Shelter for You Nirvana for Our Sons
Buddhist Belief and Practice in the Sri Lankan Army

Daniel Webster Kent
Silverdale, Washington

B.A., Whitman College, Walla Walla, 1997
M.A., University of Virginia, 2003

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Karen C. Lang _____

Anne M. Blackburn _____

H.L. Seneviratne _____

Paul S. Groner _____

John W. Nemec _____

Abstract

Shelter For You, Nirvana For Our Sons: Buddhist Belief and Practice in the Sri Lankan Army explores the decisions and ethical evaluations made by Sri Lankan Buddhists participating in the country's twenty-five-year civil war. Rather than searching for Buddhist justifications or authorizations of warfare, this dissertation focuses on the experiences of individual Buddhists who participate directly or indirectly in the war effort. This dissertation is organized around three basic questions: 1) Do monks and soldiers believe that negative karma is created when individuals fire their weapons at the enemy? 2) How do monks preach to soldiers who are heading off to the battlefield? 3) How do parents mourn their sons who have died in combat? By questioning how contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists evaluate these difficult ethical decisions, this work demonstrates how the doctrine of karma is used as an interpretive device for understanding actions on the battlefield as well as their consequences for both soldiers and their families.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is dedicated to all of those who have died, been injured or lost a friend or relative in the conflict in Sri Lanka. Over the last twenty six years Sri Lankans of all ethnicities and religions have suffered incredible hardships as the result of a conflict rooted ultimately in hatred, ignorance and desire. Although this work focusses on the experiences of Sinhala-speaking soldiers and Buddhist monks, I do not mean to ignore or trivialize the pain and hardships experienced by Tamils fighting on the other side of the forward defense lines. The Sri Lankan civil war is a tragedy that has affected everyone living on the island. Now, after twenty six years of conflict, an entire generation of youth have matured, knowing nothing but violence and uncertainty. I submit this dissertation with the hope that one day soon, the island and all of its peoples may know peace and prosperity.

Many individuals have helped me during the course of my research and I fear that I cannot possibly list them all here. First, I would like to thank my parents, Graham and Dorothy Kent, who have always supported my decisions even though they still don't quite understand what I have been doing in Asia all this time. Next, I would like to thank Jonathan S. Walters, my teacher and my friend. Without Jon's encouragement, I may never have travelled to the island once known as Serendib. I would also like to thank my dissertation advisor, Karen Lang, who has supported me throughout my graduate school career and, most importantly, made sure that I finished my dissertation. Thanks also to the members of my committee, John Nemec, Paul Groner, and H.L. Seneviratne. I would like to offer special thanks to Anne

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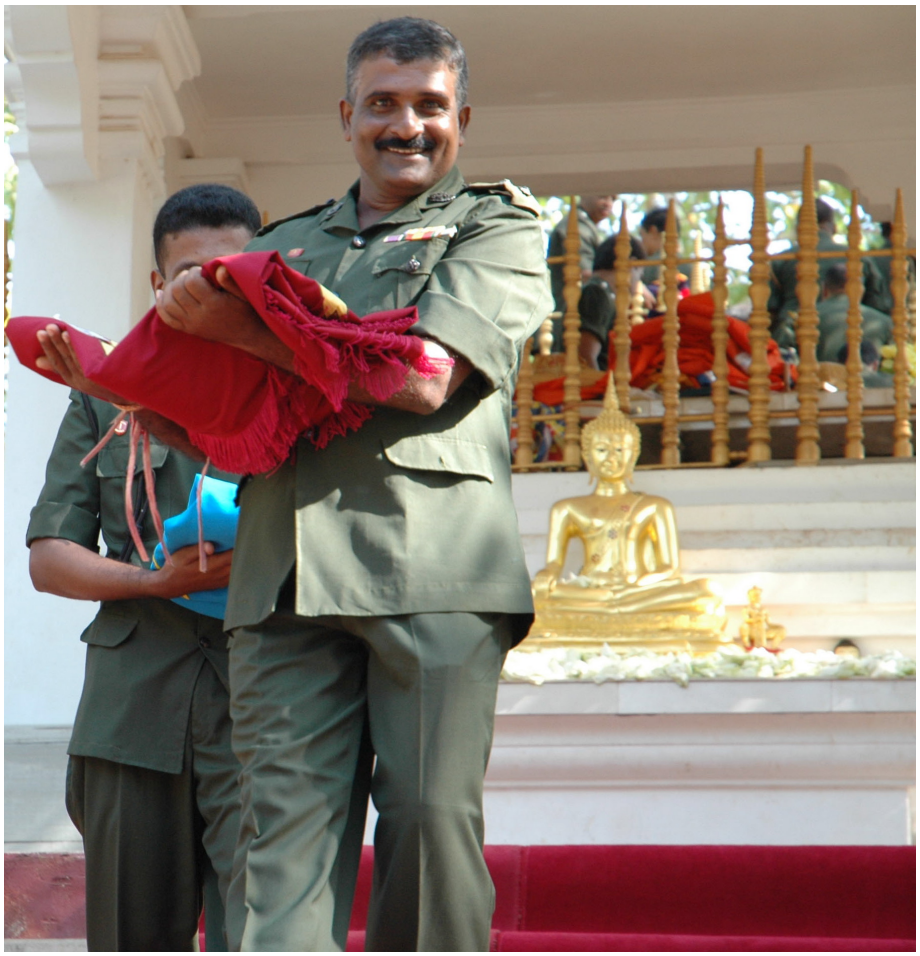
Introduction



> [Y]ou cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written I statements, even though he has spoken or written with perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.
>
> --R.G. Collingwood[1]

In the Yodhājīva Sutta, a warrior approaches the Buddha and asks whether or not it is true that soldiers go to heaven if they die on the battlefield. The Buddha refused to answer this question.[2] Dissatisfied, the warrior presses the Buddha for an answer and the Buddha refuses for a second time. After being asked for a third time, the Buddha responds, telling the warrior that soldiers who die in the midst of battle will fall to a hell called the "realm of those slain in battle" (SN XLII.3).

In contemporary Sri Lanka, monks often find themselves speaking to soldiers and answering their questions. With a large portion of the rural youth of the country fighting in the 25-year-old civil war with the LTTE separatist organization, it is impossible for most monks to avoid interacting with soldiers. Whether blessing young men before they set out for basic training, or preaching at their funerals, monks often find themselves speaking to soldiers and their families. What does a

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[1] Collingwood, R. G.. *An Autobiography*, Oxford University Press, 1978. pg. 31.

2 A note on diacritics: All Sinhala and Pāḷi words, with the exception of proper names, are spelled according to standard Sanskrit conventions. Sinhala proper names appear according to the individual spellings, if known, adopted by the informants; eg. Obeyesekere rather than Obeyasekara.

monk say to soldiers on these occasions? Do they tell them that they are facing rebirth in a hell realm or do they elect to remain silent on this topic?

This dissertation is about questions and answers. It is about the questions asked by scholars approaching the topic of Buddhist involvement in war. It is about the questions asked by Sri Lankan Buddhists participating directly or indirectly in the country's 25 year-old civil war. Finally, it is about the questions that I asked my informants over the course of four years of field work conducted at and around Sri Lankan army bases.

The guiding question behind the vast majority of studies of Buddhism and war is "how can/does Buddhism justify, legitimate or otherwise allow war?" Scholars have asked this question, attempting to resolve the perceived conflict between the first precept against killing and the contemporary reality of active Buddhist participation in warfare. Recent scholarship guided by this question has, for the most part, been quite fruitful, challenging essentialized presentations of Buddhism as a religion of absolute pacifism with more nuanced explorations of Buddhists making the decision to engage in warfare.

Justification, however, is not the concern of the warrior in the *Yodhājīva Sutta*, nor is it the primary concern of contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists participating in the war. When asked of their concerns about war, soldiers and monks spoke in terms of karma and intentionality rather than in terms of justice. After speaking with several monks and soldiers at the beginning of my research, I found that one of the most common questions asked by soldiers of monks is: "Will I receive negative karma if I kill the enemy on the battlefield?" During sermons to soldiers, monks respond to this implicit question, easing their concerns and attempting to instill in

them a positive state of mind that, they hope, will protect them and reduce the amount of negative karma that they create in the course of their duty. Whether a war is justified or not, a Buddhist soldier on the battlefield is left with his own individual intentions, actions and the results of those actions.

How do Buddhist participants in war understand their actions? Scholars have searched to discover Buddhist justifications of war and explain how followers of a religion that most view as entirely pacifist can fight in an ethnic conflict. While some of their conclusions succeed in giving us insight into how contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists legitimate the decision to go to war, they do little to explain the consequences of this decision for individual Buddhists. Whether a war is justified or not, a Buddhist soldier on the battlefield is left with his own individual intentions, actions and the results of those actions.

I first conceived of this project while sitting in on a course on religion in the American Civil War. Hearing about how Union and Confederate chaplains interpreted the war in religious terms, I thought immediately of Sri Lanka's civil war, wondering how Sri Lankan Buddhists interpreted the conflict and looked after the spiritual welfare of soldiers. Coming from a military family myself, I was intrigued by the possibility of exploring the religious worlds of Buddhist soldiers and their families.

This dissertation is based upon field work conducted between the years of 2004 and 2007. The field work consisted primarily of the observation of religious ceremonies sponsored by the army and numerous interviews with soldiers, their families and the Buddhist monks who minister to them. The majority of these interviews and religious ceremonies were recorded on a handheld recording device

and then translated in their entirety with the assistance of my research assistant T.M. Jayatillake. While this approach was tedious at times, it has, I hope, helped me to present a level of detail absent from most work on this topic.

In terms of focus, this work spotlights those who participate most directly in the conflict, namely soldiers, their families and the monks who minister to them. Although this dissertation will address issues of violence in general, that is not its primary concern. On the contrary, it focusses on the interpretive strategies employed by soldiers, monks and families during war. At the outset of my research, I decided to focus on the individuals whose voices are not normally heard, namely the soldiers fighting the war and the monks who advise them. Rather than scouring newspaper articles for public statements on the war by politicians and elite monks, I visited army camps, small temples and the homes of soldiers in order to learn about war and religion within the context of a lived reality.

In contrast to such as Obeyesekere, Bartholomeusz, Harris, Tambiah, and Seneviratne, who concentrate upon statements made be monastic elites or politicians, I deliberately selected anonymous soldiers as well as monks who do not live in the national spotlight. While, I did conduct a few interviews with more prominent politically-active monks, namely Maduluwawe Sobhita, the majority of my interviews are with average monks, who deal frequently with military personnel.

As my fieldwork was conducted over a period of four years, my interviews reflect changing moods and attitudes towards the war in general. When I began this project in 2004, the country was still full of hope going into the second year of a ceasefire. As I completed fieldwork in 2007, however, the ceasefire was in tatters and the army had returned to full scale warfare. At the beginning of my work, I was

unable to find any funerals of soldiers to attend. Shortly after I left, however, military offensives and LTTE surprise attacks have produced a steady stream of bodies which demand interpretation by their families.

While scholars of Buddhism have been concerned with Buddhist legitimation of violence, what are the concerns of the soldiers who deal directly with life or death decisions and their consequences? How do monks, who often have long-standing personal relationships with the young soldiers advise them as they go off to battle? This dissertation attempts one such shift of questioning by approaching the conflict not in terms of objective justification, but in terms of individual karma. Not only is this approach more in keeping with the concerns of Buddhist doctrine, but it is also truer to the concerns of monks soldiers and their families.

In the first chapter, I review contemporary scholarship on the topic of Buddhist participation in war and argue that the majority of scholarship has been shaped by the perceived tension between Buddhism and violence of any kind. The question "How can non-violent Buddhists participate in war[?]" has shaped scholarship, obscuring other lines of questioning. While this line of questioning has led to a reconsideration of essentialized visions of Buddhism as a "religion of peace," it has, for the most part, ignored the voices of Buddhists actually participating in conflict.

The second chapter of this dissertation, discusses the different responses that I received to the question: "When a soldier fires his weapon at the enemy, does a negative karma occur?" Based on interviews with over one hundred SLA soldiers and the monks who counsel them, this chapter explores war at the level of individual

action.[3] Do justifications of the war on the whole affect the karma produced by the actions of the soldiers? What kinds of actions produce negative karma and what are the short term and long term results of those actions? To my surprise, I discovered that there was by no means a consensus response to my questions. Indeed, there is real debate over whether soldiers create negative karma through their actions. All of the arguments that I encountered, however, were based on different understandings of karma and intention, not justice.

Chapter three will illustrate the relationship between soldiers and the Buddhist clergy, focusing on the sermons monks deliver to soldiers. The question underlying this chapter is: "What are your goals when you preach to soldiers going to the battlefield?" By focussing on goals, this chapter explores the ways in which preachers use their words to act upon their audiences. Rather than searching sermons for justifications of war or viewing sermons as a transparent indication of Buddhist attitudes towards war, I examine sermons as complex actions meant to have effects upon its audience. I argue that most preachers attempt to protect soldiers during battle by shaping their intentions. A soldier who goes to battle full of hatred, desire and delusion, they argue will be a great danger both to himself and to others. By shaping the intentions of soldiers, many preachers hope to minimize unwholesome actions on the battlefield and maximize the welfare of the soldiers.

The fourth and final chapter will deal with the inevitable consequence of war: death. This chapter is the result of a line of questioning asked of monks and the parents of soldiers killed in battle. How is the death of a soldier differentiated from

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[3] SLA is the accepted acronym for the Sri Lankan Army. It refers to the army of the Sri Lankan government.

other deaths? How do monks help families with the mourning process? What practices do families employ to remember and assist the dead? How does the military as an organization memorialize the dead? According to traditional Sinhala Buddhist beliefs, an individual who dies a violent death at young age will very likely be reborn in a state of suffering. In this chapter, I argue that monks and the families of dead soldiers supplement Buddhist interpretations of the deaths of young soldiers with military symbols and rhetoric in order to transform these inauspicious and untimely deaths (*akāla maraṇa*), into selfless and heroic ones.

Each of these chapters represents a shift in questioning. Rather than looking at religion for the causes or justifications, I examine how those caught up in conflict see themselves and their actions in religious terms. Instead of viewing sermons to soldiers and their families as sources of "Buddhist" understandings of war, I analyze them as performances meant to have particular effects. Rather than viewing the ubiquitous memorialization practices performed for fallen soldiers as simply evidence of the increased militarization of Sri Lankan society, I explore the religious problems that arise when a soldier is killed and demonstrate how these memorials attempt to solve them. By moving away from the perceived conflicts between categories and focussing instead upon the concerns of soldiers participating directly in the war as well as the monks who support them, this work takes Buddhist warfare for granted and delves into the interpretive strategies and practices employed by Buddhists engaged in war. Buddhists are fighting whether Buddhism justifies war or not. This dissertation will explore that reality.

Chapter 1

Reconsidering Buddhist Just War

> We who strike the enemy where his heart beats have been slandered as "baby-killers" and "murders of women." . . .. You and I, Mother, have discussed this subject, and I know you understand what I say. My men are brave and honorable. Their cause is holy, so how can they sin while doing their duty? If what we do is frightful, then may frightfulness be Germany's salvation.
>
> ----Captain Peter Strasser, head of Germany's World War I airship division, in a letter quoted by Gwynne Dyer in her book War

> According to the Buddhist position, all wars are fought within the hearts of people….There are no conflicts where there is no greed, hatred and ignorance. No matter how terrible the reality of a war may be, every single war has one of these unwholesome roots at its core.
>
> ----Maduluwawe Sobhita

Captain Kanishka walks along the shore of the ancient reservoir that abuts the backside of the 6th Sri Lankan Light Infantry (SLLI) headquarters in Mihintale, Sri Lanka.[4] Kanishka is a jovial man, whose dark, pockmarked face would seem fierce if he didn't always have a smile on it. A casual observer might miss the slight limp in Kanishka's left leg, a reminder of the .50 caliber machine gun round that tore through his left thigh in the attack on Jaffna in 1995. Kanishka was promoted to Captain recently and is proud of the three stars on his shoulder. At 38 years old, he is responsible for this small army camp and its 85 soldiers.

Kanishka is a Sinhala Buddhist. As a teenager after graduating from secondary school, he studied for two years at a *pirivena*, a Buddhist school attended primarily by young monks and the children of particularly pious parents. In 1986,

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[4] While it is officially known as the SLLI, most of its members still refer to the Sri Lankan Light Infantry by its old title, CLI or "Ceylon Light Infantry."

three years after Sri Lanka's civil war began with the bodies of thirteen Sinhala soldiers and the flames of anti-Tamil riots in Colombo, Kanishka joined the army. Kanishka says that his goal in life has always been to do no harm. He asserts:

> During this life, I have never wronged anyone. That is why I have the strong belief that I will not be killed by an enemy. That is my strongest belief. I try to cultivate this among the boys in my platoon. If you do something wrong, you will reap the result.[5]

Kanishka's statements may sound strange to a student of Buddhism. How can a soldier, whose job necessitates the taking of life, possibly believe that he has never harmed anyone?

Kanishka admits that he has probably killed many LTTE soldiers over the course of his twenty years in the army. On one occasion he remembers putting an enemy soldier, a young girl armed with an T-56 assault rifle, in the sights of his rifle, pulling the trigger and watching her fall to the ground. According to most doctrinal and folk articulations of karma, this action is a *pāpakamma* and will have a negative effect.[6] Captain Kanishka identified a human being, took aim, pulled the trigger, hit his target and literally rejoiced as his attacker fell to the ground. "How did you feel when you saw her fall[?]," I asked. "I felt victorious!" Kanishka responded honestly.[7]

While the camp once served as a transfer center, housing soldiers temporarily on their way up to postings on the front lines in the north of the island, it has been transformed over the past five years into a recreational facility. Today, enlisted men

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[5] Interview with Captain Kanishka on November 8, 2005 at 5th SLLI regimental headquarters near Mihintale.

[6] *Pāpakamma* literally means "negative action." It is the opposite of *puññakamma*, "positive action."

[7] Ibid.

and officers can rent rooms for the night and enjoy the scenery and wildlife surrounding the reservoir. The majority of the soldiers stationed at Mahākanadarāva have experienced battle. Indeed, of the sixty soldiers that I spoke with on the base, forty six had been injured on the battlefield. During the day, soldiers limp around the grounds of the camp, cutting grass, farming vegetables and tending the many animals that are kept in the camp's zoo.

The 6th SLLI camp proved to be the perfect research location. First of all, the 6th SLLI camp is not a busy place. The soldiers, stationed there to recuperate from their injuries, have the time and freedom to speak with me. Second of all, almost all of the soldiers stationed there have experienced combat and most have been injured. When they speak about battle they do so from a position of experience. Finally, the camp and its soldiers are established firmly in the religious environment of Mahākanadarāva, the small suburb of Mihintale located on the Mahākanadarāva reservoir.

There are two temples near the army camp and Kanishka visits one or the other of them almost every evening. He enjoys drinking tea with the head monks, Ratanavaṃsa and Ānandavaṃsa and he frequently organizes work parties of soldiers to clean the temples' grounds or repair their buildings. Kanishka has assigned one soldier to paint murals inside the image house of Ānandavaṃsa's temple and has assigned a group of soldiers to build a new building for a Buddhist sunday school (*daham pāsal*) at Ratanavaṃsa's temple. In addition, Kanishka sends food from the camp kitchen to the monks several times a week.

My research assistant, Tilak, and I are sharing the camp's "Holiday Cabin", located on the bank of the reservoir. Peacocks patrol the area, attempting to impress

nearby Peahens with their plumage. Two soldiers, armed with T-56 assault rifles, man the small sand bag bunker to the left of the cabin twenty four hours a day. Guard duty here, however, is a largely ceremonial duty and the soldiers spend the long hours listening to the radio and, recently, speaking to the strange American who keeps asking questions about Buddhism.

* * *

The wave of anti-Tamil violence that swept through the island of Sri Lanka in July of 1983 shook the foundations of Sri Lankan society. Known as "Black July" this event challenged scholars to explain how such a thing could possibly happen in Sri Lanka. K.M. DeSilva articulates this dilemma, asking: "…how the model colony of orderly, peaceful transition to independence became an exemplar of periodic outbursts of violent ethnic conflict…[?]" (DeSilva 6). Immediately after independence Sri Lanka had been viewed as an example for other former colonies to follow. The violence of 1983, however, caused a re-evaluation across all fields of study as scholars began to ask why, how, and when Sri Lanka was transformed from model colony into fractured one.

Over the course of my relationship with Sri Lanka, I have watched the casualty numbers rise every year. In 1996, when I first visited the island, the Associated Press ended every article on Sri Lanka with a reminder that 50,000 people had been killed during its thirteen year-long civil war. Today, in 2008, the BBC Sinhala news website states that 70,000 people have been killed and over a million displaced by the, now, twenty-five year-old civil war. Over 5000 soldiers and

civilians have been killed in the last two years alone after a three-year ceasefire agreement fell apart.

While scholars from all disciplines rushed into the discursive space ripped open by Black July, anthropologists and scholars of religion turned their collective gaze on religion in general and Buddhism in particular. Less than a year after the riots, Gananath Obeyesekere writes: "What then is the background to this violence, unprecedented in the history of a country designated by the people themselves as *dhamma dipa*, 'the land of the Buddha's dharma', a doctrine of non-violence and compassion? I am a Sinhalese and a Buddhist and this is the troubling question that I ask myself"(Obeyesekere 1984, 154). Stanley Tambiah echoes Obeyesekere, asking: "If Buddhism preaches non-violence, why is there so much political violence in Sri Lanka today[?]"(Tambiah 1986, 1). Finally, Ananda Wikremeratne expresses his own remorse, writing "Isn't it a shame…that all this violence should take place in Sri Lanka? After all, Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. How can Buddhists resort to violence[?]" (Wickremeratne 1995, xx).

As Buddhist soldiers rushed off to fight and die on behalf of their *raṭa*, *jātiya* and *āgama*, country, race and religion, scholars were forced to re-examine their assumptions about Buddhism as a religion of non-violence. Confronted with this challenge to the integrity of Buddhism, scholars began posing solutions in order to reconcile the paradox that they perceived Buddhist violence to be. The first step towards reconciliation was the separation of Buddhism the religion from Buddhists who adopt violent means. In 1993, Gananath Obeysekere questioned the Buddhist identity of those who advocated violence, writing: "To say that the killing of one's enemy is justified is a perversion of Buddhism, and those who condone such acts

have rejected their Buddhist heritage…"(Obeyesekere 1993, 158). By condemning those who made the decision to go to war, Obeyesekere shifted the focus away from Buddhism to the Buddhists themselves, preserving Buddhism as a tradition of absolute non-violence, while questioning the legitimacy of contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists.

This assertion that Buddhism is irreconcilable with warfare of any kind has been made by many scholars, supported by verses from the Pali canon. One of the first Buddhist pronouncements on just-war theory comes from Walpola Rahula's 1959 classic, *What the Buddha Taught*. Implying Buddhism's superiority over Christianity, Rahula writes:

> It is too well known to be repeated here that Buddhism advocates and preaches non-violence and peace as its universal message, and does not approve of any kind of violence or destruction of life. According to Buddhism there is nothing that can be called a 'just war'—which is only a false term coined and put into circulation to justify and excuse hatred, cruelty, violence and massacre. Who decides what is just or unjust? The mighty and the victorious are 'just', and the weak and the defeated are 'unjust'. Our war is always 'just', and your war is always 'unjust'. Buddhism does not accept this position (Rahula 1974, 84).

Rahula's words, written fifteen years after the end of World War II and twenty-four years before the official beginning of Sri Lanka's civil war, deny the possibility of a just war and define Buddhism as a religion of pacifism. Forty-five years later, the scholar monk, Deegalle Mahinda echoed Rahula's words, writing:

> Violence, no matter in what form it is manifested, has to be met with non-violent measures. Solutions to conflict should be found only through non-violent means. Violence cannot solve problems. Only non-violence brings peace (Deegalle 2004, 130).

It is hard to find fault with Rahula and Deegalle's statements. Indeed, one need not

look far for passages in the Pāli canon on the consequences of harming others. The most famous of these being the fifth verse of the *Dhammapada*, "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.[8]" (Dp I.5. Thanissaro trans.). The 130th verse of the *Dhammapada* takes on an imperative voice, advising the reader: "All tremble at the rod, all hold their life dear. Drawing the parallel to yourself, neither kill nor get others to kill.[9] (Dp X.2, Thanissaro trans.). The following verse then articulates the consequences of ignoring this suggestion: "Whoever takes a rod to harm living beings desiring ease, when he himself is looking for ease, will meet with no ease after death (Dp X.3, Thanissaro trans.).[10] Scholarship on Buddhism and war has focussed almost exclusively on this perceived dichotomy between the ideals of non-violence recorded in the Pāli canon and the violent behavior of living Buddhists.

This separation of the actions of Buddhists from Buddhism as a religion formed the basis of historical inquiries into the problem of Buddhist violence. The question driving scholarship became: "when did Buddhism transform from a religion of peace to a nationalist religion that legitimated ethnic war?" Scholars of Sri Lankan religion have put a great deal of abstract labor into reconciling the beliefs and practices of Sri Lankan Buddhists with Buddhism with a capital 'B.' Describing how Victorian scholars dealt with the disjuncture that they perceived between Buddhism as a philosophy and the beliefs and practices of living breathing Buddhists, Phillip Almond writes:

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8 *Na hi verena verāni sammantīdha kudācanaṃ. Averena ca sammanti esa dhammo sanantano.*

9 *Sabbe tasanti daṇaḍassa sabbesaṃ jīvitaṃ piyaṃ. Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye.*

10 *Sukhakāmāni bhūtāni yodaṇḍena vihiṃsati. Attano sukhamesāno pecca so na labhate sukhaṃ.*

> Defined, classified and understood as a textual object, its contemporary manifestations were seen in light of this, as more or less adequate representations, reflections, images of it, but no longer the thing itself (Almond 25).

Sinhala Buddhism was conceived as one of these representations or reflections of the pure textual tradition**.** The category serves an important descriptive purpose, differentiating the Sri Lankan tradition from the Thai, Khmer and Chinese Buddhist tradition. Despite its obvious utility, however, this category has contributed to the confusion apparent in the contemporary discussion of Buddhist practice during the civil war.

The first serious discussion of Buddhism and war is Paul Demiéville's 1957 article, "*Le Bouddhisme et la Guerre*." A response to an article on Japanese warrior monks, or *sōhei*, Demiéville discusses the doctrinal ramifications of Buddhist participation in war. He writes:

> Is Buddhism's militarization just a phenomenon found in Japan, or do we see other examples in the general history of Buddhism? How was it explained? This departure from a doctrine whose main cardinal precept is to refrain absolutely from killing any living being? What might the social, economic and political motives of this phenomenon have been? What logic did the guilty parties use to justify ideologically their deviation from the proscribed doctrine? (Demiéville, 347).[11]

Demiéville's work is founded upon the assumption that there is a contradiction between Buddhism and warfare that must be resolved. He asserts that "Not killing is a characteristic so anchored in Buddhism that it is practically considered a custom" (ibid.). Beginning with this assumption, Demiéville sets out to find the social, economic and political causes of this deviation from doctrine.

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[11] Translation by Michael Jerryson in *Buddhist Warfare*, Michael Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer eds. Forthcoming Oxford University Press.

This assumed contradiction between violent activity and Buddhist doctrine has served as the basis of all subsequent scholarship on Buddhism and war. In his conclusion to *Zen at War*, his 1997 study of Japanese Buddhist participation in World War II, Brian Victoria writes:

> Where and when did these adaptations begin? Were they unique to Japan, or did they have antecedents that can be traced back to China or even India itself? Were these adaptations unique either to Zen or to Mahayana Buddhism in general, or are there parallels in the history of the Theravada Buddhism as well? And how do these later adaptations compare with the original teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, assuming that it is possible to know what his teachings were (Victoria, 193).

Victoria, like Demiéville before him, draws a distinction between the original teachings of Buddhism, which are identified with pacifism, and historical accretions, which allow for a departure from normative doctrine. The primary assumption underlying this work is that Buddhism is a religion of peace and that Buddhist participation in warfare represents a transformation of its teachings by historical exigencies.

Lay and monastic scholars have cited these and a host of other passages when arguing for a Buddhist position of absolute pacifism. While normative statements by monks supported by canonical passages serve as an effective (and necessary) case against violence and war, they leave very little space for understanding how Sri Lankan Buddhists participate in and deal with the present reality of war. Is there a way to reconcile this apparent paradox? Is there a way to understand Buddhists who decide to go to war without condemning them for violating their Buddhist heritage? How can monks and some scholars eliminate the possibility for just-war without condemning soldiers for engaging in war and in some cases encouraging them to go forth and do their duty?

The most commonly cited story of Buddhist warfare and its consequence comes from the Mahāvamsa, the 5th Century CE Pāli chronicle. In the 2nd Century BCE, King Duṭugämuṇu is said to have lead his armies carrying a spear decorated with a relic of the Buddha to victory over over Eḷāra, a South Indian king who ruled the Lankan kingdom of Anurādhapura for forty-four years. After establishing himself as a ruler, Duṭugämuṇu, like the Mauryan King Aśoka before him, was plagued with guilt after killing so many people. Eight *arahats* flew in from Piyaṇgudīpa and soothed the king by explaining that he was only guilty of killing one and a half human beings: one who had taken the five precepts and one who had taken refuge in the triple gem.[12] According to the Mahāvaṃsa account, after his death, Duṭugämuṇu is reborn in heaven to await rebirth as the chief disciple of the future Buddha Metteya. Furthermore, he is said to have explained his motives, declaring, "Not for the joy of sovereignty is this toil of mine, my striving (has been) ever to establish the doctrine of the Sambuddha.[13]" In other words, according to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, Duṭugämuṇu went to war not for personal glory, but for the sake of the Buddhist

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[12] Mhv. XXV vv. 103-111. The full episode is recorded as follows: "Sitting then on the terrace of the royal palace, adorned, lighted with fragrant lamps and filled with many a perfume, magnificent with nymphs in the guise of dancing-girls, while he rested on his soft and fair couch, covered with costly draperies, he, looking back upon his glorious victory, great though it was, knew no joy, remembering that thereby was wrought the destruction of millions (of beings). When the arahants in Piyangudipa knew his thought they sent eight arahants to comfort the king. And they, coming in the middle watch of the night, alighted at the palace-gate. Making known that they were come thither through the air they mounted to the terrace of the palace. The great king greeted them, and when he had invited them to be seated and had done them reverence in many ways he asked the reason of their coming. `We are sent by the brotherhood at Piyangudipa to comfort thee, O lord of men.' And thereon the king said again to them: `How shall there be any comfort for me, O venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a great host numbering millions?' From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings have been slain here by thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto the (three) refuges, the other had taken on himself the five precepts Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from thy heart, O ruler of men!"'

[13] *Rajjasukhāya vāyāmo nā'yaṃ mama kadācipi; Sambuddhasāsanasseva ṭhapanāya ayaṃ mama.*

religion.

This story of genocide-forgiven has long troubled scholars of Sri Lankan Buddhism. In his 1956 *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Walpola Rahula calls this episode a blatant distortion of Buddhist teachings, writing: “The Mahāvaṃsa clearly states that the above advice was given by eight arahants. But it is absolutely against the spirit of the Buddha’s teaching. Destruction of life, in any form, for any purpose, even for the establishment, protection or propagation of Buddhism, can never be justified according to the teaching of the Buddha” (Rahula 1966, 228).[14]

In a more recent article, Deegalle Mahinda takes a similarly hard line stance on the Duṭugämuṇu episode, writing: "Examining a pervasive myth used for violence, we perceive that the position of the Pāli Chronicles, The Mahāvamsa, is rather contradictory to the fundamental Buddhist teachings of the Pāli Canon." Like Rahula before him, Mahinda sees the Duṭugämuṇu episode as a mistake. He writes:

> Justifying that killing Tamils during the war is not a *pāpa* (i.e. sin, evil) is a grave mistake even if it was used in the Mahāvamsa as a means to an end. Such violations of the tolerant sensibilities found within post-canonical Pāli Chronicles cannot be justified since Buddhist scriptures do not maintain that the severity of one's negative acts varies depending on one's caste, race or ethnic group (Deegalle 126).

Confronted with this troublesome episode in the Mahāvaṃsa, Rahula and Mahinda simply discard it as an aberration among Buddhist literature.

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[14] Despite his rejection of Buddhist support for this action, Rahula defines this moment as the birth of Sinhala nationalism. He summarizes the entire episode, writing: “The entire Sinhalese race was united under the banner of the young Gāmaṇī. This was the beginning of nationalism among the Sinhalese. It was a new race with healthy young blood, organized under the new order of Buddhism. A kind of religio-nationalism, which almost amounted to fanaticism, roused the whole Sinhalese people. A non-Buddhist was not regarded as a human being. Evidently, all Sinhalese without exception were Buddhists.” (Rahula 1966, 79)

While the Mahāvaṃsa account of the arahants advice to King Duṭugämuṇu has inspired much consternation among Buddhist scholars, it has also served as the starting point for serious inquiries into the Buddhist warfare. Writing in 1978, five years before the start of the Sri Lankan civil war, Alice Greenwald was also troubled by this episode. She writes:

> This study will explore how historiography both mediates and justifies the contradiction inherent in a Buddhist king who would go so far as to place a relic of the Buddha in his battle lance and call for a company of 500 monks to escort his troops to war (Greenwald, 13).

Much like Rahula and Mahinda, Greenwald draws a distinction between the Mahāvaṃsa account of Duṭugämuṇu and an imagined great tradition of Buddhism. In order to deal with the apparent contradiction, Greenwald distinguished the purposes of the Mahāvamsa from those of the Pāli canon. She explains, writing, “These are charters specifically intended to establish and affirm Sinhalese religio-national consciousness. The actualization of orthodoxy is thus of far less significance than the construct of a radically nationalistic sentiment rooted in historiographically predicated sacred sanctions" (Greenwald, 30). Greenwald argues that the author of the Mahāvaṃsa was not composing a text affirming Buddhist teachings, but was writing a charter for the Sinhala nation. The goal of the writers was not to point out a loophole in karmic law, but to establish Duṭugämuṇu an ideal Buddhist king who establishes an orderly Buddhist state (Greenwald, 20).

Taking his lead from an earlier article by Gananath Obeyesekere, A Meditation on Conscience, Steven Berkwitz further nuances the account of this incident by comparing the Mahāvamsa version of the story with the Thupavamsa account. Berkwitz argues that rather than legitimizing “a particularly violent

expression of kingship or ethnic nationalism" the Thupavaṃsa account "appears to promote an ethical debate of conscience." The text doesn't excuse the king or justify war in any way, but reassures him that the merit he's accumulated in past births is so great that his rebirth as a disciple of Maitreya can't be done by his actions (Berkwitz 2004, 79). Berkwitz concludes that the Sinhala Thūpavaṃsa "affirms that the king is akin to a bodhisattva and that significant amounts of merit can cancel out the effects of even the most unwholesome activity" (Ibid.). Berkwitz, therefore, stresses that the Thupavaṃsa is not meant to justify war, but to illustrate the power of Duṭugämuṇu's past merit.

In a recent article, Rupert Gethin takes a different approach, arguing that canonical texts do indeed support the statements of the arahants forgiving king Duṭugämuṇu's actions. Gethin writes: "It is significant that the text falls short of explicitly claiming that in being the cause of the slaughter of millions of men Duṭṭhagāmaṇi has performed no unwholesome *kamma*. What the arahats say is that his actions need not be an obstacle to rebirth in a heaven realm. Such a statement has a scriptural basis in, for example, the Mahākammavibhaṅga Sutta, which points out that someone who kills living beings need not in all circumstances be reborn in a hell realm, but may even be reborn in a heaven realm (M III 209). Moreover, according to the systematic analysis of the act of killing in the Pali commentaries, a victim's lack of virtuous qualities is a factor that diminishes the weight of the always unwholesome act of killing"(Gethin 2006, 77). Pointing out that the arahants never denied the negative karma produced by the king's actions, Gethin demonstrates how Theravāda doctrine does not rule out rebirth in a heavenly realm because of negative actions (Ibid.)

Citing the work of Hermann Kulke, Gethin argues further that the Duṭugämuṇu episode must be understood in terms of the sectarian struggle between the Mahāvihāra and the Abhayagiri monastic complexes taking place at the time of the Mahāvaṃsa's writing.[15] Gethin writes that In the face of extreme persecution at the hands of the king, Mahāsena, Mahānāma, the author of the Mahāvamsa, may have been attempting in his text to rehabilitate the image of Duṭugämuṇu, the great patron of his Mahāvihāra temple complex (Gethin 2006, 77).

While most scholarship has focussed on this assumed disjunct between Buddhism and war, over the last ten years scholars have begun to create new discursive space for understanding Buddhist warfare. In an article published in 1999, Lambert Schmithausen scours the Pāli canon, commentaries, *vaṃsa* literature, as well as some Mahāyana texts in order to discover: 1) the explicitness of the sources regarding the applicability of the norm of not killing to war; 2) the tension between values and norms on the one hand, and, on the other, the constraints of ordinary life or worldly aims leading to the non-observation of the norm against killing; 3) attempts to harmonize politics and ethics, i.e., to take recourse to force and even war while at the same time observing the norm or not killing; 4) explicit attempts to qualify or relativize the norm (Schmithausen, 46). Addressing the first point, Schmithausen cites the episode from the Yodhājīva Sutta cited above, in which a soldier questions the Buddha about death on the battlefield. Schmithausen summarizes it, writing:

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[15] Kulke, Hermann. 2000. Sectarian Politics and Historiography in Early Sri Lanka: Wilhelm Geiger's Studies on the Chronicles of Sri Lanka in the Light of Recent Research. In *Wilhelm Geiger and the Study of History and Culture of Sri Lanka*, edited by U. a. T. Everding, Asanga. Colombo: Goethe Institute & Post Graduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies.

> This text, thus, unambiguously applies the precept not to kill to participation in war, stating as it does that not only actual killing but even the mere intention to do so, or the wish that the enemies be killed, is bad karma (*dukkaṭa*). Further, these sermons do not confine their judgement to offensive war only but rather suggest its applicability to any war, including defensive war (Ibid., 48).

From this text, Schmithausen concludes that the laws of karma are in effect no matter what the causes of the war. Whether a soldier is in an invading army or taking up a defensive position, he or she will be culpable for acts of killing. Despite the karmic consequences of killing faced by the individual soldiers, however, Schmithausen points out that the Buddha "...does not declare offensive war, let alone *any* war to be immoral" (Schmithausen, 50).[16] Explaining this withdrawn attitude, Schmithausen writes: “The Buddha's main aim in any case was not social or political change but the spiritual self-perfection of individuals , and it was for this purpose that he founded the Order” (Schmithausen, 50).

Schimithausen’s work serves as a good starting point for the study of Buddhists engaged in warfare. In addition to his useful review of pertinent canonical material, he reminds us that: "[N]orms are not necessarily invalidated by the fact that they are occasionally or even constantly violated by certain individuals or groups" (Ibid. 52). He makes the point that while a Buddhist might engage in killing against the advice of the first precept, that does not mean that the first precept is invalid nor that killing invalidates one’s Buddhist identity.

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[16] I am not sure if the word 'immoral' here is useful. The Buddha did not pass judgement on actions, rather he commented on them. There is a difference between saying that an action is immoral and that an action has negative consequences. The sentence 'this action is immoral' is equational and absolute. The grammar has defined the action as something that never changes (at least within the sentence.) The sentence 'this action leads to bad effects,' on the other hand, contains a verb and is thus active. The action itself is not defined as immoral, rather it moves or pushes one in an unwholesome direction.

In a paper presented at the 2003 conference on Buddhism and War at Bath Spa in England, P.D. Premasiri agrees with Schmithausen, arguing that the Buddhist path has little to do with warfare. According to Premasiri's interpretation, the Buddhist path transcends war, neither condoning nor rejecting it and while the Pali canon explains the negative effects of war, it does not exclude those who engage in it from membership in the Buddhist community. He begins his argument by rejecting Buddhist justifications of war:

> Whatever the worth of a desired end may be, the Theravada canonical scriptures considered to be the primary source of the Buddhist system of moral values of the Sinhala Buddhist community of Sri Lanka, contain absolutely no instance in which violence is advocated as a means of achieving it (Premasiri 2003).

Despite the lack of justification for war, Premasiri does not accuse Buddhists involved in war of violating their heritage. He explains:

> Liberation is ensured only by the elimination of greed, hatred and delusion. War, whatever form it takes, is produced by greed, hatred and delusion and other ramifications of these basic roots of unwholesome behaviour. This would imply that if every Buddhist pursued the Buddhist goal of liberation there should be no wars in Buddhist communities. But can we reasonably expect this to happen? The Pali canon itself bears evidence that even the Buddha did not expect it to happen (Premasiri 2003).

Premasiri argues that Buddhist doctrine is not concerned with justifying war, only describing the effects of human actions. He invites scholars to view the Buddhist path to liberation as unconcerned with war and earthly conflicts.[17]

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[17] In his response to Premasiri's paper given at the 2003 Bath conference, Damien Keown criticizes these approaches as "psychological reductionism," arguing that "…to analyze war primarily in terms of psychology is to overlook its essential moral dimension" (Keown 2003). Keown argues that "[S]o long as those acting in the defense of life in these circumstances do so without hatred and using the minimum degree of force, it is hard to see what they do wrong" (Keown 2003). In his rebuttal, Keown, suggests his own criteria for a just war: defending life results in war without hatred and therefore is not wrong. Keown's argument, however, is very unclear. At some points in his response to Premasiri he states that Buddhism does not contain a justification of war. At other times he suggests that justification of war is "prefigured" in Buddhist doctrine. Perhaps Keown is suggesting that Buddhism *should* contain a just-war theory to help deal with the present conflict in Sri Lanka.

In his book, *Nirvana and other Buddhist felicities : Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*, Steven Collins suggests another solution to the conflict apparent in Buddhist involvement in war. Comparing the Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta with the Temiya Jātaka, Collins points out that there seem to be two modes of Dhamma at work. On the one hand, the Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta presents images of good kings, who rule their kingdoms through the fair and appropriate application of force. The Temīya Jātaka, on the other hand, tells the story of a prince who pretends to be deaf and dumb so as to avoid the negative karma that is inevitably produced by carrying out the duties of a king. Collins represents these two positions as two distinct modes of Dhamma. He writes:

> Mode 1 Dhamma is an ethics of reciprocity, in which the assessment of violence is context-dependent and negotiable. Buddhist advise to kings in Mode 1 tells them not to pass judgement in haste or anger, but appropriately, such that the punishment fits the crime. To follow such advice is to be a Good King, to fulfill...the duties of the royal station.
>
> Mode 2 Dhamma is an ethic of absolute values, in which the assessment of violence is context-independent and non-negotiable, and punishment, as a species of violence, is itself a crime. The only advice possible for kings in Mode 2 might seem to be "Don't be one!", "Renounce the world!", "Leave everything to the law of karma!" Many stories recommend just this. Others, however, envisage the utopia of a non-violent king" (Collins 1998, 420).

