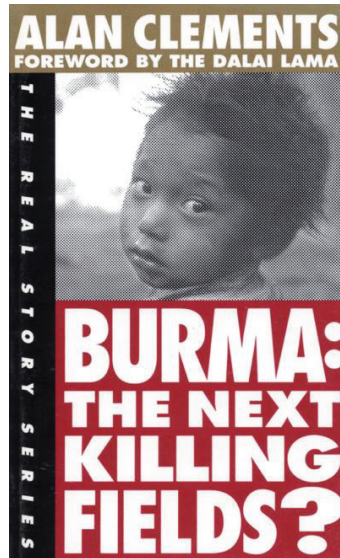


Burma: The Next Killing Fields?

by Alan Clements



Foreword by H.H. the Dalai Lama
Odonian Press, Berkeley, CA, 1992

And co-author of *The Voice of Hope*
Aung San Suu Kyi: *Conversations with Alan Clements*

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One of the recurrent arguments against spirituality and spiritual practices is that they serve as escapes from involvement in, and contribution to, the world. Spirituality is therefore seen as a self-serving, introspective escapism. The most political formulation of this notion was the Marxist idea that religion is the opiate of the masses, and this formed the basis for the massive suppression of religion and spirituality throughout the Communist world. Yet such a view fails to recognize that periods of solitude and inner searching represent only one phase of a much larger spiritual cycle. It mistakes the beginning of the spiritual life for its totality, and does not recognize that the so-called inward arc is usually a prelude to the outward arc of return to the world. Indeed, in his survey of world history, Arnold Toynbee found that the most characteristic feature of those individuals who had contributed most to human development was what he called the cycle of “withdrawal and return.” Such people tended to withdraw from society for periods of inner search and subsequently returned to bring the fruits of their search back to the world.

This process of return and service is widely recognized in the world’s great wisdom traditions. In Christianity, it is “the fruitfulness of the soul”, in Zen, “entering the marketplace with help bestowing hands”, in Plato, it is the “reentry into the cave,” and it is the phase called by Joseph Campbell “the hero’s return.” A dramatic example of this cycle of withdrawal and return is evident in the compelling and important book by Alan Clements. In 1979, Alan became a Buddhist monk and moved to Burma where he lived and meditated quietly in a monastery for the best part of the next eight years with no political involvement whatsoever.

Subsequently he returned to the West to lead meditation retreats. However, as Burma descended into political chaos and tyranny, with rampant torture, mass killings, and other abuses of human rights, he became one of the most active and effective of all Westerners. Since he spoke Burmese, he was able to undertake three perilous trips into Burma where he lived in the jungle with refugees, listened to firsthand accounts of mass slaughter, torture and rape, and saw maimed victims of torture and war.

The result is a powerful, moving, personally and politically informed account of the devastation brought to Burma, the abuse of its people, the torture and terrorization of resisters and innocents alike, the decimation of Buddhism, the deforestation of the land, and the complicity and deafness of the outside world-hungry for Burmese trade and especially its teakwood.

This is no mere compilation of facts and statistics. It is an engagingly, even grippingly written book with compelling firsthand accounts of Alan's travels in Burma and also first person accounts by Burmese. It contains a foreward by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, with suggestions and actions that readers can take to halt this holocaust.

This book stands as an indictment of the Burmese dictatorship and of the inactivity of the outside world and as a call to action for all concerned for human rights and the preservation of Buddhism. It is a ringing demonstration that intensive mediation and spiritual practice can foster compassionate and passionate political involvement and leadership.

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Additional books by Alan Clements
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