. Among the life-affirmative societies he placed the Zuni Indians, the Mountain Arapesh, the Aranda, the Semangs, the Todas, the Polar Eskimos, and the Mbuti Pygmies. Relying on evidence collected by anthropologists, he claimed that in these societies "there is a minimum of hostility, violence, or cruelty among people, no harsh punishment, hardly any crime, and the institution of war is absent or plays an exceedingly small role. Children are treated with kindness, ... [and] there is little envy, covetousness, greed, and exploitativeness. There is also little competition, ... a general attitude of trust and confidence ...; a general prevalence of good humor, and a relative absence of depressive moods". (Fromm, 1973, p. 194).

This chapter investigates how well Fromm's generalizations apply to the society of Ladakh, a mostly Tibetan society located in northwest India which, until some decades ago, was relatively isolated from Western contact. The chapter centers on the nonviolent ethos and worldview of traditional Ladakh, an ethos based on Buddhist conceptions of "no-self," religious merit and demerit, karma, compassion with all sentient beings, and the undesirability of mental poisons such as greed, anger and hate, jealousy, envy, and spiritual ignorance. The nonviolent ethos of Ladakh culminates in the ideal of the bodhisattva, a religious savior figure embodying the ideals of compassion, altruism, nonviolence, and karmic interconnectedness. Our interviews suggest that most Ladakhis have deeply internalized the Buddhist "Ethos of Peace."

Subsequently, the chapter compares the ethos of Buddhist Ladakh to the worldview and competitive ethos of the modern U.S.A. The argument is advanced that the aggressive and expressive forms of individualism prevailing in the U.S.A. stand in stark contrast to the restrained, synergistic, cooperative forms of social interaction found in Ladakh and other peaceful societies. It is also argued that because modern psychology is a manifestation of individualism, it unwittingly contributes to the forces of fragmentation that undermine American society leading to social disorganization and violent behavior.

### Buddhist Ladakh

Ladakh is located in the northwestern area of India and forms a part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. About half as large as England, it has approximately 135,000 inhabitants. More than 99 percent of the land is a high-altitude mountain desert, but barley, buckwheat, potatoes, turnips, and walnut and apricot trees are planted in the valleys. Ladakh borders on Pakistan and on Tibet, the latter now forming part of China. There is one town, Leh, which nowadays has more than 20,000 inhabitants. The other Ladakhis live in villages, but some nomadic pastoralists roam the higher, more remote areas. Most Ladakhis are farmers, craftsmen, small-business men, government officials, or members of the Buddhist clergy. They speak Ladakhi, a Tibetan language. Hindi, Urdu, "standard Tibetan," and English are spoken by some Ladakhis in business or government transactions or by the Buddhist clergy. Literacy levels vary greatly by region, social class, gender, and age, but the large majority of children in Leh and surrounding villages are now attending at least primary school.

The upper Indus valley forms the cultural center of Buddhist Ladakh. Many of the monasteries that traditionally

have dominated the spiritual life of Buddhist Ladakh are located here. The monasteries belong to a variety of Tibetan lineages such as the Gelugpa ("Yellow Hat"), the Kargyupa (including Digunkpa and Dukpa), the Nyingmapa, and the Sakyapa.

Close to 60 percent of Ladakh's population profess the Buddhist faith while most other inhabitants of Ladakh belong to the Sunni and Shia traditions of Islam. Among the Muslims are Baltis and Ladakhis. The Baltis share their culture, language, and religion with the Baltis of neighboring Baltistan, a province of Pakistan. Pervasive cultural differences and certain political tensions separate the Baltis from the Buddhist Ladakhis. In contrast, the Muslim Ladakhis are often rather similar in their cultural habits and personality traits to the Buddhist Ladakhis, although the two groups differ in their religion. The present chapter confines itself to the Buddhist population and is based on interviews which were conducted with 72 Buddhist children, men, women, and monks during 1980-1981. The findings of this study cannot necessarily be extended to other Tibetan societies since many of them follow a less peaceful way of life than Ladakh. In addition, Ladakh has undergone many sociocultural and economic changes during recent decades that will not be discussed in this essay (see Gielen [1993, 2001] for additional information on this point).

## METHOD

### Sample:

The sample of 72 respondents included 8 boys and 8 girls, ages 10-12, 8 boys and 8 girls, ages 14-16, 10 men and 10 women, ages 25-73, and 20 monks, ages 20-72. All respondents were Buddhists and came from Leh and surrounding villages. The 20 monks were affiliated with a wide variety of monasteries throughout Ladakh. Their educational attainments and ranks within their monastic communities varied considerably, and some of the monks had, in the past, gone to Tibet for higher religious studies. Four rinpoches (abbots) were included in the sample. A large majority of the interviewees spoke little or no English. They came from a considerable variety of backgrounds and included farmers, village workers, shopkeepers, small government officials, and their wives and children. Some prominent citizens from Leh were also included in the interviews. Educational levels of respondents varied from no schooling at all to college education.

The sample included a highly varied cross-section of Ladakhis from Leh and surroundings, but compared to the rest of Ladakh, the sample was better educated, had been more influenced by exposure to the "modern world," and included a smaller percentage of farmers.