Collins' explanation of these two conflicting modes of Dhamma is that the second mode, represented by the Temīya Jātaka, functions "... not to describe or advocate a possible world but to make a comment on the real one" (Ibid., 436). Collins points out that it is not reasonable to assume from the Temīya Jātaka, or other texts representing the second mode of Dhamma, that the author expected all kings to give up their thrones in order to avoid negative karma. He explains:

> "In the karmic long term, every act in each individual consciousness-sequence will produce its appropriate result; so one might think, a priori, that there should be no need for human kings or anyone else to interfere with the process, still less for themselves to commit, in punishing wrongdoing, the same evils of violence and killing which karmic law will itself punish in both cases. But to imagine that any king, or indeed anyone in ordinary human society, could or should have been able to live by such rules would be as preposterous as to suggest that in medieval Europe there should have been no need for human law since God, in the Christian imaginaire, eventually punishes all sinners....This point is sometimes made in all seriousness in discussions of Buddhism, and it is a good example of how orientalist scholarship, in the recent and pejorative sense of the word, de-realizes and infantilizes its object" (435)

Collins, therefore, like Schmithausen, opens up a discursive space for discussing Buddhist participation in war without accusing those Buddhists of violating their identity. By interpreting Buddhist texts in terms of their work-like functions (what they try to do) rather than simply in terms of their documentary functions (what they say), Collins suggests a more nuanced way of interpreting Buddhist participation in violence.

In an another attempt to create a space for Buddhist participation in war, Elizabeth Harris compares Buddhist doctrine with the contemporary conflict in Sri Lanka. In her search for Buddhist justification of war Harris concludes: 1) Higher principles of Buddhism condemn war; 2) In some circumstances, war, authorized by the State, to defend a people against external aggression can be justified; 3) War to take territory is not justified; and 4) In war, an ethic of compassion is desirable if the proliferation of war is to be stopped (Harris 100). Harris postulates that for a war to be just it must be free of *avijja*, ignorance. Those who go to war "…should have transcended the urge to relate all sense data to self, or by extension to their own group, ethnicity or nation. They should be able to discern quite clearly right view and wrong view and be able to stop any movement towards *papañca*, unwholesome

proliferation of thought before it begins" (Harris 105).

While Harris' conclusions do not absolutely rule out the possibility of war, according to her criteria, the present Sri Lankan war, based on concepts of ethnicity and nation, is not just. According to Harris' logic, only an enlightened being, who has transcended attachment to the self, could possibly declare a just war. Furthermore, Harris applies a theory of individual psychological action to a collective decision to go to war. Even if we were to accept that a *cakravartin*, without *papañca*, could fight a defensive war without greed, hatred or delusion, what of the soldiers who make up his army? Presumably the soldiers will not be as spiritually developed as their leader. Like many studies of Buddhism and war, Harris ends up comparing contemporary Buddhists unfavorably with Buddhist doctrine. Although Harris allows for the doctrinal possibility of war, like Rahula and Deegalle, her work does little to assist the serious study of Buddhists presently participating in combat.

Tessa Bartholomeusz's *In Defense of Dharma: Just-War Ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka* is the most comprehensive attempt to create space for discussion of Buddhist involvement in war to date. This work attempts to piece together an implicit just-war theory from canonical and post-canonical Pāli texts, Sri Lankan newspapers from the past century, and a small sample of ethnographic interviews conducted over the summers of 1997 and 1999. The primary goal of Bartholomeusz's work is to argue against the essentialized image of Buddhism as a religion of peace (Bartholomeusz 2002, 96). She provides and refutes the historical background for the creation of a dichotomy between "peaceful Buddhists" and "warlike Christians," de-mythologizing these polarized conceptions. Bartholomeusz argues that Locating definitions of Buddhism as a pacifist religion in the anti-Christian rhetoric of late 19th

century Buddhists such as Anagarika Dharmapala, Bartholomeusz deconstructs Buddhism as a monolithic force for pacifism and makes room for the search for just-war theory within Buddhism (Ibid., 104-108).

Rather than searching the canon for authoritative pronouncements on war, Bartholomeusz searches for the internal logic employed by Sinhala Buddhists to support their decision to go to war. Summarizing the organizing questions of her research, Bartholomeusz writes:

> The questions guiding my study are: what sorts of Buddhist stories, if any, do Buddhist Sri Lankans employ when threatened? If threatened--whether from within or without--have Sri Lankan Buddhists justified battles and wars, both ideological and military? Above all, is there a "just-war" ideology, based on Buddhist narratives, that accords with the internal logic (that is, to the specific context) of Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition[?] (Ibid., 15).

Over the course of her argument, Bartholomeusz answers these questions definitively, writing “Sri Lankan Buddhism's particular religio-political rhetoric, legitimized on the basis of canonical texts and on the stories of the *Mahāvaṃsa* , allows for the possibility of war if certain criteria are met” (Ibid., 100). In short, Bartholomeusz searches for just-war thinking in her interviews with monks, textual review, and investigation of newspaper archives and finds it.

After creating theoretical space for the existence of a just-war theory, Bartholomeuz sets about constructing one, drawing on the theoretical work of two scholars, Charles Hallisey and James Childress. Bartholomeusz combines Hallisey’s discussion of Buddhist ethics as “ethical particularism” with Childress’ refiguring of just-war criteria in terms of *prima facie* obligations, and applies the theories to the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. *Prima facie* obligations refer to ethical obligations which can

be overridden when they come in conflict with each other. For example, the obligation to speak the truth may be overridden if doing so would result in the death or injury of another, and the obligation to refrain from killing or causing injury could be overridden by the obligation to preserve the life of an innocent. These *prima facie* obligations contrast with absolute obligations, which can never be overridden in any circumstance.

In his article, *Ethical Particularism in Theravada Buddhism*, Charles Hallisey attempts to break away from blanket definitions of Buddhist ethics with the innovation of the term "ethical particularism." Criticizing attempts to label Buddhist ethics according to traditional ethical categories such as consequentialism or virtue ethics, Hallisey demonstrates how two important Buddhist texts resist categorization according to a single ethical tradition. In response to this problem, Hallisey applies W.D. Ross' concept of the *prima facie* obligation to two examples selected from Theravada Buddhist literature including the following analysis of the *Maṅgala Sutta:*

> The canonical text itself appears to be a list of thirty-eight *prima facie* duties, in Ross's sense, all of which are construed as instances of "auspiciousness" or *maṅgala*. There is no doubt that we are in the realm of the ethical since the list includes such things as "the five precepts," "diligence in ideals," "profitable courses of actions," "ceasing and refraining from evil," and "doing actions that are blameless." At the same time, the list is quite inclusive and includes taking care of one's spouse and children as well as abstinence from sexual intercourse; no associating with fools as well as attaining the Path and seeing the Four Noble Truths; worshipping those worthy of worship as well as the realization of nirvana" (Hallisey 1996, 39).

Concluding that it is impossible to fulfill all of the ethical obligations listed in the text simultaneously, Hallisey argues that Theravada Buddhist ethics resists classification and instead should be seen as situation-specific.

In the introduction to this article, Hallisey outlines the importance of

articulating the correct question as opposed to attempting to discover a correct answer (Ibid., 34). By re-focusing scholarly inquiry, Hallisey challenges modern researchers to open the study of Theravada Buddhism up to new types of questioning. Hallisey writes:

> It is important that we try to fashion terms like "ethical particularism" into interpretive bridges if we are ever to make the study of Buddhist ethics a part of academic discussions of ethics as well as a concern of Buddhist studies (Ibid., 43).

Taking up Hallisey's call for the creation of "interpretive bridges," Bartholomeusz attempts to demonstrate the presence of just-war thinking in both Theravada Buddhist literature and contemporary rhetoric, thus opening the door for collaboration between scholars of different disciplines and religious traditions.

Bartholomeusz attempts to construct just such an interpretive bridge between her work and that of just-war theorist James Childress, whose work is also informed by the writings of W.D. Ross. Applying the concept of *prima facie* obligations to just-war theory, Childress constructs just-war criteria to serve both just-war theorists and pacifists alike. Childress summarizes his intentions in his article, *Just-War Criteria*, writing:

> Just-war theorists sometimes overlook the fact that they and the pacifists reason from a common starting point. Both begin with the contention that non-violence has moral priority over violence, that violent acts always stand in need of justification because they violate the prima facie duty not to injure or kill others, wheras only some non-violent acts need justification (e.g. when they violate laws.) While pacifists can remind just-war theorists of this presumption against violence, pacifists also need just-war theorists. In a world in which war appears to be a permanent institution, debates about particular wars require a framework and a structure that can be provided by the criteria of the just-war tradition properly reconstructed (Childress 1992, 369).

The concept of the *prima facie* obligation allows for the preservation of the ideal of

non-violence in a world where war is a permanent part of life. Furthermore, just-war criteria articulated as a series of *prima facie* obligations provides a common structure in which both pacifists and just-war theorists can debate the justice of particular conflicts. Childress's particular formulation of just-war criteria fits in perfectly with Bartholomeusz's goals as a writer. Not only is she able to apply competing *prima facia* obligations to the Sri Lankan civil war and create an interpretive bridge to the field of ethics, but she also addresses the primary concern of her book: to reconcile the image of Buddhism as a pacifist religion with both past and present wars.

Through the application of *prima facie* obligations, Bartholomeusz produces a completely different interpretation of the Mahāvaṃsa story of the arahant's advise to Duṭugämuṇu, viewing it as an articulation of Buddhist just-war theory. She writes:

> Scholars who presume that Buddhism places an absolute duty of non-violence on Buddhists have argued that the scene of Dutugemunu, with his relic in his spear and headed for battle, warrants justification. My reading of the episode is that it contains its own justification for war. Indeed, it legitimately can be argued that the Mahāvaṃsa's rendering of Buddhist just-war thinking entails the prima facie responsibility to be non-violent. In other words, because the duty is prima facie, it can be over-ridden - though the justification necessary to do so is extremely weighty - if certain criteria are met. In the Mahāvaṃsa, just-war thinking provides a scenario in which Dutugemunu's violent actions are justified and in which non- violence remains the guiding force. The justice of his war, moreover, is underscored by the fate of his spear, as well as his own fate: according to the Mahāvaṃsa (62:81-3), Dutugemunu is to be "the first disciple of the sublime Metteyya," that is, of the future Buddha, surely a destiny preserved only for the righteous (Bartholomeusz, 63).

The concept of the *prima facie* obligation seems to be the perfect solution to the paradox faced by scholars of Buddhism. By viewing the Buddhist obligation of non-violence as a *prima facie* obligation capable of coming in contact with and being over-ridden by other *prima facie* obligations rather than an absolute, Bartholomeusz

creates the ethical space for a just war within the Sri Lankan tradition. Unfortunately, however, Sri Lankan Buddhists themselves resist this definition.

When the voices of her informants do appear, they take a back seat to Bartholomeusz's theoretical goals of linking Sri Lankan Buddhist thought with her starting principles drawn from the broader tradition of ethics and just-war theory. Many informants denied the possibility of a just-war in the Buddhist tradition and reduced her questions to individual processes of karma. Bartholomeusz, however, does not allow the voices of her informants to derail her objectives and continues to impose Childress' categories onto their testimonies. Bartholomeusz admits as much, writing: "When I asked, 'Can militant dharma *yuddhaya* be justified from the point of view of canonical Theravada Buddhism?,' I was usually met with a resounding, 'No'" (Bartholomeusz, 110).[18] One of her informants responds to her questions explaining: "Just as you do not find a chicken curry recipe in the Pāli canon, you do not find a theory of just war there either," implying the complete irrelevance of just-war theory in the Buddhist worldview (Bartholomeusz, 16-17).

Bartholomeusz organizes her data according to the template provided by Childress in his re-articulation of the traditional criteria for just-war. Turning her gaze upon the

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[18] There are a number of methodological problems present in this brief insight into Bartholomeusz's interview techniques. First of all, the use of the word dharma *yuddhaya*, "righteous war," in her question is inappropriate. Over the course of my 90+ interviews with monks and soldiers, I have never once encountered this word as a description of the current conflict. Secondly, the use of the word "justified" is similarly problematic. While Bartholomeusz provides us with a Sinhala translation of just-war, *yukti sahāgata yuddhaya*, this is not a word in common usage in classical or modern Sinhala discourse, but rather a direct translation of the English. In contrast to the ethically loaded term 'just,' *yukti sahāgata* literally means "imperative." Another word used by Bartholomeusz, *dharma yuddhaya*, which was a phrase specific to the rhetoric of J.R. Jayawardene, is used freely by Bartholomeusz as a common term for "war in accord with the dharma" (Bartholomeusz, 99). Though it may seem neutral, this one question forces Bartholomeusz's informants to answer within her conceptual framework and not theirs. Other examples of this sort of behavior can be found on pages 16 and 122.

Pali canon, commentaries, and the testimony of her ethnographic subjects, Bartholomeusz finds evidence to support the existence of all seven of Childress' just-war criteria: 1) Legitimate authority; 2) Right intention; 3) Announcement of intention; 4) Last resort; 5) Reasonable hope of success; 6) Just conduct; 7) Proportionality (Bartholomeusz, 57; Childress, 64-65; Childress, 357-363). While I do not wish to argue against the relevance of these criteria in evaluating particular conflicts, based on my ethnographic data, I do not believe all of the conceptual criteria necessary to align the current war in Sri Lanka with Childress's just-war checklist are present within the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition or relevant in the minds of Sri Lanka Buddhists themselves.

Bartholomeusz's work demonstrates the biggest potential danger of deductive reasoning: by proceeding from general premises to derive particular information, a researcher can easily shape the data to fit her own pre-conceived conclusions. While Bartholomeusz's work does an excellent job of demonstrating how Childress's particular perspective on just-war criteria can be applied to Sri Lanka, she does so by discounting the assertions made by the majority of her informants. Take for example the following exchange between Bartholomeusz and the recently deceased Venerable Madihe Pannasiha:

> Despite his protests that there is no such thing as just-war in Buddhism, with a twinkle in his eye and a friendly grin, the Venerable Madihe Pannasiha listed many of the criteria for just-war thinking that we isolated in Chapter Two: just cause—the protection of the dharma—as well as right authority and right intention. All of these issues shaped his retelling of the well-known story of Dutugemunu. He also added that the enlightened beings' words of consolation to Dutugemunu after the war shows us that the pious Buddhist king was remorseful, another criterion of just-war thinking, as we have seen (Bartholomeusz, 118).

Thus, Bartholomeusz alters the testimony of her informant to fit into the categories of just-war criteria and away from the emotional state of mind of the king. Another monk responds to Bartholomeusz with a similar dismissal of the terms of her question:

> Are you asking if Buddhists can go to war? Yes, to protect the country and to protect the religion. *But war is a matter of karma - that's why there is war, all bad things done in the past come back to corrupt us - this is why there is war. In the past, too, karma resulted in war*. Look at Dutugemunu's war against the Tamils, this was karma. But if it weren't for Dutugemunu, you wouldn't be talking to me now. I give worship to Dutugemunu for allowing us to worship in *dharmadwipa*. He was a great king; he saved this island (Bartholomeusz 12 italics mine).

While her informants tried to direct the discussion away from concepts alien to Buddhist doctrinal presentations towards the concept of karma, Bartholomeusz refused to relinquish her conclusion that Sri Lankan Buddhists think about war in terms of *prima facie* obligations. In short, Bartholomeusz argues that the Venerable Pannasiha believes something different from what he says that he does.[19] Bartholomeusz, rooted in the principles of just-war theory, seeks to derive information from her informants to link the Sri Lankan conflict to the larger field of comparative ethics. In order to serve this goal, she ignores the assertions of her research subjects that conflict with her initial thesis.

In an article in the Journal of Buddhist Ethics, *Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The Analysis of the Act of Killing in the Abhidhamma and Pali Commentaries,* Rupert Gethin challenges many of the assumptions underlying

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[19] This strategy harkens back to Gombrich's famous distinction between cognitive and affective understandings of religion. Attempting to account for contradictions that he perceived between what his informants told him and what they did, Gombrich created the categories of cognitive and affective belief. See *Gombrich, Richard Francis. 1991. Buddhist precept and practice : traditional Buddhism in the rural highlands of Ceylon. 2nd ed., with minor corrections ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, pp. 5-7.*

Bartholomeusz's attempts to apply rule-based ethical theories to Buddhist ethics. In his article, Gethin warns of the dangers of applying etic, or external, concepts to Buddhist beliefs and doctrines. He writes:

> *Abhidhamma* — and hence I think mainstream Buddhist ethics— is not ultimately concerned to lay down ethical rules, or even ethical principles. It seeks instead to articulate a spiritual psychology focusing on the root causes that motivate us to act: greed, hatred, and delusion, or nonattachment, friendliness, and wisdom. Thus that intentionally killing a living being is wrong is not in fact presented in Buddhist thought as an ethical principle at all; it is a claim about how the mind works, about the nature of certain mental states and the kinds of action they give rise to (Gethin 2004, 190).[20]

While Gethin does not reject the possibility of comparison, he argues that scholars in the field of Buddhist ethics often obscure the nature of Buddhist karma theory. Theories of just-war are composed of rules and principles unfamiliar to the traditional Sri Lankan frame of reference, which are incompatible with Buddhist theories of karma. Applying his understanding of Buddhist doctrine to war, Gethin writes:

> While certain acts of killing may be manifestations of stronger and more intense instances of anger, hatred, or aversion, no act of killing can be entirely free of these. There can be no justification of any act of killing as entirely blameless, as entirely free of the taint of aversion or hatred. In Abhidhamma terms, acts of killing can only ever be justified as more or less *akusala*, never as purely *kusala*. This applies to acts of so-called mercy killing, and acts of war and suicide (Gethin 2006, 71).

Gethin, therefore, sides with Premasiri, viewing warfare in terms of individual actions and the intention or, *cetanā* behind them.

While Gethin's arguments can be accused of privileging Buddhist doctrine

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[20] Although I would not go as far as Gethin to identify Abhidhamma with "mainstream Buddhist ethics," much less the ethical calculations of contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists, he makes an important point about the dangers of comparative studies. It is important that comparison does not overwhelm the categories and terms used by Buddhists themselves.

over other sources such as literature and ritual practice, he makes an important point. Buddhist doctrine does not contain conditions for laying down ethical rules and principles through which war could be justified. On the contrary, Buddhist doctrine is concerned with psychology, focusing on the root causes and effects of individual action. The decision to take up arms leading to a just or unjust conflict has little relevance to systematic presentations of Buddhist principles. After war begins, however, Buddhist doctrine, literature and practice all have a great deal to say about actions and the effects of those actions on the battlefield.

In his book, *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity and Difference*, Ananda Abeysekara takes the debate about Buddhism and violence in a new direction through the application and post-modern and post-colonial tools of interpretation. Rather than attempting to find canonical or ethnographic evidence to harmonize the perception of conflict between Buddhism and violence, Abeysekara challenges the assumptions underlying the categories of "Buddhism" and "Violence" themselves. Abeysekara points out that authoritative definitions of what is and isn't Buddhism can shift within a period of years, months or days (Abeysekara 2002, 12).

By so doing, Abeysekara seeks to strike a middle ground between anti-essentialist arguments of contemporary scholarship and the essentialist positions posited by cultural subjects. In other words, he wishes to take into account the fact that different communities produce authoritative and essential accounts of what does and does not belong to their culture despite the efforts of post-modern scholarship to account for the ever-changing and unbounded nature of culture. Abeysekara articulates this problem, writing:

> Conventional disciplinary narratives that tend to view religion and violence in terms of their difference or interrelation are governed by assumptions about the self-evidently defined nature of such categories. Such categories, I have insisted, are not available as transparent objects of disciplinary knowledge: the meanings of "religion" and "violence" are discursively produced, and hence shift within the conjunctures of different debates. (Abeysekara 2002, 234)

Abeysekara argues that categories such as religion and violence are abstractions agreed upon through processes of debate. As these categories are constantly changing, it is dangerous to apply them uncritically to the past.

As a middle path between the ossification of Buddhism as an unchanging historical entity and unbounded relativity, Abeysekara suggests that scholars should look closely at the contexts in which Buddhists define their identity. In particular, Abeysekara argues that only by examining thin slices of time, which he terms “minute contingent conjunctures.” can we gain insight into the complex web of debates and power relationships that make particular articulations of religion or culture possible. He explains his method, writing:

> I want to demonstrate modestly some of the ways in which the relations between what can and cannot count as Buddhism, culture, and difference, alter within specific "native" debates. That is, to demonstrate the ways in which what I call "minute contingent conjunctures" make possible and centrally visible the emergence and submergence, the centering and marginalizing, the privileging and subordinating of what and who can and cannot constitute "Buddhism" and "difference" (in this case, in Sri Lanka). To be more precise, what concerns me are the ways in which diverse persons, practices, discourses, and institutions conjoin to foreground competing definitions about "Buddhism" and its "others" within a period of a few years, if not months or days. Those competing discourses that seek to foreground such definitions often do so in order to take precedence over formerly authoritative discourses defining the terms and parameters of religion and difference. This, as I will theorize it in depth below, is what I mean by contingent conjunctures (Abeysekara 2002, 3-4).

Abeysekara makes a very important point in his work. As we have seen in this chapter, most scholarship on Buddhism has been shaped by an assumed dichotomy between Buddhism as an eternal and absolute category represented by its textual tradition and Buddhists, individuals who ultimately fail to live up to its ideals. By looking closely at short periods of time, Abeysekara attempts to reveal some of the processes by which Buddhism is constituted and reconstituted as a category depending on the historical circumstances. In other words, Abeysekara shifts the focus of his scholarship away from "Buddhism" and onto "Buddhists" who actively shape their worlds through discourse.

While scholarly debate since 1983 has successfully challenged one-dimensional understandings of Buddhism as a pacifist religion, by over-emphasizing the violation and reconciliation of categories, scholars have lost sight of the actual participants in the Sri Lankan civil war. This work seeks to fill this lacuna by giving voice to soldiers and monks who are directly involved in the war. Rather than condemning Sri Lankans for their failure to uphold Buddhist imperatives or arguing for just-war criteria that conflict with local understandings of the role of Buddhism, this work will concentrate on the interpretive strategies employed by Buddhists after the decision to go to war has been reached.

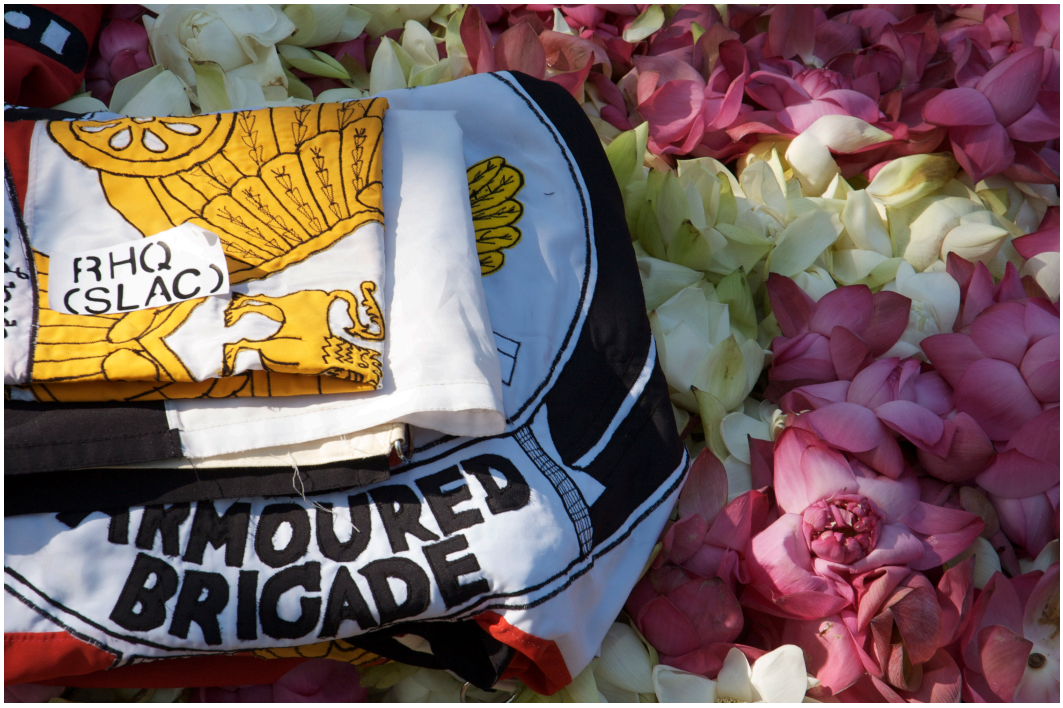
Today no one is surprised anymore by violence in Sri Lanka. While the deaths of thirteen soldiers in 1983 sparked a week of riots, today it is common to read about soldiers dying in the northern or eastern operation areas. Sri Lankan Army (SLA) soldiers kill Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadres and LTTE cadres kill SLA soldiers. Both sides use civilians caught in the crossfire as propaganda

supporting their respective causes and demonizing the other. While scholars were first shocked by the outbreak of violence in this model colony, populated by followers of a religion of peace, today there is only war and the daily body counts. For Sri Lanka, the question whether or not Buddhism can justify war is a moot one. Buddhists are fighting in a war whether it can be justified or not.

The early scholarship on Buddhism and violence has served an important purpose. It has helped us move beyond the artificial image of pacifist Buddhists towards a more nuanced understanding of Buddhists as real people independent of attempts to rigidly categorize them. The questions asked in the shadow of Black July, however, have ceased to be useful in a time where monks preaching to Buddhist soldiers have become the rule and not the exception. While Buddhism may not, as most Sri Lankans would argue, have anything to do with war, war certainly has something to do with Buddhists. Past works on Buddhism and war, however, have stopped at the point where the decision to support war is reached without exploring how this decision affects the soldiers, families and monks who are most closely involved in it. What if Buddhists do decide to fight a war? What then?

Chapter 2

Buddhists at War



> A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. -----Tim O'Brien[21]

During my first day at the Panagoda army camp, I heard my first war story. While interviewing enlisted men working at the administrative center of the Divisional Headquarters, I met a thirty three year old Corporal from the Light Infantry. The Corporal wore black-rimmed glasses, and was known by the nickname "Specs." Specs proved to be an excellent story teller with strong opinions. He hates the army and when I asked him when he will retire, he told me the exact day, December 5, 2012.

We are sitting in the small alms hall attached to the office of the Sri Lankan Army Buddhist Association at Panagoda army temple, a large temple complex across from the 11 (pronounced "one-one") Divisional headquarters on High Level road, ten miles from Colombo. Panagoda is one of the largest military facilities on the island. Serving as an administrative hub and as a training center for new recruits, Panagoda houses over ten thousand military personnel.

The temple, where my research assistant and I conducted many of our interviews, is officially known as Śrīmahābodhirajarāmaya, but many soldiers call it "*Paḍikapanārāmaya,*" or pay-cut temple, on account of the five rupees garnished

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[21] O'Brien, Tim. 1990. *The things they carried : a work of fiction*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 76.

from their pay checks every month to fund the Army Buddhist Association.[22] The first thing that one sees when approaching the temple from the direction of Colombo

The preaching hall at Panagoda Army Temple.

is the relic tower that was built in 2005, the large *toraṇa* gate and a golden Buddha statue that was donated by Thai monks. Walking through the *toraṇa* gate, one crosses a long parade ground covered by landscaping tiles and comes to a reflecting pond and

[22] The Sri Lankan Army is said to consist of 150,000 active duty personnel. If five rupees is garnished from each of their paychecks, that puts the monthly budget of the Army Buddhist Association at around 750,000 rupees or $7000 per month.

a large stairway cut into the hill. Climbing the stairs one comes to the central hall, which houses the thousands of visitors that come for army day festivities. According to many of our informants, the main hall was once a church, but after the land was purchased by the army, it was converted into a preaching hall. To the right immediately before the preaching hall is a large painted plaster Buddha statue.

Turning left at the preaching hall, one walks down another path. To the left is the Bodhi tree: a big tree whose limbs are held up by steel supports, crafted in the same style as those that support the limbs of the Śrī Mahābodhi tree in Anuradhapura. Passing the Bodhi tree, one reaches the temple's stupa, a milky white tower surrounded by a sand walkway for circumambulation. Across from the stupa is the office of the army *Baudabalamandalaya*, built in exactly the same style as a monastic residence, along with a private audience chamber.

It is in this building that my research assistant, Tilak, and I now sit, interviewing Specs about his experiences in the army. Specs joined the army in 1990, an extremely tempestuous time in the country. At that time, the government was fighting a war on two fronts: "the southern war" against the *Janatha Vimukti Peramuna* (JVP) composed of Sinhala youth and the "northern war" against the Tamil LTTE. Specs explained that he did not join the army out of any patriotic sentiment, but out of purely financial reasons. He explains:

> I didn't join because of the war, but because of the economic situation at home. Actually. there was a small personal problem at home. My father was around, but my parents lived separately. My mother took responsibility for the house. My father lived separately....My father is living in Kandy and mother lives here with us. My younger sister and I were with mother. That is why I had to find a job.[23]

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[23] Interview with "Specs" on September 26, 2005 at Panagoda Army Base.

Specs explained that his mother had pleaded with him not to join, going so far as to hide all of the letters that arrived from the army. Eventually, however, Specs snuck off to the recruiting station with a group of friends and was in a training camp in Eastern Sri Lanka a week later.

A few years ago, while on patrol in northern Sri Lanka, Specs witnessed a friend mutilated as he attempted to disarm an improvised explosive device. The explosion blew off both of his friend's hands and took away his eyes. Specs was also injured in the blast, peppered in the face and neck with shrapnel. Specs recounts the event:

> He took a *Joni baṭa* (an anti-personnel mine) and tried to defuse it. It blew up in his hands. I was near him. If I had been a little closer, I would have gone blind. Both of his arms were blown off and his eyes were blinded....While I was watching, his arms were turned into hamburger. He just picked the thing up and after that he couldn't see anything in the world. If I had been closer, I would have been killed. It may have been from previous merit.[24]

After seeing his friend's hands and eyes taken from him, Specs thinks immediately of karma. When I asked him why he thinks that he was unharmed while his friend was injured, he replied:

> That sort of thing must occur as the result of merit....One becomes disabled like this because of some sort of negative karma, but one's life is saved because one has done some sort of merit. That is what we think. It must be that. It is the way of karma.[25]

Indeed, the most common lens used by Sri Lankan monks and soldiers, evaluating the war, is the theory of karma. Like Specs, most soldiers refer to karma when explaining

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[24] Ibid,

[25] Ibid.

deaths and injuries on the battlefield. Likewise, they evaluate their activities and those of others on the battlefield in terms of *piṅ* and *pav*, merit and demerit.[26]

For most Sinhala Buddhist soldiers, the question is not whether or not a war is just, but whether or not it is possible to kill without desire, hatred or delusion. In the heat of battle, each soldier's karma is his own. Venerable Sudarsana, a forest monk and former Corporal in the infantry before ordaining, takes a firm position, arguing:

> *Cetanā 'ham bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi*. Intention becomes karma. You must accept that Lord Buddha has said that if someone makes a mistake in one's life then an *akusala* occurs. If this is the case, let's say one is fighting in behalf of the country. We need to divide this question into parts. There could be a concept that this (fighting on behalf of one's country) is a good thing. However, that is not the truth (*yathartha*.) That is to say, it is wrong to say that *akusala karma* does not collect when one fights on behalf of the country. One must first divide *kusala karma* and *akusala karma*. It would be good to think this way. Can a soldier shoot another person while practicing *maitri* meditation? If he were doing that, how could he kill? Could one kill without obstruction (*pathigha*) or displeasure (*amanāpa*?) No.[27]

The term chosen by Sudarsana to evaluate the actions of soldiers is familiar to all Buddhists, *cetanā*, or intention, is critical in Buddhist doctrinal literature for determining the effects of an action.

Not all monks, however, agree that soldiers produce negative karma when they fire at the enemy. When I asked Venerable Pilässi Vimaladhajja, a monk living near the army Buddhist temple at Panagoda, whether negative karma occurs when soldiers shoot at the enemy, he responded with a firm "no." In order to illustrate his point, he began singing a short song of his own composition about the 2nd century

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[26] The Sinhala terms *piṅ* and *pav* are equivalent to the Pāli *puñña* and *pāpa*, respectively.

[27] Interview with Venerable Sudarsana on March 9, 2006 at Labunoruwa Āraññā. The citation, "*Cetanā 'ham bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi*," comes from AN III, 416. The full citation is "*Cetanā'haṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi, cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā*" O Monks, intention is what I call karma. Having intended one does karma with body, speech and mind."

BCE Sinhala culture hero, Duṭugämuṇu.

Niridun Duṭugämuṇu Maha yuda keruvēya
Bērāganna āgama dana näsuvēya
Pirisidu sirilakama eksatkeruvēya
Avasana sandahāmin suvayak läbuvēya

Duṭugämuṇu, the lord of men, fought a great war.
He killed people in order to save the religion.
He united the pure Sri Lanka
and received comfort from that in the end [of *Samsāra*].[28]

This poem, which Vimaladhajja recites during his frequent sermons to soldiers invokes the story of Duṭugämuṇu from the *Mahāvaṃsa* that has troubled scholars of Buddhism such as Bartholomeusz for many years. Vimaladhajja focuses not on Duṭugämuṇu's remorse after the war, but rather on his intentions before the war and his subsequent rebirth in heaven to await his future birth as the chief disciple of the future Buddha Metteya.[29]

While Bartholomeusz cites the chronicle of Duṭugämuṇu as evidence of a Buddhist just-war theory in which war is justified when the Buddhist Dhamma is threatened, Vimaladhajja is more focused on the intention behind Duṭugämuṇu's

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[28] Interview with Ven. Pilässi Vimaladhajja in Homāgama on November 29, 2005.

[29] Indeed, one of Richard Gombrich's interview subjects uses the story of Duṭugämuṇu specifically as an explanation of the concept of *ahosi karma*, karma that does not come to fruition. Gombrich's informant explains: "For example, Duṭugämuṇu killed many Tamils in war, which is pav, but he did it to save Buddhism, and then he did so much for Buddhism (founding monasteries at Anurādhapura, etc.) that his pin so far outweighed his *pav* that he will stay in heaven (*divyalōkē*) till the time of Maitrī, the next Buddha, when he will be reborn as his right-hand disciple...and attain nirvana. His *pav* will therefore never mature, there being no results (*vipākē*) of bad karma in heaven." (Gombrich 253) While one may question this particular informant's interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, his words reveal the terms important to him in debates about Buddhist involvement in warfare: karma and *vipāka*.

actions and their results. When I encouraged Vimaladhajja to explain further, he replied:

> War is fought to eliminate the power of the enemy. If one purposely kills many people, then *pav* occurs. If one has the intention to kill, then *pav* occurs. We are fighting with the power of the enemy. So *pav* does not occur.[30]

Vimaladhajja reasons that *pav* does not occur because soldiers do not have the intention to kill. Vimaladhajja is not giving soldiers a blank check to kill whomever they wish while fighting the enemy. He stresses that if a soldier has the intention to kill, a negative karma occurs. If a soldier's intention is to fight the enemy in order to protect the country and religion, however, their actions do not produce negative consequences.[31]

While these two very different monks disagree in their answers to my question, they harness similar terminology and concepts to provide their answers. As Sudarsana, says, quoting the Buddha, *Cetanā 'ham bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi,* "O Monks, intention is what I call karma." Both monks base their arguments on whether the actions of soldier do or do not produce negative karma not upon justice. The question is not whether or not war can be just, but whether or not it is possible to kill with a positive intention. Both monks identify intention, or *cetanā*, as the factor, which determines the positive or negative effects of an action and neither use language applicable to the formation of a just-war theory, *prima facia* or otherwise.

Neither monk, furthermore, makes reference to the idea of ethical obligations

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[30] Interview with Venerable Pilässi Vimaladhajja in Homagama on November 25, 2005.

[31] It is important to note here that Vimaladhajja is stressing individual intentions over the objective judgements about the justice of a particular war. A soldier with the intention of protecting the country, race and religion will not create negative karma regardless of the justification of the war. In the same way, a soldier fighting in a "just" war will garner negative karma if his intentions are rooted in ignorance, hatred or desire.

coming into conflict with one another. The need to preserve the country, race and religion (*raṭa, jātiya and āgama*) are not in conflict with the Buddhist ideal of nonviolence according to Vimaladhajja, rather defense of Sinhala Buddhism is a noble intention equated with karmic reward as recorded in the story of Duṭugämuṇu. While they both address issues of intention and karma, the monks do not use concepts found in Childress's just-war criteria such as "legitimate authority," or even "reasonable chance of success," to evaluate the current conflict. Both monks, rather, rely on Sinhala Buddhist terminology such as *cetanā* that do not translate directly into to the broader field of comparative ethics.[32]

While the language of justification has little basis in Buddhist doctrinal literature, the language of karma and intention, on the other hand, is ubiquitous. Karma is the main focus of Venerable Hammalawa Saddhatissa in his 1970 work, *Buddhist Ethics*. In his presentation of the act of killing, Saddhatissa begins with intention, demonstrating how *cetanā* is directly related to the amount of negative karma created by an action. Saddhatissa illustrates the severity of the karmic effects of killing by making reference to the five conditions that must be fulfilled for a karma of killing to be created. Citing a passage from SN 2:12, Saddhatissa introduces the six means of killing: (1) killing with one's own hands (*sāhatthika*); (2) causing another to kill by giving an order (*āṇattika*); (3) killing by shooting, pelting with stones, sticks, etc. (*nissaggiya*); 4) killing by digging trenches, etc., and entrapping a being (*thavara*); (5) killing by the powers of *iddhi*, or occult means (*iddhimaya*); and (6) killing by mantras, or occult sciences (*vijjāmaya*)" (Saddhatissa, 60-61).

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[32] While it may be argued that *cetanā* as "intention" matches the second of Childress's criteria, right intention, as we shall see later, *cetanā* can only be seen in individual terms in reference to particular actions and not to general intentions.

Having established the means of killing and the conditions that must be fulfilled for a karma of killing to be created, Saddhatissa then focuses on the degree of "moral guilt" produced by different acts of killing. Saddhatissa argues that *cetanā* and karmic results are determined by "…the physical and mental development of the being that is killed and the circumstances under which the deed is committed" (Saddhatissa 60). He explains further that, "The karmic results of killing a man and killing a child vary in proportion to the physical and mental development of the two. Patricide, matricide, the slaughter of innocent people and of people of considerable mental development are therefore particularly productive of evil results to the killer" (Ibid.). For Saddhatissa, therefore, *cetanā* is much more than just a cognitive decision, but encompasses the circumstances of an act of killing and the identity of the one killed.

In a 1996 article exploring suicide in the Pāli canon, Damien Keown argues against the analysis of karma purely in terms of individual intentions, emotions, or mental states, reasoning that there is something inherently wrong about killing. He writes:

> My unease about allowing a determining role to motivation is that it leads in the direction of an ethical theory known as Subjectivism. Subjectivism holds that right and wrong are simply a function of the actor's mental states, and that moral standards are a matter of personal opinion or feelings. For the subjectivist, nothing is objectively morally good or morally bad, and actions in themselves do not possess significant moral features. The "roots of evil" approach to moral assessment described above is subjectivist to the extent that it claims that the same action (suicide) can be either right or wrong depending on the state of mind of the person who suicides: the presence of desire (or fear) makes it wrong, and the absence of desire (or fear) makes it right….It would mean, for example, that the wrongness of murder lies solely in the perpetrator's desire to kill. But this is to take no account at all of the objective dimension of the crime, namely the wrongness of depriving an innocent person of his life (Keown 1996, 12).

Keown rejects the possibility of individuals killing without producing negative karma, arguing that the act of killing is innately, objectively wrong. “In murder,” he writes, “a grave injustice is done to someone, regardless of the murderer's state of mind. To locate the wrongness of murder solely in desire, is to miss this crucial moral feature of the act” (Keown 1996, 12).

Keown’s position on killing should be contrasted with his position on war. On the one hand, Keown holds that killing is objectively wrong while on the other he argues that Buddhism can and should justify war in some circumstances. While these two positions may seem to be contradictory, with further consideration one can see that they share key assumptions. Keown argues that the intentional act of killing is wrong not because of the intention behind it, but because there is something objectively wrong with killing, an immutable quality that cannot be moderated by the mindset of the killer. In the case of just war, on the other hand, he argues that Buddhist justification of war is possible because there is something objectively wrong with allowing the innocent to die. Although he does not cite directly the concept of the prima facie ethical obligation, his conclusions are very similar to Bartholomeusz. Keown seems to argue that the obligation to avoid killing is transcended by the obligation to protect the innocent.

Rupert Gethin responds to Keown’s argument in his article, *Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The analysis of the act of killing in the Abhidhamma and Pali Commentaries*. In this article, Gethin reaffirms the relationship between the karmic effect of an action and the mental state that accompanies it. In fact, Gethin begins his argument, much like Saddhatissa, with a

discussion of the degrees of culpability of different actions. Summarizing various citations from the Pāli canon and its commentaries, Gethin concludes that the different degrees of negative karma produced by particular acts of killing are related directly to the effort and negative emotion necessary to kill the particular being. He writes:

> What the commentary is trying to get at, I think, is the psychological attitude, the quality of intention that might be involved in killing different human beings: that is, we tend to feel differently about and find it harder to understand — and perhaps regard as more blameworthy — the killing of innocents than we do the killing of some serial murderer, for example (Gethin 2004,173).

Like Saddhatissa, Gethin understands intention as something more nuanced and powerful than just a decision to go about a particular course of action.

While this analysis seems to refute Keown's argument, it actually treads a middle ground between positions. Gethin agrees with Saddhatissa that rules in the *Vinaya* and precepts can be broken with wholesome intentions. Killing, however, is a special case. Gethin argues that according to the commentaries, killing is impossible to perform without negative consciousnesses. He illustrates with a story from the *Vinaya* commentary. The commentary presents the scenario of a king who orders the execution of a thief with a smile. While on the surface it may seem that the king's decision is not accompanied by any negative emotions, in reality the act of killing can only be accompanied by a painful feeling and can only originate out of the roots of hate and delusion (Gethin 2004, 175). This interpretation allows Gethin to simultaneously avoid subjectivist and objectivist theories of action. According to Gethin's interpretation, the act of killing is not wrong because of "the wrongness of depriving an innocent person of his life" (Keown 1996, 12), but because it is

impossible to kill with anything but negative intentions accompanied by negative emotions.

