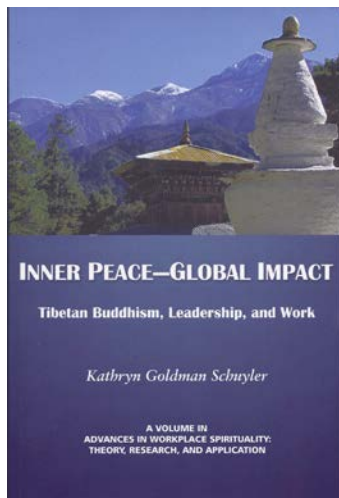


Book Review



Inner peace – global impact: Tibetan Buddhism, leadership, and work. Editor: Kathryn Goldman Schuyler, 2012, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC. A volume in “Advances in workplace spirituality: theory, research, and application”.

Reviewed by Glenn Martin.

This book consists of a collection of 21 essays from an eclectic array of writers on the influence of Tibetan Buddhism in the west, and in particular, its increasing influence on business and leadership thought.

The book is about connections, in numerous ways. Its subject is the connection between the personal state of inner peace and the state of human affairs globally. Second, the book is about both concepts in Tibetan Buddhism and the experience of Tibetan Buddhists coming to the west. Including both these aspects in the book is an illustration of its key premise, that intellectual ideas are connected with personal experience and social context; they cannot be divorced from each other.

The selection of writers also exhibits connection, between writers who are Tibetan Buddhists, western writers who are immersed in Tibetan Buddhism, and prominent western writers on business and leadership (such as Margaret Wheatley and Peter Senge) who can see the shared truths between their own writings and those of Tibetan Buddhism.

As editor and contributor Kathryn Goldman Schuyler says, the ideas of Tibetan Buddhism should not be isolated from the story of how its knowledge and traditions came to the west. The sociology of knowledge in itself has a lot to tell us about the relevance and importance of Tibetan Buddhism to business and leadership. She says that this movement has been a two-sided process. Writers in the west are giving increased attention to the centrality of personal awareness in leadership development, while Tibetan Buddhism, having awareness at its centre, has begun to apply its teachings to the practice of leadership.

The book offers a number of themes from Tibetan Buddhism as important contributions to western ideas about business and leadership. The philosophy maintains that a broader view of life is needed than materialism. It maintains that heart and mind need to be seen as one, not separate from each other. It presents compassion (along with wisdom and ethics) as the foundation for excellent leadership. In terms of practice, it holds that you can only understand who you are through contemplation. In addition, it suggests that the feminine principle is critical to leadership.

In her essays, Schuyler finds common thoughts between Tibetan Buddhism and streams in western writings on leadership, such as Robert Greenleaf’s servant leadership. The contribution she finds in the Tibetan wisdom perspective is that it offers reasons for serving others rather than using leadership for personal fame, power or wealth. The challenge the teaching also presents is that we have to learn through experience. The goal is more than grasping intellectual concepts; it is about achieving clarity and awareness, and incorporating the ethical in moment-by-moment living.

While Tibetan Buddhism offers a fresh and challenging perspective to western understandings of leadership, it also faces its own dangers. Sogyal Rinpoche, one of the prominent Tibetan teachers, noted that the popularity of Buddhism could lead to it being promoted as an accessible product which is quick and easy to master, rather than a path that requires patience and discipline.

The essays cover a remarkable range. They include interviews with Tibetan leaders and stories of the development of Tibetan Buddhist organisations in the west. They include interviews with Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley and Bill George, and a discussion of the Dalai Lama's views by Thupten Jinpa, his translator. The essays also cover key themes in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. The interconnectedness of everything is one these themes.

Judith Simmer-Brown expounds on the feminine principle in Tibetan Buddhism, exploring Tibetan legends and the lessons that can be drawn from them: "We as leaders do not need to be change agents as much as we need to acknowledge the certainty of change". To relate this to everyday experience within organisations, she takes the concept of mandala and applies it to the practice of dialogue. She is guided by the Tibetan belief in the interdependence of centre and periphery, and the need for a safe container in which helpful dialogue can occur.

Susan Skjei's essay, "Leading with authenticity and presence", illustrates the worlds that this book is seeking to bridge. It tells the story of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, one of the pioneers who brought Tibetan Buddhism to the west, but in doing so it also gives an account of key ideas that are rejuvenating approaches to leadership in the west. She explains how materialism and egotism stand as the biggest obstacles to effective leadership. Effective leaders are authentic, which is to say they are able to look beyond ego and selfishness, face their fears and access deep wisdom to respond appropriately and imaginatively to unprecedented problems.

Bronwen Rees's essay offers insights from a project that introduced Buddhist meditation into organisations. She describes the workings of power from a Foucaultian perspective, and contrasts this with a Buddhist perspective. An action research approach was adopted, and she reports on the mixed success of the project and its evolution into other initiatives. She reflects that their methods offer the potential for transformation of individuals and groups, but one needs to be conscious of the impacts of the dominant power structures and ways of thinking.

As a writer on ethics, I am heartened by the strong linking of meditation with ethics and the practice of compassion, evident through many of the essays in the book. It is unhealthy and unhelpful for ethics and meditation to be treated in isolation from each other.

The book is distinctive in offering a variety of accounts of Tibetan Buddhism as it is being applied in the practice of leadership in organisations. Alongside this, it presents an insight into the sociological aspects of the penetration of Tibetan Buddhism into the west. There are few books (yet) that fill this gap and the book addresses the subject with an exquisite selection of material.

Availability: through various websites; available as hardback, paperback and Kindle e-book.

Reviewer: Glenn Martin, writer on human resource, training and development and ethics, and author of *Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace* and *To the Bush and Back to Business*.