### Questionnaire and Interview Procedure:

The questionnaire included two moral decision stories taken from Colby and Kohlberg (1987) and two social reasoning dilemmas taken from Selman (1979). The author presented his Ladakhi informant, Mr. Nawang Tsering Shaksपो, J & K Cultural Academy, Leh, with a selection of moral and social decision stories and asked him to select those stories that appeared to him to be especially appropriate for Ladakhi settings. The stories were translated into Ladakhi, and some of their details, such as names, were changed. Each of the four stories described a hypothetical dilemma where the actions and expectations of the fictitious adults and children clash with each other. The following is an example of a dilemma:

Should desperately poor Stobdan steal dakjun (a difficult to attain, traditional type medicine) from a doctor-druggist in order to save his deathly ill wife? (An adaptation of Kohlberg's Heinz story)

The four vignettes were followed by an extensive series of standard questions, which attempted to elicit the reasoning behind the interviewee's decisions. The questions were designed to raise issues such as the value of life, property, theft, mutual role-taking, interpersonal expectations and duties, punishment, guilt, promise and trust, conceptions of the subjective nature of persons (thoughts, feelings, motives), self-awareness and self-reflection, personality traits, self-esteem, dyadic relationships, anger, and friendship. Depending on a person's answers to these issues, numerous other questions were introduced.

In addition to the decision stories described above, three new dilemmas were constructed with the help of Mr. Wangchuk Shalipa. Sixteen of the interviews included the three new dilemmas. The three stories described a son who wanted to become a monk against the wishes of his mother, a young couple who got married against the determined opposition of the husband's parents, and a woman who felt cheated after buying a shawl from a Kashmiri shopkeeper. Thirty-eight respondents were given an abbreviated version of Fowler's (1981) faith interview. In this interview, a person was asked about his/her life story, the meaning of life, the nature of his/her religious commitments, and about various values and attitudes that constituted his/her faith. The faith interview

included a wide variety of broad, open-ended questions that were used to elicit a person's overall outlook on life. The interviews took place in schools, monasteries, the author's guesthouse and hotel and, occasionally, in the fields. They usually lasted 1½-3 hours and were tape-recorded. Several interpreters were used throughout the research. More details about the research procedures and findings may be found in Gielen and Chirico-Rosenberg (1993).

#### Constructing the Ethos of Ladakh

Based on the interviews with 72 Ladakhis, the author's daily interactions with Ladakhis over a time period of six months, his participation in religious festivals, and a review of sacred writings, mythology, folk songs, and poetry, themes that were felt to reflect the prevailing ethos of traditional Ladakh were identified. Ethos, here, meaning the characteristic spirit or "genius" of a people. This includes characteristic value systems, forms of moral reasoning, attitudes, and overall worldview. If intact, the ethos of a people makes their lives meaningful and shapes basic attitudes toward existence and social life.

The author's observations were condensed into an "ideal-type" (Max Weber) representation of Ladakh's Buddhist ethos which in a coherent, but purified and exaggerated way sum up the guiding spirit of Ladakh's traditional culture. The ideal-type representation of Ladakh's ethos is then contrasted with an equally purified and exaggerated representation of the culturally dominant ethos of modern, liberal America. By contrasting the worldviews, moral conceptions, and guiding spirits of two such highly different societies, the inner coherence and spiritual beauty of Ladakh's ethos are highlighted. The comparison also points to the enormous psychological and spiritual distance which separates the Buddhist vision of inner and outer peace from the competitive, individualistic, assertive-aggressive vision of self-actualization that shapes life in modern capitalist America.

In Ladakh, the Buddhist vision of human nature, the situation of humans and other sentient beings in the illusory realm of suffering (*dukkha*), and the way to overcome suffering are frequently depicted in the form of the Wheel of Life. By understanding the symbolic messages encoded in the Wheel of Life, the reader will gain a preliminary understanding of the worldview that prevails among the Buddhists of Ladakh.

#### The Buddhist Wheel of Life

Close to the entrance door of every large Ladakhi monastery, one finds a painting of the Wheel of Life or Wheel of Becoming (*bhavacakra*), which in a concrete, easily understandable form sums up the worldview of Tibetan (Vajrayana) Buddhism, the religion that helps to shape the worldview and ethos of Ladakh. The author has often seen simple farmers standing in front of the Wheel of Life while paying special attention to those parts of the painting that depict humans suffering in the Buddhist version of hell or purgatory.

The wheel shows various beings in the six zones of existence which together make up *samsara*, the realm of illusion, reincarnation, and suffering. *Shinje* (Yama), Lord of Death, holds the wheel in his claws and teeth, symbolizing that attachment to *samsara* represents a kind of spiritual death. Fortunately, every sentient being is born with the possibility of reaching enlightenment or Buddhahood in this or a future lifetime, thus escaping the wheel of suffering.