Gethin shifts the argument away from actions that create positive or negative karma to actions that can be performed with positive or negative mental states. If it is possible to perform an action without hatred, greed or delusion, then it is possible to perform that action without creating negative karma. If, however, even a small amount of negative emotion accompanies an action, then it will create negative karma. This argument stops short of assigning objective and ultimate moral value to the act of killing, while simultaneously avoiding the moral ambiguity of extreme subjectivism.

In recent years, scholars of Buddhist ethics have continued to explore the meaning of *cetanā*. Rather than interpreting intention as a cold intellectual calculation, scholars have begun stressing the mental and emotional states that accompany particular actions. In her 2003 article, *The Aesthetics of Excess,* Maria Heim draws a clear connection between emotion, intention and karma. Heim argues that Pāli canonical texts generally identify feeling (*vedanā*) and perception (*saññā*) as the roots of intention (Heim, 532). As such, the way that one feels effects the way one perceives, which in turn effects the intentions behind one's actions. For Heim, therefore, intentions are not rational calculations, but the result of emotion. She explains:

> Feeling, not reason, generates the intentions on which morally significant actions rest, and cognitive activity follows feeling and intention. This ordering suggests a quite striking departure from many western ethical systems, in that here, rationality and reflection, far from being the basis of moral action and choice in motivations, follow along behind. Feelings are regarded as prior to motivation and are thus

central to analyzing how moral activity comes about" (Heim, 533).

This recognition of cognitive and affective elements in *cetanā* helps understand how mitigating circumstances and the identity of the victim affect the *cetanā* behind an act of killing.

While soldiers and monks may be united in their use of *cetanā* and karma to evaluate the actions, there is a great deal of disagreement about how *cetanā* is related to karma and, most importantly, whether or not there are situations in which one can kill without creating negative karma.[33] Of the twenty monks interviewed over the course of my research, eleven believed that firing a weapon on the battlefield produced negative karma and nine believed that it did not.[34] Soldiers were also split in their assessments. Of 58 soldiers interviewed at the 5th Sri Lankan Light Infantry (SLLI) camp in Mihintale, 33 believed that negative karma did not occur when they fired their weapons at the enemy, while 25 believed that it did occur (See Table 1). While each of these soldiers agreed that intention determines the karmic effects of particular actions, they disagreed on whether it was possible to fire their weapons with a positive intention. Even though all of my informants employed the same terminology in their evaluation of action on the battlefield, they still differed in their understandings of those actions and employ different lines of reasoning to support their claims.

The monks and soldiers interviewed over the course of my fieldwork present a

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[33] It should be noted that with the exception of two of my informants, who are long-time friends, the monks in this sample were chosen specifically because of their relationship with the army. The monks in this sample either live very near to an army camp, participate frequently in ceremonies sponsored by the army, or were members of the army prior to ordination.

[34] Venerable Ratanavaṃsa changed his answer over the course of the time that I knew him. In 2005 he answered that firing at the enemy produced *pav*. In 2007, however, he reversed his answer, arguing that negative karma need not be produced by a soldier firing at the enemy.

variety of opinions regarding killing on the battlefield, many informed by Buddhist commentaries, which treat the act of killing in great detail. In the most commonly cited formulation, found in the *Atthasālinī* (95-104) *Papañcasūdanī* (i. 198-200, 203-4), the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* (69-76), and the *Digha-nikāya-aṭṭakathā-ṭikā* (i. 143-54), 5 conditions must be fulfilled for a negative karma of killing to be created: 1) There must be a living creature; 2) One must know that the creature is living; 3) One must intend to kill the creature; 4) One must perform the necessary action; 5) The creature must die.[35]

Informed by the framework delineated in this commentary, Buddhist monks and soldiers use intention of the action as well as certainty of the results to evaluate the accomplishments of soldiers. Through my fieldwork I discovered a wide range of interpretations of the intentions behind the act of killing on the battlefield. As we have seen, some Buddhists state that it is possible to kill without creating negative karma depending on the *cetanā*, while others argue that this is impossible. Still others argue that there are levels of karma determined by the intention (See Appendix 1).

When asked about a situation in which the five conditions for a karma of killing would not be fulfilled, Rahula, a young monk from Kandy replied, "If you put cartridges in a gun and it accidentally went off, then there would be no *pav* because there would be no intention to kill there.[36]" Rahula reasons that a killing karma would not occur in the case of an accident. Venerable Maṅgala, the head of a

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[35] From Saddhatissa's citation: Dhs. A. 129; Sdhp. V. 58; Kkvt. 50; Uj. 62; cf. Sūyagada, op. cit., I. 1, 2.24-29

[36] Interview with Venerable Rahula on September 16, 2005 at his temple near Peradeniya.

monastic training center in Kandy also rejects claims that soldiers can fire their weapons without creating negative karma. He explains:

> The mentality of someone on the battlefield is to fight with the enemy; to defeat the enemy. At such times there is hatred....Now if someone were to draw a knife on you, what would you do? You would consider what course of action to take to save yourself. You would think of a way of defeating that enemy before he could destroy you. We know that it is a sin to destroy that person. However, we love ourselves more than that person.[37]

According to Maṅgala, violent actions against others, no matter what the circumstances, are based on attachment to the self. There are no special rules or intentions that allow one to escape the karma produced by one's actions.

Surprisingly, many soldiers agree that their activities inevitably produce negative karma. When I asked Specs about killing on the battlefield, he gave me a surprisingly sophisticated answer. While he stated that killing on the battlefield created negative karma no matter what, he also stressed that soldiers shouldn't think about it. He elaborates, saying:

> If we all thought about *pav*, we couldn't have an army. If you say things like that then we couldn't get the proper result from the army. Then every soldier would be trying to figure out what *pav* he was committing. If everyone went thinking like that, then we couldn't do this job. If monks went out everyday and preached that this work is a sin, then we couldn't do it.

Specs then goes on to distinguish Buddhist thought from soldiers fighting on the battlefield, explaining:

> Buddhist *darśana* is different. It is true. You can live your live according to it. We fight with other people because of lust for power and desire. If we could fix that then there would be no need for war. If

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[37] Interview with Venerable Sarasiyapatuve Maṅgala in Kandy on October 4, 2006.

> that were so then war would not be needed in a country....That is the way of this world. It would be best if everyone could live in peace. We must reach that place and from there fix not just the country, but the entire world. If you take shooting, the person who gives the order and the person who fires will both certainly receive *pav*.

While all soldiers believe that their actions are necessary for protection of the state and its citizens, many share Specs' opinion, accepting that they will have to face the consequences of their actions in the future. While some soldiers speak of their actions in a fatalistic way, remarking, "One does not join the army to make merit," others see their actions as intentional sacrifices for the good of the country. A disabled 30-year-old Corporal explains how his duty conflicts with Buddhist teachings:

> According to the teaching of Buddhism, *pav* occurs. It is impossible to prevent it. According to my knowledge of the *dhamma*, the *akusala karma* of *prāna ghata* occurs there. I think that many of our soldiers know this. However, this is our duty. There are many duties like this in the world. Many people give different reasons to justify (*sādarane karanna*) *pav*, but it is still *pav*.[38]

Even though he uses language hinting of justification and absolution, this soldier believes that *pav* still occurs. The Corporal acknowledges the *akusala* nature of his actions, but at the same time he argues that there are many necessary jobs that produce negative karma for those who perform them. When I asked him for some examples of other jobs that produce negative karma he mentioned fishermen, executioners and butchers. While he accepts the negative nature of his actions, the Corporal does not distinguish his job from these other occupations in the country.

Those who informed me that killing on the battlefield does not produce negative karma also used intention as their basis of evaluation. Gnanatilaka, the chief

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[38] Interview with anonymous Corporal on September 26, 2005 at Panagoda.

incumbent of the Mirissaväti Caitiya in Anurādhapura, utilizes the metaphor of a rabid dog entering the temple ground. If one were to kill the dog, one's intention would not be to kill, but rather to protect the people of the temple.[39] In this example the animal is not an innocent creature but a threat. In the same way, soldiers who kill the enemy do so with the intention of protecting the innocent rather than killing a living being. A 29-year-old Lance Corporal echoes Gnanatilaka, explaining:

> It isn't *pav*. There is a saying in Sinhala, 'It is the fool that gives up when he sees a venomous snake.'[40] That is to say, if a venomous snake comes to your house, you are a fool not to kill it. That's because if you don't kill it, it will bite you and then kill other people. If you don't destroy a terrorist then the entire country is finished. Our duty is to protect the country and its people. It is a service.[41]

Intention here is used in the cognitive sense: the soldier's primary intention is the protection of the country, killing is only the instrument he must utilize to accomplish his goal.

While Gnanatilaka and the Lance Corporal stress the intention to protect over the intention to kill, other monks and soldiers point out the impersonal nature of their actions. One light infantry soldier explains: "Soldiers don't shoot the enemy out of personal anger (*paudgalika tarahaka*). If they shoot they do so for the common good. This war is on behalf of the country, people, religion, region, and motherland. It would be *pav* to shoot one's neighbor over a land conflict, but the intention here is a good one."[42] This soldier separates the act of killing on the battlefield from intention,

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[39] Interview with Ven. Eetalawetunawewa GnanaTilaka in Anuradhapura on August 17, 2005.

40 "*Visa gora sarpayā däkka nära mōdayā.*"

[41] Interview with anonymous Lance Corporal (Subject 20) on January 15, 2007 at Mahākanadarāva 6th CLI Headquarters.

[42] Interview with anonymous Private (Subject 34) on January 13, 2007 at Mahākanadarāva 6th CLI Headquarters.

transforming the act into a neutral one. This soldier is not alone in his reasoning. Major Chandrapala, the commander of the army temple at Panagoda, also emphasizes the lack of personal anger behind the actions of soldiers. He argues:

> In Buddhism, one needs to fulfill five conditions for a sin to occur. Those five are not fulfilled by us. Our goal is just to face the enemy with the goal of protecting our own lives and the lives of others. Our soldiers don't kill with anger.[43]

Chandrapala reasons that soldiers fire their weapons at the enemy not with anger, but out of their duty to protect others. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa adds, "The soldier doesn't have anything personal against the enemy. The enemy is against the nation (*jātiya*) and the religion. If not that, they are connected to some other problem. The enemy is an enemy because of those things. It is not personal."[44] For these informants, anger and personal anger in particular is the deciding factor behind the creation of a negative karma.

Anger, however, is not the only emotion that associated with *pav*. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa explains the mindset of a soldier in battle. "Every time he fires, he thinks, 'Oh no!' When he shoots, he hears the explosion. When he hears it, he thinks, 'Oh no!' So, he feels very sad. He is not sure where the mortars he fires are landing. So he thinks, 'Oh no!'"[45] According to Ratanavaṃsa, the sadness that soldiers feel in their *hita* factors into the negative karma created when firing at the enemy.

Some soldiers claim that they do not create pav because they are merely

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[43] Interview with Major Chandrapala on November 30, 2005 at Panagoda army temple.

[44] Interview with Ven. Ratanavaṃsa on October 7, 2006 at Gale Pansala near Mihintale.

[45] Ibid.

carrying out the orders. A grey-haired private explains: "As I see it the government uses the army to stop the terrorists. So the soldiers don't get *pav*. The *pav* occurs to the government."[46] Since the intention to kill the enemy originates in the government and soldiers are ordered to fight by officers, this soldier reasons that he is buffered from any negative karma. From a doctrinal perspective, this soldier does indeed have a point. As mentioned above, killing by giving an order to kill (*āṇattika*) is one of the six means of killing. Many low ranking soldiers agreed that negative karma should not accrue to them, but to the ones who order them to kill. Another well-seasoned Corporal suggests that the negative karma could be traced all the way back to the president in whom all such orders originate.

Intention is not the only one of the five conditions open to interpretation by soldiers. Many soldiers argue that even though they fire their weapons in the direction of the enemy, they cannot be sure whether they fulfill the fifth condition, verification of the enemy's death. For many Buddhist soldiers, this uncertainty is an important factor in reduction of the negative karma that they may receive. Venerable Kassapa, a monk who was ordained after retiring from an artillery regiment, explains that the karma of killing does not occur when firing artillery because one does not see the results.[47]

It is not only artillery gunners who report a crucial difficulty of verification in battlefield killing, but front line soldiers also report inability to confirm killing. When I asked Specs if he had ever fired his weapon on the battlefield, he replied in

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[46] Interview with anonymous Private (Subject 18) on January 13, 2007 at Mahākanadarāva 6th CLI Headquarters.

[47] Interview with Venerable Kassapa on March 8, 2007 at Ratanaghara Temple in Anuradhapura.

the affirmative, but stressed that he had never actually aimed at an individual target. He explained:

> Although I haven't put a specific person in my sights and fired, I have fired my gun on the battlefield. After the battle we count the bodies. We don't know who killed who. We all just fired together. We take those bodies and we bury them. I have never taken aim at one person and fired.[48]

When firing at the enemy from the midst of a group of soldiers, there can always be some doubt as to whether it is your bullets that injure or kill the enemy. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa claims to have encountered many soldiers who are able to believe that they are not personally responsible for killing enemy soldiers. "No one thinks 'I shot that person.' No one thinks, 'My shot hit the target.' Some of the shots hit and some miss, but only a small handful of the bullets hit."[49]

In *On Killing*, a study of the psychological effects of learning to kill in war, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman identifies this denial of responsibility as a common practice among front-line American troops as well. During an interview, a World War II veteran describes his participation in battle, "there were so many other guys firing, you can never be sure it was you. You shoot, you see a guy fall, and anyone could have been the one that hit him" (Grossman, 111).

Brigadier P.U.S. Vithanage, the head of the Sri Lankan Army Psychological Operations (Psy Ops), stresses that this plausible deniability is an important factor in the ability of Buddhist soldiers to fight without fear of *pav*. He explains that firing weapons:

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[48] Interview with "Specs" on September 26, 2005 at Panagoda Army Base.

[49] Interview with Ven. Ratanavaṃsa on October 7, 2006 at Gale Pansala near Mihintale.

> …[do not] really bother me if it is a "syndicate effort" or if there is no way to tell whether or not someone was hit by me. We use large weapons so it is impossible to find out….If we think that we have killed an innocent family...like a mother and a child. If we see something like that, we know that they couldn't be LTTE. At such times, we see that we may have made a mistake. As long as we don't know for sure, it does not negatively affect our morale. Our soldiers are not afraid to fight and shoot. The five precepts are not an obstacle.[50]

While Brigadier Vithanage is less concerned with the intricacies of Buddhist doctrine than Ratanavaṃsa, his concerns are entirely practical. As the head of Psychological Operations, his job is to preserve the morale of his soldiers. If soldiers were to interpret their actions as *pav*, morale would fall. This ability to deny responsibility for specific actions creates an important block in the chain of events of negative karma that allows the soldiers to do their jobs without violating the first precept of Buddhism, to refrain from intentional killing.

While monks and soldiers disagree in their appraisals of the act of killing on the battlefield, their evaluations are not based upon seeking absolution by explaining the ultimate justice of the war. On the contrary, each of these informants stressed the importance of the *cetanā* associated with the actions of individual soldiers. Despite agreeing on the ultimate karmic implications of a variety of mindsets possible while on the battlefield, my informants all used the same principles of *cetanā, hita* and karma to express their opinions. The crucial question for Sinhala Buddhists at war is not whether or not a war can be just, but whether or not a soldier can have selfless intentions behind their decision to take life. If it is possible to kill without selfish intent, as some argue, then negative karma does not occur. Can the king represented

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[50] Interview with Brigadier P.U.S. Vithanage on April 22, 2007 at Panagoda army temple.

in the *Vinaya* story kill with a smile free from negative feelings? If this is not possible then the question falls to the quality of a soldier's intention.

While soldiers are united in their association of *cetanā* with *pav*, their application of the terms is by no means systematic. Exploring the range of individual understandings of karma and *cetanā* are crucial to entering the Sri Lankan Buddhist perspective of war. Is it possible to kill with good *cetanā* or is there something about the act of killing that makes it impossible to perform without creating negative karma? Should *cetanā* be understood as a decision made on the cognitive level or does it have an affective dimension? What are the consequences of different answers to these questions? How have scholars interpreted Buddhist doctrinal analyses of individual acts of killing?

While doctrinal analyses provide a solid foundation for understandings of normative Buddhist ethics, ethnography is necessary if we are to uncover the beliefs and practices of Buddhists dealing directly with complex ethical decisions in their every day lives. Evaluating hypothetical actions is very different from evaluating real actions performed by oneself, one's family or one's neighbors. In his article, *Is Merit in the Milk Powder? Pursuing Puñña in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, Jeffrey Samuels explains the cognitive and affective dimensions of contemporary Sri Lankan understandings of intention. One of Samuels' interview subjects explains that there are three types of *cetanā* that occur during an act of giving. These are "…prior *cetanā* (*pūrva cetanā*), a *cetanā* during the delivery of a gift (*muñcana cetanā*), and a subsequent/after/future *cetanā* (*apara cetanā*)" (Samuels 2008, 13). According to this monk, the merit or *piṅ* resulting from an act of giving is decided by one's mental and

emotional state before giving, during the gift and after the gift has been given. The *cetanā* at these moments is affected by a number of aesthetic factors including the tidy state of the temple grounds, the monk's appearance, and the attentiveness that the monk shows to the laity. If a monk were to dress shabbily and ignore the donors, then the *cetanā* of the donors would be negatively affected, resulting in the production of less *piṅ*.

The three stages of *cetanā* used to describe the act of giving can also be applied to the creation of *pav*, as Venerable Ampiṭiyē Sīlavaṃsatissa, the chief incumbent of the Welgam Vihāra outside of Trincomalee suggests. When asked about the soldiers firing their weapons on the battlefield he immediately cited the three phases of *cetanā*. He explains:

> For there to be merit, the three *hita* must be purified: *pūrva*, *apara*, and *muñcana*. Now if we give something to someone, we must first think that if we give this to them, it would be a good thing. That is the first *hita*. The other one is the time of giving and the other is the mind after giving. If you think "Oh no, it was such a waste to give this to this person," then merit will not occur. It is the same with pav.[51]

Sīlavaṃsatissa has first hand experience with mindsets during battle, having been shot by a T-56 assault rifle and hit by a mortar round during an LTTE attack on his temple. For Sīlavaṃsatissa, *pav*, like *piṅ,* is determined not by a single cognitive decision, but by one's emotional state as well as cognitive reasoning throughout the performance and completion of an action.

Samuels pays particular attention to the Sinhala concept of the *hita*. *Hita*, which he translates as "heart," is often used interchangeably with *cetanā* in colloquial

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[51] Interview with Venerable Ampiṭiyē Sīlavaṃsatissa on July 24, 2005 at Welgam Vehera near Trincomalee.

Sinhala and is roughly equivalent to the Pāli term, *citta*, which is often translated as "mind."[52] As Samuels demonstrates, the term is actually somewhere between heart and mind. The state of one's *hita*, as Samuels' informants explain, is directly related to the amount of *piṅ*, or merit, produced by particular activities. One of Samuels' informants explains: "Merit means happiness (*piṅ kiyannē satuṭa*). Happiness is the heart/mind (*hitē santōṣaya*). Demerit means unhappiness (*pava kiyannē asatuṭa*). Merit is based on these two" (Samuels 2008, 16). Samuels explains, "For the laymen and laywomen with whom I spoke about meritorious giving, conversations rarely, if ever, touched upon the need or giving to be accompanied by a donor's conscious reasoning. Instead, making merit was largely discussed in conversations focusing on the emotional state of the donor (Ibid., 10). Samuels argues that in the Sri Lankan ritual context, merit is not seen as a rational/cognitive act, but as having both cognitive as well as significant affective dimensions.

Through this understanding of the cognitive and affective dimensions of *cetanā* or *hita*, Samuels provides a convincing solution to this problem. When giving to certain individuals, one's *hita* will be pleased throughout the entire process. When giving to others, on the other hand, negative feelings may intrude before, during or after the act of giving. Just as this logic explains the production of merit, *piṅ*, it also can be applied to the production of *pav*, or negative karma. As Samuels mentioned, merit is happiness, (*piṅ kiyannē satuṭa*) and demerit is unhappiness (*pava kiyannē*

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[52] Discussing his translation of *hita*, Samuels writes: "The English phrase I translate as "attracting the heart" is based on the Sinhala expression "*hita ädaganīma*" (literary Sinhala "*leṅgatu*"). The second term in the Sinhalese expression is the gerund form of the verb *ädagannavā* which literally means to draw, pull, attract, or absorb. The term *hita* (or *sita*), which I translate as heart in this and subsequent chapters, however, is slightly more problematic as the term, like shin in Chinese and *kokoro* in Japanese, refers to both one's cognitive and emotional center." *Samuels, Jeffrey. Forthcoming. Attracting the Heart: Buddhism and Emotion in Contemporary Sri Lanka. Pp 5-6.*

asatuṭa.) Just as individuals feel different degrees of happiness when giving to different recipients under different circumstances, individuals have the potential to feel different degrees of unhappiness when killing different victims in different circumstances and therefore create more or less *pav*.

While most of my informants initially expressed simplistic formulations of karma, after several interviews, more nuanced understandings emerged. When presented with a hypothetical scenario of a soldier firing his weapon, my informants often answered in absolute terms: either the soldier does or does not accumulate negative karma. When asked the same question again, however, most admitted that not all soldiers share the same motivations. Indeed, many subjects admitted that sometimes the intentions of soldiers are neither entirely good nor entirely bad. As with the acts of giving described by Samuels, the composition of the *hita* vary according to the situation, an individual's motive and the identity of the recipient of an action. The unpredictable nature of the battlefield can affect the *hita* of soldiers in powerful ways.

Venerable Vipuladhamma, the head of a meditation center in Mihintale, expresses a particularly subtle understanding of karma.[53] He explains:

> The dharma teaches the fact that the seriousness of *pav* is decided based upon the function of the thoughts. *Pav* is determined according those thoughts and the nature of those thoughts. *Akusala* occurs if an activity is carried out along with the roots of *akusala*, *lobha*, *dvesa* and *moha*. Not even the Lord Buddha could change the fruits of karma (*karma vipāka*.) When our king Duṭugämuṇu liberated our country he said, "My efforts were not for the comforts of kingship, but for the protection of the Buddhist religion (*sambuddha sāsana*)." *Kusala* and *akusala* are decided by thoughts like that. Now, when most soldiers are shot, as *Puttujana* (normal people) they feel a lot of hatred and

[53] The name of this subject has been changed.

anger for the enemy.[54]

While Vipuladhamma rejects the possibility of killing without creating negative karma, he allows room for different degrees of *pav* depending on the intentions behind the actions. Venerable Tantirimalle Chandaratne, the head monk of Tantirimalle temple, a temple on the border regions that came under attack by the LTTE in the 1980's, also mentions how different actions incur different levels of *pav*.

> When you kill someone you necessarily fulfill five conditions. You probably know about the five conditions. For a murder to occur one must fulfill five conditions. If those five are fulfilled then it is *pav* when someone shoots someone else. However, since their (the soldiers') intention is their duty to protect the country, there are differences in the *pav* that they receive. There are divisions of *pav*, you know. The *pav* that is created when one kills someone under normal circumstances that which is created when one kills under special circumstances is different. When a soldier shoots someone, he does so on behalf of the entire country. The *pav* increase or decrease in relation to the intention.[55]

According to Chandaratne's understanding, soldiers do create negative karma when they kill on the battlefield. A soldier fighting with the intention of saving the innocent and protecting the country, nation and religion, however, will produce less negative karma than a soldier who fights out of personal hatred.

Not every soldier, however, can fight with the mindset of minimal personal attachment necessary to minimize or eliminate negative karma. Despite the efforts of the army to create homogeneous soldiers through intensive training and discipline, soldiers differ in their individual intentions and actions. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa, admits that there will always be bad seeds (*yak äṭa*), which no amount of discipline can control. He explains:

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[54] Interview with Venerable Vipuladhamma on January 18, 2007 at his temple near Mihintale.

[55] Interview with Venerable Tantirimalle Candarathana on September 30, 2005 at Tantirimalle temple.

> You need to boil beans for two or three hours before you eat them. Before you boil them, you need to soak them at 3:00 in the afternoon. Then you boil them in the morning. When you eat them after boiling them, every once in a while you bite a hard one that didn't get cooked. We call that a demon seed. (*yak äṭa*) There are beans that don't get cooked even if you boil them for two hours. In the same way, no matter how many good people you have, there will always be a few bad beans….There are bad beans. That's why I am not going to tell you that 100% of the army guys are good people.[56]

Venerable Vimaladhajja, nicknamed the Brigadier Monk by soldiers for his enthusiastic support of the army and poems of the glory of Dutugämunu, also allowed for the existence of bad soldiers who commit acts of intense *pav* on the battlefield. He admits:

> As for soldiers, not all of them are good people. There are those who have gone down the wrong path. Not the majority, but there is a small handful of guys who do bad things, who have bad attitudes, who murder people, and act thuggishly. The army punishes guys like that.[57]

Despite his florid poetry and his strong argument that soldiers do not produce negative karma when they fire at the enemy, Vimaladhajja accepts that not all soldiers fight selflessly. "There are some soldiers with bad mental states, who break into people's houses," he explains. Vimaladhajja warns that when soldiers' minds are upset and filled with hatred and selfish intentions, they could do a great deal of harm to both themselves and others.

Gune, a 38-year-old Corporal of the Ceylon Light Infantry, who has spent most of the last 15 years in various combat zones, explains the extent of the harm soldiers are capable of.

> Honestly it is possible to rape and pillage during war without being caught. However if you do that, nothing will ever go right for you. At

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[56] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa on November 9, 2005 at Gale Pansala near Mihintale.

[57] Interview with Ven. Pilässi Vimaladhajja on October 9, 2006 in Homāgama on

> such times one remembers religion and dharma. According to one's conscience, one understands that something is wrong. If one does something wrong knowingly one will reap the results (*paṭisandenavā*) right on the battlefield. They will reap the results in the blink of an eye. No one can say that that isn't true. One gets the result (*vipāka*) in the blink of an eye….There was one incident when we were in Trinco....the Tamils had cultivated a field and left it. Our guys went and harvested the rice. They harvested, sold it and took the money. Our officer didn't know about it. They harvested and sold it. There were 21 guys who did that. All 21 of them were killed on the same day at the same time. We didn't even find a single one of their bodies….Now, if one kills normal (civilians) people one will reap a bad result (*vipāka*.) They could just walk over there and a bomb would go off. In war, there is no escape from bombs and bullets. We receive results according to the things, the *piṅ* and *pav*, that we have done.[58]

Gune's narrative highlights the swift and unforgiving nature of karma on the battlefield. He explains how soldiers, who deliberately harm innocents end up being harmed themselves. Let us reconsider now Captain Kanishka's assertion that he has been protected because he has never deliberately harmed anyone in his life. For Gune, Kanishka and the majority of Sri Lankan soldiers, the justice or injustice of a war is secondary to the quality of one's own personal conduct. They believe that misconduct on the battlefield leads to immediate karmic punishment, while the intention to avoid harming others leads to protection.

While soldiers of the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) disagree on whether or not firing their weapons at the enemy produces negative karma, they are in almost unanimous agreement about the effects of firing at animals (See Appendix 2). Only eight soldiers out of 58 answered that no *pav* was produced when firing at animals while twenty of the 38 answered that no *pav* was created when firing at people. How do we account for this discrepancy? According to most normative accounts of

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[58] Interview with Corporal Gunaratna on January 25, 2007 at Bogahayaya temple near Mihintale.

Buddhist ethics, the killing animals should produce less negative karma than the killing of people. Among soldiers, however, the evaluation is reversed. A 26-year-old private explains his views on the subject:

> Negative karma is for wrong actions. We fight the terrorists in order to protect the country, nation (*jātiya*) and the land. There is no sin in protecting *raṭa*, *jātiya* and *āgama*….(but) Animals are not enemies. There is no question that it is *pav*. It is *pav* to kill animals. It is even *pav* to kill a mosquito. He is drinking blood in order to live. The Tigers (LTTE) are a wild bunch. They kill Tamil women and children. They are a nasty group. It is *pav* to kill an animal, but it is not *pav* to kill a Tiger.[59]

This young private connects the level of *pav* produced to the degree to which the victim is a threat to himself or to the country. He views the LTTE as a gang of murderers and thus feels that his actions do not produce *pav*. Animals, on the other hand, are not a threat to the innocent or to Buddhism and so should not be killed. A 32-year-old Corporal agrees, arguing that killing animals is *pav* because they don't work against the country. He explains:

> Killing a being produces negative karma, but there is no negative karma if you kill one accidentally....I said before that what we are doing is our duty. That duty is to protect the *raṭa*, *jātiya, āgama* and the people. It isn't just that, but also to protect the regional resources. If the enemy comes to destroy those resources we have to stop them. That is our duty. However, we don't fulfill our duty by killing animals.[60]

While this soldier argues that his actions do not produce negative karma because he fights on behalf of the country, nation and religion, he is unable to make the same claim about animals. If he were to kill an animal he could not have the same intention of saving innocent civilians and preserving Buddhism and thus the act of

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[59] Interview with anonymous Private (Subject 37) on January 15, 2007 at Mahākanadarāva 6th CLI Headquarters.

[60] Interview with anonymous Private (Subject 53) on January 16, 2007 at Mahākanadarāva 6th CLI Headquarters.

killing would create *pav*.

Soldiers report that animals are often caught in the crossfire. Indeed, several soldiers claim that the LTTE will sometimes advance upon their positions behind herds of cattle. None of the soldiers that I spoke with felt that killing animals unintentionally during firefights with the LTTE created *pav*. *Pav* occurs when a soldier kills an animal out of a selfish desire for food. Specs told a story of one such soldier who harmed an animal while in an operational area:

> According to what I have personally witnessed, those who perform *pav* get destroyed completely without leaving behind a single piece. Until 1989 and 90 the soldiers received beef and pork so they always cooked meat in the camp. It was during General Daluwatte's time that they stopped giving the soldiers beef. Right after the beef was stopped, there was a period in the northern camps where there wasn't any meat at all. Many soldiers were upset by this. "We don't have strength without beef," they would say. So the soldiers started killing animals. Many wouldn't kill peacocks because they were afraid of Kataragama, but they killed cows and pigs.[61] They found cows missing one, two or three legs. The cows would step on land mines and get their legs blown off. So the soldiers would shoot this cows and bring the beef back to camp. Many of the soldiers who did this were blown up on the battlefield so that not even a single piece was left. One time we found a cow that had fallen down with a broken leg. A soldier went and cut off the cow's tail without killing it. He brought the tail, skinned it and cooked it in a soup with vegetables. Later, that soldier was blown up so badly that they couldn't even say where it was that he died. You know how if you are to eat fish, you must only kill as many as you need. If you need 4 kilos of fish, you need to kill 4 kilos of fish. But in the field there are people who throw a small grenade into the water and kill all the fish. They kill the big ones, the small ones and all of them.[62]

In Specs' eyes, the karma created by killing a cow for food was just as bad if not worse than firing at the enemy and, accordingly, resulted in almost immediate retribution. After completing his story of immediate retribution, Specs then told

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[61] Kataragama is the local Sri Lankan name for the Hindu god, Murugan or Skanda.

[62] Interview with anonymous Corporal on September 26, 2005 at Panagoda.

another story of an Officer who received special protection on account of saving a goat.

> There was one time at a camp where we didn't get much to eat. In the morning we got *velankola* (a type of green that they get in the jungle, he had never eaten it before.), rice and dhal. At lunch we got rice, dhal and *velankola* and at night we got dhal, velankola and rice. We didn't have meat or fish. Every once in a while there would be a regimental ceremony. At that time, the commanding officer said, "let's feed the boys meat." and went to the nearby Tamil village and bought four goats. He brought them to the camp and tied them to trees. They cried nonstop until morning. They were crying because they had been brought to a different place. They didn't know that they were going to be killed. But everyone in the camp said that they were crying because they knew that they were going to be killed. So they cried all night. In the morning the commanding officer came and said "Quickly, return the goats. You all eat *velankola*, rice and dhal." That's how good the commanding officer was. Even though he was in the army a long time, he didn't even get a single scratch.[63]

Even those most supportive of the current war effort stop short of forgiving all actions performed as a part of it. Justified or unjustified in the war that they fight, soldiers alone are responsible for their actions. Buddhist doctrine, discourse and practice operate primarily at the level of soldiers firing their weapons and dying on the battlefield, not at the level of over-arching ethical justification. While the language of justification may help to bridge contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhist ethical thought to the broader field of comparative ethics, it does not leave room for understanding Buddhist practice performed in the shadow of war; the language of *cetanā, pav,* and karma however, does.

The battlefield is a dangerous place, filled with uncertainty. If all soldiers naturally face this uncertainty with selfless intentions free from greed, hatred and ignorance, there would be no need for sermons or other Buddhist rituals. Not all

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[63] Interview with Specs on September 26, 2005 at Panagoda.

soldiers, however, have selfless intentions. Indeed, it could be argued that there is not a single soldier in the army who goes to war with completely selfless intentions. As Michele Gamburd argues in her article, *The Economics of Enlisting: A Village View of Armed Service. In Economy, Culture and Civil War in Sri Lanka*, the majority of recruits join the army not out of nationalist sentiment, but for economic reasons (Gamburd, 2004). The sermons and rituals facilitated by the monks not only help soldiers avoid harming the innocent, but they also inspire the soldiers into the best frame of mind to minimize the consequences of firing their weapons at the enemy. Ultimately, the concept of the selfless soldier fighting without mental defilements is an ideal. It is this gap between the ideal and reality that is the target of Buddhist practice.

At the end of our interview, I asked Specs why he think that he has suffered so much in the army. He answers my question with a sense of resignation, explaining:

> That is the lot of a soldier. We have to bear it. That is my lot. Why have I been marked for this suffering? Because I chose this job. Until my time is over, this is the weight I must bear. That's the way that I think about it. In the army those sorts of things are our job. It's not something else, but this that we must bear. These are the things that I chose as a job. Actually, I have to bear these things. It's nothing to feel sorry about, it is natural. But, at those times (at night) it effects your mind. We aren't arhats. That's what I have described. It won't effect morale, but one must face such situations. Those kinds of fears appear. We have to bear such things until we resign. After you resign, then you are free. The job is done. After that you can live like a normal citizen.[64]

While Specs recognizes that the army entails a great deal of suffering and activities that produce negative karma, he accepts it as his job. He signed up for the military in hopes of bettering his family's financial situation and now he must pay the price. He

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[64] Interview with Specs on September 26, 2005 at Panagoda.

looks forward, however, to December 5th, 2012, when he will be free to live like a normal person. At that time he will no longer have to fire his weapon on the battlefield or face the possibility of being blown up beyond recognition.

Chapter 3

Performing Intention: Preaching to a Buddhist Army

> It is not easy to preach to others, Ānanda. When preaching the dhamma to others, one should keep five factors in mind. What are those five? One should preach the gradual instruction. One should preach a sermon that reveals the purpose. One should preach out of sympathy for others. One should not preach for any (personal) gain. One should preach sermons that neither harm oneself nor others (A. III. P. 184).[65]

It is almost nine o'clock in Mihintale, the dusty Sri Lankan city said to have hosted the arrival of Buddhism to the island. The sky is dark, but light and sound pours from the small temple of Bogahayāya. Silver dollar-sized red clay oil lamps cast flickering light on uniformed soldiers sitting cross-legged on the ground, listening to the local monk, Ānandavaṃsa, preaching a sermon on the topic of *sīla*, discipline and morality. Most soldiers in the audience bear physical and mental scars from their time on the battlefield, such as a fidgeting young Captain wearing special shoes to reduce the limp caused by a 50-caliber bullet that tore through his upper thigh five years ago. The stocky Color Sergeant can barely grasp the tray of flowers he offers to the Bodhi tree, having lost movement in three of the fingers on his right hand to infection after surviving for three days in a swamp after his regiment left him for dead.

For each solider who survives to show scars, others never get the chance for a special shoe or weak grip. The war dead, physically absent from the sermon at the temple, call to mind a story in the Pāli canon of a warrior who asks the Buddha

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[65] *Na kho ānanda sukaraṃ paresaṃ dhammaṃ desetuṃ. Paresaṃ ānanda dhammaṃ desentena pañca dhamme ajjhattaṃ upaṭṭhapetvā paresaṃ dhammo desetabbo. Katame pañca? Ānupubbīkathaṃ kathessāmīti paresaṃ dhammo desetabbo. Pariyāyadassāvī kathaṃ kathessāmīti paresaṃ dhammo desetabbā. Anuddayataṃ paṭicca kathaṃ kathessāmīti paresaṃ dhammo desetabbo. Na āmisantaro kathaṃ kathessāmīti paresaṃ dhammo desetabbo. Attānaṃ ca paraṃ ca anupahacca kathaṃ kathessāmīti paresaṃ dhammo desetabbo.* (A. III. P. 184.)

whether it is true that soldiers who die on the battlefield are reborn in heaven. The Buddha remained silent in response. Undaunted, the warrior asked again, but the Buddha again remained silent. After being asked a third time the Buddha responded, telling the warrior that those who die on the battlefield will not be reborn in heaven. He explains that those who die on the battlefield are inevitably overcome with hatred and pain and are born, according to those feelings, in a hell realm (SN XLII.3). Given this bleak outlook, what does Buddhist belief, doctrine and practice have to offer the soldiers gathered in Mihintale, listening to Ānandavaṃsa's sermon and considering the fate of their fallen comrades and perhaps their own futures? In an economy ravaged by a quarter-century civil war with few employment opportunities, most soldiers come from poor families to fight and kill for the *raṭa*, *jātiya* and *āgama*: the country, nation and religion. Are they doomed to hell for their choice of occupation?

Influenced by a belief that monks should not associate with soldiers, contemporary scholarship treats sermons to soldiers as anomalies contradicting the spirit of Buddhist doctrine and monastic discipline. Regardless of one's opinion regarding monks preaching to the military, however, it is undeniable that soldiers have religious needs. It is said that there are no atheists in foxholes and Sri Lankan Buddhist soldiers are no exception to this adage. The uncertainty inherent in their lives can transform soldiers from all backgrounds into enthusiastic participants in religious ceremonies. This chapter will focus on sermons delivered to the army as one such opportunity for Sri Lankan soldiers to engage in Buddhist practice. While the previous chapter illuminated the interpretive strategies employed by Buddhist monks and soldiers to understand the individual actions of soldiers on the battlefield

as well as the consequences of firing a weapon at the enemy, this chapter begins a sustained study of Buddhist practice in the shadow of war.

Although there are no uniformed chaplains in the Sri Lankan military, monks living at temples near the army camps serve the religious needs of the soldiers both informally and through Buddhist sermons or, *baṇa*. For larger ceremonies, individual regiments often invite famous preachers to their camps to sponsor ceremonies commemorating "regiment day," marking the day they were established and memorializing the missing, dead and injured of the particular unit. Other ceremonies may be commissioned by high-ranking officers seeking to increase morale and prepare for specific offensives while the army as a whole sponsors two major sermons every year. The largest ceremony occurs on October 11th, the anniversary of the founding of the Sri Lankan army. This sermon is performed at Panagoda army temple before an audience composed primarily of the families of dead soldiers. Endeavoring to ease the suffering of the families, the monks receive alms and transfer merit to the dead. The second annual sermon occurs around the first Sunday of October at the Srī Mahābodhi tree in Anurādhapura. This sermon takes place following a ceremony during which all of the flags from all of the regiments in the Sri Lankan army are blessed at the Bodhi tree and then taken back to their respective units.

What do monks preach about on these occasions and what do they hope to accomplish? In this chapter, I will argue that the goals of the monks preaching to the soldiers and how they influence the emotions of the audience are at least as important as the informational content of the sermons they deliver. Monks do not design their sermons simply to inform and serve as sources for understanding Buddhist doctrine

or the Sri Lankan Buddhist worldview. An effective sermon is also an action performed within a unique context, for a particular audience in hopes of bringing about specific effects. In other words, sermons share properties with performative utterances, statements with meaning extending beyond the information contained in the language.

This is not a new explanation of Buddhist sermons. Indeed, Stanley Tambiah stressed the performative aspects of Buddhist preaching in his study of Buddhism in North East Thailand. Tambiah points out that very few if any of the monks or lay people actually understand the Pali verses used in Buddhist liturgy. He argues that the power of these words come not from their meaning but from three factors: 1) the original authority who is the source of the sacred words (ie: the Buddha); 2) the way in which doctrine becomes a sacred object symbolizing cultural heritage; 3) the authority of the religious experts who recite them. (Tambiah 1970, 1997). Tambiah concludes that the audience at a religious function need not understand the meaning of words in order to be affected by them.

In the case of contemporary Sri Lanka, however, most sermons are delivered primarily in the Sinhala vernacular. While preachers do chant several Pali verses throughout a sermon, for the most part their sermons are intelligible to the majority of their audience. Just because a sermon is delivered in the vernacular, however, does not mean that the primary goal behind it is to convey information. In some ways sermons stand on the fence between the textual tradition and Buddhist ritual. On the one hand, most sermons contain retellings and interpretations of Buddhist texts, reorganized to suit the needs of the audience. On the other hand, they have a strong performative aspect associated with rituals. Should a sermon be seen as didactic or

performative? Is the goal of a preacher to transmit information (in this case, the word of the Buddha) or is the goal to bring about some sort of transformation of reality? Can these two goals be separated?

While Bartholomeusz and other scholars have focussed on interpreting the meanings behind sermons to soldiers, no one has yet paid attention to the goals that lay behind them. What effects do Sri Lankan monks hope to bring about through their performances? Although the monks I spoke with all identified the ultimate goal of their sermons as the leading of their audience towards the wholesome path (*yahapat maga*) to nirvana, most admitted that sermons on renunciation and the fruits of enlightenment are not suitable for soldiers risking their lives on the battlefield. In the words of one of my informants, "They are uncertain whether or not their lives will end today. When they are on the battlefield with the enemy they know that their lives could end at any moment."[66] With such uncertainty in their lives, soldiers have much more immediate needs than education about the long path to nirvana. Soldiers need mental stability on the battlefield, solace from their physical and mental injuries, and a sense of protection both from the enemy as well as themselves.

