



Social Action, by Ajahn Pasanno

To understand what social action is, we must realise that it is not a case of 'me with society around me' as if the two were self-sufficient things; the two are interrelated. What we bring to the society around us is our quality of mind, our quality of heart, our quality of being; so inner spiritual training and social action cannot be separated. They are interrelated and interdependent. The training that we apply to ourselves is as important as anything we do outside, because inner training is the core. The ability we have to help others or affect others depends on our inner clarity, good intentions and the integrity with which we have looked after ourselves. The two are inseparable. Sometimes we can get all enthused about social responsibility, social obligations and even social activism but forget to ask: How do we deal with our families? How do we deal with people we are most close to? How do I pick up the phone and answer it? What do I put into the universe when somebody phones and I'm not really prepared to talk to them, or I get irritated with them? An important principle underlying social action, is that in solving social problems, you can't afford to exclude anyone or anything. Problems arise from people not understanding how they create suffering for themselves and suffering for others. Problems and suffering come from desire and attachment; you can't just wish problems away. You can't just say 'These are awful nasty people. If they weren't on the planet it would be a much better place!' They are there; they are people just like us; they are trying to look after families and children just like us; they are trying to get ahead in the world. So, for social action you have to be patient, you have to be discerning, you have to be equanimous and you have to be willing to fail. You have to be willing to recognize that sometimes things will work and sometimes they won't. Sometimes they will work, but in a way that you could never have imagined. The foundation for success however, lies in one's own practice: keeping of precepts, and developing clarity, tranquillity, reflective investigation and wisdom. These are the foundations we build for ourselves that affect the choices we make and the direction in which we apply our energy.

--Ajahn Pasanno

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