At the hub of the wheel one can see three theriomorphic symbols representing "mental poisons." These are said to turn over the wheel (and thereby all existence) again and again, repeating forever the karmic stages of birth, death, and reincarnation. The three poisons are symbolized by a pig, a rooster or cock, and a snake. The pig symbolizes ignorance and illusion, the cock greed for life and lust, and the snake hate, aggression, envy, and jealousy. The three animals bite each other's tails, reflecting intrinsic links between the basic manifestations of evil/sin/mental poisons. The symbolic nature of the three animals is easily understood since they represent a kind of "Buddhist id." Similar to Freud's theory, a combination of blind sexual (cock) and aggressive (snake) impulses together with ignorance (pig) or repression forms the core of raw, unreconstructed human nature. But unlike orthodox psychoanalysis, Tibetan Buddhism teaches that one can overcome the basic impulses of greed, hate, and attachment to egoistic goals by striving simultaneously for one's own liberation and that of all other sentient beings'. This can be accomplished by following the basic teachings (*dharma*) of Buddhism: meditation, empathy for the suffering of others, non-attachment to the illusions of this world, and the fundamental insight that the self is a steadily shifting mixture of karmic factors no more solid in substance than the ever-shifting clouds that drift across the endless Tibetan sky. All life is transitory, and attachment to the goods of this world chains a person to *samsara* and the steadily turning wheel of life. Actions motivated by greed, anger, hate, illicit

lust, envy, jealousy, egoism, and ignorance make up the basic links of the chain.

Because human beings are ignorant, they need models of perfection. In Vajrayana Buddhism, the savior figure of the bodhisattva serves as such a model. Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who, out of compassion for all sentient creatures forgo their chance to enter the blissful, timeless state of nirvana that would take them out of the Wheel of Life. Instead, bodhisattvas descend to the earthly realm where they incarnated in and tulkus and rimpoches, including the Dalai Lama and some of the abbots of Ladakh's monasteries. The Dalai Lama is considered to be a reincarnation of Avalokitesvara (Chenrezig), patron deity of Tibet and manifestation of the principle of compassion, a principle that pervades the teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism. In daily life, the principle helps to soften relationships between people and serves as an emotional glue binding people together. Harsh self-assertion, insistence upon one's rights, and the expression of aggressive impulses are unlikely to occur as long as the principle of compassion holds sway.

Although certain details of the Wheel of Life can only be understood by the theologically trained monks, our interview results strongly suggest that the average Ladakhi has deeply internalized the basic interpretation of human nature and human destiny underlying the Wheel of Life.

### Interview Results and the Observation of Daily Behavior

The results of the interviews are summarized in Table 1 where they are contrasted with the conception of human nature and goals of life prevailing among many modern, well-educated, liberal Americans. When inspecting Table 1 the reader is asked to keep the "ideal-type" nature of the constructions of the two visions of life in mind. In their interviews the Ladakhi respondents emphasized their faith in the Buddhist religion, the pervasiveness of karma, the importance of acquiring religious merit while avoiding religious demerit (sin), and the desire for a good reincarnation. These themes were especially emphasized by the older respondents who tended to show a stronger orientation toward religious concerns than the younger respondents did.

The traditional (Buddhist) Ladakhi lives in a world where the Buddhist religion is widely accepted and provides a convincing explanation for human suffering. Karma, as an impersonal, objective system of moral retribution and reincarnation, is felt to connect all "sentient beings." By showing compassion with the suffering of others (including animals), a person can acquire religious merit while experiencing a feeling of karmic interconnectedness with the web of life. This feeling undercuts natural tendencies toward self-assertion, selfishness, and acquisitiveness. Instead, conflicts between people are reduced and cooperation and interpersonal trust are emphasized. Vajrayana Buddhism creates situations of synergy, that is, situations in which the individual perceives that his or her goals merge with the goals of others. Benefiting other sentient beings is seen as also benefiting the self, because through such actions the individual advances on the path toward religious liberation and salvation. Selfishness is not abolished; rather it is fused with altruism. In addition, the self is submerged in a network of concrete interpersonal obligations and reciprocal relationships, which may have a rather utilitarian character but nevertheless stabilize the person's role in society. Thus, both concrete reciprocal relationships as well as religious sentiments shaped by synergetic conceptions hold Ladakh's society together.

The Ladakhi admires emotional restraint, quiet dignity, serenity, a certain detachment from the affairs of the world, honesty, discretion in human relationships, and religious piety. In husband-wife relationships, little emphasis is placed on intimacy or romantic love, since romantic love is based on the principle of emotion-driven individualism. Physical aggressiveness is extremely rare and confined to the occasional, usually harmless fight between young men under the influence of the local beer, chang. Capital crimes are almost unknown (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). Feelings of envy do sometimes surface and are then externalized and projected in an unconscious process of ego-defense onto outsiders, witches, demons, ghosts, and neighbors with the evil eye. In addition, fear of the "mouth of the people" (what other people will say) is rather common especially among women. On the whole, however, Ladakhis are remarkably cheerful and good humored in the face of harsh living conditions and troublesome situations. Diffuse feelings of depression are uncommon although in the interviews, a few girls and women expressed concrete feelings of unhappiness about extreme poverty, ill-treatment by stepparents, and misbehaving husbands.

While the Buddhist metaphysical doctrine of "no-self" is not fully understood by many of Ladakh's villagers, the doctrine is widely accepted on the psychological level. In the interviews, there was little focus on the self, and only limited awareness of inner feelings, conflicts, and systematic personality change over time. When asked to explain the meaning of self-esteem, only a very few Ladakhis fully grasped the question. Instead, most

respondents equated self-esteem with undesirable pride and selfishness. They saw little place for people with "big egos" in their village communities.