While the transcendent or "*lokottara*" goal of nirvana may seem diametrically opposed from the proximate this-worldly (*laukika*) goals of soldiers on the battlefield, Buddhist preachers view the concepts as interconnected. Preachers seek to transform the hearts (*hita hadanavā*) of the soldiers in their audiences, confident that the heart is the key to *laukika* comfort to progress the individual towards *lokottara* development to nirvana. Through the pleasing sound of their voices, formulaic blessings as well as re-telling of ancient and contemporary stories, Buddhist monks strategically work to

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[66] Interview with Ven. Vipuladhamma in Mihintale on January 18, 2007.

affect the hearts of soldiers. By doing so, they hope to: 1) Ease mental distress experienced by soldiers as a result of their actions and experiences in battle; 2) Grant protection from enemy bullets and bombs; 3) Reduce unnecessary killing on the battlefield; and 4) Transform the soldiers' perceptions of reality.

The source material of this chapter consists primarily of multiple interviews with several monks over the period of 2004 to 2007 who frequently preached to audiences of soldiers as well as six sermons delivered to soldiers and their families.

Balancing Performance and Content

Sermons (*baṇa* or *dharmadesanā*) are a ubiquitous part of Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. The most common sermons are associated with funerals and memorials such as *paṃsakūla* sermons performed over the bodies of the recently deceased, or *mataka baṇa*, memorial sermons performed six days, three months, one year, and sometimes every year after a person has died. Sermons are also commonly performed on full moon (*pasalosvaka*) *poya* days, or accompanying festivals or rituals such as *bodhipūja* or *pahanpūja* (lamp offerings).[67] Sermons are broadcast on television and radio as well as transcribed in newspapers and books. In present-day Sri Lanka, sermons range between cerebral interpretations of Buddhist doctrine to *kavi baṇa*, poetic sermons sung in colloquial Sinhala that can leave an audience in tears. Despite this ubiquity and cultural importance, recent scholarship has largely

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[67] Richard Gombrich made the first attempt to catalogue and explain the different types of sermons found in the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition in his thorough ethnography, *Buddhist Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Highlands of Ceylon*. While he does not attempt a detailed study or attempt to interpret specific sermons, Gombrich identifies five types of sermons carried out in the upcountry village that served as his field site. These were: 1) *mataka baṇa*, preaching at the house of a dead person; 2) *paṃsukūlē baṇa*, preaching at a funeral; 3) *sāmānya baṇa*, an ordinary sermon preached on poya days; 4) *dharmasaṃvāda*, an informal doctrinal discussion; and 5) *āsana dekē baṇa*, the two-seated sermon in which one monk recites pāli texts while the other provides Sinhala translation and commentary (Gombrich 1971, 321).

ignored sermons, focusing their energy instead on either textual or ritual studies. As Deegalle Mahinda points out, Malalasekere's *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* does not even have an entry for the term *baṇa* (Deegalle 2006, 4). While the same encyclopedia does contain an entry on *desanā*, the description deals only with the Buddha's sermons and does not even mention the contemporary Sri Lankan practice (*Encyclopedia of Buddhism* Vol. IV, 383).[68]

Contemporary scholarship on the Sri Lankan *baṇa* tradition is shaped by a dialectic between performance and content. H.L. Seneviratne and Deegalle Mahinda have both framed their brief historical narratives of Sri Lankan preaching traditions as a process of de-emphasis on performance in favor of doctrinal content. As far as modern methods of investigation can determine, before the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the typical sermon was a structured all night affair complete with elaborate decorations and, in some cases, singing and dancing. Deegalle Mahinda refers to the monks who performed these all-night preaching ceremonies as "marathon preachers," as their sermons represented feats of sheer endurance (Deegalle 2006, 93).

Contrasting the highly ritualized all-night sermons described by nineteenth and early twentieth century monks with the new style of one hour sermons pioneered by Anagārika Dharmapāla and later by Palane Vajiragnana, H.L. Seneviratne demonstrates how sermons adapted to urban life and competition from preachers. Seneviratne reproduces a description of a typical pre-twentieth-century-sermon produced by Hendiyagala Silaratna, a monk who was active in the early twentieth

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[68] For a more detailed discussion of the neglect of the study of Buddhist sermons see Deegalle, Mahinda. 2006. *Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka*. New York: State University of New York Press, pp. 3-6.

century. The outline of Silaratna's ceremonies, which would start no later than 9:00 at night and end in the early morning, may serve as a template for a long tradition of Sinhala Buddhist sermons and contained the following sequence:

> 1. The arrival of the preacher. 2. Giving merit for the *dharmāsana*, first time. 3. The invitation to preach, in *Gatha* and *prasa* (verses). 4. Giving merit for the *dharmāsana*, second time. 5. Invitation to the gods. 6. Verses of *namaskara*. 7. Prasa on benefits of hearing *bana*, lullabically. 8. Benefits of *bana*, second time, in a different literary mode. 9. The sutra. 10. Commentary. 11. *Maitrivarnana*. 12. Giving of merit. 13. Gift giving to the preacher (Seneviratne 1999, 45).

Commenting on this description of a sermon, Seneviratne states that "...the doctrinal content was insignificant." He explains:

> "A look at this sequence makes it clear that the doctrinal content is limited to the core of the sutra and the commentary. Even there the sutra is not understood, because it is in Pali. Even the commentary may well be another text, in Pali or Sinhala, which is also memorized by the preacher and chanted. The appeal of this was more poetic or musical within an overall structure of religious emotion. It is possible that some preachers improvised and got across to the more educated or more intellectually inclined listeners some of the doctrinal content (Ibid., 45-6).

Protestant presuppositions emphasizing the transmission of information in a religious sermon may lead one to conclude that these nineteenth-century sermons were but exercises in ignorance.[69] Indeed, the preponderance of ritual and supposed lack of doctrinal content was precisely the target of critiques leveled against sermons in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Anagarika Dharmapāla argued that short succinct sermons to effectively convey Buddhist teachings were important in the competition with Christian preachers and the success of the Buddhist mission (Ibid., 42). Dharmapala's critique

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69 cf. Schopen, Gregory. 1991. Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism. History of Religions 31 (1):23-Jan.

of sermons culminated in the preaching tradition credited to Palane Vajiragnana in the early twentieth century. Deegalle Mahinda refers to this tradition as the "Vajirarāma style" in reference to the famous temple founded by Vajiragnana in Colombo. Spread throughout the country through Vajiragnana and his disciples' radio broadcasts, these sermons were meant to appeal to a new urban industrial population. Describing his ideal sermon, Palane Vajiragnana wrote:

> A sermon should be preached according to times and circumstances. Since in these days men do not have more than an hour to devote even to listen to a sermon, it is inappropriate to preach a sermon for longer than an hour. It is better to listen [to a sermon] for fifteen minutes per two or three days than to preach for two or three hours each day. . . . What is preached should be intelligible to even a child. . . . [C]ollections, auctions, music, dancing and fireworks. . . should not be allowed during a sermon. *A sermon is meant to teach ethical conduct and improve virtue and [worldly] wisdom and not to collect money by swaying the people by means of music, dancing, gymnastics, invitations to preach, fireworks and so forth.* Such brief sermons will help the development of virtue and [worldly] wisdom, and the decline of crime, theft, bad manners in the villages, and promote harmony (Ibid., 54 italics mine).

In contrast to the sermon described by Hendiyagala Silaratna, Vajiragnāna's sermon emphasized content over performance. For Vajiragnana, traditional sermons did not further Buddhist education or develop virtue, but were merely shows staged in order to collect money. In contrast, Vajiragnana's sermons stress content, communicating a succinct message intelligible to everyone in the audience. For Vajiragnana, therefore, performance was subordinate to content.[70]

As the Vajirarāma style of preaching spread throughout the country via radio and television, elaborate all-night performances such as the *āsana dekē baṇa* have

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[70] It would be wrong, however, to deny completely, the performative functions of the Vajirarāma style of preaching. Indeed, by advising that a sermon must be preached according to the time and the circumstances, Vajiragnāna attempts to optimize the effectiveness of preachers. By preaching according to the time, a preacher ensures that the audience will listen to his words and act accordingly.

almost completely died out in contemporary practice. As documented by Seneviratne and Deegalle, however, in the 1950's, a new type of poetic sermon was innovated by Venerable Siyambalagamuve Guṇaratna. This sermon, known as *kavi baṇa*, consisted of colloquial Sinhala commentaries sung by monks with beautiful voices. In the 1970s, Venerable Panadure Ariyadhamma created a *kavi bana* and ritual of offerings to the *bodhi* tree, called the *bodhipujā*. The *bodhipujā* has since become so popular that it is now arguably the most frequently performed Buddhist ceremony in the country.[71]

While they are not quite the all night performances of early twentieth century performers such as Silaratna, *kavi baṇa* and *bodhipujā* are supremely aesthetic experiences, which can inspire emotional outpourings from the audience. On the evening of a *bodhipujā*, the tree is decorated with flags and the *bodhi* shrine (*bodhi mandapa*) is lit with coconut oil lamps. The flickering lamps in the night can transform even the most humble temple into a strikingly beautiful ritual space. Thus, after Vajiragnana's innovation of more content-based sermons, performance once again became an important aspect of mainstream preaching in Lanka.

Although the proportions of performance and content form the basis of scholarship on sermons, scholars have not yet explored the intricacies of this dialectic. Emphasizing the lack of doctrinal content of nineteenth century sermons, Seneviratne writes "…for the majority the sound was the message, the act of hearing itself being understood as generative of merit" (Seneviratne 1999, 46). While he

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[71] Richard Gombrich provides a translation of the entire Bodhipujā liturgy in X. Further analysis and interpretation of the Bodhipujā's dramatic rise in popularity can be found in x, y, and z.

notes that the verb most commonly associated with sermons, *pavatvanavā*, literally means, "to perform," he does not pursue this topic in his work.

Deegalle Mahinda also raises, but fails to explore questions about the performative aspects of sermons. Inspired by Elizabeth Harrison's work on Buddhist sermons in Tokugawa Japan, Deegalle argues that the performance of a sermon can be just as important as its content. Looking back on this apparent fluctuation between performance and content, Deegalle embraces both as important aspects of an effective sermon. He argues that the ideal sermon as described in the Pāli canon is a blend of meaning and performance, writing:

> In Buddhist religious discourse, the approximate corresponding terms for content and form are *sārtha* (P. *sāttha*) and *savyañjana* (P. *sabyañjana*). In the Buddhist preaching tradition, at times, there seems to be a preoccupation with *sārtha* and *savyañjana*. However, in the ritual enactment, preachers would not recommend the sacrifice of *sārtha* for the sake of *savyañjana*, or vice versa. Since a preaching rich in both content and form is considered a good sermon, equal emphasis is placed on both aspects, and two-pulpit preaching should maintain a balance between *sārtha* and *savyañjana* for the sake of efficacy in transmitting the Buddha's message. A *dhammadesanā* should contain both *sārtha* and *savyañjana*, since the Buddha himself taught a doctrine that is charming in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end (Deegalle 2006, 109).

When analyzing sermons, Deegalle's use of the term "performance," which he sometime substitutes for "form" is at times unclear. The reader is left wondering if he intends "performance" merely to be seen as the aesthetic elements of a sermon such as the demeanor of the monk or if "performance" should be viewed in terms of performative utterances: words spoken in order to have specific effects. While Deegalle generally uses performance to refer to aesthetic elements, his definition of a sermon hints at a more instrumental understanding. Deegalle defines the Buddhist sermon as "…an educational method in traditional communities and a tool in

converting human hearts in a variety of different religious communities" (Deegalle 1997, 182).

In his recent book, *Popularizing Buddhism: Preaching as Performance in Sri Lanka*, Deegalle rephrases his definition, writing that "...Buddhist preaching can be seen as a 'composite' of 'strategies' for converting the hearts of ordinary people and for transforming their personalities by persuading them to engage in good works" (Deegalle 2006, 16). By using words such as 'tool' and 'strategy', Deegalle indicates that a sermon is, above all else, an action and not a static text. In his 1983 article on Sri Lankan Buddhist sermons, *Die Botschaft der friedvollen Lehre (śānta dharmay paṇiviḍaya): Einfūhrung in die buddhistische Predigt in Sri Lanka,* Peter Schalk also defines Sri Lankan Buddhist sermons explicitly as acts of performative speech, characterizing sermons as transmissions of the word of the Buddha in public speech acts (Schalk 1983, 72). This definition emphasizes that sermons serve two functions: not only transmitting the teachings of the Buddha but also effecting change in the audience on a level beyond intellectual understanding (Schalk 1983 79).

While both Schalk and Mahinda suggest that sermons should be viewed as both carriers of information and actions effecting change in the world beginning with the hearts of the listeners, both stop short of analyzing the agency of specific preachers and their sermons. Mahinda mentions how sermons transform the hearts of soldiers, but he does not explain exactly what this means or how it happens. Schalk, on the other hand, suggests that sermons could be important tools for the socialization of different groups, but stops short of pursuing this line of analysis, suggesting that it would be a subject appropriate for future inquiry (Schalk 1983, 80).

In other words, while both scholars stress that sermons are actions, neither actually explores their effects or the goals behind them.

What can we learn by applying Schalk and Mahinda's definitions of sermons to sermons delivered to the military? When one analyses sermons solely for their content, there is a tendency to turn them into proof texts supporting particular visions of Buddhism. When one looks at sermons as actions, however, new lines of questioning open. If sermons are viewed as both mediums for communicating information and as actions attempting to accomplish particular goals, then what messages do monks communicate to soldiers in sermons and what are their goals as preachers? How do monks achieve these goals and what are the aggregate effects of their words?

Charles Hallisey was one of the first to point out how scholars of Buddhist history and ethics tend to approach their material primarily for its documentary functions. In an article co-written with Anne Hansen, Hallisey cites the work of Dominic LaCapra, pointing out two approaches to reading texts, one that focuses on the "documentary" aspects of a text another, which focuses on the "worklike" aspects. While the documentary aspects of a text "…situate it within an empirical reality and convey information about that reality," (Hallisey and Hansen, 307) the worklike aspects supplement reality, "bringing into the world something that did not exist before in that significant variation, alteration, or transformation..."(LaCapra 1983, 30).

Hallisey and Hansen apply LaCapra's ideas specifically to Buddhist narrative such as the *Dhammapada* commentary on DhP. I.4 and the story of Paṭācāra. While scholars have traditionally assumed that these stories were merely examples of

"watered down Buddhism" meant to appeal to the masses, Hallisey and Hansen argue that they work at subtle levels to transform the moral lives of their audiences. They write that the "...Theravādin commentators apparently recognize the significance of the worklike aspects of Buddhist narratives themselves. That is, they see that a story transformed the person to whom it was told...." (Hallisey and Hansen, 311).

Applying LaCapra's methods to Buddhist narratives, Hallisey and Hansen argue that Buddhist narratives act upon readers, "prefiguring, configuring and refiguring" their moral lives. Borrowing from the work of Ricouer, Hallisey and Hansen defines prefiguration as the effect of narratives in enlarging an agent's moral horizon, configuration as the power of narratives to expose the opaqueness of moral intention, and refiguration as the healing and transformative potential of narratives (Hallisey and Hansen 1996, 308). Taking the story of Paṭācāra as an example, Hansen and Hallisey first demonstrate how the narrative of the loss of her husband, children and parents prefigures the audience by evoking sympathy for her plight as a human being subject to the same forces of karma as anyone (Ibid. 314). Secondly, they show how the story configures the ethical life of the audience by showing "...the opacity of karma displayed in the narrative profoundly configures moral life by undermining any confidence we might have in our ability to identify the karmic results of any particular action that we plan to do" (Ibid. 319). Paṭācāra's plight was not the result of one identifiable action, but the result of the infinite web of past karma. Finally, Hallisey and Hansen argue that Paṭācāra's story refigures our moral lives by enabling "...us to cultivate a crucial distance from our own circumstances and gives us a way of seeing our lives with a degree of detachment" (Ibid., 323). Hallisey and Hansen argue, therefore, that Buddhist narratives are not simply "watered down Buddhism,"

but rather complex texts which work upon and transform the moral lives of their audiences.

Richard King illustrates further the problems that face those attempting to interpret oral performances as texts in his essay on religion and hermeneutics, *Sacred Texts, Hermeneutics and World Religions*. King writes:

> Writing speech down transforms it. In speech, once the words are spoken there is nothing left of them to work over. However, if speech is 'translated' into a written form it immediately becomes accessible to study, a greater degree of analysis, and to recontextualization and reinterpretation. If one combines this with the wider audience one might hope to reach in a literate community one can see the 'universalizing' tendency of writing, a tendency that seems to work against the immediacy and particularity of the oral event (King 63).

While King is referring specifically to originally oral traditions such as the Vedas and Buddhist suttas, his argument applies equally to contemporary sermons delivered in Sri Lanka.

In his analysis of canonical and post-canonical Buddhist material, Steven Collins also points out the failure to take into account the work-like aspects of texts. He writes that scholars of Buddhism have treated "...the texts, or (as is more often the case) passages within them conceived separately as "proof-texts" simply in a documentary fashion," and forgotten that "...texts also have work-like aspects, which supplement material realities.…" (Collins 1998, 417). Like Hallisey and Hansen, Collins applies this approach to previously ignored examples of Buddhist literature. Discussing the fantastical elements of the *Agañña*sutta and the *Temiya Jātaka*, Collins writes: ""...the function of stories such as that of Temiya is clearly not to describe or advocate a possible world but to make a comment on the real one" (Collins, 436).

The stories, Collins argues, do not reflect reality, they comment on it in an attempt to influence the reading or listening audience.

In his recent work on Buddhist *vaṃsa* literature, Stephen Berkwitz also emphasizes the function of texts over their content. While studies of *vaṃsa* literature once focused primarily upon the veracity of the events that they record and their timelines in particular, Berkwitz challenges the assumption that *vaṃsa* texts were written as histories meant only to chronicle the past. On the contrary, Berkwitz argues that *vaṃsas* were written primarily to shape the emotions and ethical thinking of their audiences. Berkwitz writes that *vaṃsas* "…were designed to exercise the emotional lives of Buddhist devotees, structuring the ways people think, feel, and act with respect to what happened previously" (Ibid., 586). By de-emphasizing documentary approaches to *vaṃsa* texts, which tend to view them only as history, Berkwitz highlights how their authors sought to act upon their audiences in order to shape them into "…a community of moral actors, who, in turn, were expected to respond jointly to the obligations that history has placed upon them" (Ibid., 599).

Thus, Berkwitz, like Hallisey and Collins, demonstrates how an analysis of the work-like elements of a text can lead to new lines of questioning and thinking about Buddhist sources. Maria Heim sums up this approach very well in the conclusion to her own study of the use of emotions in Buddhist narratives. She writes: "Buddhist texts are not merely descriptive accounts of the world and our place in it...many texts seek to have an enduring effect on their audiences" (Heim, 551).

Despite this movement towards functional analyses of Buddhist texts, however, most work on religion in the Sri Lankan army has stalled at the documentary level. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, many scholars studying

Buddhists understandings of war have approached the statements made by their informants as "proof texts" supporting either positions of just-war or pacifism. Bartholomeusz and Harris's discussions of the narratives and doctrinal statements employed by contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists on the topic of war are very important contributions to our understanding of what has become a key facet of Sri Lankan Buddhist life. By largely ignoring the performative functions of these narratives, however, these scholars only produce a one-dimensional picture of Buddhist responses to war.

Tessa Bartholomeusz, for example, converts Venerable Bengamuwe Nalaka Thera's explanation of his sermons to soldiers into a proof text supporting Buddhist just-war theory. Nalaka explains his sermons to soldiers:

> My responsibility is to boost the morale of the soldiers. None of the other religious representatives [Hindu, Christian, Muslim] ever visit the camps. I console them by reminding them of all the good deeds they have done in their life. Quelling the terrorists in the north is solely to protect and safeguard the dharma. The soldiers in the army are courageous; they have become selfless. Therefore, it is possible even to attain *nibbana*, even for those fighting for the country and the *sāsana* (Bartholomeusz, 122).

Bartholomeusz reads this statement as data supporting her argument that contemporary Buddhists utilize just-war thinking. She writes: "Here in this line of thinking, where intent is the determining ethical criterion, the Buddhist precept of non-violence can be abrogated in defensive postures that may require killing, but that do not impede one's spiritual development" (Ibid.). Although Bartholomeusz identifies correctly Nalaka's concern for intention, she ignores Nalaka's stated goal—to boost morale—in favor of her own goal—to piece together a Sri Lankan Buddhist theory of just-war.

In this chapter, I follow the lead of recent scholars on Sri Lankan Buddhism and approach sermons to soldiers primarily as actions meant to produce intended effects rather than documents containing didactic pronouncements of Buddhist attitudes towards war. My analysis of sermons to soldiers as performances will pay attention to the goals of the preacher as well as the words and other tools he utilizes to accomplish them. When a monk preaches to a group of soldiers, his primary goal is not to teach the soldiers about meditation and the fruits of the homeless life because these topics would not help him effect a positive change in the hearts soldiers. The preachers may instead select a topic the soldiers can relate to and remind them of the heroism of Duṭugämuṇu and Valagambāhu. The majority of the audience are very familiar with these stories, and the preacher chooses the story not to inform or re-enforce doctrinal understanding, but rather as a tool for inspiring comfort and goodwill in the hearts and minds of the soldiers. In general, sermons to soldiers tend to be more instrumental than didactic in nature. Indeed, sermons are classified as a type of *pinkama*, or "act of merit," emphasizing the primary goal, to produce merit, over ancillary goals of conveying information.

Captain Kanishka expresses the effect on the heart when he describes what attracts his soldiers to particular sermons. He explains that:

> The boys like to hear the sermons of skilled preachers….Even if they are lying, they preach in a way to attract their hearts (*hita ädanavā*) If you do anything methodically, it will succeed. One has to preach with the right rhythm. Now, you may not like the way that I sing, but you would enjoy a good singer. With preaching too, if something is presented well, we will enjoy listening to it. That is the only difference. That is why I said, 'as long as someone preaches well, we like to listen.'[72]

Capt. Kanishka makes an important point here. Sermons are less dependent upon

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72 Interview with Captain Kanishka in Mihintale on November 11, 2005.

content than how they make the audience feel. For the majority of soldiers, the information presented in a sermon is not as important as the way in which it is delivered. A skillful preacher, such as Vimaladhajja, can easily attract the hearts of his audience with the beauty of his voice and the imagery of his poems. According to Kanishka, a monk could be preaching lies, but if he preaches well, people's hearts will be drawn to his words.

The Work of Words

What goals do preachers have when preaching to soldiers? In the introduction to his collection of sermons, *Vicitra Dharma Deśanā: Dharma Deśanā Tihak Ätuḷat Dharma Saṅgrahaya* Attuḍavē Rāhula writes: "Preachers should preach having the idea 'preaching is for the purpose of attaining *nibbāna* for both the listeners and preachers'" (Attuḍavē Rāhula xvi). Many others echo Rahula's words. Venerable Vipuladhamma describes his goals when preaching a sermon:

> When we preach sermons, our goal is to shape people's lives according to the five precepts. The main foundation of life is the five precepts. Taking that as a foundation we try to introduce them to a peaceful environment where they live without troubling others, weighing down others, aren't jealous of others, and don't hate others. Furthermore, the goal of Buddhism is to free people from the suffering of Samsara.[73]

There is nothing surprising about these goals. The Buddha taught the way to nirvana and thus one would expect his monks to follow suit.

When we look closely at the content of sermons to soldiers, however, nirvana seems very far away. When I asked Vimaladhajja, nickanamed "the Brigadier monk," for his enthusiasm in preaching to soldiers, what he preached during his sermons to soldiers, he immediately began singing verses of his own composition:

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[73] Interview with Venerable Vipuladhamma in Mihintale on January 18, 2007.

Veradun hitaṭa täti gänmak näti vēvā
niraturu sämaṭa sämaviṭakama jaya vēvā
säma devivarun ekasē oba räkadēvā
mē piṅ bālen säma jivita surākēvā

May your heroic hearts (*hita*) not feel fear.
May you all always have victory.
May all of the gods protect you as one.
Through the power of this merit, may all lives be protected![74]

Far from leading soldiers to nirvana, these verses encourage soldiers, wishing them protection and courage as they face the enemy. Is there a solution to this apparent contradiction?

While all monks will state that the ultimate goal of a sermon should be to lead the audience to the wholesome path of nirvana, when they preach to soldiers they emphasize protection and fearlessness on the battlefield. Although these goals may seem contradictory, the preachers see them as linked by a gradual path of development from the *laukika* (Pali: *lokiya*), or worldly, and *lōkōttara* (Pali: *lokuttara*,) or transcendent.[75] By preaching in a way appropriate to a listener's place on the path, monks can maximize the effects of their sermons. Regardless of whether a preacher's audience is ready to begin working towards nirvana or simply hoping to survive the next day's battle, the goal of his sermon will be the same: the transformation his listener's heart.

When asked to describe the ideal sermon, many monks explained that it would be both timely (*kālīna*) and appropriate (*uccita*) to the audience. When monks speak of timely and appropriate sermons, they are referring not just to the content of a

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[74] Interview with Ven. Pilässi Vimaladhajja in Homagama on November 25, 2005.

[75] John Holt points out that *lokottara's* literal translation is "pre-eminent in the world" rather than transcendent. Through this definition, he stresses that *laukika* and *lokottara* are connected in a continuum rather than separate states of existence. (Holt, personal communication 1/13/07)

sermon, but also to its effects. Attuḍavē Rāhula explains that "[P]reachers should prepare themselves for preaching *baṇa* having an understanding of the listeners' ideas and customs (*sirit/virit*) and the size of the audience. He should also be aware of the time he is going to spend and what he is going to preach" (Rāhula xvi). Very much in the Vajirarāma tradition of preaching, Rāhula stresses the importance of preaching according to the needs of the audience. Maduluwawe Sobhita, one of the most influential preachers in Sri Lanka, uses the same terms in his explanation of his goals when preaching:

> As for a topic...last week I spoke at the home of the president. When I preach to the president, I must preach to him as a leader about how he should rule the country. Then, when I preach to a child, I must preach in such a way that is suiting to the minds of little children. When I preach to young people, I need to preach in a way that is suited to the hearts (*hita*) of young people. In particular, these days, drugs and alcohol are spreading across Sri Lanka. I need to preach in such a way as to save the young generation from these things….[76]

While he does not find himself preaching to the president, Venerable Maṅgala echoes Sobhita in his explanation of an ideal sermon:

> When I preach a sermon, I need to preach a sermon that will benefit everyone (who has come to listen.) A small child must be able to get something out of it. A scholar like you must be able to get something out of it. A farmer must be able to get something out of it. A businessman must be able to get something out of it. My needs are different from your needs. I pick up what I want and you pick up what you want. Our ideas and attitudes are very diverse. So, there must be various sections within each sermon so that it can be fruitful for everyone.[77]

In other words, Sobhita and Maṅgala aspire to tailor their sermons to have a maximum positive effect on a maximum number of people.

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[76] Interview with Venerable Maduluwawe Sobhita at Nagavihara Temple in Kotte on October 10, 2006.

[77] Interview with Venerable Sarasiyapatuve Maṅgala in Kandy on October 4, 2006.

By taking into account the concerns of the audience as well as the situation, Venerable Ānandavaṃsa attempts to make his sermons both timely and appropriate to a wide audience. He explains:

> When the Lord Buddha preached sermons, everyone felt that he was speaking directly to them. That is what is recorded in the sermon books (*bana pot*). Once the Lord Buddha started preaching a sermon, everyone, whether they are adults, young people or children, thought that he was preaching for them especially. That is a quality that the Lord Buddha had. Even now, when a monk preaches, people decide whether a monk is good or great. Like that. When I say great, it is because of the way (*vilasaya*) that the monk delivers it. The sermon could be the same. The contents could be the same, but there is a difference in the way that they deliver it. A monk needs to have the skill to preach to everyone so that the message will be equally distributed among them. On such occasions a sermon is successful.[78]

Preaching to soldiers, however, raises a problem. As we saw in chapter two, many monks and soldiers believe that actions on the battlefield necessarily create negative karma, thus distancing them from the goal of nirvana. How, therefore, does a monk preach to a soldier? What do monks consider to be timely and appropriate for soldiers? As it turns out, sermons to soldiers can be very mundane in nature. The chief incumbent of the Jayanthi Vihāra in Anurādhapura, explained that he would often preach sermons discouraging soldiers from spending their entire paychecks frivolously after returning from operational areas. He explains:

> In sermons we say things that fit the time. How a person should act. A commander once came to me and told me that his boys didn't know to use the money that they have earned. They spend outrageous amounts of money on certain things. Their lives are not stable. Sometimes, when they go home they live unwholesome lives. He asked me, "Venerable sir, give a sermon to keep them away from such things."[79]

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[78] Interview with Ven. Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on November 21, 2006.

[79] Interview with the Chief Incumbent of the Buddha Jayanthi temple in Anuradhapura on October 18, 2005.

At the request of a unit commander, the Jayanthi monk proceeded to preach a sermon telling soldiers to save their money and avoid drinking and gambling.

Venerable Kassapa, a former officer in the Sri Lankan army, admits that he calls upon his military experience when preaching to soldiers. He describes the topics he chose for a particular sermon: "Since I know about the army, I tied the word *sīla* to *vinaya* and preached a sermon for an hour and a half. The army has a *vinaya*, you know. I tied the army discipline to *sīla* in the sermon and then performed a Bodhipūja. That was the first sermon that I gave to the army."[80] While one immediately associates the word "*vinaya*" with monastic regulations, in modern Sinhala it is also used as a general term for discipline. By using this term, all too familiar to those who have gone through basic training, the Major monk is able to connect the individual experiences of soldiers to the Buddhist term of *sīla*, or morality. Indeed, during my conversations with soldiers at the Panagoda Divisional headquarters, the vast majority of my informants pointed to *vinaya* as the most important trait of a good soldier.

In addition to practical advice, preachers also commonly preach words of encouragement to audiences of soldiers. Vimaladhajja, the Brigadier monk, describes the kinds of topics that are appropriate to soldiers:

> When I go to preach to a group of soldiers, I preach in the necessary way to them. I preach about the greatness of King Dutugämunu. Each occasion calls for a timely (*kālīna*) sermon. Each occasion has a suitable (*uccita*) sermon.[81]

Vimaladhajja explains that stories of Duṭugämuṇu can buttress a soldier's courage. Vimaladhajja sang the following verse as an example of how reminders of the

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80 Interview with Venerable Kassapa at Ratanaghara temple in Anuradhapura on March 8, 2007.

[81] Interview with Ven. Pilässi Vimaladhajja in Homagama on October 9, 2006.

Sinhala kings can assist the soldiers:

hela putune biya novanna
täbu paya passaṭa noganna
hela rajavaru sihi karanna
nobiyava peramuṇaṭa yanna

Oh Son of the Sinhala, don't be afraid.
Do not step back from where you stand.
Remember the Sinhala Kings
and go forward fearlessly.[82]

Vimaladhajja explains that his verses give the soldiers courage and help to protect them on the battlefield.

In his sermon following the 2005 flag blessing ceremony in Anurādhapura, Venerable Ralapanāve Dhammajoti preached on the Dhajagga Sutta, the Flag sutta. This sutta, which forms the basis of the *iti pi so gātha*, the most commonly recited protective verse, draws a parallel between *deva* warriors and monks meditating in the forest. As the story goes, during the war between the *deva* and *asuras*, Sakra, the king of the *deva* ordered his soldiers to look upon his standard if they ever felt frightened. If they couldn't find his standard then they were to look upon the standard of the *deva* king Pajāpati. If that standard was also not present, they should then look on the *deva* king Varuna's standard. Having finished this story, the Buddha advises his monks:

In wilderness, monks, at the foot of a tree,
or in an empty dwelling,
recollect the Buddha:
You will have no fear.

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[82] Interview with Ven. Pilässi Vimaladhajja in Homagama on November 25, 2005.

If you don't recall the Buddha —
best in the world, the bull of men —
then recollect the Dhamma,
leading outward, well expounded.

If you don't recall the Dhamma —
leading outward, well expounded —
then recollect the Sangha,
the field of merit unexcelled.

For those who have thus recalled
the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, monks,
there will be no terror, horripilation, or fear (Thanisarro trans.).

Despite insisting that the ultimate goal of a sermon is to direct the audience towards the path to nirvana, the topics chosen by preachers to soldiers are concerned with mundane topics, such as personal finance, and stories meant to inspire courage and grant protection.

Perhaps more interesting than the topics monks raise in their sermons to soldiers are the topics that they absolutely do not raise: *pav,* or negative karma. When asked about his sermons to soldiers, Ānandavaṃsa explains the fine line that he must walk when selecting topics. He explains:

> If he (a soldier) goes to war, he must first protect himself. When we preach to people like that, we have to decide whether we should preach in a way that would decrease their belief (*visvāsa*), self-confidence and pride in themselves (*ātma abhimānaya*) or in a way that would increase their self-confidence. During sermons, our goal is never to tell them to kill anyone. We don't come forward to tell them that killing people, killing animals or harassing others is not *pav*. We don't say that and we can't say that. The Lord Buddha never preached anything like that. However, the Lord Buddha has preached about confidence and

> determination saying: "*Attasammāpaṇīdhi ca.*"[83] If that is the case, one must preach in order to develop their abilities. One must tell them, "You have been engaged for a serious task. You are engaged in a task in which you might even lose your lives. If you are given a duty, you must do it well. We tell them to protect the *jātiyaya*, country and soil because they perform the service that they are bound to . What we have to tell them to do is to loyally (*paksapāti pugalayek haetiyata*) carry out the orders that they receive from above. Obey your officers faithfully. They can't avoid the task assigned to them just because they follow a certain religion. According to that, when we preach, we preach in a way that will increase their self-confidence (*atma saktiya*.) We don't preach to them to kill anyone or that killing is good. We preach in order to increase their self-confidence.[84]

On the one hand, Ānandavaṃsa does not want to encourage killing or tell soldiers that killing does not produce *pav*. On the other hand, however, he does not want to reduce the confidence of soldiers and possibly put them in danger.

Ānandavaṃsa stresses that monks cannot tell soldiers to kill:

> They [monks] don't bless them so that they will receive the strength to kill, but so that they would be protected during battle. That was the prayer. We wouldn't say, "May you have strength. May you defeat the enemy." We can't pray for that! If monks were to pray for that there, they would face problems with the Vinaya. A monk can never tell someone to kill. In the same way, they can't say that killing is good. They also can't say that dying is good nor can they say that it is good that someone is dead. In terms of Vinaya, we can't say, it is good to kill someone. We can never say that. Nor could we say that it would be good if someone died. Also we can't suggest that someone die, saying "It would be good if you died." You must know....During *upasampadā*...That is why monks don't have any blessing for killing. "May soldiers be protected. May they be free from sickness and suffering. May they live lives without accidental harm."[85]

Venerable Maṅgala shares Ānandavaṃsa's concerns for the immediate well-being of the soldiers. He asserts: "If I were to go to an army camp and tell them to

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[83] The full verse reads as follows: *Patirūpadesavāso ca pubbe ca katapuññatā attasammāpaṇīdhi ca etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.* "To reside in a suitable location, to have done meritorious actions in the past, to set oneself on the right path---this is the most auspicious thing."

[84] Interview with Ven. Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on November 21, 2006.

[85] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on December 5, 2005.

love their enemies saying, 'Love your enemies. May your enemies be healthy.' What would the enemies do? They would come and destroy the camp!" He continues later: "If a soldier thought, 'I can't shoot this person; it is a sin,' he would not be suitable for that job. If he were to do that, another soldier would come along and shoot him."[86] A soldier who fears the sinful consequences of his actions may be more physically vulnerable than a soldier who is confident in the correctness of his action. If a soldier were to join the army and suddenly decide to not perform his duties, he would be endangering himself, his unit, and ultimately the country; thus preaching to soldiers of sin would upset their minds and potentially put them into danger.

Much like the portrayal of the Buddha in the Yodhājīva sutta, these monks choose to remain silent about the consequences of soldiers' activities on the battlefield rather than condemning them to hell. Pointing out the negative karma generated on the battlefield would be neither timely nor appropriate for an audience of soldiers. When choosing appropriate and timely sermons for soldiers, monks inevitably focus on the soldiers need for immediate protection and assistance rather than the promise of future release from suffering. While Ānandavaṅsa and Maṅgala both agree that the ultimate goal of their sermons is to lead the audience towards the path to Nirvana, they admit that this is not appropriate for everyone. A soldier, they argue, is bound to his duty to fight the enemy. If a soldier refuses to fight, he will be punished by one's superiors or killed in battle.

Laukika and Lokottara

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[86] Interview with Venerable Sarasiyapatuve Maṅgala in Kandy on October 4, 2006.

"*Hamduruwo*, does negative karma occur when a soldier fires his weapon at the enemy on the battlefield?" I ask Ānandavaṃsavaṃsa at his temple.[87] As we sit in the small wall-less class room cum dining hall that connects to Ānandavaṃsa's approximately 8 x 10 foot sleeping cell, a middle aged corporal paints murals of the Buddha's first visits to the island in the small image room. Ānandavaṃsa answers definitively: "It couldn't not occur. A negative karma occurs."[88] Shortly after I asked this question, our interview was interrupted as a young man approached Ānandavaṃsa bearing a handful of betel leaves, the traditional offering to a monk. The man bowed before the monk and explained that he was planning to join the army and needed a letter or recommendation. Ānandavaṃsa nodded and produced a pen and stationary from his cell. He quickly wrote a few paragraphs, signed the letter and returned it to the young man. The man bowed again and Ānandavaṃsa blessed him, "*Suwa pat vevā*," "May you be healthy!"

When I asked Ānandavaṃsa about the young man, he explained that he had been in his Buddhist Sunday school class as a boy. Many young men from the village come to Ānandavaṃsa when they need a letter of recommendation for a job application. Whether they are applying to a job at a hotel or to the army, young men do not think twice about visiting Ānandavaṃsa with a handful of betel leaves. How can Ānandavaṃsa sign these letters while believing that a soldier's job necessitates the creation of negative karma?

Venerable Itäpanna Dhammalankāra is another seemingly paradoxical figure. Despite preaching at the annual army day memorial ceremony at Panagoda army

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[87] The term "*hamduruwo*" is a Sinhala honorific used when addressing monks.

[88] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on December 5, 2005.

temple, Dhammalankāra argues that Buddhist *Dhamma* could never condone war. He explains to an audience of Sri Lankan officers that, "Our dharma does not condone (*anumata*) the harming of any type of being. We show *maitrī* for all people and animals. When a war starts, we must only try to stop it."[89] During a *bodhipūja* ceremony sponsored by the soldiers at a small infantry camp Venerable Neluwakande Gñānānanda, echoes the rejection of just war to another group of soldiers:

> What we need is to live in peace. Everyone values life. Buddha Dharma does not condone the murder of humans or even animals. Problems in society arise because of the bad actions of people. The result is that many people suffer. That is why we think that this country must be full of peace. The final result must be peace. That is our goal.[90]

Like Dhammalankāra, Gñānānanda is careful to separate Buddhist teachings from the act of killing.

These views are not just responses to the questions of American scholars, but monks interpreting the current conflict for an audience of soldiers engaged in the war. The denial of Buddhism's ability to condone war is a common feature of Buddhist rhetoric regarding the island's ethnic conflict. In a 2006 article in the Sunday edition of the *Lakdiva* newspaper, the Venerable Piṭiduwe Siridhamma writes, "The Lord Buddha demonstrated that it is not wrong (a mistake) for a leader to go to war if it is on behalf the government of a country or on behalf of the unity of the country, and if there is no alternative to war. However, Buddhism has never condoned (*anumata*) war" (Siridhamma, 2006). Siridhamma appears to advocate criteria for a necessary war while simultaneously reminding his reader that

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[89] Interview with Ven. Itäpanna Dhammalankāra in Rukmale on September 28, 2006.

[90] Sermon delivered on March 9, 2007 at Mihintale by Venerable Neluwakande Gñānānanda.

Buddhism does not condone war. Even when preaching to soldiers, monks will often deny the relationship between Buddhist teachings and killing in war. Citing the Dhammapada during his sermon at the army's annual flag blessing ceremony at the Srī Mahābodhi in Anurādhapura, Venerable Ralapanāve Dhammajoti, the head of the Lankārāma temple simultaneously advises the gathered soldiers to embrace non-hatred and "do what must be done." He preaches:

> If one speaks according to the dhamma, the Lord Buddha did not approve of war. "*Nahi verena verāni sammanatidha kudācanaṃ, Averena ca sammanti esa dhammo sanantanoti*." Hatred is not quelled by hatred. You must have loving-kindness for those who hate you. That is what he said. Even though that is said in the *dhamma*, as I said before, we must face various situations during different periods. This happens throughout the world.[91]

How is it possible for monks to support soldiers by preaching to them without justifying or condoning the war in Buddhist terms? Are these monks being hypocritical?

There is no easy answer to this question. The purpose of this work, however, is not to condemn individual Buddhists for their views and actions but to examine the lines of reasoning they employ during a time of war. If we are to accept these statements made by contemporary Sri Lankans, over-arching justification is not an acceptable solution to this dilemma.

Regardless of their involvement with the army, the majority of monks that I spoke with made a sharp distinction between Buddhism and war. In a conversation in 2006, the outspoken, Maduluvave Sobhita explains:

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[91] Sermon delivered on October 1, 2005 at the Srī Mahābodhi compound in Anurādhapura by Venerable Ralapanāve Dhammajoti. The Pāli verse quoted by Dhammajoti (Dhp 1.5) is perhaps the most widely quoted verse in the Pāli canon.

> The Lord Buddha preached: "*aññā nibbānagāmini,*" the path to nirvana is special....In the same way, when ruling a country...now King Aśoka, no matter how much he dedicated and worked for the dharma, he did not disband his army. When ruling a country, there are steps that one must take as a ruler. This does not need to be mixed with this religion (Buddhism.) There are two paths. The road to nirvana is one thing and ruling the country is another. Now, a farmer spreads fertilizer and pesticide. There he has the idea of protecting his field. He has to do that, right? Not everyone in the world has seen nirvana. We must live *laukika* lives.[92]

For Sobhita, it is not that war conflicts with the path to nirvana, it is that the two things are categorically different. Sobhita makes it clear that a country could not operate if all of its inhabitants were to pursue nirvana. They must live *laukika* lives.