Because competition is downplayed, competitive sports events are rarely held in the villages with the exception of some archery "competitions" and polo games. The archery competitions turn out to be amiable affairs during which much beer is consumed, frequent laughter is heard, and many arrows miss their goal. Similarly, the traditional dances held during the competitions or on other occasions tend to be quiet and stately, rather than emotional and exciting.

Traditional child-rearing practices in Ladakh support the development of children and youngsters who are well-suited to function in a noncompetitive, peaceful, and hardworking though relaxed society. Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994), for instance, conducted in 1980 a study of birth and childrearing practices in the very traditional Zangskar area of Ladakh. They report that the parents they observed and interviewed generally took a calm, patient, relaxed, good-humored, and loving approach to the tasks of childrearing. The young children were only very rarely pressured or punished, nor were many restraints placed upon them. Having reached the age of five or six, the children were then introduced step by step to household tasks and they were also expected to take care of younger siblings in a nurturing, responsible way.

Tibetan societies, such as Ladakh, have traditionally assigned a relatively high status to women, especially when compared to their lower and more restricted positions in the neighboring societies of Muslim Kashmir and Pakistan, Hindu India, and Confucian China (Gielen, 1985b, 1993). Traditional Ladakh was—and to a much lesser extent still is—a center of fraternal polyandry, a system of marriage in which a wife is married to two or more brothers. Such a system is simply unthinkable in the neighboring Muslim societies, since it assigns to the wife a central if delicate position in the web of family life. Relationships between Ladakh's men and women have always been more relaxed, open, cheerful, flexible, and egalitarian than corresponding relationships in other traditional peasant societies. This is not to say that there exists true equality between Ladakh's men and women, a situation that is, at any rate, unknown in the world of peasantry.

#### Nonviolent Ladakh in the Light of Fromm's Theories

Our results show considerable agreement with Fromm's previously cited generalizations concerning the nature of peaceful, small-scale societies. As predicted by Fromm, we find in Ladakh a minimum of hostility and violence among the people, very few serious crimes, a quiet but persistent disapproval of greed, covetousness, and exploitiveness, little competition and individualism, a good deal of interpersonal trust and cooperation based on synergistic religious sentiments as well as concrete notions of reciprocity, a general prevalence of cheerfulness and good humor, a relative absence of depressive moods, a fairly easy going attitude toward sex (this is more fully discussed in Gielen, 1993), a loving approach to childrearing, and comparatively high levels of equality between the sexes. While Fromm's investigation focused predominantly on nonliterate societies, the present study extends his findings to a semi-literate society with an upper stratum of highly trained monks, government officials, and educators. It should be added that the results of our interviews are in good agreement with the observations of long-term residents of Ladakh including anthropologists (Kaplanian, 1986) and development experts (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). There also exists convincing historical evidence that Ladakh has been an internally peaceful society for many years (Friedl, 1984).

While there is considerable agreement between Fromm's descriptive generalizations and the findings of the present study, this does not mean that Fromm's overall interpretation of anthropological findings is correct. Fromm's work is based on a secondary analysis of observations by Benedict, Briggs, Mead, Montagu, Turnbull, and others, which may be partially invalid (Fox, 1975; Freeman, 1983). Above all, Fromm and the anthropologists just cited do not sufficiently distinguish between surface behavior and the world of inner, invisible impulses, fantasies, preoccupations, and fears. In a given society, very low rates of violent behavior may coexist with a cultural world filled with violent imagery. Modern Japan represents a striking case in point. It has the lowest homicide and assault rates of any industrialized country, but the popular world of Japanese comics (manga) is saturated with sadomasochistic imagery of the most explicit kind.

In Ladakh, the calm, nonviolent world of everyday behavior is accompanied by a religious imagination that emphasizes a central tension between serenity and a kind of "frozen inner terror." The tension is expressed in the contrast between statues of calmly meditating Buddhas and vivid religious paintings filled with monsters, skulls, and corpses. This world of religious-artistic imagination symbolically expresses just those contradictory aspects of recalcitrant human nature which cultural relativists such as Benedict, Montagu, Mead, and socialization

theorists such as Fromm have neglected in their search for unitary but reductionist sociocultural explanations of human behavior. While society exerts a pervasive influence on human nature, so does our evolutionary heritage. Human nature is not "empty" as the cultural relativists would have us implicitly or explicitly believe. In contrast to Benedict, Fromm, Mead, and Montagu, Tibetan Buddhism does assume that greed, hate, envy, jealousy, and so on are inherent in human nature. At the same time it teaches that these tendencies can be channeled and ultimately overcome through the constant practice of compassion, disciplined meditation, and spiritual insight into the "empty" nature of the self. At a more concrete level, religious merit may be acquired through actions such as prayer, circumambulation of sacred places and buildings, giving to the sangha (monks and nuns), acts of charity, saving the lives of animals, and blessings from high ranking lamas. According to Tibetan Buddhism, beneath the magic-like forms of the phenomenal world there is only *tongpanyi*, that is, Emptiness or the Void. The ultimate goal of the human journey through life is the recognition that one's own True Mind, *tongpanyi*, and nirvana are one and the same. This insight, to be sure, is difficult to realize at the experiential level, but once it is achieved, violence and greed vanish—not only in theory but often also in practice. In contrast, modern psychology has been remarkably unsuccessful in reducing violence, greed, and self-centeredness. Why this is so will be discussed in the next sections, which compare the peaceful ethos of Ladakh to the much more violent and individualistic ethos of the United States of which modern psychology is a partial manifestation. In the tradition of cross-cultural psychology, the Buddhist Ethos of Peace is held up as a mirror, in which to see in stark outline the American ethos of expansive individualism. The comparison underlines the potential for violence that has always been inherent in the American ethos, but which in recent decades has manifested itself in especially virulent forms.