In an article published 2003 in the Sinhala Language journal,*Vidyodaya Dharma Śastrīya Sangrahaya*, Sobhita stresses the unwholesome roots of war and denies the possibility of a just-war, writing "The decisions that people make within the grasp of *lobha*, *dvesa* and *moha* (desire, hatred and delusion), the three roots of *akusala*, cause conflicts.[93] There are no conflicts, where there is no *lobha*, *dvesa* and *moha*. No matter how vicious/terrible the form of a war may be, every single war has one of these (unwholesome roots) roots of *akusala* at its core" (Sobhita, 26). Sobhita clarifies, "According to the Buddha Dharma, the only thing accomplished by war is suffering. Like physical and verbal harm, it (war) is not useful in solving the problems of society. No matter what form, Buddha Dharma does not condone violence (*hiṃsā*)" (Sobhita, 27).

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[92] Interview with Ven. Maduluwawe Sobhita in Kotte on October 10, 2006.

[93] The terms *kusala* and *akusala* refer to type of good and bad karma, respectively. *Akusala kamma* is often translated as actions that are unskillful. An *akusala* action is rooted in the *akusala mūla*, greed, hatred and delusion, and typically leads to negative consequences. A *kusala kamma*, on the other hand, is an action that is skillful. Rooted in the *kusala mūla* of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, *kusala kamma* typically lead to favorable results.

Many monks from a variety of different backgrounds agree with Sobhita's statements. Citing the Pāli canon, the Venerable Sarasiyapatuve Maṅgala, the head of a monastic training center near Kandy explains, "There is a vast gap between the rules of war and the rules of dharma. They are two things. First, there are the rules of government. Then there are the rules of dharma. There are several systems of rule in the world: "*atthi dhipāteyya, lokadhipādhipatteya, dhammādhipatteya*" [94] Maṅgala explains in detail:

> Government is a different category (than the Dharma). Religion exists within a state. So, it is not fitting for religious specialists, whether they are Catholic fathers, Hindu priests or Buddhist monks to try to reform the laws of government. There is another group of people to do that. There are rulers like the President, the prime ministers and the ministers of parliament. Why were they elected by public election? To protect the country. They need to protect the country according to the rules of the country. They need to protect the religions in a country. As for Sri Lanka, they need to give Buddhism the primary position. They need to protect Buddhism. They cannot tell the people to chase out the Catholics and Hindus. Those religions must also be established. They must also be protected. They must be respected. That is the law of the country. As Buddhists, we follow the Dharma of the Lord Buddha. So we need to understand our roles and duties. We need to know what are the rules of the state and what are the rules of dharma. What will happen if these two are mixed? If that happens, there will be a problem. When that happens there will be a problem. What happens when pure water is mixed with dirty water?[95]

Maṅgala's explanation must be understood within the context of contemporary Sri Lanka. Maṅgala is troubled by the idea of the monastic *Jatika Hela Urumaya* (JHU) party and the monks that represent it as members of parliament. While Maṅgala, who is very active in society, does not believe that monks should be isolated in a cloister in order to practice meditation exclusively, he also does not feel that monks

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[94] This is a citation of A i.150.

[95] Interview with Venerable Sarasiyapatuve Maṅgala in Kandy on October 4, 2006.

should participate actively within the institution of government. Maṅgala explains that, according to Buddhist doctrine, there are two authorities, the authority of the world and the authority of the dharma.

Having understood dharma and government as separate spheres, Maṅgala has a very pragmatic understanding of the role of the soldier. He explains:

> If they do not fulfill that duty then they are guilty of a serious offense. Soldiers must act according to the rules of soldiers. Let's say that a person were to leave that environment, we can then shape them in another direction as a Buddhist. What would happen if these two things were mixed? Imagine we were making a fruit salad. You chop up a bunch of fruit and throw them in the bowl. There are mangoes, apples and grapes. The apples don't taste like grapes do they? The mango pieces taste like mango. The pineapple pieces taste like pineapple. Each thing has its own taste. Everything is mixed together, but each thing has its own individual identity. In the same way, even though everyone is mixed together in society, one needs to fulfill one's own nature. In order to fulfill their role, soldiers need to live within the laws of the army. As monks, we must fulfill our own roles. That is why, when they are fighting a war, soldiers cannot fulfill their roles as Buddhists. This is because of the rules of the government; they have to obey them. The monks of a country also need to obey them.[96]

Maṅgala does not indict soldiers for their actions on the battlefield. Indeed, he argues that soldiers must do their duty, fight the enemy and act according to the rules of soldiers. While he believes firmly that soldiers create negative karma when they fire at the enemy, he argues that they must fulfill the duties of their jobs just as a monk must fulfill his duty.

Venerable Koswatte Ariyavimala has a similar attitude to soldiers. Responding to the question, "can a soldier become a good Buddhist," he says:

> Yes, but he must carry out the orders that he receives as a part of his profession. Now all countries have an army. Here in our Buddhist country, we have a department of fisheries. Furthermore, the city and

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[96] Ibid.

> regional councils lease buildings for butcher shops. There are slaughterhouses for cattle that are approved by the government. It is difficult for people involved in these things to be Buddhist. That is because Lord Buddha did not expect an entire country to adopt his way of thought (*cintane*), because that would be impossible. As I said before, this is the world. This world contains all of the flaws of samsāra. There are distillery corporations here in Lanka. They produce intoxicants legally. There are also illegal intoxicants. There is legal gambling. Look at the development lottery. Parents tell their little children to pick a ticket, hoping that their luck will rub off. There are a lot of *adharmika* things like that in this society. It is difficult to run the country according to a common program with all of these *adharmika* things. Lord Buddha didn't do anything like that. However, there are people with good minds (*manasa*) within this society. We can direct those people onto this path. When those people receive the chance, when you teach them, they enter onto the correct path. That is the way of the world. There is nothing to be done about it….War is very bad. It is a very negative thing (*pāpī deyak*). Now very strange things happen. The entire world must take responsibility for this. Everyone wants to live happily. While on the one hand the world has advanced to the point where we can perform heart surgery in just eight hours, on the other hand we also still search for ways in which to kill vast groups of people….This is where the soldier has a problem becoming (a Buddhist.) We cannot forgive the destruction of the life of even a single ant. So, after they have completed their service, a soldier can follow this path. He can also follow this path.[97]

According to Ariyavimala, the world is marked by *saṃsāra* and thus *dukkha* in the form of war, slaughterhouses and alcohol is to be expected. Like Maṅgala, Ariyavimala accepts that a soldier must do the job that he signed up for. When they have completed their service, however, Ariyavimala believes that they can begin to follow the path to nirvana.

Although Ānandavaṃsa and Maṅgala may be concerned primarily with health and protection rather than their attainment of nirvana, it would be wrong to assume that these goals are unrelated. Ānandavaṃsa reminds us that that the path is a gradual one. Speaking with me just before taking his seat to preach at a *bodhipūjā*, Venerable

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[97] Interview with Ven. Kosswatte Ariyavimala in Gampaha on November 11, 2005.

Ānanda explains: "There is a long journey towards nirvana. There are many stages (*adi talam*). Presently the goal of a sermon is to direct people toward the wholesome path (*yahapat maga*)."[98] Ānandavaṃsa makes an important point here. For him and the majority of Sri Lankan Buddhists, the path to nirvana is conceptualized as a long and gradual process. Although many of the issues that he addresses may not seem to be directly related to Buddhism's *summum bonum*, Ānandavaṃsa understands every small act that improves an individual's comfort and decreases his or her desire as a small step on the path. In the case of soldiers, Ānandavaṃsa is clear that proximate goals such as protection and increased confidence are more timely and not in conflict with the ultimate goal of nirvana. To preach nirvana to a soldier who is more interested in surviving on the battlefield would be neither *uccita* nor *kālīna* just as sermons to soldiers celebrating the homeless life of detachment would also not be considered *uccita* or *kālīna*.

While this-worldly protection may seem to be far removed from the ultimate goal of release from suffering, the monks whom I spoke with saw no such contradiction. Indeed, they saw the two goals as linked together on the continuum between the poles of mundane and ultra-mundane orientations. Mundane and ultra-mundane orientations (Sinhala: *laukika* and *lōkōttara*; Pāli: *lokiya* and *lokuttara*) have long been the subject of debate among scholars of Buddhism. In his ethnography of Burma, Buddhism and Society, Melford Spiro identifies *laukika* and *lōkōttara* as mutually exclusive categories. He writes:

> From an ontological point of view, Buddhism postulates the existence of two planes, which, like parallel lines, never meet. On the one hand there is *saṃsāra*, the worldly (*lokiya*) plane; on the other hand there is

[98] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on November 21, 2006.

> nirvana, the otherworldly (*lokuttara*) or transcendental plane....These two planes, however, are not only ontologically discontinuous, they are also hedonistically dichotomous. The former in the realm of unmitigated suffering; the latter in the realm of the cessation of suffering (Spiro, 68).

This absolute distinction between the *laukika* and *lōkōttara* became the basis for Spiro's famous classification of Buddhism into three categories: *kammatic*, *nibbanic* and *apotropaic* (Spiro, 12).

Spiro's work was shaped by a theoretical goal: to reconcile Weber's portrayal of Buddhism as other-worldly asceticism with ethnographic data demonstrating strong this-worldly concerns among contemporary Burmese Buddhists. The three Buddhist orientations of *nibbānic*, *kammatic* and *apotropaic* separate the ascetic world-denying goals of the religious elite from the "religiously unmusical devotees" (Spiro, 66). In order to shape his data to support Weber's view of Buddhism, Spiro adopts Redfield's theory of greater and lesser religious traditions: viewing the *kammatic* and *apotropaic* aspects of Buddhism as accretions onto a great tradition of pure renunciation.

Writing six years before Spiro, the anthropologist, Michael Ames confronted the issue of mundane and ultra-mundane activity in Sri Lankan Buddhism through synthesis rather than partition. Ames argues that:

> 1. Other-worldly salvation from a life of suffering is the ideal all Sinhalese Buddhists venerate and the one that conditions or dominates all religious action. It is the ultimate goal of the system.
>
> 2. But it is an ideal that is both difficult to understand and even more difficult to attain. For most people it takes thousands and thousands of rebirths.
>
> 3. Sinhalese must therefore find temporary ways of combating suffering until salvation is possible. These temporary means-happy rebirth, consolation through magic-become important secondary goals

> of the religious system. They may even become ends in themselves rather than means to something higher.
>
> 4. The division of labor within the religious system and within the Buddhist subsystem reflects this multiplicity of goals and the emphasis placed on those that are secondary (Ames 46-47).

In other words, Ames places *laukika* and *lōkōttara* orientations and practices within the context of a gradual path to nirvana. Without splitting the tradition into categories identified with religious elites and ignorant devotees, respectively, Ames produces a holistic model of Sri Lankan Buddhism as a continuum between the mundane and ultra-mundane.

Martin Southwold continues to develop this concept of a continuum between the *laukika* and *lōkōttara* in his idiosyncratic ethnography of an upcountry Buddhist village. He writes:

> The teaching that the attainment of Nirvana is not an event of ordinary time, but of periods of supernormal, sacred time in which a Buddha is manifested, is itself symbolic. The difference between time and eternity--stands for the difference between two worlds, the *laukika* and the *lōkōttara*. To say that Nirvana is not attainable in ordinary time is to say that *lōkōttara* is not of this world. Though it is pre-eminent in the world, and may be made more so, we are not close to its perfect realization in the world (Southwold, 207).

Noting the contemporary belief that nirvana is only achievable during the time of a Buddha, Southwold identifies the *laukika* and *lōkōttara* not just with mundane and ultra-mundane orientations, but also with qualities of time. By adding this temporal element to *laukika* and *lōkōttara*, Southwold further emphasizes the importance of the gradual path for understanding the beliefs and practices of contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists. Rather than viewing *laukika* and *lōkōttara* orientations merely as reflecting the development of particular individuals, Southwold views them as a

reflection of the spiritual environs of a particular time in relationship to the presence of a Buddha.

In *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist traditions of Sri Lanka*, John Holt builds upon Southwold's argument that *laukika* and *lōkōttara* should be viewed both locatively and temporally. He asserts: "...instead of understanding these terms as denoting two simultaneously existing yet mutually exclusive spheres (which, in fact, they have a genuine tendency to do if understood only locatively), we should also understand them *temporally* with the framework of Theravāda spiritual imagery" (Holt, 23). Holt explains further, that "…to be *laukika*-oriented is always antecedent processually to *lōkōttara*. Conditioned existence in *saṃsāra* is, in fact, antecedent to the experience of nibbāna. The path to nibbāna is one of becoming 'increasingly' unconditionally oriented, or *lōkōttara*..."(Holt, 23). In other words, *laukika* and *lōkōttara* orientations do not run parallel to each other, but sequentially with *laukika* well-being necessarily preceding *lōkōttara* development. This understanding of *laukika* and *lōkōttara* as two poles of a temporally linked continuum has important ramifications for understanding the activities of Buddhists. For example, while giving offerings to deva may seem unrelated to nirvana, the assistance that one potentially receives from such activities could help expedite one's progress towards nirvana through an increased sense of spiritual comfort.[99]

Indeed, Holt applies his understanding of *laukika* and *lōkōttara* directly to the actions of Sinhala kings such as Duṭugämuṇu and Valagambāhu. He writes:

> For instance, the actions undertaken by Sinhala kings to protect Buddhism often involved the taking of life, which, on the surface, are

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[99] In the words of Kosswatte Ariyavimala: "Working for nirvana without the assistance of the deva is like working for nirvana without water." Personal Communication, October, 1999.

> not *lōkōttara*-directed actions when viewed from the ultimate moral perspective. However, because these actions were undertaken with the intention of perpetuating the religion of the Buddha, they take on an indirect *lōkōttara* significance in the Sinhala view (Holt, 24).

Just as the actions of the Sinhala kings can be viewed as contributing towards the development of a more *lōkōttara* perspective, so also can the actions of individual soldiers. If a soldier's heart is shaped correctly his actions, though initially creating negative karma, can lead towards the *lōkōttara*.

When delivering sermons, effective preachers take into account the location of the audience on the continuum between *laukika* and *lōkōttara* and preach accordingly. As mentioned previously, sermons on *pav* or on a renunciant lifestyle as the path to nirvana are neither appropriate nor timely for soldiers. To preach on such topics, monks argue, would reduce their morale and leave them vulnerable to the enemy. Once they have retired from the military, however, these topics become more appropriate as retired soldiers have the freedom to refrain from killing and concentrate fully on morality (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*.) Thus, the seemingly mundane goals of protection and removal of fear, make possible the progression of soldiers to a place and time where they can be receptive to a more *lōkōttara* message of renunciation. In this way, despite the mundane nature of their sermons to soldiers, monks are able to see the ultimate goal of their sermon to be guidance towards nirvana: guidance that suits the time and circumstances of the audience.

What can a preacher do in a sermon that could lead towards both proximate comfort and ultimate release from suffering? In order to answer this question, we must first attend to statements of preachers. While many mentioned progress towards nirvana as the ultimate goal of their sermons, many monks explained their more immediate goals to be the "transformation of hearts" (*hita hadanavā*). When asked

about his goal speaking to soldiers, Venerable Sudarsana, the former army Corporal turned monk, replies:

> I don't have a goal. I just think this....Today there are many people suffering a great deal thinking that life is suffering (*dukkha*). That is to say, suffering does not occur to a person based upon the damage or lack of damage suffered by their body, but based on whether one is able to fix one's heart (*hita*) or not. That is why I say that it is very important for people to fix their hearts.[100]

According to Sudarsana, the key determiner of an individual's suffering is not his or her physical circumstances, but the state of his or her *hita*. Thus, while he asserts that he does not bring any preconceived goals to his sermons, Sudarsana tries to concentrate on fixing the hearts of his audience.

Venerable Kassapa also admits that the heart is the primary target of his sermons and ritual performances. Recalling an operation he participated in the northern town of Wadamaracci, Ven. Kassapa explains the mindset of soldiers and the positive effects of monastic intervention.

> We were stuck there for three days. If someone went forward their leg would be blown off. When the next person went forward they would be blown to pieces. When one sees things like that one's heart (*hita*) is shocked. Everyone who is injured in war is shocked. If we can get rid of that shock, if we can bless the soldiers, if we can tie *pirith* threads and chant *pirith* in order to increase their morale (*citta sakti*), I think that is the biggest help that we give to soldiers.[101]

Remembering the sense of shock that he felt after watching soldier after soldier injured during an operation, the major monk makes it his primary goal to help soldiers transform their hearts.

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100 Interview with Ven, Mankadavala Sudarsana at Labonurwa Forest Hermitage on March 9, 2007.

101 Interview with Venerable Kassapa at Ratanaghara temple in Anuradhapura on March 8, 2007.

Explaining his goals when preaching at almsgivings, Venerable Ratanavaṃsa says, "I preach the dharma according to the dharma (*dharma anukulava*) in order to brighten people's hearts (*hite prasādayak aeti kara ganna*.)"[102] Ratnavamsa's brother monk, Venerable Ānandavaṃsa, also points to the heart as the target of his sermons. Speaking specifically about the sermons that he has delivered on regiment day, the anniversary of the founding of the 6th Sri Lanka Light Infantry Regiment, he explains that his goal is to help the soldiers and their families reduce the *dukkha* in their hearts and help them to fix their hearts by themselves (*hita hadāganna*.)

Military personnel agree that a good sermon can help soldiers fix their hearts. Major Chandrapala, the commander of the army temple remarks:

> The battleground is uncertain. It is uncertain whether you will die today or tomorrow. Bombs and mortars fall everywhere. Friends die. Then your heart gets upset. That is why we always need to keep our hearts healthy. It is times like that that you need the help of a monk. Not every monk can accomplish that in a sermon.[103]

Chandrapala explains that a beautiful sermon or well-told story can help keep the hearts of soldiers healthy. Another officer refers to the sermons of monks as "medicine for the heart." He comments:

> The monks preach in order to calm their [the soldier's] hearts. They fix their hearts by saying things like "You all are doing a good job." There is a saying that if you break your arm there is medicine, but if you break your heart there is no medicine. So the monks preach in such a way as to calm people's hearts so that they don't break.[104]

These officers testify to the potential transformative healing capacity of a skillfully delivered sermon and well-told story.

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[102] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa at Galle Pansala on October 7, 2006.

[103] Interview with Major Chandrapala in Homagama on November 21, 2005.

[104] Interview with Major Chandrapala in Homagama on November 30, 2005.

As discussed in the previous chapter, *hita*, which I translate as heart, roughly corresponds to the Pāli term, *cetanā*. While this term has traditionally been translated as "intention," *cetanā* and *hita* do not correspond simply to a cognitive decision to carry out an action, but refer to a complex of cognitive, affective and even physical sensations that accompany the performance of different actions. Actions performed with a troubled *hita* produce negative results, while actions performed with a calm (*sänsum*) *hita* do not. *Hita* is not just a determiner of karma, however, it is also the basis of all pleasure and suffering. When expressing sadness, for example, Sinhala will often say "*hitaṭa dukkhayi,*" my heart is suffering or "*hite käkkuma*," my heart aches. Alternately, in order to express happiness or satisfaction, Sinhala may say "*hita santosayi*" or "*hita sänsum*," "my heart is happy or "my heart is calm."

The *hita*, however, is not just linked to mundane comfort, but also with progress towards nirvana. When asked to explain what he means by "brightening people's hearts", Ratanavaṃsa explains:

> The main goal, by far, is to provide important points about the dharma to the heart (*hita*) of the listener. I wish that they might advance/ progress after hearing it. I hope that the person might benefit from it. That is to say, I pray that the listener's flaws be fixed, and that he have good fortune and knowledge to progress in the world as a good citizen. I put all of my knowledge to use in order to bring about this effect when I am preaching. Let's imagine that there is a person who is suffering, I want to remove that suffering through the Dharma. If that person's suffering is removed, I want to point out the reasons for the suffering. In order to do that I have to explain the way things are. Having explained the way things are, the truth, and the way to remove that suffering, I want the person to return to a normal life. If not for that some people will become confused.[105]

Ratanavaṃsa explains that calming the *hita* does not merely lead to mundane results such as protection and the removal of fear, but also serves as the foundation of future

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105 Interview with Ven. Ratanavaṃsa near Mihintale on October 7, 2006.

development on the path. After first easing an individual's suffering, Ratanavaṃsa can then explain the way things are and assist in further development.

During his sermon in Anurādhapura, Kollonawe Sumaṅgala illustrates the link between shaping the heart and progress towards nirvana. He preaches:

> You probably recall the great Samādhi Buddha statue in Mahāmevuna Uyana (in Anurādhapura). That statue didn't fall from the ground. No one created it out of nothing. It didn't just arise out of the ground by itself. Thousands of years ago that Samādhi Buddha was a huge granite boulder. How many times must they have hit this great granite rock with a sledgehammer to make this Samādhi Buddha statue? How many times must they have hit it with a hammer? How many times must they have hit it with a chisel? If the granite had broken to pieces after being hit by the sledgehammer, we would not have a Samādhi Buddha statue. It would have been flattened into the earth. If the statue had cracked after being hit by the hammer, they would probably have stopped making it. That great peace of granite faced the heavy blows of the sledgehammer. It faced the many smaller blows of the hammer. That is how the Samādhi Buddha statue was created. Our heart (*hita*) is also like a huge granite rock. We also face the blows of the sledgehammer of life's problems. We also face the blows of the hammer of life's problems. Please don't let your life fall to pieces when these problems arise. Please don't let your life crack when these problems arise. Please do not take your own lives when these problems arise. Please do not quarrel when these problems arise. Please do not lose your humanity when these problems arise. Face these problems like a huge piece of granite. One day we too could become like Samādhi Buddha statues.[106]

Through this story, Sumaṅgala draws a parallel between an individual's *hita* and a Samādhi Buddha image. Like a piece of granite, one's *hita* has the potential of becoming a Buddha in *samādhi* meditation. By remaining calm in the face of life's hardships one can eventually reach the ultimate goal of nirvana. If, however, one does not protect and control one's *hita* in the face of life's problems, then enlightenment will never be possible.

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106 Sermon Delivered by Kollonawe Sumaṅgala at Ratanaghara temple in Anuradhapura on March 10, 2007.

The primary goal of preachers when delivering sermons to soldiers, or any audience for the matter, therefore, is to transform their hearts. Contemporary preachers see the *hita* as the key to an individual's development on the Buddhist path. By calming the *hita* and thus dispelling fear and granting protection, preachers attend to soldiers' immediate problems establishing the foundation for gradual movement towards nirvana.

Attracting and Transforming Hearts

Before we examine the strategies employed by preachers in order to transform the hearts of their listeners, we must first consider what it is that gives a preacher the power to do so. This question could be rephrased as "what gives a preacher the power to do things with words?" In order for a sermon to affect an audience, the audience must first consent, consciously or unconsciously, to being affected. Bourdieu explains how the status or symbolic power wielded by a speaker is directly related to the force of a performative utterance. Bourdieu writes:

> Most of the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for a performative utterance to succeed come down to the question of the appropriateness of the speaker -- or, better still, his social function -- and the discourse he utters. A performative utterance is destined to fail each time that it is not pronounced by a person who has the 'power' to pronounce it, or, more generally, each time that the 'particular persons and circumstances in a given case' are not 'appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked' (Bourdieu 111).

A sermon cannot be delivered effectively by just anyone.[107] A monk must look like a monk, speak like a monk and act like a monk in order to have the power to affect an audience with his sermon.

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[107] The *Mahāvaṃs*a records a story in which King Duṭugämuṇu attempts to deliver a sermon on the Abhidhamma only to turn over the preaching to monks after he struggles with his performance. (Mvs XXXII.42-43.

In the case of Buddhist sermons, a variety of different factors confer symbolic authority upon the speaker. After all, before a heart can be transformed, it must first be attracted. In his forthcoming study of the monastic education, Jeff Samuels demonstrates how young monks are taught how to attract the hearts (*hita ädanavā*) of the laity through the cultivation of both their inner state (*mahanakama*) and their appearance, demeanor and behavior (śramana svarūpaya.) Samuels shows how these qualities were understood by monks and laity to affect the amount and quality of the merit produced during Buddhist ceremonies or, *pinkama*. A monk who fails to cultivate this appearance and demeanor will have less power to attract and shape the hearts of the laity.

In the introduction to his collection of sermons, Attuḍāvē Rahula advises aspiring preachers to cultivate their appearance, demeanor and the quality of their voice in order to deliver effective sermons. He writes:

> Preachers should be able to draw the listeners' attention by preaching with a clear voice that listeners are able to understand, without omitting words, sections, or syllables, using good words that brings comfort to the listeners' ears, and using a mid-range voice rather than a high or low voice. Preachers should preach without confusing the connection between the beginning and end and also protecting *sramana svarupaya*. Preachers should preach without moving the body, focusing on *nibbāna* and using similes and examples. Preachers should preach calmly and with the Buddha-like charm (*Buddha lilāvin*) like a person who walks straight along with road without any problems" (Attuḍāvē Rāhula xvi).

According to Rahula, a monk establishes himself as a preacher through both his physical appearance and the sound and quality of his voice. Maintaining the form of a renouncer (*sramana svarupaya*) and preaching with a pleasing voice, the preacher is able to comfort and charm the hearts of his listeners.

One of my informants explained that his mental state at the time of a sermon is important to its effectiveness. Describing how he prepares for sermons, Venerable Ratanavaṃsa emphasizes the need for a *hita* filled with *karunā* (compassion,) *maitri* (loving-kindness), and *dayāva* (sympathy.) He illustrates:

> I have never had the intention in my heart that a person should kill another. I have never thought that. I have never collected facts from the dharma for that purpose. I think, "May this person live." I think, "May this person live and may he benefit others." I preach sermons with that inside. So, I have never told them to kill or be nationalist. Nothing like that has come to my heart. In my heart, I have compassion and loving-kindness. Now, Lord Buddha speaks of, *karunā*, *maitrī* and *dayāva*. I speak with a heart nourished by these things....The Lord Buddha said, that his dharma could be summarized by *karunā*, *maitri* and *dayāva*. If there is *dayava*, *maitri* and *karunā* in one's mind (*hita*), even if there is some other thought, it will be mixed with these qualities….When we go to preach, if we don't have these (three things), it won't be the dharma that comes to our minds/hearts. Personally, I think...when I go to preach a sermon, when I approach the podium (*dharmāsane*), I spend a few moments in *maitrī* meditation. That is to say, I start with loving-kindness. Then my work will be successful.[108]

Thus Ratanavaṃsa argues that the state of a preacher's own heart is an important factor in transforming the hearts of others. Without *karunā*, *maitrī* and *dayāva*, a sermon will not be successful and a preacher's words will not be the dharma.

In addition to appearance and quality of performance, monks also use formulaic Pāli *gātha* to attract the hearts of their listeners. Pāli formulae like the *saraṇāgamana* and the *pansil* can serve to prepare the minds of the audience for listening to the dharma as well as establish a relationship between themselves, the audience and the words of the Buddha. While there are a variety of different preaching styles practiced today in Sri Lanka, all sermons begin with the *saraṇāgamana*, the refuge formula, and the five or eight precepts. In his doctoral

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[108] Interview with Ven. Ratanavaṃsa near Mihintale on October 7, 2006.

dissertation, *Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka*, Charles Hallisey explains how the *saraṇāgamana*, the Pāli formula by which an individual goes for refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, changes the formal relations in which an individual is situated. He writes:

> The act of going for refuge changes, in one stroke, a number of formal relations which an individual may have: with the I world of *samsara* in general, with neighbors, with the three jewels as the objects in which one takes refuge….As a consequence, with the altering of formal relations characteristic of *saraṇāgamana*, another change is effected: the refuge-taker comes to recognize within this formal relation that he or she also has a generative relation with the Buddha. The actions of the Buddha in the distant past were done in order to bring about the present possibilities for ending the oppressions of life. The Buddha is no longer perceived as just an exemplar, but as a benefactor for the refuge-taker as an individual and as a member of a community (Hallisey 90).

Hallisey's explanation of the *saraṇāgamana* in terms of how it alters one's personal relationship with the Buddha is insightful and very useful for understanding the relationship between contemporary Buddhists and the remote concept of the Buddha. This idea, however, could be extended further to a Buddhist's relationship between the other two of the three refuges: the Dhamma and the Sangha.[109] By taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, Buddhists acknowledge the Buddha as his or her benefactor; the Dhamma's power over the relentless *dukkha* of samsāra; and the monks status as representatives of the Buddha and transmitters of the dhamma. At particular sermons, the *saraṇāgamana* establishes the preacher as a member of the Sangha and his word as a medium for the dhamma.

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[109] Hallisey's dissertation concentrated on Sinhala literature such as Butsaraṇa, Amāvatura and Pujāvaliyam which all focus primarily on particular aspects of the Buddha. This analysis in particular comes from his interpretation of the refuge formulae, which frame all of the stories of the Butsaraṇa. ("*Buddham saraṇa yemi Budu saraṇa yā yutu*…") The Daham Sarana and Sangha Sarana are composed around variations of this formula, using *Dhammaṃ* and *Saṅghaṃ* respectively.

In addition, skilled preachers also establish an emotional relationship with their audience through the beauty and style of their preaching. The *saraṇāgamana* performed in an aesthetically pleasing tone by a monk with carefully cultivated *mahaṇakama*, prepares the minds of the audience members so that the sermon will have maximum efficacy. During his sermon, for example, Kollonawe Sumaṅgala does not just lead the audience in the *saraṇāgamana*, he also leads it in the singing of devotional songs to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, composed in colloquial Sinhala. By mixing Pāli, the traditional language of monastic expertise, with colloquial Sinhala, Sumaṅgala is able to both establish his authority and attract the hearts of the audience. Once his agency is established in relationship to the triple gem of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, the preacher can begin to transform the hearts of his audience with his words.[110]

Once they have established their authority as preachers and attracted the hearts of their audience, how do monks transform them? Monks utilize a number of techniques in their sermons for affecting the hearts of soldiers, including various performative speech acts such as imperative statements and the recounting of familiar narratives. Austin and Searle define three categories of performative utterances: Locution, the most straightforward aspect of speech, refers to the information communicated in a speech act. Illocution, refers to what a speaker does in the saying of a particular phrase. Finally, perlocution refers to the effects that are yielded by particular utterances.

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110 In Bourdieu's terms, this performance establishes the authority of the monk to define the dharma as well as the internal and external borders of the world.

The *saraṇāgamana*, discussed at the end of the previous section, is a good example of a performative utterance in the wild. When a preacher tells an audience to recite the *saraṇāgamana*, he accomplishes three things. First, he relates the action (reciting) to a subject (the audience) and an object (the *saraṇāgamana*). This is the locutionary act, the act of conveying information. Second, the sentence is constructed as an order directed at the audience. The imperative force of this order is the illocutionary act. Finally, this statement provokes particular effects in the audience, causing them to reflect on the triple gem and enter into a mindset appropriate to a Buddhist *pinkama*.[111] These effects are known as perlocution.

While sermons will typically begin with imperative statements as the preacher prompts the audience to chant the *saraṇāgamana* and various other Pāli *gātha*, the conclusion of a sermon will always contain multiple commands for the audience. Some of these imperatives will be formulated in the second person, instructing the audience to say effectual words, think potent phrases and perform specialized actions and some of the imperatives will be in the third person, wishing for particular outcomes.

The most common instruction that a preacher delivers to an audience is to say "*sādhu*" in acknowledgment of his words. Serving a similar function to the Christian term "amen," *sādhu*, is the stock response given by listeners to the words of a preacher. G.P. Malalasekera explains *sādhu*, as "a sort of mental or verbal 'applause'" (Malalasekera, 86). Take for example this excerpt from a sermon delivered to soldiers by Venerable Itäpanna Dhammalankāra:

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[111] This example is modeled on Ricouer's explanation of performative utterances in *Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. Oneself as Another. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 134-5)*

> Say 'sādhu' thinking "May they have fortune in the next world. Pray that we all one day reach the great nirvana at the end of suffering in saṃsāra. May everyone have the assistance of the triple gem."
>
> "Sādhu, sādhu sā!" reply the audience.[112]

By asking the soldiers to say "*sādhu*," he causes them to affirm an optative statement wishing for eventual release from *samsāra*. In other words, Dhammalankara employs an illocutionary act, the imperative phrase "say *sādhu*," which has the perlocutionary force of placing the audience in a mindset focused on lessening suffering for all gaining assistance from the triple gem. By speaking the word "*sādhu*" each soldier is invited to confirm the blessing and gain a measure of comfort in his *hita.*

In addition to this direct approach of telling the audience what to do, say and think, monks also shape the hearts of their audience through narrative. By telling stories of the past and present of Lanka, monks shape the *hita* of their listeners by defining the world. If imperative statements are the most obvious examples of performative speech then acts of definition are perhaps the most powerful. During sermons, monks delineate and categorize everything from the boundaries and internal composition of the country, nation and Buddhist religion to the ideal intention of Buddhist soldiers and the meaning of their deaths. Pierre Bourdieu identifies the act of definition as one of the most important functions of performative speech. He writes:

> By structuring the perception which social agents have of the social world, the act of naming helps to establish the structure of this world, and does so all the more significantly the more widely it is recognized, i.e. authorized. There is no social agent who does not aspire, as far as

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[112] Sermon delivered by Ven. Itäpanna Dhammalankāra at Panagoda army temple on October 11, 2005.

> his circumstances permit, to have the power to name and to create the world through naming….(Bourdieu 105).

Bourdieu argues further that through this act of naming and defining the world, a social agent consecrates "…an arbitrary boundary, by fostering a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the limit and encouraging a recognition of it as legitimate…" (Bourdieu, 118). In other words, speech acts can make arbitrary boundaries or concepts seem natural. While lines on a map may have been drawn for entirely arbitrary reasons, an act of definition by a speaker endowed with symbolic authority can make those boundaries seem like naturally occurring features of reality. A skillful monk can harness the defining power of narratives to define the world and thus transform the hearts of the listeners themselves.

The Transformed Heart

What are the proximate goals of monks seeking to shape the hearts of soldiers? Soldiers and monks expressed several inter-related effects of a successful sermon. First, my informants explained that a good sermon can help ease the mental distress produced on the battlefield. By easing this distress and calming the hearts of soldiers, preachers generate the second effect of a good sermon, protection on the battlefield. Finally, just as sermons shape the hearts of soldiers they also shape their intentions. A well-delivered sermon can thus insure that soldiers take a calm heart with them onto the battlefield, thus limiting their behavior and protecting them from negative karma. By shaping the hearts of soldiers, monks can produce more tranquil-hearted soldiers who approach combat with selfless intentions. In addition to protection from the enemy, these soldiers are also protected from their own actions.

The most immediate effect of a serene heart is a reduction in mental distress.

Many of the military personnel whom I spoke with stressed the importance of sermons in the maintenance of their hearts. Major Chandrapala, the commander of the army temple remarks:

> The battleground is uncertain. It is uncertain whether you will die today or tomorrow. Bombs and mortars fall everywhere. Friends die. Then your heart gets upset. That is why we always need to keep our hearts healthy. It is times like that that you need the help of a monk. Not every monk can accomplish that in a sermon.[113]

Chandrapala explains that a beautiful sermon or well-told story can help keep the hearts of soldiers healthy. Another officer refers to the sermons of monks as "medicine for the heart." He comments:

> The monks preach in order to calm their [the soldier's] hearts. They fix their hearts by saying things like "You all are doing a good job." There is a saying that if you break your arm there is medicine, but if you break your heart there is no medicine. So the monks preach in such a way as to calm people's hearts so that they don't break.[114]

These officers testify to the potential transformative healing capacity of a skillfully delivered sermon and well-told story. By calming hearts through Buddhist *gāthas*, stories and songs of their own composition, preachers can help soldiers to heal some of the psychological damage suffered on the battlefield.

While fixing a soldier's heart has the immediate effect of reducing their mental suffering, a calm heart is believed to be accompanied by a number of positive side effects. First and foremost of these ancillary effects is protection. Indeed, conveying protection is the most common goal of a preacher delivering a sermon to soldiers. Venerable Vipuladhamma explains:

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113 Interview with Major Chandrapala in Homagama on November 21, 2005.

114 Interview with Major Chandrapala in Homagama on November 30, 2005.

> According to our Buddhist way, there is a belief that one can get protection even from enemies by remembering the virtues of the jewel of the Buddha, jewel of the Dharma and jewel of the Sangha....The Dharma records that one should remember the Dharma when they are afraid or horripilated....The Lord Buddha said that one should remember someone without defilements (*kiles*). A person without defilements has no fear. Only a person with defilements has fear. That is why it is no good to remember someone with defilements at such times. That is why one must remember someone like Lord Buddha without defilements.
>
> We Buddhists have a powerful belief in the power of that. So, even on the battlefield soldiers get a lot of courage when they tie Pirith threads. They think that they will be protected by them. That's how they get the ability to advance bravely. They don't retreat. Their morale (*citta dhairyaya*) is increased by *pirit desanā*.[115]

Many soldiers reported to me that a calm heart is the only sure way of being protected on the battlefield. "A protective medallion cannot stop a bullet," claims one officer at Panagoda camp. "The only way to get any kind of protection on the battlefield is to have a calm heart."[116] The soldier is not implying that a tranquil heart can magically protect one from enemy artillery, but it allows one to act with equanimity and without obstructive negative emotion.

A calm heart, however, does not refer to one's emotional state alone, it is also intimately connected with intentionality. As discussed in the previous chapters, soldiers and monks both explained that actions performed with a calm *hita* do not result in negative karma. As such, shaping the *hita* of soldiers does not just protect soldiers through the evocation of a meritorious state of mind, but also shapes their intentions, reducing the negative karma that they create when firing their weapons.

Venerable Assaji, the official advisor to the Sri Lankan Army Buddhist

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115 Interview with Ven. Vipuladhamma in Mihintale on January 18, 2007.

116 Conversation with anonymous Officer in Homagama on September 22, 2005.

association, explains the importance of a composed heart in soldiers: "A soldiers mind must be calm because he has a sharp weapon in his hand. A person with a sharp weapon in his hand must work with wisdom. They have to work with intelligence and efficiency. A soldier must be wise and have a calm heart." [117] Assaji's comments have a dual meaning: not only can a soldier easily harm others he can also harm himself and those around him. In order to keep himself and his regiment safe the soldier must have the presence of mind to use his weapon effectively.

Venerable Ratnavamsa also stresses the potential danger of a soldier with an upset mind. He explains:

> Normally when people are fighting with weapons in an extraordinary mental state, they need to have mercy and compassion. In order to change that, they need satisfaction. When they return to society, they need to give their strength for the good of others. If not, it is no good for them to go out and use their strength for wrong things….Theft for example. A soldier can be very skilled at theft. As for murder, a soldier can do that too. That is why he needs to have love, compassion and mercy to direct his mind towards good things.[118]

Given the dangers of a battlefield, it is very easy for a soldier to fall into negative behavior. Ratanavaṃsa explains that a soldier on the battlefield is often "… consumed with hatred for the enemy, thinking 'Where are they coming from, who shall I kill, who shall I shoot, who is coming forward?'"

One of the most important tasks of a monk preaching to soldiers is to assist in the transformation of their intentions. The monks attempt to reorient a soldier's personal intentions for joining the army into corporate or communal intentions. A

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[117] Interview with Ven. Dodangoda Assaji in Colombo on November 23, 2005.

[118] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa near Mihintale on December 4, 2005.

soldier does not fire on the enemy for a paycheck, he fires for the good of the nation. A soldier does not kill the enemy for revenge, but in order to protect the innocent. Consider, for example, this letter written in a volume commemorating Sri Lankan soldiers who have died in the war:

> We used to live in a small hut that we had built. In the hut were my older sister, her two sons and myself. The terrorists came to the Nāvak kulama area and destroyed the whole village, cutting up people, smashing houses and setting them on fire. At that time, the terrorists came and attacked. During that attack, my older sister was shot and she lay on the ground in a pool of blood, hiding her two children underneath her. The terrorists thought that all three of them were dead. Poking us with the barrels of their rifles, they left thinking that we were dead. I pretended that I was dead. The two children were unconscious. The older boy was nine. The younger boy was seven. There was blood all over the bodies of my sons. My sister took leave from this world. I was the one who raised the children. When he got bigger, the eldest started to say, "Let's get revenge for the death of our mother." The younger boy said, "I'll join the army to get revenge for mother." They both secretly joined the army. The younger boy gave his life during a terrorist attack. I light a lamp in the morning and the evening to give merit to my golden son (Goḍigamuwa 2000, p. 15).

This letter, written as a memorial to Lance Corporal Nimal Disanayaka, explains how Nimal and his brother joined the army out of feelings of intense hatred for the LTTE.

When I discussed this letter with Venerable Vimaladhajja, he accepted that there are indeed people who join the army for revenge. He argued, however, that "… once they go to the battlefield, they don't think like that (anymore.) It is not a single person who fights a war, you know. It is a platoon. When one fights together with a group, those types of thoughts won't arise. It is only when a troubled person just sits around thinking that such thoughts arrive. When one is discussing things with a group, those feelings don't arise. Isn't that so?"[119] Vimaladhajja argues that even though one may join the army with thoughts of revenge, once they are part of a

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[119] Interview with Venerable Pilässi Vimaladhajja in Homagama on November 29, 2005.

fighting unit, they fight not for personal reasons, but for the group as a whole. Vimaladhajja argues that although a person may join the army for revenge, when he fires his weapon on the battlefield, he does so for his unit and for his country.

As the Buddha points out in the Yodhājīva Sutta, if a soldier dies in the midst of battle seized by anger, he will be reborn in a hell realm. While it is impossible to control completely the contents of a soldier's *hita*, many preachers stressed that they do their best to shape them in other directions. Venerable Dhammalankara explains his role in reducing unnecessary violence on the battlefield.

> They could go to war and kill innocent Tamil people. We don't want this at all. On the battlefield there is a war between two groups and people from both sides die. However, we can't condone the killing of innocent Tamils, Muslims, or Sinhala. We tell them to never do such things. We tell them not to harm a single animal whether it is a goat or a cow. There is no need to harm animals like that. They are innocent animals.[120]

By preaching in this way, Dhammalankara seeks to reduce collateral damage. Soldiers who go to war with calm minds, Dhammalankara explains, are less likely to harm innocent civilians or animals. Explaining his goals when preaching to the military, Maduluwave Sobhita begins by stressing his duty to control the actions of soldiers.

> When I preach to soldiers...(I say) 'You are bound to protect the *jātiya*. You are bound to protect the unity of the country. You are bound to protect the peace of the country. That is why the people pay your salaries. That is why you need to protect the people of this country. While doing that, do not harm any other religions. Do not get any ideas about harming members of other ethnicities. While taking steps to protect the country from the enemy, act fearlessly.'[121]

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[120] Interview with Ven. Dr. Itäpanna Dhammalankāra on September 28, 2006.

[121] Interview with Ven. Dr. Maduluwawe Sobhita in Kotte on October 10, 2006.

Sobhita, in effect, defines what it means to be a soldier. He tells his audiences that soldiers are paid to protect the peace not to kill the enemy. Sobhita takes care here to shape the intentions of the soldiers. He never says "don't take up arms!" On the contrary, he tells the soldiers what their intentions should be when they take up arms.

Venerable Vipuladhamma, explains the dilemma that arises when he preaches to soldier's whose job it is to kill:

> Now their goal (soldiers) is to create an environment where peaceful and harmonious (*sahajivana*) people can live freely. So it is not good to have the intention (*cetanā*) of destroying people. It is not good to have the intention (*cetanā*) to take revenge. That is because everyone living here in Mihintale has the right to live. There are people who are trying to grab away that right. Those people must be stopped in order to give people the opportunity to live together harmoniously. If they go to battle with that goal, their goal is very good. We give them encouragement (*diri gaenvim kerenava*) for that.[122]

Sermons, therefore, can be very important tools for shaping the intentions of soldiers to both limit their actions as well as the amount of negative karma that their actions produce.

Soldiers agree with monks that sermons and Buddhist teachings help to limit the violence on the battlefield. A seasoned corporal explains the role of Buddhism in limiting the actions of soldiers on the battlefield. He explains: "There is a very high probability that soldiers will make mistakes of some kind or another. The Buddha Dharma does a very important service in minimizing the probability that they will do anything unwholesome (*ayahapatak*). Buddhism can prevent bad actions such as unnecessary destruction, killing, rape, and burglary."[123] The Corporal's Color Sergeant agrees, explaining:

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[122] Interview with Venerable Vipuladhamma in Mihintale on January 18, 2007.

[123] Interview with Corporal Gunaratana in Bogahayaya on January 24, 2007.

> We are very inclined to Buddhism. Through religion we can decrease the amount of harm and wrong activities, in war. If they are Buddhist, soldiers can be kept away from unnecessary activities. A good Buddhist doesn't just worship a *caitiya*. They respect churches and *caitiya* as well. They don't destroy the religious sites of others. With the exception of mistakes, they don't do anything on purpose (*hitala*). That is how Buddhism affects soldiers. I also believe that Buddhism helps with discipline.[124]

In this chapter, I have argued that the primary goal of a preacher delivering a sermon to soldiers is to transform the hearts of his audience. After attracting the hearts of the soldiers, a preacher then attempts to transform them hoping to calm their minds, shape their intentions and thus convey protection from both the enemy and from themselves. How, then, do monks actually transform the hearts of their audience?

Monks utilize a number of tools for affecting the hearts of soldiers. First, as previously mentioned, effective preachers create multi-sensory aesthetic experiences when they preach. Their appearance, their behavior, the sounds of their voices, and the decorations of the preaching venue all affect the *hita* of the audience members. Secondly, preachers employ imperative statements to induce the audience members into performing certain actions, saying certain words and thinking certain thoughts. By combining the activity of body, speech and mind, the preachers can further shape the *hita*. Finally, preachers can shape the hearts of their audience through narratives. By recounting stories of the Buddha, past kings, and contemporary troubles, preachers further shape the hearts of their audience by framing their experiences in particular ways. Once we begin viewing war through individual intentions and actions, rather than in terms of justification or legitimation, the sermons that monks

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[124] Interview with Color Sergeant on October 22, 2006.

deliver to soldiers take on new meaning. If soldiers and monks view individual karma as the primary problem on a battlefield, it follows that preachers will concentrate their sermons on influencing karma rather than justifying war in objective terms.

Chapter 4

Shelter for You, Nirvana for Our Sons

> When we die, we relinquish our individuality. Void of personality, the corpse joins the masses. Once the skin, muscles and organs have fled their frame, the bones attest only to the fact that a life was lived. Except to the scientist, they do not offer the who, what, where, and when. The skeleton is the halfway point to not having existed at all (Christine Quigley, The Corpse: A History, 9).

"Shelter for you. Nirvana for our son!" These words are written above the picture of a young man embedded in the wall of a small bus shelter on a lonely stretch of the A9 highway. The young man was killed in battle in 1998 during Operation Jayasikuru, a government offensive aimed at opening the A9 up to traffic between Kandy and Jaffna. Jayasikuru, which means "Certain Victory" was a colossal failure and more young men died during the operation than during any other single offensive of the war. Today, the faces of many of these young men adorn memorial bus shelters built on the same road that they gave their lives to open.

"Shelter for you, Nirvana for our son," reads the epithet, but how can the family of a soldier even suggest the possibility of nirvana. Their son, after all, most likely died as the result of injuries sustained while engaged in battle. The death of a soldier is an inauspicious event. Indeed, the Buddha clearly states in the Yodhājīva Sutta that soldiers who die in battle will be reborn in a hell realm. How then are the families of soldiers killed in Sri Lanka's civil war to understand the deaths of their sons?

This chapter explores how Sinhala Buddhists understand the bodies of dead soldiers. I will argue that memorial ceremonies are primarily acts of interpretation

that project meaning onto the corpses of the recently dead. These acts of interpretation are performed explicitly for the purpose of easing the suffering of both the living and the dead and reinforcing a Buddhist vision of the world. In the case of dead soldiers, however, I will argue that strictly Buddhist interpretations are viewed as inadequate in the face of the violent and inauspicious nature of their deaths. Soldiers, after all, often die violent deaths while engaged in acts of intentional killing. In the Sri Lankan Buddhist worldview, these circumstances predispose the soldier to a negative rebirth in the future. Faced with this ominous scenario, therefore, monks often augment Buddhist interpretations of the bodies of soldiers with nationalist meanings in order to assuage the grief of mourning families. In other words, during memorial ceremonies for soldiers, nationalist and communal concepts are employed alongside Buddhist doctrine as tools for reducing the grief and suffering of families mourning the deaths of their sons. These interpretations of the bodies of soldiers as those of selfless Buddhist heroes are then often enshrined in small bus shelters built along Sri Lanka's roadways as private memorials. Through this memorial construction, the meaning and agency attributed to the deceased soldier is thus reified, propagated and preserved.

Recently, several scholars, including Cynthia Enloe, Neloufer DeMel and Anuradha Chenoy have written about the process of militarization. Enloe, as quoted by both DeMel and Anuradha writes that militarization is "...a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually becomes controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas" (Enloe 2000, 3; DeMel 2007, 12; Chenoy 2002, 6). All three scholars point out that militarism "...inhabits ordinary, daily routines in a manner that naturalizes and masks our own embeddedness within

it...” (DeMel, 12). In other words, processes of militarism can extend to all aspects of life making individuals dependent upon the military for a sense of worth.

In this chapter I will illustrate how families of dead soldiers have become dependent upon military ideals when mourning their sons. While most families of dead soldiers have, at best, ambivalent attitudes towards the military, their expressions of grief are shaped by military symbols. First, I will demonstrate how militaristic interpretations are applied to the bodies of soldiers during the funerals not for the sake of militarism itself, but to supplement Buddhist interpretations that fail to ease the grief of losing a son or daughter under such inauspicious circumstances. Second, I will show how compensation paid by the government to the families of soldiers killed in battle fuels memorial construction, which enshrines military values in the public sphere. Finally, I will conclude by showing how the symbols used on bus halts take on a different significance when displayed outside of the context of the family.

Reading Corpses

On October 23rd 2007, the LTTE staged an unprecedented attack on a Sri Lankan airbase in Anurādhapura during which commandos were supported by planes from the newly revealed LTTE air tigers. The unprecedented coordination of land forces and air power resulted in the deaths of fourteen Sri Lankan Army or “SLA” soldiers, twenty LTTE cadres as well as the destruction of eight SLA aircraft, including a valuable MI 24 Helicopter gunship. On the evening after the attack, which lasted less than an hour, the Sri Lanka Ministry of Defense website released an article captioned, “Brave defenders’ mortal remains taken to native places.” This

article, which includes a photo of three wooden caskets draped with Sri Lankan flags, praises the sacrifice of the young soldiers while emphasizing that all of the bodies were released to relatives for their "final rites and subsequent military funerals" (October 23, 2007).

On October 26th, 2007 the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defense website ran two articles about the LTTE cadres killed in the attack. The first article, posted at 7:43 AM was captioned: "Terror Attack at Anurādhapura airbase; over 20 terrorists killed." While the first article on the fallen SLA soldiers contained only a picture of flag-draped coffins, this article contained graphic pictures of LTTE cadres lying dead on the tarmac. On the evening of the 26th, another article was run with the caption: "Decomposed LTTE Dead Bodies Buried." In this article, the author explains that "[M]any of those dead bodies were found strewn over the affected base with many organs and limbs severed as a result of the explosives those terrorists were carrying with them" (Ministry of Defense, Oct. 26, 2007). The writer elaborates, "Some of those had been reduced to lumps of flesh which were completely disturbing in nature." No mention was given of funerals or returning the bodies to their families.

These articles represent two distinct interpretations of the war dead. The first article endeavors to hide the horrific reality of death in dignified symbols. The bodies of the Sinhala soldiers are literally wrapped in the country's flag. The second set of articles looks death directly in the face and displays the harsh reality of dead young men on the battlefield. The bodies are depicted as piles of flesh intended to inspire revulsion.

When stripped of all flags, uniforms, and rhetoric, the bodies of young Tamils and young Sinhala are physically indistinguishable. What is the difference between

the body left behind by a young Sinhala soldier and that of a Tamil rebel? What is the difference between the bodies left to rot before burial and ones in flag-draped coffins? After the flag has been removed and the coffin lowered into the ground, where does the public relationship to the war-dead transfer? For the families of the Sinhala soldiers, what is the difference between a coffin and a memorial bus halt constructed alongside the A-9 highway?

In her groundbreaking study of the phenomenology of torture and war, Elaine Scarry explains the non-referential nature of the bodies of war dead. Placed side by side, the bodies of soldiers from opposing armies often contain little to indicate the political beliefs that initially put them into opposition. Scarry writes:

> Injuring, the contest activity, has no relation to the contested issues: if the wounded bodies of a Union and a Confederate soldier were placed side by side during the American Civil War, nothing in those wounds themselves would indicate the different political beliefs of the two sides…(Scarry 115).

Scarry argues that the bodies of soldiers scattered on the battlefield are virtually indistinguishable from one another but for the uniforms and external symbols applied to them. "Does this dead boy's body 'belong' to his side, the side 'for which' he died, or does it 'belong' to the side 'for which' someone killed him, the side that 'took' him?" Scarry asks (Scarry, 119). She continues: "That it belongs to both or neither makes manifest the nonreferential character of the dead body that will become operative in war's aftermath, a nonreferentiality that rather than eliminating all referential activity instead gives it a frightening freedom of referential activity, one whose direction is no longer limited and controlled by the original contexts of personhood and motive, thus increasing the directions in which at the end of the war it can now move" (Scarry, 119).

Dead bodies, therefore, are ideal symbols. Although they once spoke and had individual agency, now they are speechless and subject entirely to external interpretation. In her book, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, Katherine Verdery remarks:

> Dead bodies have another great advantage as symbols: they don't talk much on their own (though they did once). Words can be put into their mouths-often quite ambiguous words-or their own actual words can be ambiguated by quoting them out of context. It is thus easier to rewrite history with dead people than with other kinds of symbols that are speechless (Verdery, 29).

In death the bodies become empty signifiers upon which meaning can be projected. As in the photographs and press releases discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the death of a soldier puts in motion the production of meaning. The Sri Lankan Army media department selects some bodies (the bodies of SLA soldiers) to be heroic defenders and others (the bodies of LTTE cadres) to be disgusting lumps of flesh. Regardless of the meaning assigned to them, in death both the SLA soldier and the LTTE cadre lose their individuality and are co-opted for different ideological goals.

Over the course of the last twenty five years, tens of thousands of memorial ceremonies have been held for Sinhala Buddhist war dead. These ceremonies range from small funerals performed for individual families to the annual ceremony held at Panagoda army temple to which the families of all war dead are invited and currently attracts over ten thousand grieving family members. Each of these memorial ceremonies, from the smallest to the largest, is accompanied by a set of rituals as well as a sermon which attempts to give meaning to the bodies of those who died in the war. After all of the memorial services are completed, and the body is no longer available as an object to be interpreted, many families build physical memorials with

compensation checks received from the army. The sermons delivered, the rituals performed, and the memorials constructed are all rich sources for understanding how contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists produce and propagate knowledge about the war and those who die fighting in it.

Dying Buddhist in Sri Lanka

Death is a very important and powerful event for Sri Lankan Buddhists. Not only is it a time for grief at the loss of a loved one, but it is also the locus of a great deal of religious activity. Sri Lankan Buddhists believe that the death of a friend or relative is an important occasion for the living to learn about the Buddhist dharma. In his introduction to Sri Lankan Buddhist rituals, A.G.S. Kariyawasam writes:

> Among Buddhists death is regarded as an occasion of major religious significance, both for the deceased and for the survivors. For the deceased it marks the moment when the transition begins to a new mode of existence within the round of rebirths. When death occurs all the *kammic* forces that the dead person accumulated during the course of his or her lifetime become activated and set about determining the next rebirth. For the living, death is a powerful reminder of the Buddha's teaching on impermanence; it also provides an opportunity to assist the deceased person as he or she fares on to the new existence (Kariyawasam).

As an opportunity to influence positively the fates of both the deceased and the living, memorial ceremonies, therefore, are viewed as critically important.

Death is an event that demands interpretation. Charles Keyes and Anusaranaśāsanakiarti argue that "[T]he fact of death poses a fundamental problem of meaning…"(Anusaranaśāsanakiarti and Keyes, 1). In a later article, Keyes explains this assertion, writing: "Memorial rituals subject death to a Buddhist interpretation and juxtapose it with a course of action that moves people away from the abyss of meaninglessness to which ultimate suffering carries one" (Keyes, 273).

In other words, memorial sermons, like the sermons to soldiers discussed in the previous chapter, have important work-like functions that must be acknowledged. Memorial ceremonies do more than simply make abstract statements about ultimate meaning; rather they attempt to supplement reality by projecting meaning onto the bodies. Viewed in this way, a memorial is an interpretive activity, assisting in the creation of memory and connecting individual instances of death to the general Buddhist understandings of reality.

For Sri Lankan Buddhists, there are three ceremonies that must occur after a death. First is the *pansakula* ceremony, which immediately precedes burial. Second is the *mataka baṇa* or "memorial sermon," which is generally performed on the sixth night after a death. Finally there is the seventh day almsgiving (*sat davase dāne*) performed at noon on the seventh day after the death. As noted before, families will also sponsor almsgivings three months and one year after a death with some continuing to sponsor ceremonies annually thereafter. After a death occurs, the local funeral society (*ādāhana saṅvidhānaya*), an association of local residents, will typically take control of funeral preparations leaving the grieving family free to contact relatives and cope with their loss.[125] The funeral society will do all of the cooking, set up shelters for funeral guests, and hang white cloth banners and streamers along the sides of the street leading to the entrance of the house where the death occurred (*mala gedera*). The family will keep the body in the house for one or

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125 Jonathan Walters explains how the Funeral Society program was first instituted by Sirimavo Bandaranaike's government as part of sweeping reforms and standardization of the handling of the dead. For more information see Walters, Jonathan S. 2003. "Deanimating and Reanimating the Dead in Rural Sri Lanka" in *The Living and the Dead: Social Dimensions of Death in South Asian Religions.* Albany: State University of New York.

two days, giving relatives time to return and pay their final respects.[126] It is customary to avoid cooking in the house while the body is present and so the local funeral society will also provide all food and drink until the burial.

The Sinhala Buddhist memorial cycle begins with the body. In Sri Lankan Buddhist households the body is generally embalmed and then brought home where it remains until it is buried or cremated. The body itself is the focus of all activity. The odor of the body penetrates the home and is ever-present through all of the rituals. Indeed, many monks admit to getting nauseous the first time they chanted over a several-day-old dead body.

The body is normally dressed in a white shirt and sarong while the embalming process staves off decomposition giving the body a somewhat lifelike appearance. In the *mala gedera*, or death house, the corpse resembles a Buddhist lay-person (*upāsaka/upāsikā*) sleeping after a visit to a Buddhist temple.[127] Dressed in the white cloth of the *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* and surrounded by monks, the body does not evoke the pain or uncertainty of death, but the virtue and calm of a dedicated Buddhist. The white color of the corpse's clothing as well as the *mataka vastra* pieces of cloth offered during the *pansakula* are not coincidental. Indeed, *mataka vastra* are always

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[126] I have heard stories of families keeping the body in the house for several days as they wait for relatives living abroad to return home. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa recalled a recent funeral in which the son of a maid working in the Middle East was killed in the war. He told how the body had to be embalmed twice so that it could be kept in the house for five days Tuesday and Saturday are considered inauspicious days for burials and funeral homes are often closed on Sundays and thus if a family member were to die on a Thursday night, it is conceivable that the body could remain in the house until Monday.

[127] The term upāsaka and its feminine upāsikā refer to Buddhist lay people. While there is some debate about what qualifies one as an upāsaka, generally the term is used to refer to people who visit temples on full-moon-days dressed in white shirts and sarongs, in the case of men, or white saris, in the case of women. Ironically, this white uniform of the upāsaka is referred to in contemporary Sri Lanka as "*jatika änduma*," or "national dress." This indentification of traditional Buddhist temple dress with national identity further conflates Buddhist, national identity and racial identities: *raṭa, jātiya and āgama.*

white and will never have any kind of print or design on them. Many monks interpreted the white cloth as a symbol of the purity of the dead person. Ven. Ānandavaṃsa explains: "There is a reason for using those white cloths. That is because it is the same as a person's life. The other thing is that a white cloth is clean. Some people compare the piece of white cloth to the life of the dead person. We preach that in the sermon in order to remind the people of the good things that he had done when he was alive."[128]

The sermons delivered at the *pansakula* ceremony and at the *mataka baṇa* further reinforce the memories of virtue and purity associated with the deceased. Ven. Ānandavaṃsa explains how he memorializes the dead during a typical memorial sermon: "During the sermon, one goal is to state the value and virtue of the dead person. They sponsor the sermon in the name of the dead person, you know. There we preach for the relatives who have paid for the *pinkama*. Then we need to highlight a few points to the people so that they will remember the dead person."[129]

While memorial ceremonies strive to project meaning and value onto the lives of the deceased, they also attempt to connect the deaths with Buddhist teachings on the nature of reality. Monks stress the importance of the body for a meditation on impermanence. The lifeless body of a member of one's family serves as proof of the Buddhist principles of *anicca*, *anattā* and *dukkha*. Venerable Ānandavaṃsa explains:

> As a religion, Buddhism is a dharma that preaches about impermanence. Everything is impermanent. That is to say, even our bodies are like that. Life is the same way. The fact that life is impermanent can be proven with evidence when a person dies. One can also perform impermanence meditation on dead bodies. So, when someone dies, we need to preach about impermanence in order to

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[128] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on February 16, 2007.

[129] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on November 21, 2006.

> advise the living. "Look, this person has died. We will also die. We only have a short amount of time to live. During that short time we must live well. It is not good to engage in bad things, the five sins, or the ten *akusala karma*." We tell them to live a life without harming others. Through that a person can be successful in life in this life. In order to be successful in the next life, we make the dharma desanā into a sermon into a consideration on impermanence. That is why we use the Buddha's words about impermanence in those sermons. "*aciran vatayaṃ kayo, patavim adhisesati. vuddo apeta vinyano, nirattaṃ va kalingaraṃ*." We preach to the people using verses like that one. We do that in order to lead people to the right path. By speaking about impermanence we give them some understanding of the Dharma. When people listen to sermons about impermanence, a *kusala karma* occurs. It is the *kusala karma* of meditation (*bhavanā*).[130]

Venerable Ratanavaṃsa concurs with Ānanda, explaining: "The sermon at this time is also a concentration on impermanence. '*Anicca vata sankhara, uppadavayadhammino. Uppajjitva nirujjhanti tesam vupasamo sukho*.' All conditioned dhamma are impermanent. A person who is born dies. That is to say a person who is born dies and what is created will be destroyed. So this is a very good occasion to concentrate on impermanence." As a collection of *samskāras*, the body is subject to arising and falling away. Memorial preachers, therefore, use the fresh corpse as a powerful symbol of this important Buddhist principle of reality.

What goals do monks take into memorial ceremonies? When asked about his goals as a memorial preacher, Ven. Ānandavaṃsa responded that his primary goal is to help grieving family members reduce the *dukkha* in their hearts and help them to fix their hearts by themselves (*hita hadāganna*.) He explains:

> The *pansakula* (or memorial) sermon is not for the dead person, but for the people there. We need to help renew their lives. We need to decrease the *dukkha* in their hearts. We must show them that we are with them and help them to get rid of their suffering. One must preach there in order to show the impermanent nature of the world."[131]

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[130] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on February 16, 2007.

[131] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on November 21, 2006.

By praising the deceased and connecting their inert bodies to universal Buddhist laws, Ven. Ānandavaṃsa seeks to ease the grief in their hearts and help them come to terms with death in general. Ānandavaṃsa illustrates by referencing the *pansakula* and the water-pouring ceremony:

> Since they took the 5 precepts before that they also get the *kusala karma* of *sīla*. They offer a white cloth so they get the *kusala karma* of *dāna*. Three *kusala karma, dāna, sīla* and *bhavana*, all occur. The *kusal* collected there is then rejoiced in for the deceased person. We pour water as an example in order to show how water fills an empty container and spills over. From that we are saying that the deceased person's (next) life is filling and overflowing with merit. (*piṅ*). That is done in order to ease the hearts (*hita*) of the living. To help them fix their hearts (*hita hadāganna*). So, that is what a *pansakula* is.[132]

Ānandavaṃsa summarizes the *pansakula* ritual as an act of merit that can develop three of the ten *kusala karma* (*dāna, sīla* and *bhavanā*).[133] By taking the precepts, offering the *mataka vastra* fabric to the monks and contemplating the impermanence of life, those who participate in the *pansakula* have the opportunity to fix their hearts and make progress on the Buddhist path.

Venerable Ānandavaṃsa also points out that the ceremony brings families together like no other occasion. Thus, Ānandavaṃsa argues that the water pouring ceremony helps to heal rifts in a family and increase solidarity in the face of grief. He illustrates with a story:

> I remember at one house the oldest son....it was the oldest daughter who died. The son had a land problem with his sister. He didn't come for the sermon. He didn't come when the monks were speaking.

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[132] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on February 16, 2007.

[133] The ten kusala karma or "wholesome actions" are 1) giving (*dāna*), 2) being morally upright (*sīla*), 3) meditation (*bhāvanā*), 4) giving/transferring merit (*patti*), 5) rejoicing in the merit of others (*pattānumodanā*), 6) rendering service [to others] (*veyyāvacca*), 7) honoring others (*apacāya*), 8) preaching (*desanā*), 9) listening [to the teachings] (*suti*), and 10) having correct views (*diṭṭhiju*). The ten akusala karma are the opposite of the ten kusala karma.

> When they were pouring water he approached his mother. Then after pouring water his mother hugged him and cried. Everyone cried. The eldest son hugged his mother and father and cried. All of the anger was over right then.[134]

The crisis of death gathers extended families in one place, forcing family members to confront their disagreements and overcome them. The water pouring ceremony, more than any other event during the memorial cycle, symbolizes this gathering of the family. During the water pouring ceremony, the immediate family gathers around the water jug as the head of the family pours it into the bowl. The family huddles close around the jug, each trying to touch it as the water is poured.

Monks utilize the opportunity presented by the memorial ceremony to help families and the deceased on a variety of levels, from spiritual development to healing family rifts. The interpretation of corpses makes merit possible. By viewing the body not simply as an object for grief, but as a symbol of Buddhist concepts, participants in memorials produce very real positive effects: grief is eased and families are brought together.

Dying as a Buddhist Soldier

All Buddhist memorial services attempt to project meaning onto the body of the deceased, create a specific, virtuous and comforting memory and extend the merit making activity of the individual beyond death. The death of a soldier, however, is an unusually charged event fraught with religious problems. The circumstances of a soldier's death are inauspicious. As a young person whose life has been interrupted, the body of a dead soldier conjures forth images of negative karma performed in the past. In order to ease anxiety about the death and the future births of the soldier,

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[134] Ibid.

most monks have chosen to supplement Buddhist interpretations of dead bodies with nationalist ones that represent the bodies as remnants of valuable lives given selflessly for the benefit of the country, race and religion.

Although the body of a young soldier may not contain any direct reference to political issues, in Sri Lankan Buddhist culture it contains a great deal of religious significance. The body of a young man or woman killed violently represents an *akāla maraṇa*, an untimely or inauspicious death. An *akāla maraṇa* is popularly believed to be the result of negative karma produced either in this life or a previous one. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa discusses the meaning and causes of an untimely death. He explains:

> Untimely death is what you call it when a healthy person suddenly dies. There is the belief that a person dies according to their karma and the amount of life-force (*ayusa*) they have. People believe that people face untimely deaths because of big *akusala* karma from their previous lives. Even a little child could face an untimely death. Then the people will say, his life force is over (*genāpu ayusa ivarayi*). He must have created some karma in the past.… Remember how Ven. Mogallana was killed by thieves? Whether it is today or back then, someone faces untimely death because of previous karma. I have seen people face untimely death for killing animals and because of great hatred (*dveśa sahagata*). I have seen those kinds of people die for no reason at all.[135]

Ratanavaṃsa compares those who die violent deaths before their times with the arahant, Mogallāna. According to tradition, despite his status as an arahant and his development as a meditator, Mogallāna was beaten to death by bandits as the karmic

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[135] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa at his temple in Mahakanadarava, February 21, 2007.

consequence of attempting to kill his parents in a past life.[136] No matter who one is, the force of one's past negative karma can take one's life away at any time.

While nothing has been written on the phenomena of *akāla maraṇa* in Sinhala Buddhist culture, S.J. Tambiah, Charles Keyes and Alan Klima have discussed it in the context of Thai Buddhism. (Tambiah 1968, 98; Anusaraṇakiarti and Keyes 1980, 14; Klima, 174). According to these authors, the bodies of victims of untimely death are actually feared in certain Thai villages. Tambiah notes that such bodies are denied cremation for fear that it may cause future descendants to die under similar circumstances. (Tambiah 1968, 98). Furthermore, victims of *akāla maraṇa* in Thai Buddhist culture are denied all ritual and buried in the ground in order to shield the family from the malevolent power of the death. While Sinhala Buddhists do not hold such extreme beliefs about sudden death, there is no denying that it is viewed as extremely inauspicious.

When looking through the photographs of Sri Lanka's war dead, one is struck

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[136] The story of Mahā Mogallāna's death is found in the Sarabhaṅga Jātaka (J. v. 125). According to this account, Mahā Mogallāna was captured and killed by Brigands. Below is E.B. Cowell's translation of this passage: "On the seventh day an act committed of old by the Elder, carrying with it consequences to be recognised on some future occasion, got its chance for mischief. The story goes that once upon a time, hearkening to what his wife said, he wanted to put his father and mother to death; and, taking them in a carriage to a forest, he pretended that they were attacked by robbers, and struck and beat his parents. Through feebleness of sight being unable to see objects clearly, they did not recognise their son, and thinking they were robbers said: "Dear son, some robbers are killing us: make your escape," and lamented for him only. He thought, "Though they are being beaten by me, it is only on my account they make lamentation. I am acting shamefully." So he reassured them and, pretending that the robbers had been put to flight, he stroked their hands and feet, saying, "Dear father and mother, do not be afraid, the robbers have fled," and brought them again to their own house." This action for ever so long not finding its opportunity but ever biding its time, like a core of flame hidden under ashes, caught up and seized upon the man when he was re-born for the last time, and the Elder, in consequence of his action, was unable to fly up into the air. His magic power that once could quell Nanda and UpĀnandavaṃsa and cause Vejayanta to tremble, as the result of his action became mere feebleness. The brigand crushed all his bones, subjecting him to the' straw and meal' tortures, and, thinking he was dead, went off with his followers" (Cowell vol. 5, 65).

by how young and proud most of them look. In their immaculate uniforms, these young ghosts allow a glimpse into the shattered hopes and dreams of countless families. The deaths of these young soldiers are untimely, inauspicious and destructive. When asked to discuss the fates of soldiers who die on the battlefield Venerable Itäpanna Dhammalankāra admits that they are uncertain. He explains:

> I can't say. We can't say that the same thing will happen to each person because we don't know what their mental state was at that moment. According to Buddhist teachings, the last moment (*avasan situvilla*) determines the next life: whether it is good or bad. According to that one is reincarnated. We don't know what the mental state of a soldier is at that moment. We don't know what kind of form it takes. Some may be angry. (*kēntiyen, vairayen, krodayen*). Some may not. We can't say. It is determined by each person's thoughts.[137]

Venerable Maṅgala, the head of a temple near Kandy, agrees with Dhammalankara, explaining that rebirth is determined by the content of the *hita* at the time of death.

> Reincarnation occurs according to the thoughts at the last moment of life. We can't say what sort of thoughts will be in a soldier's mind. If we were sitting here talking and a bomb were to suddenly go off, what would happen? We can't know? Our reincarnation could be good. That sort of thing could happen. Some people might be left without arms and legs after being hit by a bomb. They wouldn't die immediately and negative thoughts might arise. Hatred could arise. They might think: "If I see the guy who did this to me, I'll kill him and cut him into pieces." When they are reborn they would go and kill that person somehow. That is what would occur in their mind along with the suffering. There is no way that person's next life could be good.[138]

While there is no guarantee that a soldier will be consumed with hatred when he dies, Maṅgala admits that it is likely in most situations. If one dies consumed by the pain of one's wounds, hatred is likely to arise and direct one towards future lives of hatred and misery. This, needless to say, is not an acceptable understanding of death for

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[137] Interview with Ven. Itäpanna Dhammalankāra in Rukmale on September 28, 2006.

[138] Interview with Sarasiyapattuwe Maṅgala at his temple near Kandy on October 4, 2006.

soldiers or for their families. The father of a soldier who died in 1995 recalled the *mataka baṇa* held on behalf of his son.

> The monks came and said..."May this hero who gave his life for his country and *jātiya* never again face an untimely death." That is what they prayed for. He went on behalf of his country. It wasn't in vain (*nikan giya nemee*). So we perform merit (*pindaham kerenawa*) making ceremonies.[139]

It is important for Sekara that his son didn't just face a normal untimely death. On the contrary, his son sacrificed himself selflessly for the country. In a commemorative letter written to a veteran's organization in Kaṭugastota, the mother of a deceased soldier writes:

> When my son comes home for vacation, after he prepares *dāne*, he goes alone to the temple to offer it. Even today the head monk of our village temple, gives good sermons on the good qualities of my son at the *dāne* that we give every month. My son, who gave his life on behalf of the country and the nation is a valuable gem. I wish with all of my heart, "May you be reborn in every life as my son" (Goḍigamuwa 2000, 116).

This is typical of the memorial services held for soldiers in Sri Lanka. For the bodies of soldiers, Buddhist interpretations alone are often insufficient for quelling grief and fixing their hearts. Their families, fellow soldiers and, indeed, all Sri Lankans have a need to remember soldiers as more than the decomposing bodies of young men who died inauspicious deaths consumed by feelings of hatred. When a soldier dies in battle, therefore, his death triggers more than just traditional Buddhist mechanisms of meaning production.

In order to evaluate positively the bodies of soldiers, therefore, preachers and family members mobilize martial symbols and rhetoric during the memorial process.

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[139] Interview with Mr. Sekara in Bogahayaya on January 24, 2007.

Rather than interpreting the bodies simply as evidence of *anicca*, *anattā* and *dukkha*, memorial preachers tend to view the bodies as symbols of compassion and selfless devotion to others. They announce that the deceased soldier fought and died for the security of the state and its peoples and not for personal reason. By viewing the bodies as defenders of the nation, Buddhists attempt to see the soldiers not through their specific actions of intentional killing on the battlefield, but through their general roles as protectors of the innocent. In other words, when viewed in the context of the nation, as opposed to the context of the individual or the family, the death is portrayed not as something inauspicious, but rather something that is valuable and worthy of praise. As we will see later, however, this rhetoric does not necessarily solve the Buddhist interpretive problems, but merely serves as a palliative to the intense suffering experienced by the families of soldiers killed in battle.

The projection of meaning onto a soldier's body begins even before the *pansakula* ceremony, when the body is brought home. To begin with, the bodies of soldiers themselves are the product of the army's selection process and training program.[140] In her recent book, *Militarizing Sri Lanka*, Neloufer de Mel points out the physical requirements for joining the Sri Lankan army. Men seeking admission to the army as enlisted men must be between 18 and 24 years of age, not less than 5 feet, 4 inches (1.63m) in height with chest measurements of not less than 24 inches (61 cm). Requirements for officers are even more stringent with applicants between 18 and 22, minimum chest measurements of 32 inches (81 cm), and a height of 5 feet, 6 inches (1.68 m) (de Mel, 44). Young, above average in height and toned by regular

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140 Michel Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish* that the body of a soldier is the result of the skillful application of state power. He argues that by the late eighteenth century, soldiers were no longer born, but made through a process of discipline. Through intensive training, a villager was transformed and given the air of a soldier (Foucault, 135).

exercise regimens, the corpses of Sri Lankan soldiers stand out in sharp relief from those that normally arrive in the *mala gedera*.

Uniformed representatives from the army normally deliver the bodies of soldiers. In contrast to the white in which most corpses are dressed, soldiers are often displayed in their uniforms, or, in cases where the body cannot be displayed, the closed casket draped with the Sri Lankan flag stands in for the corpse. Typically, the local police will bring news of the death and later in the day, representatives from the army will deliver the body to its home.

While the white clothing of the *upāsaka/upāsikā* evokes images of a devoted Buddhist, the uniform triggers associations with duty and country. The army uniform is a powerful symbol. Many of the parents of dead soldiers explained that their children joined the army because of their attraction to the uniform. Clutching a framed picture of her son, the mother of one soldier explained: "He saw his brother come home, wearing the uniform and the hat of a soldier. When his brother left, he also wanted to wear the uniform." When I asked the mother of another soldier why he had joined the army, she explained that the young boy had seen soldiers in their uniforms and felt attraction (*āsayi*) for them.[141] A soldier in his uniform is differentiated from the rest of society. Like monks who are distinguished by their robes, soldiers are set apart by their uniforms, service pins and medals. Major Cakkrawarthi of Panagoda army temple goes so far as to identify the uniform with service to his country. When asked why he hadn't retired after being disabled by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in the north, he explained: "I believe that if I am

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[141] This response is very similar to the responses that Jeffrey Samuels received when asking young monks why they had joined the monastic order. Many young monks explained that they had seen monks dressed in their robes and felt "āsayi" for them. Jeffrey Samuels, Personal Communication.

in my uniform, no matter where I serve, it will be a service to my country. That is why I am happily serving here."[142] Lying in a casket, dressed in their uniforms, the bodies of soldiers appear special in comparison to those of normal civilians. Just as white cloth transforms civilians into icons of the ideal Buddhist lay person, the uniforms covering the bodies of soldiers evoke images of selfless devotion to the country, race and religion.

During memorial ceremonies, monks continue to actively interpret the bodies of dead soldiers. In this brief excerpt from a sermon delivered to a crowd of over ten thousand relatives of war dead gathered at Panagoda army temple, Venerable Itapanna Dhammalankāra stresses the value of a soldier's death. He preaches to the grieving families:

> You must understand that your relatives did not die in vain. They died while engaged in the heroic service of protecting the country, nation and the *sāsana* of the fully enlightened Buddha. That is why there is no doubt that the great names (*śrī nāma*) of the war heroes (*raṇaviru*) will be recorded in history above all others. They have protected and continue to protect the country (*raṭa*). They have protected and continue to protect the race (*jātiya*). They have also protected and continue to protect the *sāsana* of the fully enlightened Buddha. That is why there is no doubt that their names have earned a special place in this country's history.[143]

Discussing this sermon with me a few weeks later, Dhammalankāra explained his strategy when preaching to the families of soldiers killed in battle.

> Some mothers and fathers are accustomed to saying "Our son gave his life for the country, the race and unity of the country" so they don't feel shocked. There are some like that, but there are also those that are inconsolable. We tell them that this is a sacrifice (*pūjā*) for the country.[144]

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[142] Interview with Major Chandrapala at Panagoda army temple on November 21, 2005.

[143] Interview with Ven. Itäpanna Dhammalankāra in Rukmale on September 28, 2006.

[144] Ibid.

Dhammalankāra's words to the gathered families are typical of sermons delivered at the memorials of soldiers. He calls the soldiers *"raṇaviru,"* or "war heroes," a term that has penetrated Sri Lankan society.[145] The term "*raṇaviru*" is an honorific used to refer to all soldiers.[146] Dhammalankāra stresses that the deaths of soldiers are not meaningless and that the names of those who have given their lives for the country, race and religion (*raṭa*, *jātiya* and *sāsana*) will be preserved in history.[147]

The phrase, "*raṭa*, *jātiya*, *āgama*," country, race and religion is repeated like a mantra in all ritual activities performed for soldiers. The phrase "*raṭa*, *jātiya*, *āgama*" is a politically charged slogan. Indeed, H.L. Seneviratne refers to it as the "refuge of scoundrels," referring to its ubiquity in the speeches of nationalist politicians (Seneviratne 1999, 67).[148] *Raṭa* is a fairly straightforward term that refers to the country of Sri Lanka, as a unified whole. The term *jātiya*, on the other hand, is a little more ambiguous. While it is sometimes translated as "nation" as suggested by the term *Eksat Jātiyaka Pakṣaya*, or United National Party (UNP), it also has racial

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145 Another term frequently used to describe soldiers, both living and dead is "*mura devatā*," or "guardian deities." It should be remembered, however, that soldiers are not simply passive objects of nationalist rhetoric. After hearing a sermon in which he and his fellow soldiers were referred to as "*mura devatā*," Captain Kanishka called his wife and informed her in jest that as a guardian deity he deserved more respect at home.

146 There is even a national holiday called War Heroes' Day on June 7th commemorated with a postage stamp. *See de Mel, Neloufer. 2007. Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, pg. 19.*

147 There are a few different ways of expressing country, race and religion. The most common is *raṭa*, *jātiya* and *āgama*. Less common are the terms *raṭa*, *däya* and *samaya,* which come from *hela bhāsā,* an archaic form of Sinhala touted by nationalists as a pure language. Although *sāsana* is also used to refer to the Buddhist religion in sermons to soldiers and their families, it is less common than *āgama* or *däya*.

148 Seneviratne traces the origin of this phrase to the writings of Venerable Kalukondayave Pannasekhara, an heir to Anagārika Dharmapāla's missionary philosophy of rural development. Seneviratne, H.L. 1999. *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 67.

overtones. Somapala Jayawardhana's Sinhala-English Dictionary define the term "*jātiyaya*" as "nation." The term "*jātiyabhēdaya*", on the other hand, is defined as "ethnic distinction" (Somapala, 93). The final term, *āgama*, is equally divisive. In contrast to the term *āgam*, which is plural, meaning "religions," in the plural, *āgama* is a singular noun translated as "The Religion." The Religion, of course, is Buddhism. The act of giving one's life for the *raṭa, jātiya, āgama*, therefore, is a function of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. One gives their life for this country as a unified whole; the race, the Sinhala; and the religion, Buddhism.

The monks that I spoke with were quite clear that their first task during the funeral of a soldier is to assign value to the death. Venerable Maṅgala, explains the sermon that he typically delivers to family members on the sixth night after a soldier has died.

> On the other hand, I also show the parents the value (*ägavīma*) of the death. You see, some people die because of love affairs…..If something goes wrong, they drink poison and kill themselves. They jump in front of trains. They hang themselves. They jump into reservoirs. Such things happen all of the time. They destroy their lives because of various problems. They destroy their lives with liquor or drugs. As far as I know, Sri Lanka has the second highest suicide rate in the world….So, in a country where so many lives are destroyed, we need to appreciate those who sacrifice their lives for the country and the nation….When I remind parents of this, they become happy. When they think that their son didn't just give his life for no reason, but that he served us, our country and our nation, they feel a little better….There are two results of this: On the one hand, they become happy with the dharma and on the other side they become happy with their son's heroism. Through these two things, their suffering naturally decreases.[149]

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[149] Interview with Sarasiyapattuwe Maṅgala at his temple near Kandy on October 4, 2006.

While the value of most dead bodies lie in their potential for symbolizing the dharma, in the case of soldiers monks like Maṅgala feel a need to assign other values as well.

Speaking with me moments after signing a letter of recommendation for a young man seeking to enlist in the army, Ven. Ānanda, also discusses the values that he assigns to the bodies of dead soldiers.

> We talk about their sacrifice. We talk about their value. No one likes to die. Some of them might have died because of their own mistake. The enemy could have been faster. We don't say that they died because they weren't careful. We say that they dedicated their lives to protect the welfare of the country, race and religion (*raṭa*, *jātiya* and *āgama*)….There are some people who drink poison and just kill themselves without being of use to anyone. There are people like that, you know. When people look at the death of soldiers, their deaths have value. In that way, when you compare their deaths to people who just commit suicide, they have value.[150]

Ānandavaṃsa stresses that monks like him really have no idea about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of individual soldiers. They may have been careless. They may, as Maṅgala points out, even have been consumed by anger as they died. Regardless of these uncertainties, however, monks attempt to stress the value of a soldier's sacrifice for the sake of their grieving family.

Sacrifice or "*pūjā*" is a common term attributed to the deaths of soldiers. According to this rhetoric, a soldier will sacrifice himself selflessly on behalf of the country, race and religion. During a sermon to the families of soldiers in Anuradhapura, Venerable Kollonāve Sumaṅgala exclaims: "We are not dying in a quarrel over a fence. We haven't lost our arms and legs trying to save the gold and

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[150] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa in Bogahayaya on November 12, 2006.

silver of our brothers and sisters."[151] During an interview, Venerable Vipuladhamma of the Mihidu Arañña temple also stresses that soldiers are not dying in a simple land dispute with a neighbor. Stressing the value of a soldier's death he compares soldiers to those who die "at the boundary of their own land in a fight with their neighbor."[152] He implies that in contrast to a soldier's death, death in a simple land dispute is worthless. Venerable Dhammalankara goes so far as stating that a soldier's death is not individual, but a sacrifice for the entire country.[153]

Venerable Vipuladhamma, the head of a forest hermitage meditation center near Mihintale expresses his goals in terms very similar to Ānandavaṃsa's. He explains:

> (I say) 'He gave his life on behalf of the mother country.' You can console people by saying that. Death occurs in many different ways….Some kill themselves after failing in their married life. Some die after failed love affairs. Some kill themselves because of financial problems. Some die in untimely (*akāla*) and unfortunate ways because of these things. However, the soldier's goal was higher than this. This is not something done on behalf of one's family or children, this is something done on behalf of all of the children and the entire country. He devoted his life to the lives of all the children who will be born in this country.[154]

Vipuladhamma raises a common theme found in sermons to the families of deceased soldiers. He stresses that soldiers do not fight and die with selfish intentions. They have a higher goal: to protect all who live or ever will live in Sri Lanka. During a

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[151] Sermon delivered by Kollonawe Sumaṅgala at Ratanaghara temple in Anuradhapura on March 10, 2007.