#### American Habits of the Heart

As Table 1 makes clear the ethos of Ladakh presents a striking contrast to the ethos of modern America. The watchwords of modern America are competitive, assertive individualism, striving for status, material success, self-chosen achievement goals, and rich experience, a concern for the abstract moral goals of equality and individual freedom in the presence of very high rates of family disorganization, deviance, and crime, an emphasis on self-actualization, self-expression, and self-esteem as the ultimate good, a widespread emphasis on sexuality, rapidly increasing rates of depressive, narcissistic, and other character disorders, and the pervasive presence of capitalistic goals such as consumption and profit seeking. Many of these tendencies in modern America are the outcome of a historical process that in its general outlines was already foreseen 170 years ago by de Tocqueville.

In 1831, the French nobleman, political scientist, historian and politician Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States and soon thereafter wrote *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (1835-1840), one of the most perceptive analyses of American society ever published. In this book, de Tocqueville shows himself impressed above all by the leveling power of equality, a power that "creates opinions, gives birth to new sentiments, founds novel customs, and modifies whatever it does not produce" (de Tocqueville, 1964; p. 3). Among the most important of these ordinary practices of life or "habits of the heart" suggested by conditions of equality is individualism: "...In ages of equality...everyman seeks for his opinions within himself...in the same ages, all his feelings are turned towards himself alone.... Individualism, at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but, in the long run, it attacks and destroys all others, and is at length absorbed in downright selfishness" (de Tocqueville, 1964, p. 173).

In a more recent book: *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) suggest that de Tocqueville's prophecies may have come true in recent years, and that after individualism's long march through America's history it has now grown malignant and self-destructive. They argue their point well, basing their conclusions on interviews with over 200 white middle-class respondents as well as drawing on their wide-ranging readings in sociology, social philosophy, religious studies and history.

*Habits of the Heart* should not be merely taken as one of the many recent books deploring the new "me generation," "the culture of narcissism," "being your own best friend," "looking out for No. 1," and so on. For Bellah et al., individualism does not ordinarily denote mere selfishness. At its best, it may stand for "our highest and noblest aspirations, not only for ourselves, but for those we care about, for our society and for the world." Individualism, then, forms the very core of American identity. Americans cannot give up individualism, since this would lead them to abandon their deepest identity. Yet, at the same time, individualism in recent years has

grown rancid. As the self has grown autonomous and free, seemingly unencumbered by heteronomous obligations and duties, it also has grown empty. It is no wonder that people encounter more and more difficulties in "finding themselves."

The authors of *Habits of the Heart* distinguish between four strands of individualism: Biblical, civic, utilitarian, and expressive individualism. Biblical individualism came to America when the first Puritans landed on its shores, and it celebrates the moral freedom derived from a direct, personal covenant between God and man. Civic individualism may be seen in Jefferson's republican ideal of a self-governing society of relative equals. Citizens participate in the polity because of self-interest and civic virtue, which are seen as being closely intertwined. Utilitarian individualism was made popular by Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and Poor Richard's *Almanack*. Franklin's emphasis on hard work, effectiveness, and rational calculation survives in contemporary cost-benefit analysis, Skinner's behaviorism, social psychological exchange theory, and the cool calculations of the many young men and, nowadays, women who set out every year with the goal of "making it." Expressive individualism holds that each person has a unique inner self, a core of feeling or intuition that should be developed and expressed. Today, humanistic psychology and modern psychotherapy speak the "romantic" language of expressive individualism.

But while the older forms of Biblical and civic individualism connect the self to society, the newer forms of utilitarian and expressive individualism drive a wedge between the self and society. Biblical and civic forms of individualism connect the self to a "community of memory." The self becomes embedded in a network of obligations and interdependent persons who participate in discussion and decision-making against a background of vivid memories of the community's past. Modern expressive individualism merely creates "lifestyle enclaves," groups of people who express their identities through shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities. Members share, for the time being, a common lifestyle. These enclaves, however, do not create true interdependence between their members, nor do they reflect common histories across generations. These enclaves have become the staging ground for a new self and a new, culturally dominant attitude towards life: the therapeutic attitude. The therapeutic attitude both derives from, and drastically redefines, the traditional American individualism. It celebrates a changing, "authentic," rather nebulous inner self that has become the sole arbiter of all values and commitments. Through an act of intuition or cool calculation, the therapeutic self chooses actions and commitments, because they feel good, because they get desired results, or because they increase a person's feelings of self-worth. Conventional moral expectations are now perceived as authoritarian impositions that, because they come from outside the self, are claimed to be irrational and illegitimate. The therapeutic self has grown fluid and provisional, moving in and out of social roles without ever fully identifying with any of them.

To the therapeutic self, self-insight and self-acceptance are crucial yet precarious and commitments are always temporary. Morality has become thoroughly relativistic, though the person must demand honesty from himself/herself and others. Honesty functions as a crucial virtue, because it is needed to distinguish the demands of the subtle, inner voice of the "true self" from the cacophony of other, spurious selves that were externally imposed during the necessary, but deeply suspect process of socialization. Bonds with parents are weakened because the parents are too easily experienced as jailers of the nascent self. Interpersonal relationships rest upon an underlying, temporary social contract that has to be constantly renegotiated as the self changes. This situation destabilizes long-term relationships and undercuts the possibility of a stable family life.

Psychotherapy, with its search for the true self, has become the model for many other social relationships. It is a thoroughly flawed model, speaking the radical language of individualistic self-expression and moral relativism, but failing to ground the self in wider "communities of memory." At the same time and at the societal level, the American community of memory is threatened with fragmentation because the partial voices of ethnic self-assertion undermine a cohesive commitment to the overriding goals of the republic.

#### American Habits of the Heart in Buddhist Perspective

From the Buddhist point of view, many of the individualistic goals propagated in postmodern America and by psychologists serve only to chain people ever more tightly to the revolving Wheel of Life, thereby keeping them in a state of spiritual ignorance, emotional restlessness, self-centeredness, dissatisfaction, and self-induced suffering.

While the idea of nonviolence forms the center of Ladakh's traditional way of life, it has been marginal to the American way of life, which instead emphasizes mastery over nature and energetic competition with others.



While this vision has sent some Americans to the moon, it sends others to their graves and to overflowing prisons. In contrast to Buddhism, which favors quiet contemplation and tries to extinguish the burning fever of the craving for life, the culturally dominant vision in America underlines the desirability of success, rich experience, and an energetically led life. Whereas the Buddhist teachings emphasize an introverted approach to self-mastery hopefully leading to the evaporation of the restless, selfish ego, the American vision stresses self-control as a prerequisite for the extroverted mastery of life tasks and fulfillment of one's goals, needs, and desires.

Americans who are under the "threat of being entirely confined within the solitude of their own hearts" frequently end up in the offices of those reluctant modern soul doctors, the psychologists. Their therapeutic attitude centers the attention of their clients on the vagaries of their personal histories, thereby reinforcing just those aspects of personality, which, according to Buddhism, continue to imprison them in the narrow confines of their own egos.

While Buddhist doctrine has identified greed, hate, aggression, lust, envy, jealousy, pride, and spiritual ignorance as the ultimate sources of human unhappiness, modern American society has been ambivalent about the acceptability of these "mental poisons," frequently rejecting them on the surface, but accepting them in practice. In return, it has paid a high price for this ambivalence. Among all fully industrialized nations, the United States places the greatest emphasis on competitive individualism and individual choice and, consequently, has the weakest family system, the highest rates of homicide, assault, and rape, the most serious drug problem, the highest rate of litigation, and a horrendous problem of child abuse.

Violence has always been close to the center of the American way of life, but in recent decades it has grown malignant because it feeds on the forces set free by the weakening of family life. More and more children grow up in fatherless households and poverty, conditions that invariably lead to high rates of delinquent behavior during adolescence and early adulthood (Bernard, 1993). The United States is the only major country that allows its citizens to buy a wide variety of weapons. It worships the gun, as depicted in numerous movies and TV series. Modern American culture emphasizes self-expression and individual choice to such an extent that competing values of restraint, sobriety, tranquility, and responsibility have lost their guiding force among major segments of the population.

The emphasis on individual choice is just as prevalent among liberal segments of the population as among conservative ones. While there exist, of course, many "softer" areas in American society, the corrosive influences of unchecked individualism have been steadily eating away at the fabric of communal and civilized life. The influences are most visible among the ruins of inner cities where a lack of visible success induces the marginal and the poor to desperate acts of self-destruction and violence against others. The corrosive influences remain more hidden for the middle classes and the wealthy among whom they nevertheless surface in the form of divorce, abandonment of families by fathers, abuse of children and spouses, alcoholism, depression, and narcissistic personality disorders.

## Conclusion

When Benedict published her book, *Patterns of Culture* in 1934, she meant to be scientifically neutral about the basic values of the three societies she described. But this is not what many of her readers concluded because they correctly perceived that Benedict's own value preferences "leaked through" her seemingly objective comparisons. Benedict, as well as many of her readers, preferred the peaceful life style of the Hopis over the power-oriented life style of the Kwakiutl and the fear-driven treachery of the Dobus.

In contrast to Benedict, this author makes no pretense at being value-neutral. In his opinion, the peaceful ethos of the Ladakhis has much to teach to modern Americans whose comparatively violent way of life is morally suspect. The comparison between the Ladakhi and the American ethos suggests that the American ethos is inherently flawed. These flaws cannot be remedied by the currently popular prescriptions of liberal American psychology and social science. More multiculturalism, more freedom of choice for everybody, more autonomy for women, greater freedom to express one's sexual preferences, more tolerance for alternate life styles, greater emphasis on self-esteem and feeling good about oneself, more psychotherapy for law breakers, the confused, and the anxious, and a push for laws augmenting the rights of the individual at the expense of the group. Whatever the moral justifications for these prescriptions, following them will do little to stop the social disorganization and violence-proneness of modern American society—it may well make the situation worse. This is so because the prescriptions themselves reflect the excessive emphasis on freedom of choice and individualism that constitutes

a root cause of social disorganization (Wallach & Wallach, 1983). The prescriptions are part of the problem, not part of the solution. Without being aware of it and without meaning to, psychologists share an indirect responsibility for the bloody tears that rend the fabric of American society. This ironic if deeply disturbing conclusion is bound to displease the many who look to psychology and the social sciences for solutions to pressing social problems; however, the more important question to ask is: Are psychologists willing to confront their complicity in the violent society of today, and will they be able to incorporate lessons learned from peaceful societies, such as Ladakh, in their search for a better tomorrow?