[152] Interview with Venerable Vipuladhamma in Mihintale on March 9, 2007.

[153] Interview with Ven. Itäpanna Dhammalankāra in Rukmale on September 28, 2006.

[154] Interview with Venerable Vipuladhamma in Mihintale on March 9, 2007.

sermon delivered in Anurādhapura in March of 2007, Venerable Kollonawe Sumaṅgala cries out plaintively to his audience:

> Veterans, it is true that you receive a salary, but can you measure that salary when you lose your arms and legs, when you offer your lives, or when you fight with death? When soldiers are giving their lives, I don't know whether you can measure that life in paychecks. You patriot soldiers are such a blessing for the country! Your mission is to leave behind the warmth of your parents and your small infant children to go to battle to save the innocent from the wicked terrorists.[155]

By stressing the selflessness of soldiers' actions, preachers like Sumaṅgala attempt to transform inauspicious deaths into more auspicious ones. According to the typical memorial sermon, soldiers are not paid to participate in acts of intentional killing for money, but rather fight selflessly, motivated by compassion for the country.

Given the bleak outlook for soldiers who die on the battlefield, Buddhist values do little to help assuage the grief of mourning families. Monks, therefore, apply communal and nationalist lenses in order to give the corpses value beyond their utility as tools for contemplations on impermanence.[156] For families, it is obvious that the death of a son is not a valuable thing, but a tragedy. When viewed through the lens of the nation, on the contrary, the death becomes a selfless act necessary to the continued existence of a unified Sri Lanka.

During funerals most monks do not employ nationalist images and vocabulary in order to push forward the war effort. They employ these images, on the contrary, in order to console parents who have lost children to violent and untimely deaths. While the end result of this nationalist rhetoric may be the same acheived by state

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[155] Sermon delivered by Kollonawe Sumaṅgala at Ratanaghara temple in Anuradhapura on March 10, 2007.

[156] When I say "tools for contemplation on impermanence" I am not referring to the practice of *pilikul bhāvanā* in which monks meditate on corpses. On the contrary, I am referring to sermons on impermanence, which most commonly accompany funerals.

propaganda disseminated in newspapers and television, the stated intention behind it is benevolent.

Though the monks I spoke to said they were motivated primarily by compassion for the grieving families of dead soldiers, their use of nationalist discourse has many unfortunate consequences. In this short epitaph written in a collection of letters written by relatives of war dead, Buddhist interpretations are entirely supplanted by martial ones. A grief-stricken relative writes:

> Not with sighs nor with tears can I fill the space that you left. I will fill that space with a battle cry. I will create a weapon of fire, take it up into my two hands and go to wage war. I pray for your Nirvana (Goḍigamuwa 2000, 93).

This epithet stands out from typical Buddhist memorializations of soldiers. While the author recognizes the uselessness of "tears and sighs," he replaces grief not with Buddhist interpretations of death, but with a desire for vengeance.

Another common way of projecting value onto the bodies of dead soldiers is to compare them to Sinhala kings of the past. The father of a Captain killed in the North writes:

> We were joined by fate and separated by fate. You have done more of your duty to sustain the existence of the country than we have. On the day that my son, the heroic war leader, destroyed the Mānkulam tiger camp and gave it to the nation, everything went well in the end. I consider the shot that hit you not as an insult to your fate or ours, but as a fatal shot for the security for the nation and region. Heroic son, I hope (*prarthanā*) that following in the footsteps of people like Duṭugämuṇu and Parakramabahu will be enough for you to unlock and open the door to the city of Nirvana (Goḍigamuwa 2000, 35).[157]

Rather than interpreting his son in terms of *anicca*, *anattā* and *dukkha* and praying that his son achieve enlightenment through meditation or by meeting a future

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[157] This letter comes from a collection of commemorative messages collected by the Samasta Lankā Raṇaviru Padanama, the All Sri Lankan War Hero Foundation, a foundation located in Katugastota dedicated to the families of the war dead from all three branches of the Sri Lankan armed forces.

Buddha, this father prays that his son will attain nirvana by following in the footsteps of the Sinhala kings who fought against the *Damila* kings.

While one should recognize how these memorial preachers identify the bodies with Sinhala kings and selfless action on behalf of the nation, it is equally important to pay attention to what they distinguish the bodies of the soldiers from, namely, suicide victims. It is not surprising that monks would take great pains to distinguish the bodies of soldiers from those of individuals who have taken their own lives. The death of a young person is always untimely and the majority of young deaths are the result of suicide. As Venerable Maṅgala points out, Sri Lanka has an extremely high suicide rate.[158] When a monk presides at the funeral of a soldier, therefore, he must distinguish the body of the soldier from the suicide victim. When asked what he preaches at the funeral of a suicide victim, Ānandavaṃsa replies candidly: "Actually, I don't say anything good about people who killed themselves. You can't say anything good. They have done something very bad. Birth as a human is very rare. They could be married. They could have children. Their children and wives need to live. A good person does not just leave them behind and free oneself because one can't believe in them. Such a person cannot take responsibility. They just leave behind their problems for others to solve. One cannot praise such a person."[159] A

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[158] According to the World Health Organization (WHO) report, Sri Lanka ranks number four in suicide-related deaths per 100,000 (61.4 recorded in 1991) behind Lithuania (84.1 recorded in 2004), Belarus (73.3 recorded in 2003), and the Russian Federation (71.3 recorded in 2004). (From World Health Organization Website, 2007. http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide_rates/en/index.html.)

[159] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa at Bogahyaya temple on November 21, 2006.

soldier, in contrast, is always praised no matter his true character or the circumstances of his death.[160]

Monks admit that the goals of these memorials for soldiers go beyond fixing the hearts of families. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa argues that the meanings projected onto the bodies of dead soldiers have beneficial effects on other soldiers as well. He explains:

> When a person with a good goal dies, there is a lot of positive strength in their mind. "If I died protecting my nation and my religion. I did not die loafing around like a lazy person." That is to say, he died because the enemy shot him. He died because the enemy attacked. He has seen everywhere on banners and posters that there is great honor in dying on the battlefield like a heroic soldier. This idea has penetrated his mind. At that time he won't forget that. So he dies with great honor.[161]

Thus for Ratanavaṃsa, the meanings projected onto soldiers do not simply console the minds of grieving family members, they also help future soldiers with their own dying process. By projecting these meanings onto the dead, Ratanavaṃsa hopes to shape the intentions of living soldiers going to battle. He reasons that these

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[160] There can be a real tension between a monk's desire to fix the hearts of the gathered people and the character of the deceased. Monks can be tempted to heap false praise on those who don't deserve it in order to appease the family. Ānandavaṃsa admits that there are some occasions when he is speaking at the funeral of someone who lived a bad life. He explains, "A monk can preach like this only if the deceased person was a good person. A monk can't say that a drunk or a thief is good person because the villagers know what he was like. There are times like that. What do we do at those times? We don't say anything about that person. We don't praise them. We just preach a sermon explaining what death is. We also tell the people that they must live good lives" (Ānandavaṃsa). Despite his own conviction to avoid false praise, Ānandavaṃsa admits that there is a great deal of pressure for a monk to heap praise upon the deceased. He complains, "Now in some places, you can see people lying about the virtues of the dead person. They just lie about such things. They praise the person just to win over the hearts (*hita*) of the people there. When monks go to preach, some *daẏaka* like to hear praise for the virtues of the deceased, so sometimes they end up praising them, even if they didn't mean to at first. If a monk doesn't praise the dead, they might lose some prestige (*prasāda*). The lay people may say: 'Even though the monk came, he didn't say anything! All of our relatives were there, but he didn't say good things. Why do we help the temple so much? Even though we help the temple, the monk didn't say anything for us'" (Ānandavaṃsa).

[161] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa near Mihintale on October 7, 2006.

interpretations of the dead, can shape the hearts of soldiers going into battle so that they too can fight selflessly, avoiding negative karma and rebirth in realms of suffering.

Much like the sermons discussed in Chapter Two, these memorial rites have a secondary function of performing the ideal intention that soldiers should take to the battlefield. While a monk can never know the circumstances surrounding an individual soldier's death, he can instruct soldiers about the proper intentions to take into battle. Ratanavaṃsa explains further:

> I am saying that a person who dies with good thoughts will not go to hell. That is to say, when that person dies he has great confidence that he has done a good thing. That is in his mind so his rebirth will be a good one. He will be reborn in a good place because he didn't die doing a bad thing. He believes that he did a good thing. So he won't have a bad rebirth.[162]

By encouraging this confidence in the righteous of their cause, therefore, Ratanavaṃsa and other monks seek to protect soldiers from the negative results of *hita* filled with anger and attachment to the self.

While this nationalist rhetoric may be extremely off-putting to an audience of Buddhist scholars, it serves an important purpose in contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhist practice. Sri Lankan monks are often portrayed in the international media and in scholarship as the distributors of nationalist ideologies for the purpose of furthering their ambitions for a unified country through a military solution. The reality, however, is much more complicated. Many monks find themselves ministering at the funerals of young men who attended their sunday dharma classes (*daham pāsal*). When confronted by grieving parents seeking to make sense of their

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[162] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa near Mihintale on October 7, 2006.

son's life and death, nationalist rhetoric is a tempting medicine for easing their suffering. The communal and nationalist concepts that many monks project onto the bodies of soldiers transform their deaths from violent inauspicious events into supremely Buddhist acts of compassion and sacrifice. Viewed within the context of country, race and religion, the bodies of young soldiers are freed from the bonds of negative karma and granted the possibility of future births without the threat of untimely death. Nationalist rhetoric, in this case, becomes a tool, albeit a dangerous one, for easing the grief of mourning families and protecting soldiers rather than just a stimulus for a military solution to the conflict.

"Missing in Action Means Dead"

Compounding the crisis of a soldier's untimely death is the fact that on many occasions, the families of soldiers do not actually receive the body of their loved one. Some soldiers go missing in action. Other bodies may be so mutilated that they are sent home in sealed caskets. On some occasions, the army has been known to send home empty caskets to stand in for the dead soldier. This absence of the body intensifies the crisis of death.

The presence of the body is crucial in the mourning process. Venerable Ratnavamsa explains the importance of having the body present at the *pansakula*. "The dead person will be able to get more merit at this time than at any other because the body is right there. At other times we just give merit by thinking in our heads. At other times we just use our imagination."[163] Ratanavaṃsa explains further that

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[163] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa near Mihintale on December 8, 2005.

one must be particularly careful to act with wisdom while the body is in the house. The dead will benefit from the *bhakti* and *sraddha* in the hearts of their family members. For Ratanavaṃsa, therefore, the presence of the body is important in merit production. While it is possible to create merit for anyone at anytime by using one's imagination, the actual presence of the body provides extra power to the exercise. Ratanavaṃsa, in other words, recognizes the symbolic power of the corpse. After the body is gone, merit production will become gradually more difficult as the departed family member fades into memory.

Without concrete proof of their son's death, a family is robbed of an important merit making opportunity. Without a body to focus their minds on, merit making is limited by the power of memory and imagination. More importantly, they may continue grasping onto hope for years. Sekara described his wife's condition in the years following their son's disappearance.

> Even though I decided that he was dead, my wife would watch the road. She watched the road for years. I have been around the world and the country and have some knowledge about these things so I decided that he was dead. I even went to the camp and asked them. The Brigadier told me to understand....the head of the Airport camp. ….I asked him to explain the meaning of "Missing." He told me that he couldn't explain it to me. I then told him to tell me. Does it mean that he is dead? Does it mean that you couldn't get the body? But he didn't say anything. So my wife would watch the road for years thinking that he would come. Now she isn't well.[164]

In some cases the military may send home a sealed casket, which the family is instructed not to open. Sent home wrapped in a Sri Lankan flag, some caskets contain plantain stalks and rocks rather than the actual body, which may have not

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[164] Interview with Mr. Sekara in Bogahayaya on January 24, 2007.

been recovered from the battlefield. In other cases a soldier may be declared missing in action, leaving a family in limbo for months or even years.

When families don't receive the bodies of their children, it is sometimes difficult for them to believe that the child is actually dead. This very problem is the subject of the 1998 Sri Lankan movie, *Pura Handa Kaluvara* (Death on a Fullmoon Day.) In the film, an old man named Vanni Hami receives news that his son, Bandara, has been killed in battle. Shortly after receiving the news, a sealed coffin arrives draped in the Sri Lankan flag. Vanni Hami, however, refuses to accept his son's death. When approached later about the compensation check from the government, he refuses, explaining that such things are for dead people. A week after the funeral ceremonies conclude, a letter from his son arrives. Written before Bandara's death, the letter further strengthens Vanni Hami's resolve, giving him physical proof that his son is still alive. To Vanni Hami, the letter seems to be concrete proof that his son survives. The concrete nature of the letter seems much more real than the abstract body that he was never able to see. In the final scene of the film, Vanni Hami digs up his son's coffin with the help of the other villagers. Opening the sealed coffin, they discover not Bandara's corpse, but a banana stalk and rocks.

While this film may seem dramatic, its plot is familiar among many families whose children went missing during the war. One woman recalls the story of the arrival of her brother's body after being killed in battle:

> I can't even think about it. The message came in the evening. My husband has a younger brother in the army. He was the first one to see it. He was the one who sent the message. It was then that we learned that the Tigers had attacked over there, but we didn't know that little brother was dead yet. The message arrived at around 7 or 7:30 in the evening. My daughter was about to be born. I couldn't stand it. I was so sad. I heard that a message had come. I was inside the house. I heard that they were bringing the body in a sealed casket. They

> wanted to deliver it to our mother, but she wasn't at home. What were we to do?...After that they brought the body to our house at night. We cried. We were so angry that we wanted to kill the people who had brought the body. Actually, how sad it is to see someone go off and come back in a casket born on the shoulders of others.[165]

The sister of the soldier explained that the representatives from the army were assigned to guard the casket. While the family desperately wished to open the casket for one last look at their dead relative (and for proof that he was indeed dead), the army guards would not allow it.

When there is a question about whether or not an individual is alive or dead, there is also confusion about the appropriate religious rituals. Despite the rigid schedule of the *pansakula*, *mataka baṇa* and *mataka dāne*, a family is not going to begin funeral preparations if there is a chance that their loved one is still alive. One family explained: "We were reluctant to perform *dāne* and *pinkama* immediately. We thought that he was still alive. We performed *bodhipujā* thinking that he was still alive somewhere. We performed *bodhipujā.*"[166] In the case of uncertainty, families typically consult astrologers and soothsayers and perform *bodhipūjas* to create merit.

The practice of performing *bodhipūjā*, or worshipping the Bodhi tree is a relatively new one in Sri Lanka. While there is evidence of a long tradition of worshipping the Bodhi tree in Sri Lanka, today *bodhipūja* refers specifically to a set liturgy composed in colloquial Sinhala around 1976 by the charismatic poet-monk Pānadurē Ariyadhamma (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 384). Today, *bodhipūjās* serve as an alternative to the popular practice of making vows to the devas in exchange for this-worldly assistance. A *bodhipūjā* can be performed by students seeking assistance with exams, individuals facing a inauspicious astrological period (*apala*),

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[165] Interview with the family of a dead soldier on March 8, 2006 near mile post 117 of the A9 highway.

[166] Ibid.

or by soldiers and their families seeking protection on the battlefield. By performing *bodhipūjas* instead of funeral rituals, the families of missing soldiers hope to produce merit to assist their loved one without admitting their death.

When soldiers go missing, most families go through the same process. First, they may consult a soothsayer (*śastra kārayo*) in order to determine whether their son is still alive or not. One family explained the ordeal they went through after receiving news of their son's disappearance:

> A message came (saying that his son had gone missing). The town of Mulativu had been under constant attack. We couldn't go there to check. Then my husband's family checked the astrological chart (*handahana*). They told us that he had an *apala* (inauspicious astrological period) and that we should hold a *bodhipūjā* for 7 days. So we performed the *bodhipūjā*. We went to *devales* and took vows. They went to a twenty two year old man that looks into *śastra* for dead people. At that time he told us that he had escaped into the forest and that he is trying to return. After that we spent a lot of money trying to bring him back. After that one of our relatives said, "Until the army gives us a death certificate, mother will think that brother is among the living."[167]

The family explained that different sooth sayers would give them different answers. The brother of the dead soldier added:

> Each person said something different. Some said that he was alive. Some said he was dead. However, most said that he was alive....They were probably just saying that to get a profit. If they said that we would keep coming back. There are people like that. They would say, "He will come back today." So after we went and performed a *pūjā* they would say, "He will come back in 3 days." So we just kept waiting thinking that he would return. We kept waiting thinking that he would come home at night and call for us. They told us that he had escaped into the forest, you know. We waited around like that for a long time. We would take mother and go to the *devales* early in the morning, but he didn't come back.[168]

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid.

Another family living on Kurunegala road, told of how they consulted a soothsayer after they were informed by the army of their son's death, but did not receive his body. According to the mother, the soothsayer became possessed (*aveśa venavā*) by her son and said "I am thirsty." After hearing this she explained "He said that so I give drinks at a *dāna sal* every year. Ever since we heard that he was thirsty we started giving drinks every *Vesak Poya* day."[169]

If there was any doubt at all whether a soldier was indeed dead or not, all of the Buddhist families that I spoke with immediately began to sponsor *bodhipujā* ceremonies. One grieving mother that I met at the annual army day memorial service at Panagoda explained her reasoning:

> We couldn't find out whether he was alive or not. The only thing that we could do was give merit....If they had brought the body we would have known that he was dead. Otherwise there is nothing that you can do. When we checked with *śastra*, they told us that he was alive somewhere.....According to Buddhism, the only thing you can do is perform *bodhipūjā*.[170]

When I asked the brother of a missing soldier whether it was possible to give a seven day *dāne* for a missing soldier, he responded firmly:

> No you wouldn't give the seventh day dane. When the message comes that someone is missing you would go and perform a *bodhipūjā* and pray for blessing (*set patanavā*). When you perform a *pansakula* you pour water and rejoice in merit. You wouldn't do that (if they are alive.)[171]

His wife, who was also participating in the interview added:

> We didn't give on those first days. You only give after someone is dead. You give *dāne* and *pinkama* if they are not among the living. You give merit for the next life. If there is a suspicion that someone is

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[169] Interview with family on Kurunegala road near Katugastota on February 7, 2007.

[170] Interview at Panagoda army temple on October 11, 2005.

[171] Interview with the family of a dead soldier on March 8, 2006 near mile post 117 of the A9 highway.

> still alive you would just pray for blessing (*set patanavā*). Then you pray for long life and the prevent *apala*. If there is a suspicion that someone is alive you wouldn't give *pansakula* or give a dane to the Sangha....You only pour water after you find out that someone is dead.[172]

What if a soldier who has been declared missing is, in fact, dead and his family does not perform the proper ceremonies? When asked this question, Ānanda responded thoughtfully:

> If people don't give merit and he is dead and expecting merit, he will probably face difficulties. That is because he wants to receive merit. While waiting for merit he will be reborn somewhere else. If we do not perform a *pinkama* then the *kusala karma* that he has performed himself becomes more important. The performance of a *pansakula* or the giving of a *dāne* affects the living just as it affects the dead. That is because when someone dies it affects the psychological states of the living. People have developed minds so when someone dies they are affected. For that reason, *pansakula* and the giving of *dāne* is important for both the living and the dead.[173]

Given these risks, it is not surprising that some families do indeed perform the seven day almsgivings before their relative has been confirmed dead. The patriarch of one such family in Bogahayāya near Mihintale explained his rationale for skipping the *pansakula* and performing the seventh day almsgiving:

> It (a pansakula) wasn't necessary. My son wasn't here for the pansakula. We gave alms to the sangha. You need a body to perform a pansakula. You need a body to have a pansakula. We didn't have the body. You perform the pansakula when there is a body. We gave alms from the seventh day onwards.…We gave the seventh day and three month dāne and still give every year.[174]

Sekara explained that after three days of waiting, he decided that his son must be dead. "The Tigers don't take prisoners," he explained. After seven days, therefore,

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[172] Ibid.

[173] Interview with Venerable Ānandavaṃsa on February 16, 2007 in Mihintale.

[174] Interview with Mr. Sekera on October 22, 2006 in Bogahayāya.

he decided to perform the almsgiving. Sekara's wife, however, did not share his certainty. Sekara admitted that she would watch the road waiting for their son to return for a year after he went missing.[175] On a muggy evening on the shores of the Mahakanadarāva reservoir, Venerable Ratanavaṃsa summarized the challenges facing a family whose son has gone missing in action. He states frankly, "Missing in action means dead."[176]

Shelter for You….

The memorial ceremony is but a tourniquet for easing immediate suffering. Nationalist rhetoric may be able to assuage the immediate grief of families, but it is not able to overcome completely the inauspicious fog that surrounds the death. For many families, memorial ceremonies for their sons never cease. The memorialization of individual soldiers continues long after the sermons are over and the body is in the ground, but continues for years in the merit-making activities of his or her family. Physical memorials preserve the interpretations of corpses produced during the memorial ceremonies and display these interpretations for the general public to see. The compensation given to families upon the death of a soldier serves as a fuel for the construction of physical memorials. Unsatisfied with the static concrete grave markers that became popular in the mid twentieth century, however, many families have constructed objects which do not simply stand in for their children, but also create merit by providing some kind of service. On behalf of their dead children, families sponsor annual or monthly almsgivings, build road-side

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[175] Ibid.

[176] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa on February 21, 2007 near Mihintale.

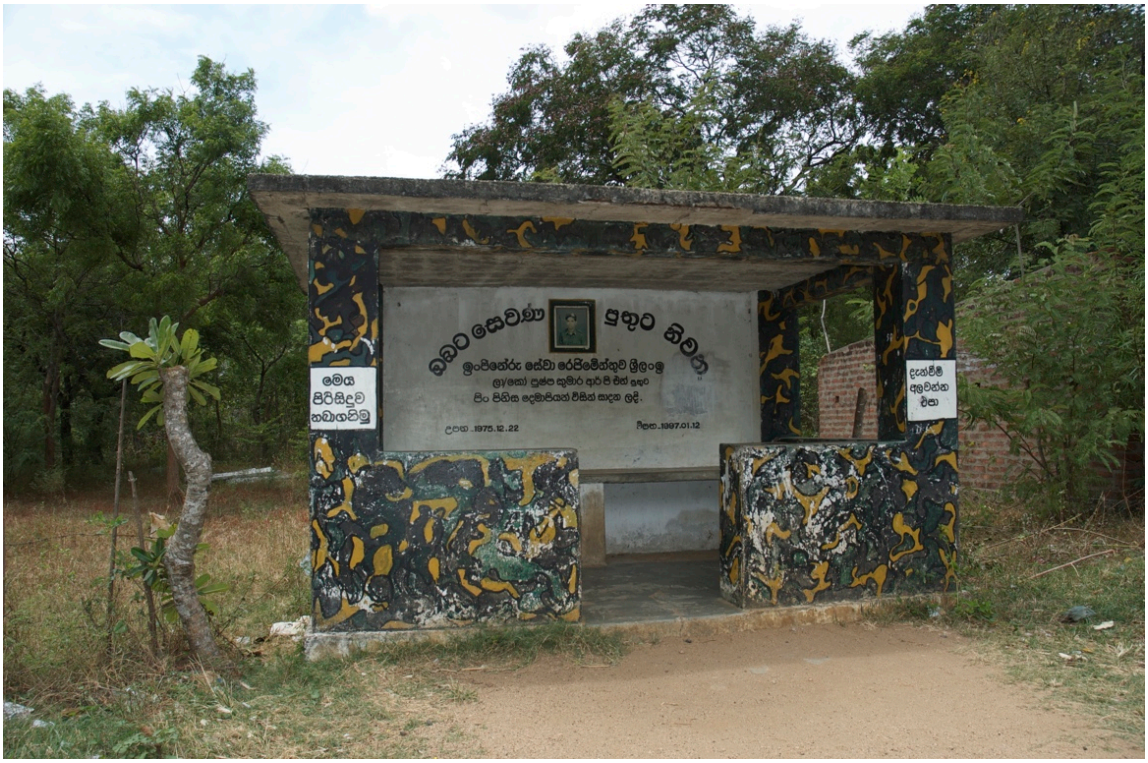
memorials, and construct buildings at local temples. Indeed, it is impossible to drive on any major road without encountering at least one memorial.

Photograph taken inside a bus stand at mile post 42 on the A9 highway. The face of the soldier is obscured and hand prints are clearly visible over the face.

It was July, 2005 when I first took notice of the camouflage bus stands lining Sri Lanka's road ways. I was driving back from Trincomalee with my research assistant, having interviewed Venerable Ampiṭiyē Sīlavaṃsatissa of Welgam Vihara about the attack on his temple three years prior. On the drive back to Kandy, I

photographed eighteen memorial bus stands. As I photographed the framed picture of one soldier inside a bus halt, my flash went off obscuring the picture with its reflection of the glass. When I looked at the photograph later I saw that while my flash has concealed the face of the soldier, it had revealed two hand prints, one large and one small, on the glass. Perhaps these hand prints are just random marks left by travelers using the bus stand for shelter or perhaps they are the hand prints of parents who have come to bus stand to remember. Whatever the source of the hand prints, they serve as evidence that the bus stand still serves as a site of human activity. Parents often do, indeed, spend a lot of time inside the bus stands that they build for their sons. On more than one occasion, I have approached a bus stand to find the father of the dead soldier sitting inside.

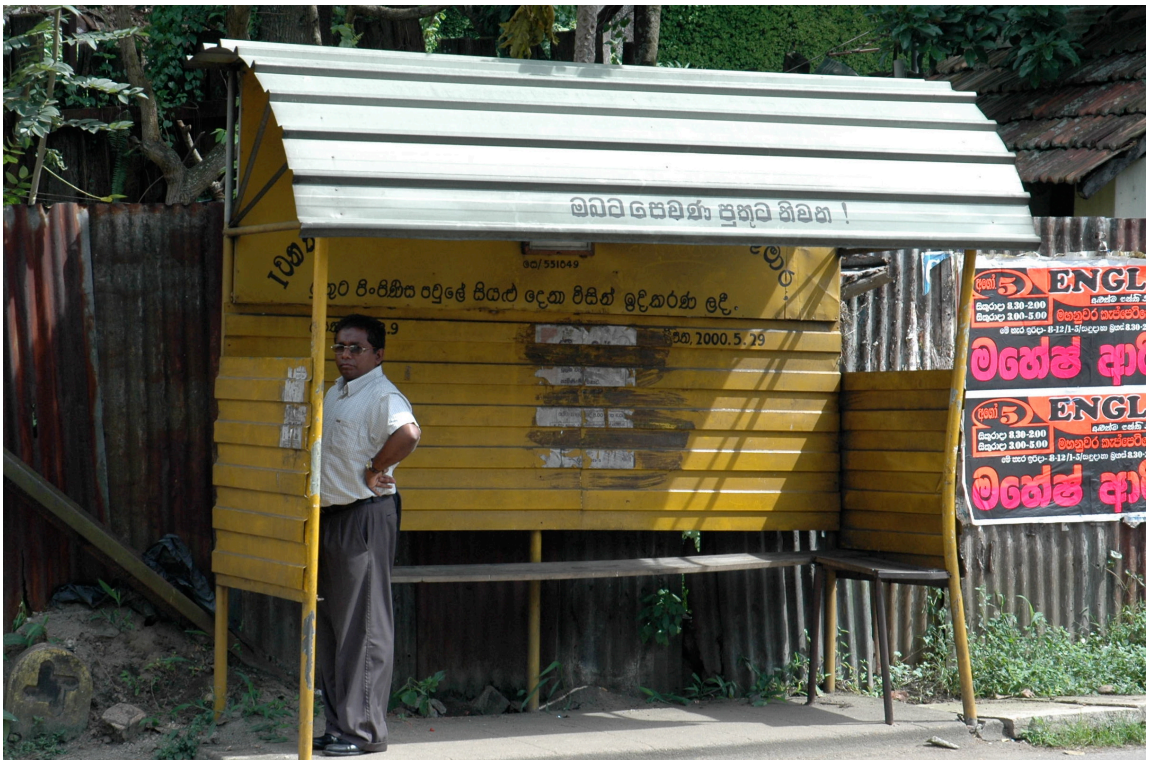
There are many types of memorials for dead soldiers, but by far the most ubiquitous are the many bus shelters dedicated to soldiers killed in action. Memorial bus stands serve several functions for the deceased and their families. First of all, these bus stands enshrine the meanings projected onto the bodies of dead soldiers over the cycle of memorial services. The memories that were chosen during the *pansakula* and the sixth day sermon are literally made concrete through the construction of these roadside memorials. Secondly, bus halts serve as permanent *pinkama*, producing merit for the dead after all rituals have concluded. Just as the *pansakula* and almsgiving ceremonies serve to extend the agency of the dead by creating merit that they were unable to create while still living, so does the bus halt continue to create merit by sheltering travelers from the sun and rain. Physical Memorials such as bus halts and temple buildings preserve/enshrine the meanings determined during rituals and continue the agency of the dead indefinitely.



Bus Shelter at mile post 165 on the A6 highways near Trincomalee.

Memorial bus stands come in all shapes, sizes and colors. Some bus stands are painted in the cream color most popularly used on Sri Lankan homes, while others are painted in camouflage paint in imitation of military uniforms. Some bus halts are mounted with Sri Lankan flags and others are decorated with regimental insignia. Most bus halts contain a photograph of the deceased or missing soldier dressed in their military uniform and a record of the birth and death, much like a tombstone.[177] Bus halts are often built to correspond with the scheduled almsgivings for the dead. A few families reported that they had their bus halts complete in time for the three month *dānes*, but the majority built them for the one-year death

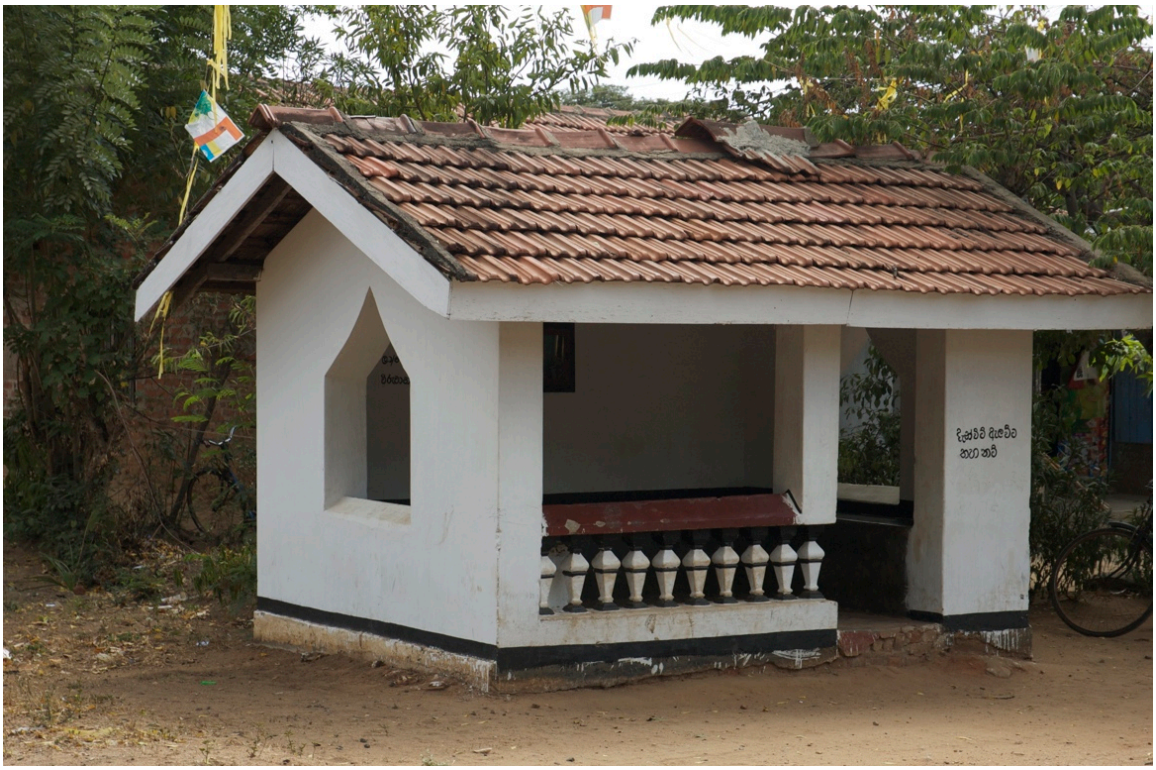
177 After observing over one hundred memorial bus stands and grave stones, I only discovered one photograph in which the deceased soldier was not in uniform. This bus stand near the town of Eppavala contained a picture of the soldier as a young boy, dressed in his white and blue school uniform.



Bus Shelter at milepost 101 on the A1 highway.

anniversaries. Some bus halts are built by families alone and others are built communally by a village. Different families reported spending different amounts of money on the construction of their memorial bus stands with estimates ranging from fifteen to thirty five thousand rupees. In addition to this initial expense, most families continue to maintain the bus stands, spending several thousand rupees every year to repaint it.

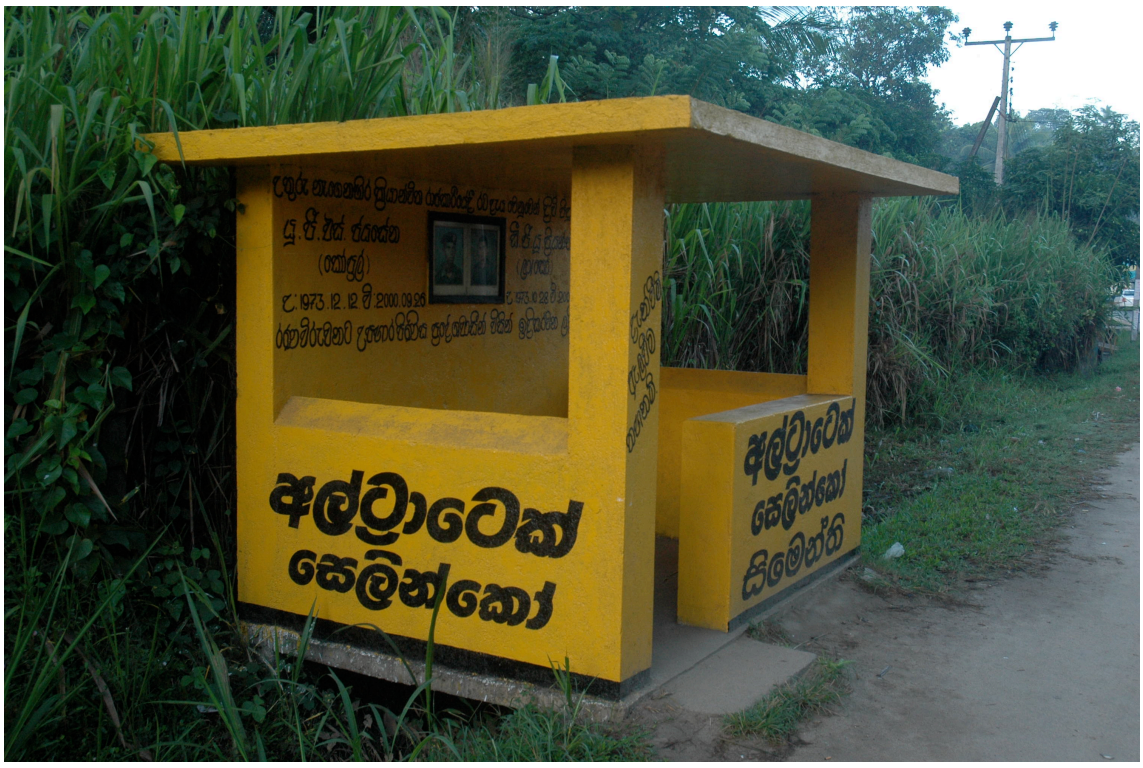
As one drives down the length of the A9 or on any of Sri Lanka's major roads, one confronts these bus halts one after another. On one ten-kilometer stretch of the B213 road near Eppawala, there are fifteen bus halts and elaborate tombstones for soldiers. While memorial ceremonies project meaning onto the bodies of dead soldiers, physical memorials such as bus halts enshrine these meanings long after the



Bus Stand at milepost 27 on the B213 road near Eppawala.

body itself has been disposed of. In other words, bus halts serve as a surrogate for the corpse of soldiers, preserving the meanings projected upon them even as the bodies themselves decay. The photographs and text adorning the walls of memorial bus halts serve as an extension of the memorial ceremonies, mixing Buddhist and nationalist interpretations of the fallen soldier.

The condition of different bus halts varies. Some bus halts are covered by graffiti with collapsing roofs and tarnished or missing photographs. Other bus halts are still in pristine condition, receiving frequent paint jobs and cleaning. The condition of a bus halt tell us a lot about memory. The well-maintained bus halt indicates an individual who is still very present in the hearts of his relatives. A dilapidated bus halt, on the other hand, represents a soldier who has passed into the



In addition to memorializing two soldiers, this bus shelter also advertises "Ceylinco Ultratech Cement."

fog of memory. During my field work, I was unable to find any of the families who had built bus halts that had fallen into ruin.

The majority of the bus stands that I encountered were built between 1990 and 1999. The newest bus stand I encountered was built in 2000. Why did the practice of building bus stands die out so quickly? One possible reason for the sharp decline in the construction of bus stands is the opening of the large government-sponsored war memorial built in Mayilapitiya in the hill country near Kandy on October 3, 2002. Designed as a multireligious site, Mayilapitiya contains diluted symbolism from all four of the island's major religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam). While the memorial garden is beautiful, however, it does not participate in the

rhetoric of merit production. As such, it is unlikely that it would be the reason for the decline in bus stand construction.

Another more likely reason for this could could be the decline in casualties in general. The 1990s witnessed the heaviest fighting and the largest numbers of casualties in the war. 1996 was a particularly bad year as (estimate number of deaths) were killed and thousands others injured. A western monk, who practiced *pilikul bhāvanā*, or meditation on corpses, told me stories of bodies piling up in the central courtyard of the Colombo morgue as they were unable to keep up with the continuous stream of war dead.

Finally, bus stands may simply have gone out of fashion. Many of the monks that I spoke with laughed when I asked them about memorial bus stands, calling them superstition. These same monks, however, were more than happy to allow families of dead soldiers to give donations and construct structures within their temples for the purpose of merit production.

Why Bus Stands?

Death, even untimely death, is not a new phenomena in Sri Lanka, but the construction of memorial bus stands, however, is relatively new. Why has the construction of private memorials become so widespread during these twenty five years of war? There are many answers to this question. First of all, the families of soldiers have the financial means to build memorials for their children. When a soldier is killed in battle, their closest relative (usually the parents or the spouse) receives a compensation check from the government. Without this all too disposable

income, families would be unable to build bus halt memorials or fund temple construction projects.

When a soldier is killed, their closest family (in the case of unmarried soldiers, the parents and in the case of married soldiers, the spouse) receive *vandi* or compensation. The amount of compensation received has changed over time, but most families I spoke with reported receiving around 60,000 rupees.[178] In addition to this one time pay off, the families of soldiers killed in action continue to receive the soldier's full salary (around 16,000 rupees per month for a Lance Corporal) until the time when the soldier would have retired (a period of up to 20 years) after which they receive the pension as well.[179]

Understandably many families do not feel entirely comfortable profiting from the death of one of their members. In her article, *Money that burns like oil: a Sri Lankan cultural logic of morality and agency*, Michele Gamburd discusses the fetishization of money in the small Southern village of Naeaegama. Gamburd explains how villagers attached moral properties to money corresponding to how it was earned. Money earned with hard work and good intentions will give fruit (*yā denavā*) while that earned through inauspicious means or circumstances will "burn like oil" (Gamburd, 2004, p. 172). Gamburd explains that: "[I]n the moral universe of burning money, agency does not reside solely in human beings; money and the

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[178] Approximately $560.00 in 2008.

[179] One of my informants was kind enough to provide me with one of the monthly pay slips that his family receives on behalf of their son, who went missing in action. Total pay for June, 2005 was Rs. 16,382.10. The families of higher ranking soldiers and officers will receive more according to the rank. Additionally, soldiers receive an automatic promotion at death. In other words, a private killed in action would be promoted to Lance Corporal and a Captain would be promoted to Major. The vast majority of war dead are listed as "Lance Corporals."

power that adheres to it behave according to moral rules" (Gamburd, 2004, p. 170). Giving examples of money that burns, Gamburd's informants emphasize both the means of earning the money and the emotional state of both the source of the money and the recipient (Illicit liquor production, money lending, gambling, stealing, bribes).

It is hard to imagine money earned under more inauspicious circumstances than the death of one's child. Many families of dead soldiers find themselves in the position of being supported almost entirely by compensation checks. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa explains the predicament of most families who lose sons to the war:

> They get a lot of money (when their son dies.) They get a big shock when they receive it. This is what I see. First they get a large sum of money all of a sudden and then they get the pension. Some close relatives also expect to receive some of the money. So, if they tell them that they spent the money doing something at the temple, they get out of having to give anything to the relatives. They get a little freedom when they do things like this. The other thing is...enjoying it by themselves.….they are afraid to enjoy things that they receive in (the son's) name after he dies. More than fear is sadness. That is why, by doing some kind of meritorious work, the get a kind of freedom to enjoy it (the checks) later. Then there is no sadness. They think, "We have done something for our son and so it doesn't matter if we take the rest."[180]

The money earned upon the death of a soldier is believed to be just as flammable as any other inauspiciously earned money. Venerable Ratanavaṃsa's temple contains four structures built on behalf of war dead by their families. The first is a temple bell dedicated to a Lance Corporal from the Sinha regiment. Second is a donation box, or *piṅ peṭṭiya*, dedicated to an enlisted man in the air force. Third, is the kitchen, which was sponsored by a family who lost two sons in the army. Finally, one of the paintings in the temple's *viharage* was sponsored by the parents of a dead soldier.