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#### Endnotes

1This chapter compares the ethos of a small, slow changing, traditional, agriculture-based society with that of a large, rapidly changing, modern postindustrial society. It does not discuss the interplay between economic-technological forces and the "superstructure" of belief systems in the two societies. Anthropologists and Marxists frequently emphasize that the belief systems and personality structures of individuals in a given society reflect the adaptation of that society to ecological and economic factors. Such a reductionist argument cannot account for the peaceful ethos of Buddhist Ladakh: In the Suru Valley of Ladakh and in neighboring Baltistan (Pakistan), there live the Baltis who must adapt to the same ecology as the Buddhists of Ladakh. Nevertheless, there exist striking differences in culture, worldview, and psychological make-up between the Shias of Baltistan and the Suru Valley on one hand, and the Buddhists of Ladakh on the other hand. "It is clear to even the casual observer that life sits heavy on the people [of Muslim Kargil in Ladakh]..." (Rizvi, 1989, p. 155). The dour but emotional Shia distrust strangers, see themselves as perennial victims of the outside world, assign an inferior place to women, and preach a puritanical, emotional, often fanatic form of religion which is directed against drinking, dancing, and having fun. All this stands in stark contrast to the cheerful, easygoing tolerance of Buddhist life in Ladakh. The passions of the Shia are more easily aroused than those of the Buddhist Ladakhis, resulting in their greater readiness for violent action. The Baltis were more or less forcibly converted from Buddhism to Islam during the 16th and 17th centuries, suggesting that they may have been similar to the Buddhist Ladakhis prior to that time. They continue to speak a Tibetan language. It would be fascinating to do comparative psychological research in Baltistan and Buddhist Ladakh, since the overall situation resembles that of a natural experiment: Whereas the ecological and early historical circumstances are similar for the two peoples, their modern psychological and cultural adaptations are quite different.

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#### Table 1

Comparison of the Worldviews, Ethos, and Personality Characteristics of Traditional Ladakhis and Modern Liberal Americans

## TRADITIONAL LADAKHIS MODERN LIBERAL AMERICANS

### ULTIMATE MEANING OF LIFE AND ROLE

**OF RELIGION IN PROVIDING MEANING:** Religion universally accepted-- There are no coincidences or chance events; everything is meaningful and ruled by karma-- Life means suffering, but is only a kind of dream-- Death is relative, not final-- Not harming others leads to good reincarnation-- Meaning exists objectively and has been revealed-- "Why?" questions and doubt are rare-- Mystic contemplation leads to ultimate truth beyond all conceptualization, but systematic meditation is only practiced by some religious specialists

Role of religion limited and subject to debate-- death often seen as final tragedy-- meaning of life is subjectively chosen and never final (existentialism)-- doubt frequent and "why?" questions encouraged-- life in this world the only provable reality-- mysticism seen as avoidance of the struggle of life

**NATURE OF MORALITY:** Morality is an objective system of prescriptions revealed to rinpoche, saints, etc.-- It is part of an impersonal system of retribution (karma) and reincarnation and is embedded in religion-- Central emphasis on not causing people and animals to suffer-- Moral relativism, self-consciousness, ideological reflection on ethical systems are rare (the latter is now increasing because of political-religious «competition») Personal choice of competitive values that must be justified to self and others-- morality more or less separate from religion aggressive and sexual feelings, must be channeled constructively but not denied

**GUILT AND SHAME FEELINGS:** Unclear conception of guilt feeling-- Guilt feelings rare or deeply submerged-- Limited self-blame-- Strong feelings of shame and «moral fear» when breaking interpersonal norms or especially religious prescriptions-- Considerable tolerance for other people and worldviews Guilt feelings commonly recognized and often strong-- strong ambivalence about desirability of guilt feelings-- frequent self-blame and blame of others; ambivalence about tolerance

**CONSCIENCE AND SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY:** Unclear or no conception of conscience--Correctly analyzed actions rather than conscience are emphasized-- Strong but not rigid sense of moral responsibility. Inner voice that guides and checks antisocial desires and produces guilt feelings.

**DRIVES:** Expression of drives is muted-- Greed, selfishness, lust, ignorance are considered the basic causes of suffering, leading to bad reincarnation-- Conflict between id and superego fairly low Acquisitiveness, sex, and toughness necessary for personal happiness and self-actualization, although they create intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts; intense conflicts between id and superego

**EMOTIONALITY, ASSERTIVENESS, DEFENSIVENESS:** Generally low levels-- Emphasis on quiet dignity, detachment, serenity, inner quietness, and «emptiness»--Impatience, being high strung, tense, and driven are uncommon--Assertiveness, aggressiveness, impulsivity, inner restlessness, emotional expressivity all considered undesirable and uncommon-- introversion, shyness, timidity fairly common. High levels of emotionality, assertiveness, defensiveness-- emotional expressivity in the service of personal goals is valued

**CONCRETE LIFE GOALS:** Long life, health, reasonable prosperity, happiness, acceptance from and convivial relationships with others Long life, health, monetary success; achievement; good relationships and happy family life

### SYNERGY (MASLOW) AND COMPETITIVENESS:

High level of synergy: altruism leads to merit and better reincarnation (limited by pragmatic concern for immediate self-interests)-- little competitiveness

Low level of synergy-- competition and competitiveness considered very important-- life often seen as approaching zero-sum game

**SELF AND SELF-ESTEEM:** Little focus on self-- self-esteem seen as selfish and undesirable pride-- self embedded in society-- few basic identity conflicts-- limited awareness of inner feelings and inner conflicts-- little awareness of inner personality change

Extreme individualism and emphasis on self's autonomy and self-esteem-- self-esteem precarious, but key to happiness; frequent redefinitions of self accompanied by identity conflicts

### INDIVIDUALISM AND INDIVIDUAL CHOICE:

Not emphasized

Very strongly emphasized

**INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS; ROMANTIC LOVE; DEPENDENCE FEELINGS AND RELATIONSHIP TO AUTHORITY:** Concrete reciprocity and obedience are emphasized-- ambivalence rare or not recognized-- little emphasis on intimacy and romantic love in husband-wife relationships-- dependence on religious leaders easily expressed; non-hostile belief in authority  
Ambivalence in relationships frequent; relationships romanticized with strong emotional expectations that may not be met-- obedience seen as inhibiting self-actualization-- dependence feelings seen as weakness and debilitating-- distrust of authority, very high divorce rates and family instability common

**GENDER ROLES AND DIFFERENCES** Gender roles are seen as part of the natural order-- moderate emphasis on gender differences Gender roles are contested and perceived as societal constructions subject to negotiation and personal choice

**HAPPINESS:**

Frequent, though life is hard; feelings of depression and tragic conceptions of life are uncommon

Rather difficult to achieve; feelings of depression, emptiness, futility rather common against a background of general optimism

**FAITH, TRUST, TRUTHFULNESS:** Very strong faith-- considerable interpersonal trust-- "naive" honesty and "innocence" combined with lack of ability to systematically manipulate others

Variable; faith and trust often uncertain; manipulation of others may be perceived as being necessary

**IDEAL MODEL OF PERFECTION:** Compassionate saint who has conquered his selfish passions (greed, envy, anger, hate, lust) and fears. Such figures are known through hagiographies, Milarepa's biography, jakata stories of the former lives of the Buddha, etc., but perfection is considered unattainable by most

Well adjusted and self-actualized person who leads a full life, achieves much, and is admired by others

**ANOMIE AND DEVIANCE** Very low levels of anomie and deviance Moderate levels of anomie; very high levels of deviance

**PROPENSITY TO VIOLENCE** Gender roles are seen as part of the natural order; moderate emphasis on gender differences Gender roles are contested and perceived as societal constructions subject to negotiation and personal choice



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on violence, and Buddhist responses to violence. Within this Handbook, suicide and euthanasia are discussed in separate chapters. Therefore, their discussion in this chapter will be brief to avoid unnecessary overlap.

Soen was the first Zen Buddhist monk to teach in the United States. Through his disciple, D.T. Suzuki, they helped establish a Western familiarity with Japanese Buddhist traditions. During the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), Soen framed the Buddhist doctrine to articulate violence. More than not, when Western scholars discuss Buddhism and violence, they invoke the Buddhist precept of ahimsa. While scholars commonly translate ahimsa as “non-violence”, a more precise. To the extent that such deracinated expressions of Buddhist ideas are accepted as defining what Buddhism is, it can indeed be surprising to learn that the world’s Buddhists have, both in past and present, engaged in violence and destruction. There is, however, no shortage of historical examples of violence in Buddhist societies. Sri Lanka’s long and tragic civil war (1983-2009), for example, involved a great deal of specifically Buddhist nationalism on the part of a Sinhalese majority resentful of the presence of Tamil Hindus in what the former took to be the last bastion of true Buddhism (the Right after the invasion, the United States abolished two pillars of the Iraqi state – the Baath Party and the military. Amid the political chaos, most Iraqis turned to their ethnic and sectarian identities for survival.<sup>24</sup> The rise of ISIS through radicalization of local Sunnis and the influx of jihadists from neighboring countries and Europe cannot be explained without reference to the chaos created by the occupation of Iraq.

pacism and tolerance. But in several of Asia’s Buddhist-majority nations, monks are inciting bigotry and violence – mostly against Muslims.<sup>44</sup> 34 Anger is a human faculty (together with appetite and reason); thus each human being has a potential to commit violence. Buddhist scripture condemns violence in every form. Ahimsa, a term meaning ‘not to injure’, is a primary virtue in Buddhism. This article discusses Buddhist principles with regard to violence, and also provides certain, historical instances concerning the use of violence by Buddhists, including acts of aggression committed by Buddhists with political and socio-cultural motivations, as well as self-inflicted violence by ascetics or for religious purposes. Despite these historical instances, as far as