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[180] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa at Galle Pansala, December 8, 2005.

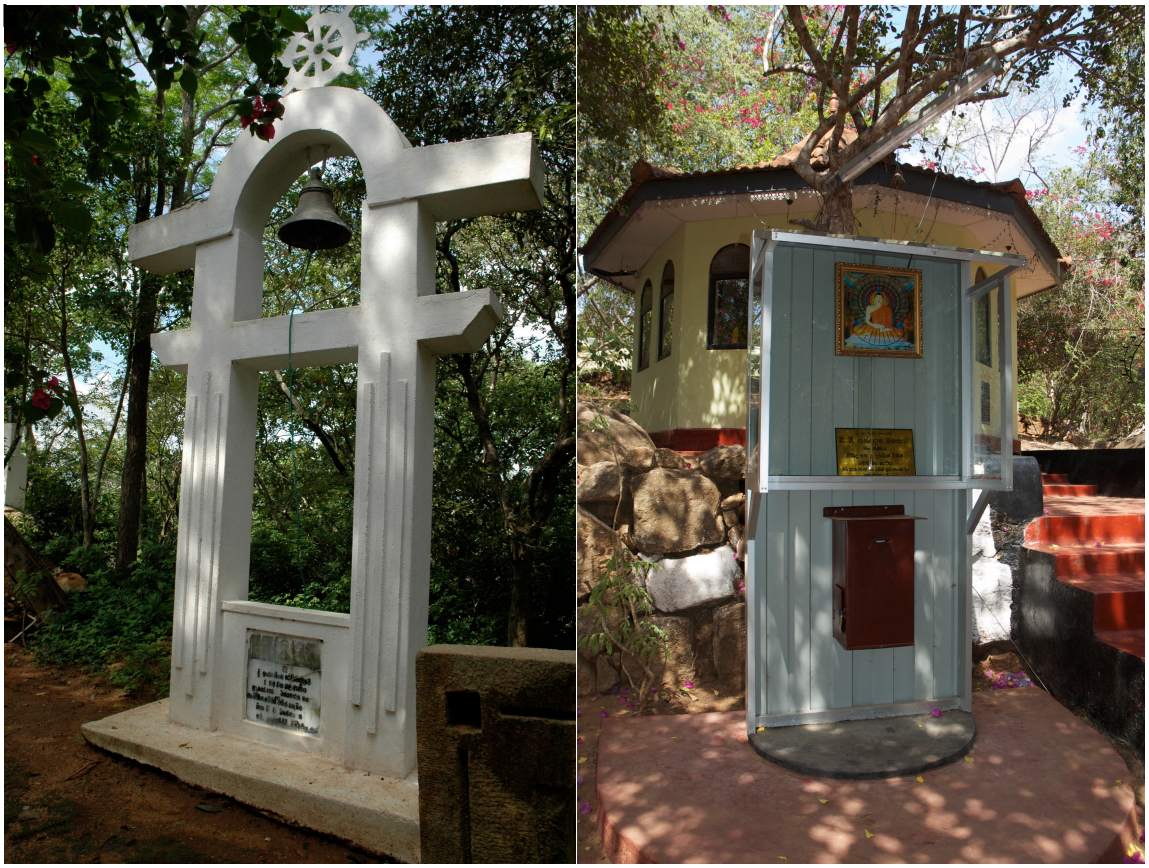
Ratanavaṃsa's temple is not unique in the support that it receives from the families of war dead. Indeed, most temples have at least one structure dedicated to war dead. Ānandavaṃsa's temple, which is much smaller than Ratanavaṃsa's, contains several structures dedicated to soldiers, including a bell, a light pole, and a water tank. The ancient temple Dorakadalāva, on the other hand, is surrounded by a wall embedded with nine plaques dedicated to soldiers by their families. The wall surrounding the bodhi tree was also constructed by the family of a dead soldier.

In addition to the obvious structures visible at his temple, Ratanavaṃsa admitted that much of the general maintenance was, indeed, sponsored by the families of war dead. He explained that the parents of dead soldiers make up the majority of temple donors, dedicating the merit from their work to their sons. While sitting next to his temple's fifteen foot tall Buddha statue overlooking the reservoir, Ratanavaṃsa told the story of a recent visit to the family who had built his temple's new kitchen. Ratanavaṃsa had arrived at their home on the very day that they had received their dead son's pay check. At first, Ratanavaṃsa thought that they had been arguing as the mother sat on the front porch with puffy eyes. The father came out of the house, greeted the monk and explained the situation to him. "Bhante, this woman is still crying. Tell her so that she will understand that crying won't bring them back to life." Ratanavaṃsa explained that their sons had always given a portion of their pay to their parents while they were still alive and the pain of that memory flooded back each time they received a pay check in the mail. Reflecting on this incident, Ratanavaṃsa attempted to explain the plight of grieving parents like these:

> So it is very hard for people who are suffering like that to enjoy (the money) by themselves without doing some kind of meritorious act for (their sons.) They don't spend all of the pay on meritorious acts, they provide for their own livelihoods, but they give the rest as *dāne* every

> month. They give *dāne* on the days that their sons died. (unclear whether they give once or twice.) They use the money that they receive from their son's pay to give *dāne*. Otherwise they have no source of income. They lived before also off of the earnings of their children. So, it is sad for people like that to just enjoy the money by themselves.[181]

Every month, families like this one receive in the mail, a reminder of their loss in the form of a compensation check. Most of these families, furthermore, are entirely dependent upon these checks for their livelihood. It is, thus, not surprising that a



On Left: Memorial Bell tower at Gale Pansala.
On Right: Donation box donated to Gale Pansala on behalf of a soldier killed in battle.

portion of this inauspiciously-earned income would be directed towards merit production on behalf of their dead sons.

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[181] Interview with Venerable Ratanavaṃsa near Mihintale on March 8, 2007.

One day while I was photographing a memorial bus shelter on the road between Kandy and Kurunegala. I stuck my head inside the bus shelter and asked the men sitting there whether they knew the family that had built it. A weathered man with a drooping face stood up and told me that that he was the father of the young man in the photograph on the wall. The man and his wife had come into town to do some shopping and he was sitting in the bus shelter waiting for her to return from a nearby shop. Before we could speak any more, the man's wife returned, wearing a purple sari with a white *choli* top and carrying a shopping bag in one hand and a black umbrella in the other. I offered them a ride home and asked if they would be comfortable talking about their son as we drove along a narrow winding paved road towards their house. Their house was white with a red tile roof and was in need of paint. Standing next to the house, in stark contrast, was a brilliant white concrete shrine room containing an image of the Buddha and various *deva*. The main room of the house was dark and almost completely unfurnished. Oddly, a motorcycle stood in the center of the room, leaking oil onto newspapers placed beneath it. Sitting on plastic chairs, my reseach assistant and I began to ask the husband and wife about their son. The husband and wife spoke together, often finishing each others sentences. They had told their son not to join the army, but he hadn't listened and snuck off with a group of his friends to join. When I asked about the bus shelter, the mother replied:

> We built the bus shelter thinking that he would receive the merit from that. When we give food to innocent people on the road our son gets the merit. We become very happy from that. We think, these things have helped him. We always think that our son will receive that merit...

The father continues as the mother chokes back tears:

Bus Shelter at mile post 7 on the A10 road to Kurunegala. The father of the soldier commemorated by the bus shelter is standing at the entrance of the bus shelter.

> We spent all of the compensation on the bus shelter. We could have built a room or a house with that money, but we spent it all on behalf of our son. Even now we give as much as possible for merit. We gave 5000 rupees so that a Buddha statue could be built at the temple. We built it on behalf of our child. Now our son receives that merit and we receive our son's salary. We live off of it. People said that it would be better if we bought land, but we built the bus shelter. We built it by ourselves without any aid from anyone else. We built it because of our love for our son...

At that, the mother and father both broke down. After speaking to the couple for about and hour, we took our leave and continued on towards Kurunegala in search of more bus shelters and the families that built them.

Venerable Vimaladhajja, the Brigadier Monk, explains that "A war hero never really dies as long as the army exists." He explains:

> I say that because they perform a memorial ceremony on the army unit days. On that day all of the relatives come and remember those who have died. In the same way, there are pictures of dead war heroes fixed to the wall of some army canteens. If one hundred men have died in a unit, that unit will keep a photo of each one of them. So every unit performs a *pinkama* once a year. That is why I said that even if a soldier dies, the army will never forget him. It is just as if he were still alive. Now, when parents receive their son's pay-slip, they remember their son, don't they? Even though they don't see their son's physical form, those mothers and fathers live well. Their son is in their thoughts. He lives on in their thoughts.[182]

According to Vimaladhajja, therefore, memorial ceremonies and monuments, as well, serve to preserve the memory and agency of dead soldiers. Even in death a soldier is able to provide for his family through his pay checks. The soldier, therefore, continues to live in the hearts of his relatives. After the body is gone, merit must be performed with one's imagination. When a family builds a bus halt memorial, they create a new physical object to focus merit production. The bus halt serves as a surrogate for the body, allowing individuals to focus onto the deceased and continue the merit making process.

Another factor behind the sudden popularity of memorial bus halts is the general increase in the popularity of grave markers over the past fifty years. While there is a long tradition of building huge monuments in order to produce merit for their next lives, such practices were limited to Sri Lankan kings. Until recently, the typical Sri Lankan was buried in the jungle in an unmarked plot on communal land. Jonathan Walters traces the adoption of memorial stones by the general populace to three sources. First of all was the Borella Kanatta cemetery, where Buddhist elites

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[182] Brigadier Monk Interview.

began burying their dead in a special Buddhist section in a direct appropriation of the Christian practice. Second, was the burial of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in a magnificent monument on the family estate north of Colombo on the Kandy road. Finally, was the passage of legislation by the Sirimavo Bandaranaike government standardizing the treatment and disposal of corpses (Walters 2003, 122). Jonathan Walters argued that the Sinhala adoption of grave stones, "...transformed the dead into non-participants in the world, nonagentive memories and reconstructions...." In other words, Walters argues that tombstones are useless in the Sri Lankan Buddhist context. While Buddhist funerals emphasize merit production and facilitating an individuals transition from this to the next life, grave stones suspend the individual in this world without allowing a means for merit production. Venerable Vipuladhamma of the Mihintale forest hermitage argues with Walters, remarking:

> In our country, tombstones are the result of Christian influence. Every countries customs change. Culture will change and mix with other things. These days we think that it is best to direct one's money towards public thing. It is good if money could be spent in a way that anyone could make use of it. There is no use in a tombstone. It's only value is for one generation. There is no value for the next generation. Then the tombstones get overgrown. The other thing is that the land is used up. This is a mixing of traditions. Rather than building a tombstone, it would be better to give the cement to a poor person so that they could build a house. Building a bus halt would be good. People use it, you know? Some people build it and write their son's name on it. When people go inside they read the name. Some people think of it (*ēka sihi karanava*) and give (him) merit.[183]

The head monk of the Jayanthi temple in Anuradhapura expresses a similar sentiment, lamenting the increasing popularity of grave markers. He explains: "When you go to villages, there are now a lot of graves. People will spend lakhs on a

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[183] Interview with Venerable Vipuladhamma in Mihintale on March 9, 2007.

grave. That is useless."[184] The Jayanthi monk continues, explaining that bus halts, on the contrary, not only help families remember the dead, but they also create a lot of merit. Bus halts, in other words, represent a particularly Sri Lankan Buddhist innovation of the grave stone. Bus halts address the concerns of monks and lay people who may feel that a grave stone is of little use to the living and dead. Rather than simply representing the deceased in a static manner, bus halts both preserve the memory of the dead and extend their merit-making capacity beyond the limits of merit making rituals.

Meaning

Bus shelters, however, do more than simply extend merit production, they also extend meaning production, announcing a family's interpretation of the death of their son to the outside world. The bus shelter is a multivalent symbol, having meanings for both the family and the nation as a whole. While to the family, the bus shelter serves as a reminder of the value of their son's death and an extension of the merit making process, to the public it serves as a valorization of military service in general. While militaristic rhetoric is used within the sphere of the family to give meaning to the otherwise inauspicious deaths of soldiers, when it becomes concretized on roadside bus shelters, it takes on a different meaning. On the roadside, the individual soldier who belonged to a family is transformed into an abstraction; a symbol of soldiers and the military in general.

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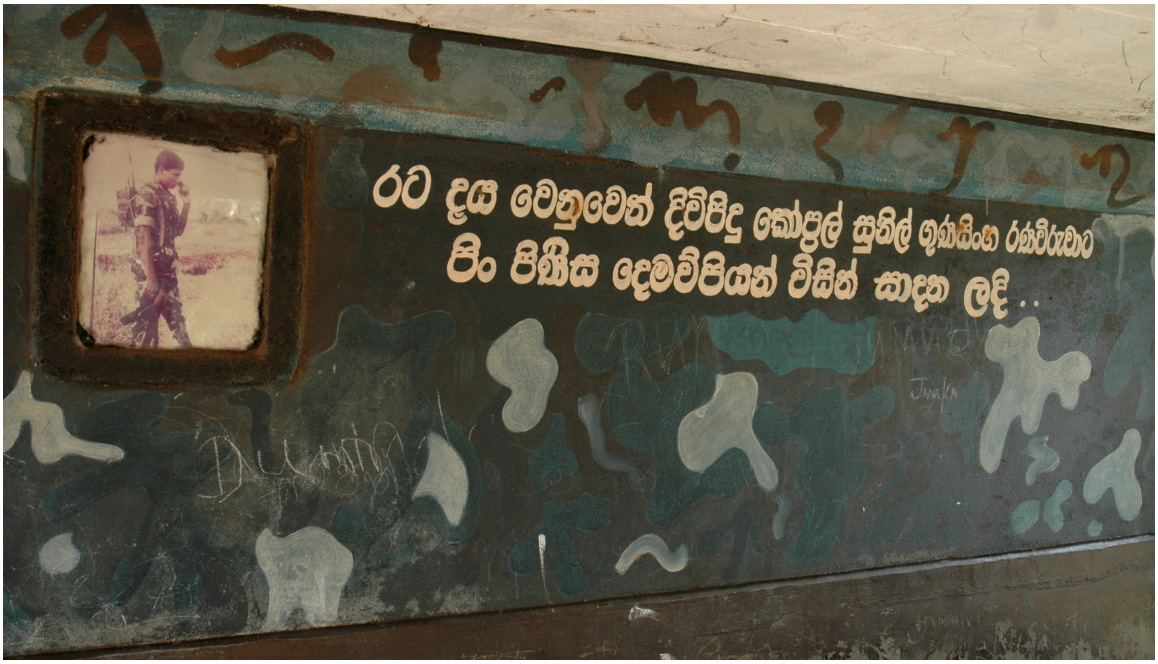
[184] Interview with the chief incumbent of the Buddha Jayanthi temple in Anurādhapura on October 18, 2005.



The inside of a bus halt in Anuradhapura. The text reads " Constructed for merit (*piṅ pinisa*) by the parents of the war hero Corporal Sunil Guṇasiṃha who gave his life for the country and nation.

This bus halt found near Anuradhapura is a typical example of a memorial bus halt. The text reads: "Constructed for merit (*piṅ pinisa*) by the parents of the war hero Corporal Sunil Guṇasiṃha who gave his life for the country and nation." In the photograph, the young Corporal stands dressed in combat fatigues with his T-56 assault rifle in one hand and a radio in the other. He looks strong, handsome and dedicated to his duty. The bus halt is painted in a camouflage motif, echoing the young man's fatigues.

The bus shelter on Avissavela road is even more striking. Painted in camouflage designs and decorated with the insignia of the soldier's regiment, this bus shelter is visually striking. The text reads:

> Shelter for You, Nirvana for Our Son
> Constructed for merit on behalf of Lance Corporal Nimal Tilakasiri of the Special Forces who gave his life on behalf of the country and nation at the battle of Mulativu.

Born 1973-11-03 Died 1996-7-19

Oh Soldier, you who are the highest honor of your frightened mother and victorious country. We will remember you both when the sun rises and when it sets.

Presented by the Sri Lanka infantry to the first special forces regiment, especially soldier number 103969, the hero, Lance Corporal Tilakasiri G.N., who departed the nation forever after a terrorist attack on September 19, 1996 while participating in the operation to rescue the Mulativu Army camp that was under attack by terrorists.[185]

The soldier, a member of the special forces, had been sent along with his company to Mulativu to rescue an entire brigade (around 3000 soldiers) that had been surrounded by LTTE cadres. The rescue operation proved unsuccessful, the Mulativu brigade HQ was overrun and almost all of the soldiers there were killed. (Sri Lanka Army 50 Years On, 540).

The soldier in the photograph looks strong and proud. Beneath the photograph is a framed letter of thanks from the Sri Lankan light infantry, praising him for his sacrifice during an operation to rescue one of their divisional headquarters. Regardless of the intentions of the family who built it, this bus shelter serves as a shrine to military heroism. Located in a public space, it serves the dual purpose of producing merit for a dead soldier and propagating and normalizing military themes within society.

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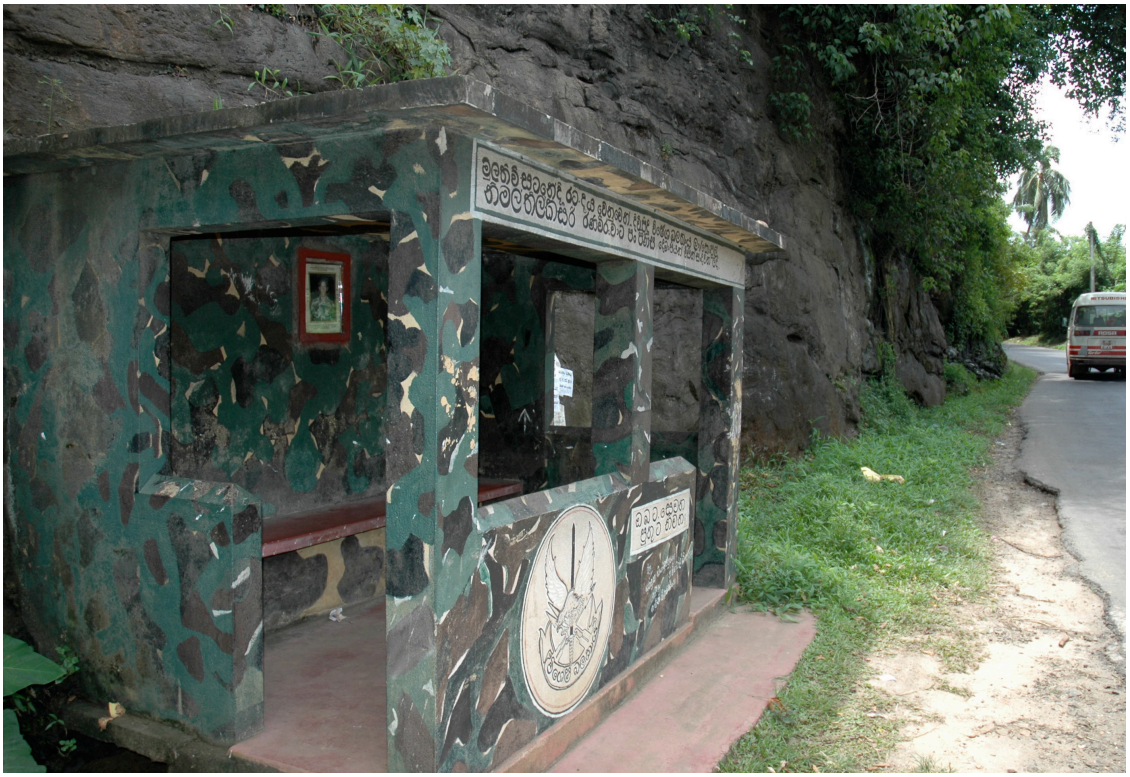
[185] Text: *Bihi kala mavaṭada dinu deśayaṭada usas gaurayak vu vira sebalanani, hiru näga ena mohotēt hiru basa yana mohotēt apa oba sihipat karannemu.* Sri *Lanka pabala regiment visin first special forces regiment veta ätulat kara siv sebala 103969 Lance Corporal Tilakasiri G.N. Ranaviruvā trastavādi prahārayakaṭa lakva tibu Mulativu Yuddha Hamudā kanduwara bērāgänīme kriyanvitayē yedi siṭaya dī trastavādi prahārayakin 1996 09 19 vänidā deśayen sadanaṭama samugannā ladī.*



Bus stand at Mile post 4 on the B127 road to Avissavella. Memorializing Corporal Nimal Tilakasiri.

Much like memorial sermons, the bus halt stresses the selfless sacrifice of the soldier. The epitaph reports that he gave his life on behalf of the country and race, announcing his value for all travelers to see. This next bus halt on the A9 from Kandy to Anuradhapura contains a bit more detail about the deceased soldier. Not only is it painted in camouflage, but it is also emblazoned with the emblem of the soldier's regiment, the second commando regiment. The text reads:

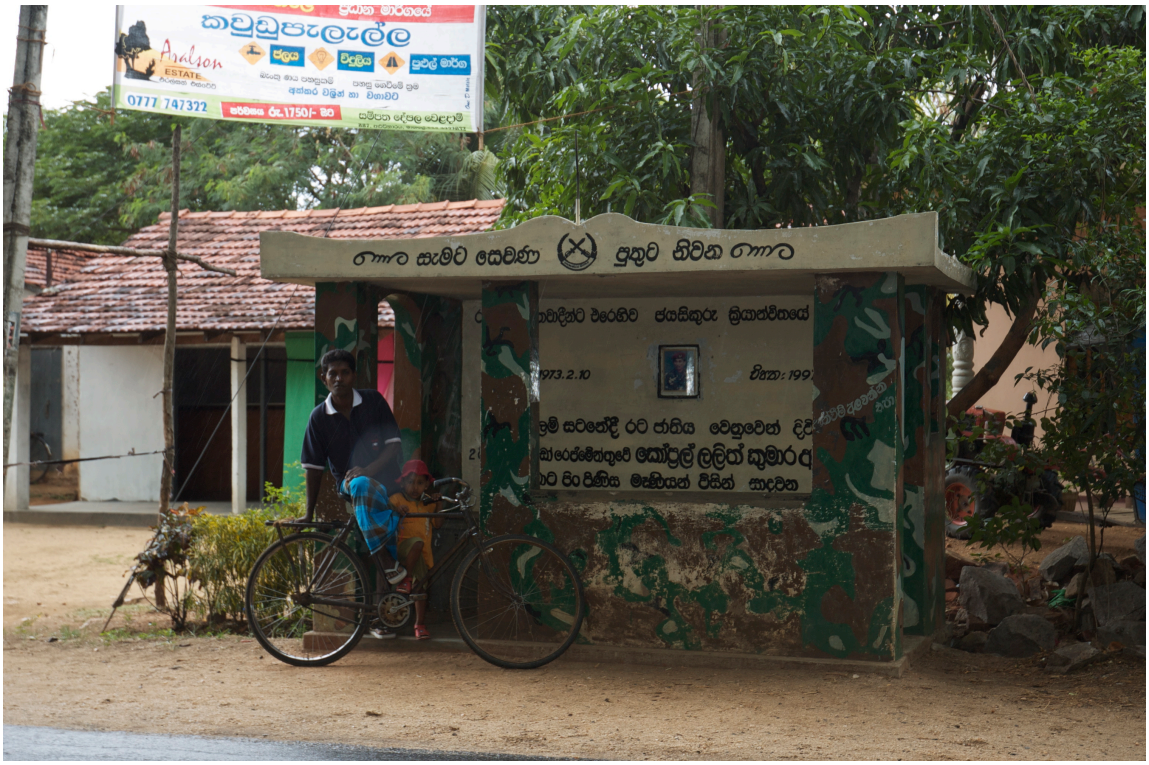
> Shelter for All, Nirvana for Our Son
>
> Built for merit for the war hero Corporal Lalit Kumāra Abēratna of the 2nd Commando Regiment who gave his life in the battle of Mankulam during Operation Jayasikuru against the vicious Terrorists. Constructed by his mother.

Close up photo of Corporal Nimal Tilakasiri's memorial plaque.

This bus halt lists the place of the soldier's death as well as the operation that he was engaged in. It should be noted that this bus halt makes a judgement on the character of those he died fighting against; they are "cruel terrorists."

The majority of the bus halts that I encountered on the major roads of the country represent variations on this theme. With the exception of bus halts built for Christian or Muslim soldiers--a topic worthy of study in its own right--Buddhist bus halts all contained a dedication of merit to the dead soldier and a recognition of his sacrifice.

To understand the full power of these bus stands, however, one must look beyond their most obvious function, sheltering travelers, and examine their role in preserving and spreading valorized representations of selfless Buddhist soldiers.



Bus shelter built for Corporal Lalit Kumāra Abēratna at Mile post 65 on the A9 road between Matale and Anuradapura. The text at top reads: "Shelter for All, Nirvana for our Son."

Writing about the relationship between statues and deceased eastern European communist leaders, Catherine Verdery writes: "Statues are dead people cast in bronze or carved in stone. They symbolize a specific famous person while in a sense also being the body of that person. By arresting the process of that person's bodily decay, a statue alters the temporality associated with the person, bringing him into the realm of the timeless or the sacred, like an icon" (Verdery, 5). Bus stands, much like statues, stand in for the bodies of dead soldiers, preserving the interpretations projected onto them during memorial ceremonies. If a bus stand is to be viewed as a surrogate body, however, it must also be viewed as a Buddhist body. Not only does it represent the soldier, but it also extends his agency in the world.

These memorials are not just passive objects. The meanings projected onto bodies are seen to create merit and assist both grieving families and deceased loved ones. By enshrining the meanings and memories established during memorial ceremonies, families seek to prolong the merit production and memory of deceased soldiers. Just as the presence of the body at the Pansakula lends more power to the merit making activities of family members, memorial bus stands produce merit by continuing to remind the world of the deceased soldier's sacrifice.

The bus halt stands in as a concrete representation of the deceased. Like the body, the bus halt is covered in military symbols. It is painted in a camouflage and often contains representations of regimental insignia. All bus halts list the rank of the soldier, further expressing the soldier's value. In some cases, bus halts will also include the soldier's serial number, further equating his individual identity with his role in the military. Ranks and serial numbers serve to further de-emphasize the soldier's individual actions and intentions, reducing him to his role and duty as a soldier.

One side effect of this attempt at merit production is the valorization and propagation of nationalist and martial values throughout the country. While newspapers and television broadcasts are the primary disseminators of these values, bus halts, as surrogates for the bodies of soldiers, are particularly powerful symbols. As Scarry and Verdery have pointed out, dead bodies have a frightening degree of non-referentiality. A dead body can be used by the living to stand in for almost anything. Verdery writes:

> Because corpses suggest the lived lives of complex human beings, they can be evaluated from many angles and assigned perhaps contradictory virtues, vices, and intentions. While alive, these bodies produced complex behaviors subject to much debate that produces further

> ambiguity. As with all human beings, one's assessment of them depends on one's disposition, the context one places them in (brave or cowardly compared with whom, for instance), the selection one makes from their behaviors in order to outline their "story," and so on (Verdery, 28).

After death, individuals lose their ability to represent themselves. Each individual soldier has a different story. Who is to say why a soldier fought and died? Elaine Scarry describes this phenomenon vividly, writing:

> Thus a Southern boy who may have" believed himself to be risking and inflicting wounds for a feudal system of agriculture, and until the end of the war will have suffered much hardship and finally death for those beliefs, will once the war is over have died in substantiation of the disappearance of that feudal system and the racial inequality on which it, depended (Scarry, 117).

As Michele Gamburd argues in her article, *The Economics of Enlisting: A Village View of Armed Service*, villagers are typically motivated to join the army not out of patriot enthusiasm, but out of financial necessity. The army is simply the highest paying job available to rural villagers with limited education and opportunities. Despite Sumaṅgala's pronouncement that soldiers are not dying for a paycheck, that is exactly what many of them are doing.

Memorializing dead soldiers is an extremely important and difficult task for Buddhist monks living in Sri Lanka today. On the one hand, monks wish to praise the war dead in order to ease the hearts of families and soldiers alike. On the other hand, this praise reinforces martial nationalism and encourages more young men to join the army, fight and possibly die for their country. Whatever the true motivation of individual soldier, or the actual circumstances of his death, during his memorial service, he is transformed into a selfless hero who acted for the interests of the state and its inhabitants rather than out of his own intentions and hopes.

In this chapter, I have attempted to illuminate the processes by which militarism has come to inhabit Sri Lankan mourning practices for soldiers killed in action. Families whose children die in battle supplement Buddhist memorial services with military symbolism in order to positively evaluate their deaths. Using compensation checks received from the military, these families then build memorials which further propagate these military symbols throughout the county. In this way, the very basic and personal practice of mourning has become linked inseparably with military symbolism.

In contrast to their pro-military symbolism, most of the families who constructed bus shelters like these are ambivalent or even hostile to the military. Most families explained that they built bus shelters primarily to create positive merit for their son, not to endorse the military as a career. During almost every interview the mother or the father would break down into tears. On one occasion, we drove away from the home of one woman as she clutched a framed photograph of her son and cried. It is clear that the majority of families of soldiers simply want the war to end. With few exceptions, most of the parents had told, even begged, their children not to join the army. Some mothers had hidden the application letters when they arrived in the mail or asked local monks to refuse letters of recommendation. The following epitaph for a dead soldier sums up the problem eloquently:

> Although you sacrificed your valuable life in service to the country, I think that it was a worthless thing. Although in newspapers, in the media and on banners, we respect soldiers, saying "We Salute You War Heroes," the army truck could not take your body to the village cemetery and your funeral had to be held on government land. I wonder if in the end it was those people, the ones that are satisfied with banners, who pushed the dirt into your grave with a bulldozer without giving you any kind of marker to

remember you by....“Beloved Brother, may you be born in our family again” (Goḍigamuwa 2000, 13).

Conclusion

Venerable Vimaladhajja is a complicated man. On the one hand, he is a monk, a representative of the Buddhist sangha. On the other hand, he is a de-facto chaplain for the Sri Lankan army. He regularly tours army bases around the country and performs *bodhipūja* ceremonies every Wednesday at Panagoda army temple. The entrance to Vimaladhajja's temple is decorated with large spent artillery shells that have been polished and turned into planters and the walls of his bedroom are decorated with commemorative plates from many regiments of the army. Over the course of his relationship with the army, Vimaladhajja has been nicknamed "the brigadier monk," reportedly because he could enter any army camp at will like a Brigadier general.[186] It would be easy to vilify Vimaladhajja. During his sermons he sings poems that urge the soldiers forward against the enemy. He draws upon images of Duṭugämunu to encourage the soldiers in their duty. He sings:

hela putune biya novanna
täbu pay passaṭa noganna
hela rajavaru sihi karanna
nobiyava peramuṇaṭa yanna

Oh Son of the Sinhala, don't be afraid.
Do not step back from where you stand.
Remember the Sinhala Kings
and go forward fearlessly.

sambudu dama nibaṅdava räki
mē apa bima paradavanna
täna kisiwaku mē lova mata

[186] Some soldiers reported that the nickname came because Vimaladhajja had let his status as an army advisor go to his head and that he had started to treat soldiers as if he were a Brigadier general.

sadahama oba säma räka deyi

There is no one in the world
who can defeat our land
that has always protected the dhamma of the Buddha.
The true dhamma will always protect you.[187]

When I asked Vimaladhajja if he saw anything wrong with his sermons to soldiers, he exclaimed:

> My gods! If we go to the battlefield and recite protective verses, tell them stories of the kings and preach some sermons about the Buddha, the morale of the boys will increase, won't it? Won't such things increase their spiritual comfort? (*adyatmika suvaya*) It is not an offense or a disgrace for a monk to go to the battlefield. It gives comfort to the boys. Our boys are happy when they hear that our monks are going to the battlefield. How great would it be to turn a battleground into a place of worship? (a play on the words *yudabima* and *pudabima*, battleground and place of worship).[188]

While Vimaladhajja's statements may be troubling to scholars of Buddhism, it should be noted that he never justifies or authorizes the war. On the contrary, Vimaladhajja's stated goal is transformation. By preaching to soldiers and shaping their hearts he claims to seek to increase their morale and spiritual comfort. By transforming the hearts of soldiers, Vimaladhajja explains that he seeks to protect them and limit the violence that they engage in on the battlefield. Through the transformation of individuals, Vimaladhajja hopes to ultimately transform the world itself, making *yudabima* into *pudabima*.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to suggest new ways of looking at Buddhist participation in war. Rather than questioning the relationship between the categories of Buddhism and war, I have focused on the decision-making-process of Buddhists participating in the war. How do Buddhist soldiers view the decision to

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[187] Interview with Ven. Pilässi Vimaladhajja in Homāgama on November 25, 2005.

[188] Interview with Ven. Pilässi Vimaladhajja in Homāgama on November 29, 2005.

fire their weapons at the enemy? How do monks advise soldiers on their way to the war, and how do families mourn their sons killed on the battlefield?

Perceived conflicts between Buddhism and violence are less apparent when we shift our questioning away from the language of justification and towards the realm of individual action and intention. Through this shift of emphasis, it is possible to gain insight into the complex lives of Buddhist soldiers without accusing them of violating their Buddhist identity. By taking seriously the ways in which Sri Lankan Buddhists apply different theories of karma and intention to both living and dead soldiers we are able to uncover the rationale by which Sri Lankan Buddhists are able to participate in war without justifying their actions in religious terms.

When intention and karma, rather than justification, are our entry points for discussions of Buddhist participation in war, a more nuanced and complex picture of soldiers and monks appears. Rather than asking whether or not Buddhism allows killing on the battlefield, I have asked monks and soldiers whether it is possible to kill with a positive intention; I have asked monks how they advise soldiers going off to battle; and I have asked the families of soldiers how they remember their dead sons. While each individual I spoke with supplied a different response to these questions, all agreed on the proper terms of the debate: intention and karma.

Some soldiers stated emphatically that the killing that they did on the battlefield was entirely blameless, stressing that their intentions were not personal. They claimed not to be motivated by hatred, ignorance or desire, but by the pure intention to protect the country and innocent population. Others, however, disagreed, stating just as emphatically that it is impossible to kill with an entirely wholesome intention. "One cannot kill while practicing loving-kindness mediation," chided

Venerable Sudarsana, the soldier-turned-monk.[189] While there was no consensus among soldiers, or monks for that matter, on the topic of killing the enemy in battle, all used intention and karma as their standard.

Once one begins to look beyond justification and consider the individual actions of soldiers on the battlefield, the sermons that monks deliver to soldiers take on a different meaning. Rather than simply justifying war, monks preaching to soldiers are often more concerned with the welfare of the soldiers on the battlefield. While preachers may, in fact, argue that the current war is necessary, that is not the primary goal behind their sermons. When preaching to soldiers, on the contrary, monks focus more upon shaping the hearts of soldiers going into battle. A calm heart, after all, insures protection and minimizes the amount of negative karma resulting from one's actions.

Looking at Buddhist participation in war on an individual level also sheds new light on memorial practices performed for soldiers killed in battle. The deaths of young soldiers are tragedies that trigger multiple practices of interpretation and memorialization. While monks preaching at memorial services may invoke military rhetoric, emphasizing a soldier's valor and the legitimacy of his cause, the primary goal in these sermons is to assist families with their grieving process. The inauspicious nature of death on the battlefield, makes the death of a soldier a crisis of meaning in which the traditional Buddhist interpretations of the death are stressed to the breaking point. By remembering soldiers as heroes who fought selflessly for the country, nation and religion, families attempt to assuage the pain of loss.

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[189] Interview with Venerable Sudarsana on March 9, 2006 at Labunoruwa Araññā.

Reflecting back on all of the conversations that I had with monks and soldiers about war over the past four years, I have come to the realization that the battlefield is not the place for Buddhist belief or practice. While this may seem to contradict the arguments that I have put forth in this dissertation, I do not mean to say that war conflicts on a fundamental level with the teachings of Buddhism. On the contrary, there is simply no time to think about Buddhism while in the heat of battle. While soldiers may prepare for battle by performing *bodhipūja* or by listening to sermons in order to calm their hearts, on the actual battlefield there is only chaos and survival. It is only after battle that soldiers begin to think about their actions in Buddhist terms.

While Captain Kanishka admitted that he felt victorious after killing a young LTTE cadre on the battlefield, he would never harm anyone under normal circumstances. In the civilian realm, Kanishka is an exemplary Buddhist, frequently visiting temples and sponsoring alms givings. On the battlefield, however, he is a killer. What will be the ultimate results of his actions? Like all Sri Lankan Buddhists, Kanishka can only hope that his positive karma will ripen at the time of death, propelling him towards a positive rebirth. As he lays dying will he recall the pain and hatred of the battlefield or will he recall the calm of a sermon or *bodhipūja*? While the workings of his personal karma may be opaque, in the end, Kanishka believes that he is a good Buddhist who has never sought to harm anyone.

Appendix 1

Table 1: Soldiers' evaluation of the act of firing at the enemy.

Subject #	Age	Rank	Injured?	Years in the Army	Fired Weapon on Battlefield?	Response to Question: "Does shooting at the enemy produce pav?"
2	35	Sgt.	Yes	?	Yes	Yes
3	37	Sgt.	Yes	?	No	Yes
4	44	Sgt.	Yes	?	Yes	Yes
5	39	Sgt.	Yes	?	Yes	Yes
8	41	Sgt.	Yes	21	Yes	Yes
10	36	Corporal	Yes	18	Yes	Yes
13	28	Lance Corporal	Yes	8	Yes	Yes
14	27	Private	Yes	6	No	Yes
15	29	Private	No	7	No	Yes
16	48	Major	No	27	Yes	Yes
17	30	Corporal	Yes	10	Yes	Yes
21	28	Lance Corporal	Yes	8	No	Yes
23	29	Private	Yes	8	No	Yes
25	26	Private	No	4	No	Yes
26	27	Private	No	5	No	Yes
27	30	Corporal	Yes	10	No	Yes
38	29	Lance Corporal	Yes	10	Yes	Yes
43	30	Corporal	Yes	10	Yes	Yes
45	42	Sgt.	Yes	20	Yes	Yes
49	34	Corporal	Yes	15	Yes	Yes
1	41	Sgt.	No	?	Yes	No
6	31	Lance Corporal	Yes	10	Yes	No
7	30	Lance Corporal	Yes	10	Yes	No
9	35	Corporal	Yes	?	Yes	No
11	35	Corporal	Yes	18	Yes	No
12	29	Lance Corporal	Yes	8	Yes	No

Subject #	Age	Rank	Injured?	Years in the Army	Fired Weapon on Battlefield?	Response to Question: "Does shooting at the enemy produce pav?"
18	30	Lance Corporal	Yes	7	Yes	No
19	27	Private	Yes	5	No	No
20	29	Lance Corporal	Yes	9	No	No
22	25	Private	No	4	No	No
24	27	Private	No	5	No	No
28	24	Private	Yes	5	No	No
29	26	Private	Yes	5	No	No
30	28	Private	Yes	5	Yes	No
31	28	Private	No	6	No	No
32	31	Lance Corporal	Yes	9	Yes	No
33	26	Private	No	4	No	No
34	28	Private	Yes	6	No	No
36	26	Private	No	6	No	No
37	26	Private	Yes	6	No	No
39	28	Private	Yes	5	No	No
40	30	Lance Corporal	Yes	10	No	No
41	26	Private	Yes	5	No	No
42	30	Private	Yes	8	No	No
44	27	Private	No	5	No	No
46	28	Private	Yes	6	No	No
47	26	Private	Yes	6	No	No
48	29	Lance Corporal	Yes	11	Yes	No
50	27	Private	No	5	No	No
52	29	Lance Corporal	Yes	8	Yes	No
55	26	Private	No	6	No	No
57	30	Lance Corporal	Yes	8	No	No

Subject #	Age	Rank	Injured?	Years in the Army	Fired Weapon on Battlefield?	Response to Question: "Does shooting at the enemy produce pav?"
58	26	Private	No	6	No	No
35	29	Lance Corporal	Yes	10	Yes	Maybe
51	30	Lance Corporal	Yes	8	No	Maybe
53	33	Corporal	Yes	11	Yes	Maybe
54	28	Private	Yes	6	No	Maybe
56	29	Lance Corporal	Yes	10	No	Maybe

The data in Table 1 and Table 2 was collected during 15-minute interviews conducted with soldiers residing at the regimental headquarters of the 6th Sri Lanka Light Infantry located in Mihintale. The interviews were conducted in December, 2005 and January, 2006.

Appendix 2

Table 2: Killing the Enemy vs. Killing Animals on the Battlefield

Subject #	Fired Weapon on Battlefield?	Response to Question: "Does shooting at the enemy produce pav?"	Response to Question: "Does shooting at an animal produce pav?"
2	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	No	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	Yes	Yes	Yes
14	No	Yes	Yes
15	No	Yes	No
16	Yes	Yes	Yes
17	Yes	Yes	Yes
21	No	Yes	Yes
23	No	Yes	Yes
25	No	Yes	Yes
26	No	Yes	Yes
27	No	Yes	Yes
38	Yes	Yes	Yes
43	Yes	Yes	Yes
45	Yes	Yes	Yes
49	Yes	Yes	Yes
1	Yes	No	No
6	Yes	No	Yes
7	Yes	No	Yes
9	Yes	No	Yes
11	Yes	No	Yes
12	Yes	No	No

Subject #	Fired Weapon on Battlefield?	Response to Question: "Does shooting at the enemy produce pav?"	Response to Question: "Does shooting at an animal produce pav?"
18	Yes	No	Yes
19	No	No	No
20	No	No	Maybe
22	No	No	Yes
24	No	No	Yes
28	No	No	Maybe
29	No	No	No
30	Yes	No	No
31	No	No	Yes
32	Yes	No	Yes
33	No	No	Yes
34	No	No	Yes
36	No	No	Yes
37	No	No	Yes
39	No	No	Yes
40	No	No	Maybe
41	No	No	Yes
42	No	No	Yes
44	No	No	Yes
46	No	No	Yes
47	No	No	Yes
48	Yes	No	Yes
50	No	No	Yes
52	Yes	No	Yes
55	No	No	No
57	No	No	No

Subject #	Fired Weapon on Battlefield?	Response to Question: "Does shooting at the enemy produce pav?"	Response to Question: "Does shooting at an animal produce pav?"
58	No	No	Maybe
35	Yes	Maybe	Maybe
51	No	Maybe	Yes
53	Yes	Maybe	Yes
54	No	Maybe	Maybe
56	No	Maybe	Maybe

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